LA TROBEANA

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

A Word from the President

It comes as no surprise that, yet again, we have a diverse range of topics covered in this mid-year edition of *La Trobeana*.

Professor John Barnes gave us a preview of his new biography of Charles Joseph La Trobe at the birthday celebrations at Mueller Hall in March, and this subject is now covered in his article 'In Search of La Trobe'. Professor Barnes' description of his research revealed many facets of La Trobe's character, and it will certainly whet our appetites for the complete story.

Dr Fay Woodhouse presents a fascinating paper 'Politics, Power and Passion: Port Phillip before the Gold Rush' which examines the relationship between the Police Magistrate, Captain William Lonsdale, and Robert Russell, the first surveyor appointed to the District.

Susan Priestley's investigative research allows her to attribute a revealing letter to the English press about Victoria in 1852 to the little-known Albert Purchas (1825-1909). He arrived from England in 1851, and became a Melbourne architect, surveyor, engineer, inventor, officer in the Victorian volunteer army, and designer of the Melbourne General Cemetery, the first park-style cemetery in Victoria.

Margaret Anderson, General Manager of the Old Treasury Building, has turned her presentation to the La Trobe Society coinciding with the O.T.B. Museum's exhibition into a gripping account of 'Victoria's First Bushrangers' at the time before the formal establishment of law and order in the colony.

'Walking on Water: Melbourne, the Yarra River, its Punts, Ferries and Bridges' is the title of Dr Dianne Reilly's paper about the inconveniences of life in the town leading to the establishment of river crossings.

To round out this edition, Dr Andrew Lemon's review of John Barnes biography *La Trobe, Traveller, Writer, Governor* will have us all requesting copies from our favourite bookshops.

Two La Trobe Society members have received awards in the Queen's Birthday Honours. On behalf of the Society I would like to congratulate them:

Diana Morgan, Member of the Order of Australia (AM) 'for significant service to the arts, particularly to the museums and galleries sector, as a supporter and benefactor, and to the community', and

Shelley Faubel, Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) 'for services to the community of East Melbourne'.

Diane Gardiner AM
Hon. President
C J La Trobe Society
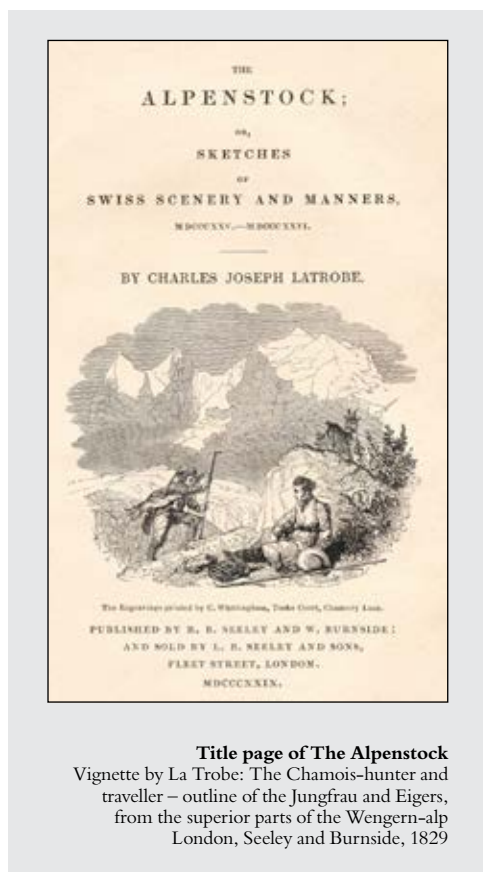
In Search of La Trobe

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. He was founding editor of Meridian: the La Trobe English Review (1982-1996) and editor of The La Trobe Journal, sponsored by the State Library Victoria Foundation, from 1998 to 2007.

This address was given on the occasion of La Trobe's 216th Birthday that was celebrated on 19 March 2017 at Mueller Hall, National Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Thank you for the invitation to talk about my biography of Charles Joseph La Trobe, which is soon to be published. This is the third biography that I've written, but I don't think of myself as a biographer—well, not the sort of writer who writes one biography and then looks around for his next subject. In each instance, I more or less drifted into writing a biography because I wanted to know more about an individual in whom I had become interested. One way of putting it, I suppose, would be to say that I began researching these lives because there were questions to which I was wanting to find answers.

The first biography that I wrote was of Joseph Furphy, the author of *Such is Life*, whose writing I had been studying from my undergraduate days. I hoped that my biography of Furphy would help readers to understand how a foundry worker in Shepparton came to write an extraordinary novel that has a prominent place in Australian literature. Writing the biography (and editing a volume of his letters as well) complemented the literary criticism that I had been writing of Furphy over quite a few years. So you could say that my book, *The Order of Things: A Life of Joseph Furphy*, was the fruit of a long association.

The second biography I attempted was a very different proposition. It would never have been written if a friend had not asked me: 'What do you know of H.H. Champion?' The answer was: 'Not much'. I knew that he was an English socialist leader who had been born in India in 1859 and had died in 1928 in Melbourne, where he had settled in the mid-1890s. I knew that in Melbourne he had written leaders for the *Age*, and that with his wife (sister of the feminist Vida Goldstein) he had had a bookshop, The Book Lover's Library, in Collins Street early last century. When I looked up biographical notices to find out more, I was intrigued to find that those written in Australia gave only a sketchy account of his life as a soldier and then socialist agitator in England, and those written in England said almost nothing about his life in Australia, and what they said was inaccurate. No-one seemed to know why this upper-class Englishman chose to spend the second half of his life in Melbourne. Having read a great deal of fiction, I should have remembered the well-known advice: '*Cherchez la femme*'. A tip from a fellow-researcher led me to a collection of his letters in the United States, in which he wrote about his unhappy relationship in Melbourne with a married lady designated only by the letter 'A'. I turned detective; but of course, there was much more to be done than unravelling that affair. My biography, which

Title page of The Alpenstock
Vignette by La Trobe: The Chamois-hunter and traveller – outline of the Jungfrau and Eigers, from the superior parts of the Wengern-alp London, Seeley and Burnside, 1829

I called *Socialist Champion: Portrait of the Gentleman as Crusader*, involved a close study of the socialist movement in late nineteenth century Britain and Australia, and the literary scene in early twentieth century Australia, where Champion was a journalist, literary agent and editor of a monthly, *The Book Lover*.

The content of my third biography could hardly have been more different from my first two, in which left-wing politics and Australian literature are at the centre of the narrative. Now I was dealing with the life of a declared Tory, an anti-democrat who was out of sympathy with 'the spirit of the times', and a conscientious servant of the Imperial government in London who thought of his long stay in the colony as a form of exile. Yet there was something that he had in common with my other subjects: like Furphy and Champion, La Trobe was a published author, a 'poor devil author', as he called himself, appropriating a phrase picked up from his friend Washington Irving. When I tell you that at one stage I thought a suitable title for my book would be: 'The Travel Writer Who became a Governor', you will perhaps understand why I, who had been a teacher of literature, spent years researching the life of a colonial official.

Probably I would never have become interested in La Trobe at all if I had not accepted

an invitation to take on the editorship of *The La Trobe Journal* in 1998, a couple of years after I retired from teaching. In 2003, coinciding with the restructuring which moved the State Library's Australiana collection that had been the La Trobe Library into the Domed Reading Room (renamed the La Trobe Reading Room), we devoted an enlarged number of the journal to articles about La Trobe and his time. My curiosity had been aroused by the discovery that La Trobe had written four travel books before he came to the colony, and my contribution to that number of the journal was an article about them. By then I had become fascinated with the personality of the man, and was increasingly curious about the direction that his life had taken.

The travel books had triggered my interest, but I doubt that I would have taken up the idea of writing a biography if the library had not held so much relevant material. Dianne Reilly was then the La Trobe Librarian. As you know, Dianne has long been devoted to La Trobe, and at the time I became editor of *The La Trobe Journal* she was working on her dissertation, the first extended study of his governorship. The State Library already had a substantial La Trobe collection, but there was also a major collection in Neuchâtel state archives, which she photocopied and later deposited in the library. In doing so she ensured that La Trobe studies would be centred here in Melbourne; and her further initiative, along with John Drury, in founding the C J La Trobe Society has stimulated valuable research about La Trobe.

What I am tempted to call 'Dianne's coup' made it possible for people like myself in Melbourne to research La Trobe's life; and so it has come about that I have written the book that I have called *La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor*. Some of you who read it may be surprised that I have written so fully about his life before he came to Melbourne, and perhaps will want to skip what you may think is just 'background'. As I hope my title suggests, my aim has been to give a portrait of the whole man, not just the official. The biography is based on the assumption that to understand the man fully we need more than a sketch of how he spent those early years, in which his character was formed, his ideas about society took shape, and he discovered where his talents lay. He had gained a reputation as a travel writer before he was employed by the Colonial Office; and without that reputation it is unlikely that he would have been so employed. And I might add, I think that the more we know about his family and his education, especially his religious education, and his personal concerns and inclinations before he came to Melbourne, the more likely we are to understand how he approached his task as a colonial administrator.

Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801–1875, artist
Near Oberviersach/Tyrol, Dolomite Mountains, 1830
Watercolour on paper
Collection: National Trust of Australia (Victoria)
Deposited on long-term loan in the Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria
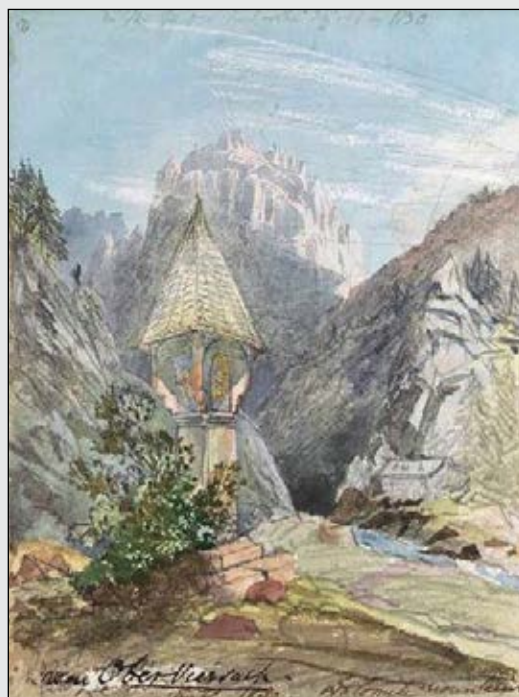
My starting point was the perspective of the authors of *Victoria's Colonial Governors*, who write: 'Perhaps the most surprising thing about La Trobe's governorship is that he should have been appointed'.[1] What I have attempted to do in my book is show how a writer of travel books, with no experience of managing staff and running an organisation, became the longest-serving senior official at Melbourne.

It seems clear that the need for a regular income rather than any interest in administration made him look for government patronage. That led to his making a government survey in the West Indies, and then to his appointment, first, as Superintendent of Port Phillip and later, after Separation, as Lieutenant-Governor of the new colony of Victoria. Becoming a senior colonial administrator was not a natural progression for him. It was a new beginning and a challenge; and because it meant putting his personal interests and inclinations second it was, to some degree, a sacrifice.

La Trobe may well have hoped that, like his father, he would be able to reconcile the demands of an official position with his taste for travel and intellectual pursuits such as botany and geology, his favourite sciences. Christian Ignatius La Trobe was a clergyman who managed to combine the conscientious discharge of his religious duties with a life of music, performing, composing and arranging scores, and publishing collections that influenced musical taste in Britain. The Moravian Church

had quickly decided that he was not suited to parish responsibilities, and in appointing him Secretary of the Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel provided the perfect niche for him. In his father La Trobe had a model of a man who, while enjoying what could be regarded by his church as 'worldly' pleasures—good company, good food and good music—never compromised the values of his Moravian faith or neglected his religious duties.

La Trobe, it could be said, was taught morality, not only at school in the Moravian settlement at Fulneck but also at home. He grew up in a family which exemplified what it meant to be a Moravian. In 1832, at a time when he did not know what shape his future might have, he wrote in a letter: 'I have been taught from Childhood to bend my spirit to the will of God'.[2] That attitude, inculcated in his childhood, was constant throughout his life.

During the years he had spent in Switzerland, no matter how much he enjoyed travelling and writing, La Trobe could not help but feel that such an agreeable life was not 'the will of God' for him. At the time he went to America and Mexico he was a young man full of promise but uncertain what lay ahead. His potentialities are described in an affectionate letter of introduction that he took from his brother, Peter, to their cousin, John H.B. Latrobe, who had become head of the American branch of the family after the death of his uncle, the architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe. This

is how Peter introduced his brother, whom he jokingly described as the 'envoy extraordinary of the English branch':

> The versatility of his taste, and the variety of his acquirements will help not a little to conciliate the favour of our dear cousins and their excellent mother:—with the latter he will talk over matters of domestic history and subjects of general literature,—with Julia he will be most happy to sing and play and wield the brush or the pencil,— with your brother, to discourse of the Ohio and Allegheny railways, and other important and interesting public works, now in progress in your immense country,—and as to yourself, I know hardly of any topic, connected with the history, statistics, literature and manners of the United States, on which he will not be anxious to converse with you and desire information, in return for what he may himself be able to impart, relative to the land of our forefathers, and his half-adopted country Switzerland. Like yourself, he is also no mean adept in the gentle crafts of poetry and painting, and has a considerable inclination to the romantic.
>
> On two subjects, in which *you* are learned, he will have less to say—I mean law & politics—though he is too much of an Englishman & a Latrobe to be altogether unacquainted with or indifferent to the latter. One thing more I will promise,—that he will not carry with him across the Atlantic, any unworthy prejudices against your country or its inhabitants.[3]

Peter paints a convincing picture of a lively, engaging and cultured young man, with a breadth of interests, which is just the impression we get from the travel book La Trobe wrote about his time in North America. That book, however, doesn't suggest a young man likely to end up as a governor of a colony. His cousin John, a lawyer, was already involved in public affairs, taking part in such projects as the resettlement of freed slaves in Liberia. Peter points to his brother's lack of interest in law and politics, the very subjects in which John had already made a mark, and then adds that teasing remark that brother Joseph is 'too much of an Englishman and a Latrobe' not to have political opinions.

In *The Rambler in North America*, which is written in the form of letters to his younger brother, the family conservatism is plain enough in passages such as this:

> You speak against the insane anxiety of the people to govern—of authority being detrimental to the minds of men raised from insignificance—of the essential vulgarity of minds which can attend to nothing but matter of fact and pecuniary interest—of the possibility of the existence of civilization without cultivation, and you are not understood. I have said it may be the spirit of the times, for we see signs of it, alas, in Old England; but there must be something in the political atmosphere of America, which is more than ordinarily congenial to that decline of just and necessary subordination which God has both permitted by the natural impulses of the human mind, and ordered in His word; and to me the looseness of the tie generally observable in many parts of the United States between the master and servant,—the child and the parent,— the scholar and the master, —the governor and the governed,—in brief, the decay of loyal feeling in all the relations of life, was the worst sign of the times.
>
> Who shall say, but if these bonds are distorted and set aside, the first and the greatest which binds us in subjection to the law of God, will not also be weakened, if not broken. This, and this alone, short-sighted as I am, would cause me to pause in predicting the future grandeur of America under its present system of government and structure of society; and, if my observation was sufficiently general to be just, you will also grant, there is that which should make a man hesitate whether those glowing expectations for the future, in which else we might all indulge, are compatible with growing looseness of religious, political and social principle.[4]

It is equally plain in the book that La Trobe has no interest in investigating how the new American republican form of government differs from the established English monarchical system. Even the political capital, Washington, doesn't seem to have held any appeal for him. Although he visited there several times, he doesn't tell his readers anything about his impressions of the place, let alone discuss the processes of government. He was an acute observer of American scenery and society but, as his brother said, law and politics were not the subjects that most interested him.
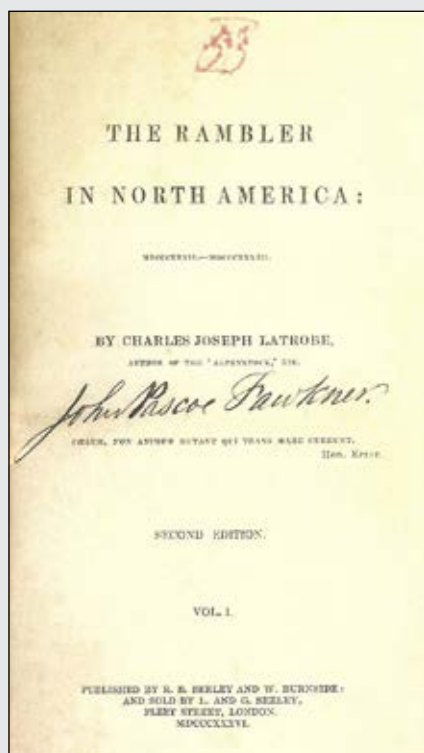
Albert-Alexander de Pourtalès, 1812–1861, artist
Pencillings by the way, 1832
Pencil sketch
Archives de l'Etat, Neuchâtel
La Trobe sketching on horseback in the American prairies

Title page of The Rambler in North America
Second edition, Vol. I with signature of
John Pascoe Fawkner
London, Seeley and Burnside, 1836
Private collection

Historians of the colonial period have tended to pass over La Trobe's life before he came to Melbourne, and have not seen the relevance of his travel writing to his career as a colonial official. I found that the travel books, and especially those of North America and Mexico, very revealing of La Trobe's personality and interests, and I regard them as an indispensable source for understanding the outlook and the sensibility of the man who arrived in 1839. The colonists seem to have been of the same view, and they read his books whenever they could get hold of them. After all, La Trobe was to them an unknown quantity when he arrived. One colonist who read them closely was John Pascoe Fawkner, an outspoken and, at times, vitriolic critic who, in at least one public attack, quoted from La Trobe's books on North America and Mexico.[5] In his travel books the young traveller, who had not then been burdened by official responsibilities, expressed his political opinions freely; and I suspect that such passages as that quoted above intensified the hostility towards him of democrats like Fawkner.

When he became Superintendent of Port Phillip in 1839 La Trobe took on responsibilities of a kind that he had never had before; and having gained the appointment devoted all his energies to it. The nature of his position as subordinate to the Governor of New South Wales and his lack of administrative experience both made his job especially demanding. He brought little understanding of politics to Port Phillip, as his clumsy attempt to pay a compliment to Governor Gipps shows. Even though he had been in the colony for a couple of years and knew how suspicious the Port Phillipers were of the administration in Sydney, he said at a public dinner in 1841 that he was ready to 'play second fiddle' to Gipps. On that occasion he gave his enemies a stick to beat him with for the rest of his time in the colony. And beat him mercilessly they did.

Thanks to the digitisation of so many of the early newspapers, it is now possible to experience directly something of the atmosphere in which La Trobe so often had to work. Historians have noted the opposition of newspapers like the *Argus*, but do not seem to have looked closely at the substance. I have to say that I find it hard to account for the viciousness of so many of the attacks before and after he became Governor. In 1848 La Trobe officially reported to the Secretary of State his assessment of the 'discreditable' press in Port Phillip:

> In plain words, ignorance, disregard of truth and a reckless and studied spirit of misrepresentation, often amounting to the most malevolent libel, have been hitherto more or less the distinguishing characteristics of all the principal papers of Port Phillip, whether under their present or past management.[6]

You might, at first, think that is an overstatement. Let me give you a small example of the abuse that La Trobe had to endure, week after week, and year after year. On 11 February 1853, the *Argus* published a letter to the editor from a recent arrival in Melbourne who signed himself 'A Stranger'. He had been present when La Trobe gave his speech at the prorogation of the Legislative Council. 'I felt for his Excellency', he wrote, 'when in his walk up the representative side of the House, he sought for opportunity to be civil, but found none'. It is a painful glimpse of the toxic atmosphere in the Council, which not long before had come close to passing a vote of no-confidence in La Trobe's government. The newcomer thought La Trobe 'a good man' but not 'a great one'. The editor could not let this pass:

> If our correspondent had known Mr. La Trobe as long as we have, he would be aware that he has as little claim to the title of a 'good' man, as he has to that of a great one. In private life, we believe that he is amiable enough. Beyond that, he is and always has been, weak, shifty, truckling to the Home authorities, treacherous, insincere, a betrayer of his people, the contemner of merit, the patron of the negligent, the incapable and the corrupt. His career, now shortly coming to a close, has been throughout that of a weak, bad man… [7]

La Trobe, I think that you'll agree, had grounds for complaint.

The colonial press was certainly among the many trials that La Trobe experienced during his long stay in Melbourne. The greatest trial was what he called 'the gold outbreak' just as he became Governor of the new colony and set about building an administration: gold brought problems that tested him to the utmost. Yet throughout all his difficulties he never wavered in his sense of duty, believing that he was doing God's will. La Trobe's Christianity is the aspect of him that is, I think, least understood today, but I regard it as central to an understanding of him. In writing about his time as Superintendent and then Governor, my aim has been to see events and people from his perspective, not that of the historian. That is to say, I have presented his official career as he saw it in the context of his own life.

'Character', writes George Eliot in her novel, *Middlemarch*, 'is a process and an unfolding'. In writing La Trobe's biography I have been guided by that wise observation. Perhaps I could

sum up my approach by saying that I have tried to make real to the reader the process and unfolding of La Trobe's character. I didn't set out to challenge the generally accepted negative assessment of his performance in office, but the better I knew him the more certain I was that he had learnt and developed to an extent that has not been adequately recognised. I didn't write the book because I had an axe to grind, but I was led to conclude that he has not been well understood and his true worth has not generally been appreciated.

In a letter to his Sydney colleague, Deas Thomson, towards the end of his time in Melbourne, La Trobe wrote:

> What we both may justly claim, is fair
> play—a truthful exposition of what
> was really said, thought & done, & that
> the past [as] such be judged as the past
> by the past & not by the present—and
> I have no misgivings as to the result.[8]

I have quoted that comment at the head of the Introduction to my book. If you read *La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor,*[9] I hope that when you get to the end—if you get to the end!—you will feel that he would not be disappointed by what I have written.

1   Davis McCaughey, Naomi Perkins, Angus Trumble, *Victoria's Colonial Governors 1839-1900,* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993, p.13.

2   La Trobe to Mme de Pourtalès, 30 June 1833, La Trobe Neuchâtel Archive, MS 13354/44, State Library Victoria.

3   Peter La Trobe to John H.B. Latrobe, 6 March 1832, Benjamin Henry Latrobe Collection, MS 1638, Maryland Historical Society.

4   Charles Joseph La Trobe, *The Rambler in North America 1832-1833*, London: Seeley and Burnside, 1835, vol.2, pp.136-137.

5   *Melbourne Argus, Port Phillip Patriot,* 4 July 1848.

6   La Trobe's views are enclosed with a despatch from Governor FitzRoy to the Colonial Secretary, Earl Grey, 10 January 1848. See *Historical Records of Australia,* series 1, vol.26, pp.167-172.

7   *Argus*, 11 February 1853, p.5.

8   La Trobe to E. Deas Thomson, 15 December 1853, ML A1531/3, State Library of New South Wales

9   Published by Halstead Press, in association with State Library Victoria and La Trobe University. (Ed.)

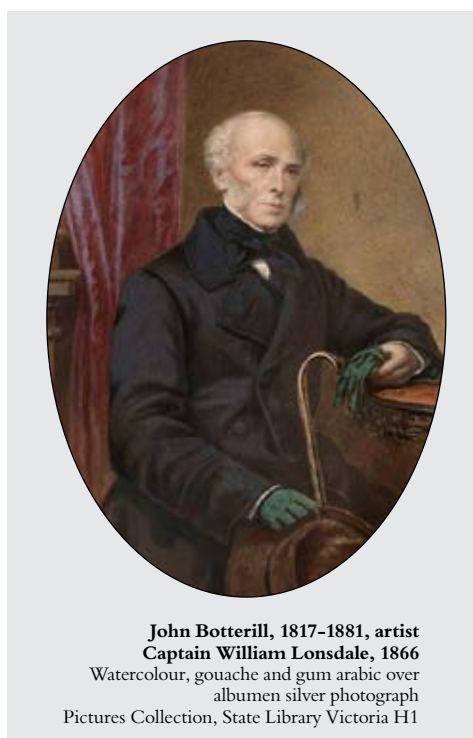# Power, Politics and Passion: Port Phillip before the gold rush

By Dr Fay Woodhouse

Fay Woodhouse is a professional historian who has written histories for the university, public, community and private sectors. She has recently edited and published Robert Russell: Artist of Early Melbourne (2017) by Patricia Hawkins. Her latest biography is The Enterprising Mr MacGregor: Stockbreeder & Pioneer Pastoralist (2016). Fay is a Fellow of the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, and is the Victorian researcher for the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

The Port Phillip District was unofficially settled by whalers, escaped convicts and then the Henty family from around 1834. The Port Phillip Association, headed by John Batman and John Fawkner, illegally settled the area around the Yarra Yarra River (now simply the Yarra River) in 1835. Because of the illegal occupation, the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Richard Bourke, saw the urgent need to establish law and order in the District. He decreed in 1836 that the District should be officially opened up for settlement and that Crown Land should be surveyed to allow settlers legal title and rights to purchase. This is a story of two men who arrived, settled and made their mark on Melbourne in different ways.[1] One returned to England a wealthy man, while the other died in Melbourne and in some quarters became known as the 'father of Melbourne'.

William Lonsdale

William Lonsdale, the son of Lieutenant William and Jane Lonsdale, was born on 21 October 1799 in the Batavian Republic. He joined his father's old regiment, The King's Own Regiment, as an ensign, in July 1819 and became a lieutenant in 1824. He arrived in Sydney in December 1831 with a detachment of troops guarding convicts. During the next five years, he served both in Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales.[2]

John Botterill, 1817–1881, artist
Captain William Lonsdale, 1866
Watercolour, gouache and gum arabic over
albumen silver photograph
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria H1

In July 1834 Lonsdale was able to purchase a commission as a Captain, and in April 1835, while stationed at Port Macquarie in NSW, he married Martha, the youngest daughter of Benjamin Symthe, a civil engineer, of Launceston. In November 1835 he was appointed

as Magistrate and also Assistant Police Magistrate at Parramatta. When Governor Bourke received Imperial authority to establish a settlement at Port Phillip, he immediately appointed Lonsdale as Chief Agent of Government, Police Magistrate and Commandant for the Port Phillip region at a salary of £300 per annum. Bourke considered the illegal settlers needed an authority in the guise of a magistrate who would maintain order, protect their personal property rights and give them legitimacy as settlers.[3]

Lonsdale resigned then sold his Captain's Commission to fund himself to take up his new role.[4] He arrived in Port Phillip on the *HMS Rattlesnake* in September 1836, accompanied by his family and two servants.[5] His appointment came in the form of two separate instructions, one military and one civil. The military instructions were standard for such a commission. He was to establish a residence, barracks, commissariat store and huts for constables.[6] The civil instructions were similar to those later given to Charles La Trobe as Superintendent. As Police Magistrate he was to exercise 'the ordinary jurisdiction of justice in accordance with the laws of England', as enforced in New South Wales. He was also to submit returns and confidential reports every month to the Governor himself.[7] Beside his duties for the immediate exercise of authority, he was to take a census, noting land occupation and aboriginal inhabitants. In his duty to protect the Aboriginal inhabitants, he was also instructed to employ William Buckley as an intermediary to ensure they were aware they were also subject to the laws of England.[8]

When he arrived in Port Phillip Lonsdale found a thriving, yet lawless, settlement of 224 people occupying the land adjacent to the Yarra River.[9] The small population lived in tents or semi-permanent wattle-and-daub houses. Lonsdale soon established his residence and office. He relished his new role as Magistrate. By the very nature of his instructions, he was effectively ruling every aspect of life in the settlement, from issuing hotel licenses to establishing the first hospital.

Because of the Colonial Office's desire to open the land to legal title, Lonsdale's arrival was closely followed, in October 1836, by Robert Russell as Chief Surveyor. He was the second most senior and the second most highly paid public servant in Port Phillip, initially on £200 per annum.[10] However, friction developed between Lonsdale and some of the other civil servants, many of whom − including Robert Russell − disputed his right to supervise their activities. While clearly working hard as Police Magistrate, Lonsdale was not beyond

reproach. He conducted private business while in the settlement and his private trading and speculation enabled him to leave the colony a relatively wealthy man.

Unknown artist
Robert Hoddle, c.1830
Oil on panel
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria H4332

Lonsdale and Hoddle

Lonsdale's first business transaction was with John Batman when he purchased 400 ewes.[11] In 1841 he and Robert Hoddle were very nearly dismissed for buying the deceased John Batman's bank shares while acting as a trustee of his Will. Certainly an unethical act! Both Lonsdale and Hoddle were also censured for land speculation by the Colonial government while holding official positions.[12]

In 1851, after Port Phillip separated from New South Wales, Lonsdale was appointed Colonial Secretary at a salary of £900 per annum. He served in the Victorian Legislative Council from October 1851 until 1853 when he became Colonial Treasurer at a salary of £1,500 per annum. He served the Victorian government until 1854 when he sailed for England. Lonsdale died in London in March 1864.

In 1917, the University of Melbourne's professor of history, Ernest Scott, read two papers to the Victorian Historical Society on the administration of Captain Lonsdale. By studying his letter books, Scott documented the chain of command, the tasks assigned to Lonsdale, his fulfillment of his numerous duties and the population's response to his administration.

Scott concluded that Lonsdale was 'a modest, unassuming, conscientious, hard-working officer, with a high sense of duty and an unsparing devotion to it'. Disciplined as a British Officer, he discharged his duties in an appropriate manner. As Scott also observed, 'he worked too hard to be ever accused of doing too little'. He deferred to his authorities in Sydney while ruling with serious determination in Melbourne.[13] Lonsdale was the quintessential regimental officer, conscious that the colonel's eye was always upon him. In no case do we find him asking for a larger endowment. He was content to work under strict authority, and never to trespass beyond his instructions.[14] Michael Cannon concurred:

> He ruled with considerable self-restraint, accepting the system as it was, handing out floggings to rebellious convicts and lighter sentences to wayward gentlemen, supervising Melbourne's growth through its first great economic boom, engaging in as much speculation on his own account, attempting to conciliate the dispossessed natives, and generally acting in a patient zealous manner. Although showing little vision, he remained a faithful servant of the Sydney government and its policies.[15]

As the entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* concludes, the most noteworthy years of Lonsdale's long public career were 1836-1839 when he supervised the founding of the new settlement at Port Phillip until Charles Joseph La Trobe took up the role of Superintendent in October 1839.[16] Lonsdale's relations with La Trobe were always good and this continued after each returned to England in 1854. Late in 1854 La Trobe wrote to a friend in Melbourne: 'My opinion of him… becomes only the stronger now that I look back upon the past.'[17]

Robert Russell

Born on 13 February 1808 near Kennington Common, London, Robert Russell was the son of a successful London merchant and amateur painter, also named Robert Russell, and his wife Marguerretta Leslie, whose family was linked to the Scottish aristocracy. He was educated at Ealing College London before being articled in 1823 to architect, William Burn, in Edinburgh. After a five-year apprenticeship he left Burn, earning letters of high recommendation. He then worked with two minor London architects before joining the prestigious office of John Nash during his commission to alter and make additions to Buckingham Palace. During 1830-1831 Russell became an ordnance surveyor
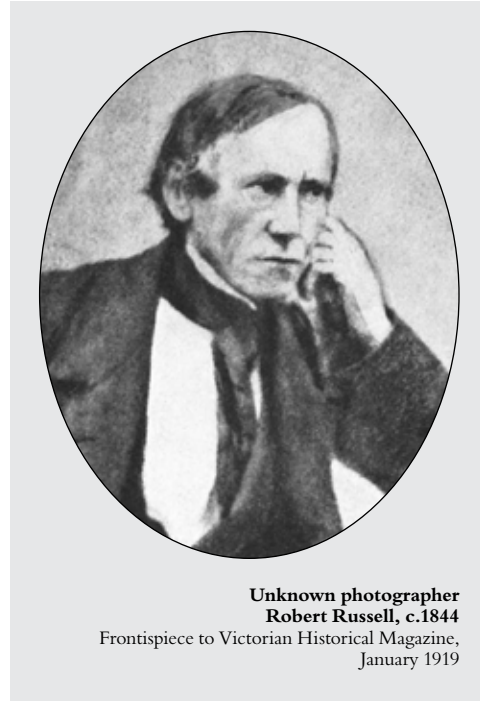
Unknown photographer
Robert Russell, c.1844
Frontispiece to Victorian Historical Magazine,
January 1919

for the British Army in Drogheda, Ireland, and loved the experience. Like his father, he had a talent for painting and found, or made time to pursue this interest in the Irish countryside.

Young and gifted, and possibly looking for a new adventure, Russell became curious about life and work in the colonies. With abundant enthusiasm, glowing credentials and letters of introduction from his previous employers, Russell arrived in Sydney in September 1833. He presented his letters to Major (later Sir) Thomas Mitchell, Chief-Surveyor of New South Wales, and was soon employed in the Survey Department under Mitchell's patronage.[18]

On 10 September 1836 Russell was appointed Chief Surveyor and Commissioner of Crown Lands at Port Phillip; no other surveyor was available at the time.[19] He was appointed with two assistants, the draughtsman Frederick Robert D'Arcy and the chain-man William Wedge Darke. This team was engaged to survey the uncharted regions of the District. With his two assistants, Russell followed Lonsdale to Melbourne. After a rough voyage from Sydney aboard the *SS Sterlingshire*, Russell and the survey party entered Port Phillip Bay on 23 September 1836. In his journal, Russell wrote of their delight on seeing the surrounding shoreline and countryside. They anchored at Gellibrand Point on 8 October and only came ashore at the Settlement on the Yarra on 9 October, 16 days after their entry to Port Phillip Bay. This date was much later than expected and was the first obstacle to their delay in carrying out their commission.

Commencing the survey was further delayed when their stores and horses, which were following on the brig *Martha*, did not arrive for three weeks due to bad weather. Without the horses, Russell reported that they conducted preparatory surveys to Geelong along the river 'Weariby [*sic*] to Gellibrand point'. As Chief Surveyor, Russell was instructed by the Acting Chief-Surveyor Samuel Augustus Perry.[20] He was to be supervised by Lonsdale to whom he would report regularly. He was to keep a detailed journal and send written reports back to Perry in Sydney. He was to survey the shores, the mountains and their passes, the rivers and their subsidiaries both surrounding and within the Settlement. He was to note the names of the occupants and the extent of their land and houses.[21] Inexplicably, despite Perry's clear instructions from the outset, Russell would not recognize Lonsdale's authority over him and refused to carry out his orders, referring him to Perry in Sydney. Reading between the lines, it appears Lonsdale and Russell took an instant dislike to each other.

The culmination of several factors delayed Russell's survey of the Port Phillip District. When they arrived in October 1836, the surveyors discovered that their horses were unfit for work. Russell reported to the Surveyor-General that they were 'in poor condition having been short of forage on the journey, as well as untrained for the halter'. Bad weather and the horses' poor condition continued to delay the survey for more than a month, indeed, until December 1836.[22] However, it was not just the lack of horses that delayed the survey; Captain Lonsdale himself was partly responsible. He reported to the Governor that he had 'deprived the Surveyor of three men to assist in clearing the beach & bringing up the stores from the beach'.[23] With his men assigned to work for Lonsdale, as well as the delays with horses and equipment, after three months in Port Phillip, Russell had little to show for his work.

Russell and Lonsdale's relationship appears to have been an explosive one. They were very different men. Lonsdale was an Army man through and through and he enjoyed exerting his authority. Russell, a young idealist and free-thinking radical, had supported the abolition of the slave trade and an emigration scheme to allow unemployed English tradesmen to come to Australia. He was well-educated, well-qualified and very full of himself! He was later described as taller and thinner than average with unruly hair.[24] He stood out in a crowd. In the early years of his colonial career, Russell displayed an arrogance towards those whom he considered to be inferior in talent and status to himself. This was a characteristic shared by some well-educated young Englishmen from his background.

Because of the delays with the horses and weather, Russell wrote to the Surveyor-General: 'under the circumstances I have considered it best

(in order to fill up the time) to commence a plan of the Settlement, and I have directed Messrs. D'Arcy and Darke to assist in this duty'.[25] His actions were confirmed in a letter from Lonsdale to the Colonial Secretary on 26 November 1836. It seems Russell took Lonsdale's letter to be official consent to proceed with a plan of the township, although his original instructions from Perry did not instruct him to do so.

Despite the imposed delays, the survey did not proceed as quickly as Governor Bourke had hoped. Lonsdale was unhappy with Russell and wrote long emotional letters to Bourke in Sydney complaining about him. The Governor expressed his concern to Lonsdale who replied in a confidential letter on 8 December 1836:

> ... respecting the Surveyors. At present it would be premature to give a decided opinion on them. They were certainly for a short time delayed by my employing their men... and since then by the horses not drawing, but it has occurred to me that they have not displayed much activity.[26]

Correspondence from both Russell and Lonsdale to Governor Bourke in Sydney, each apportioning blame for delays, continued until the end of 1836 and beyond.[27]

Russell's difficulties were both technical and physical. Chains stretched and broke and could not be replaced; magnetic fields disrupted the compasses, and tents were destroyed by fire. Men could be hurt when they worked with this equipment. William Darke 'ruptured' himself, that is, he developed a hernia while working. Judging from Russell's descriptions of frequent attempts to pull drays through rivers with insufficiently trained horses, the survey team was fortunate that Darke suffered only this complaint!

By early 1837 when the Sydney officials believed the survey was taking too long to complete, Bourke, advised by Perry, decided to visit the Settlement to review the situation. He arrived on the *HMS Rattlesnake* on 1 March 1837, accompanied by the more experienced surveyor, Robert Hoddle.[28]

Hoddle was fourteen years older than Russell. He had eleven years surveying experience in the British Army in England and the Cape Colony before arriving in New South Wales in mid-1823. He was appointed Assistant-Surveyor under Surveyor-General John Oxley, and helped him survey the site of Brisbane before spending twelve years surveying rural districts of New South Wales. Oxley thought highly of Hoddle's work but after his death in 1828 his successor, Major Thomas Mitchell, held a vastly different opinion. Mitchell disputed Oxley's recommended appointment of Hoddle as Deputy Surveyor-General. This opinion did not enhance Hoddle's career prospects. He wrote scathingly to the Governor that Hoddle was: 'a man who can scarcely spell... this man can only be employed as he has always been, at the chain'. Samuel Augustus Perry was appointed instead.[29] Relations between Perry and Mitchell were also fractious. Notwithstanding, in September 1836 Mitchell influenced the appointment to Port Phillip of his protégé Robert Russell over Robert Hoddle. Hoddle's disappointment at his failure to lead the original survey party may have led to future tensions between the two men.

Bourke's visit to Port Phillip brought about a distinct change to the Settlement. As A.G.L. Shaw writes: 'He confirmed the site, proclaimed the town, announced a land sale and promised the Aboriginal people he would later look after them.'[30] The Governor named the Settlement, 'Melbourne', after Lord Melbourne, the British prime minister. Russell was replaced as Chief-Surveyor by Hoddle, although he continued to work as an assistant surveyor under Hoddle's direction.

Prior to his departure from Melbourne on 8 March, Bourke requested a completed plan of the township from Hoddle. Russell later wrote that the plan was a morning's work for Hoddle.[31] He used Russell's feature drawing as a base, and traced the general outline of the township. It was a standard rectilinear grid aligned along the river. It meant that Hoddle was able to start marking out allotments and public reserves for the land sales.[32] It was expected that this would bring order and stability into the newly named township of Melbourne.

First land sales

The first land sales of Melbourne and Williamstown were a highly anticipated event. As the *Sydney Gazette* recorded: 'Great was the outcry to unlock the lands, yet no direct movement was made until after the visit of Sir Richard Bourke to Port Phillip'.[33] This was certainly the case.

The sales took place on 1 June 1837 and both Hoddle and Russell were present. After completing his work for these sales, Russell resigned on 7 June 1837 and returned to Sydney. Russell sent his map of Melbourne dated 1837 with the streets drawn in, to London to be lithographed. He later distributed it among his friends.

After his resignation in June 1837, Robert Russell spent six months sketching and painting in and around Sydney before returning to Melbourne in January 1838.[34] On 30 March 1838, the Colonial Office in Sydney appointed him Clerk of Works then advised Lonsdale of the appointment. He was probably appointed because qualified architects were few and far between. This was also a short-lived career. Lonsdale was not satisfied with his work, again accusing him of laziness and insubordination; he was sacked on 30 June 1839.

The Beginnings of Cultural Melbourne

After his dismissal as Clerk of Works, without reference to his sacking, Russell wrote to his father, 'I have very good connections & retain the best architectural business here besides which I do not despise the more profitable auxiliary surveying. I have taken an office & sleep & eat at the Club...[35] The Club he wrote of was the Melbourne Club, established in December 1838, one month after the establishment of the Melbourne Cricket Club. However, the Cricket Club was not a gentleman's 'Club' in the sense in which both the Melbourne and the Port Phillip Clubs (established in 1841) operated.[36]

As Geoffrey Serle writes, the founding colonists of Victoria established 'a new, large, self-governing country, automatically recreating British institutions and re-forming familiar clubs and societies'.[37] With his customary enthusiasm, Robert Russell joined the first 'gentlemen' on 15 November 1838 to form the Melbourne Union Cricket Club. He played in the first cricket match a week later in a paddock in William Street, formerly the site of the Royal Mint. The Club soon became known as the Melbourne Cricket Club.

For the next decade, as June Senyard writes, cricket games were organised between teams selected from such groups as 'the bachelors against the husbands' or 'the bearded against the clean-shaven'. The subsequent establishment of the Brighton and Geelong clubs introduced teams based on a locality. In the first cricket match, there were four balls to the over and underarm bowling was standard, but gambling was often the main interest.[38]

The Melbourne Club was established on 17 December 1838. As Paul de Serville writes, 'the Melbourne Club is the oldest club in Victoria… The founding members were squatters, civil servants, judges, professional men and merchants. While some were gentlemen by birth, the majority were accounted gentlemen in taste, manners and habits'.[39] In the small township, this distinction was an important
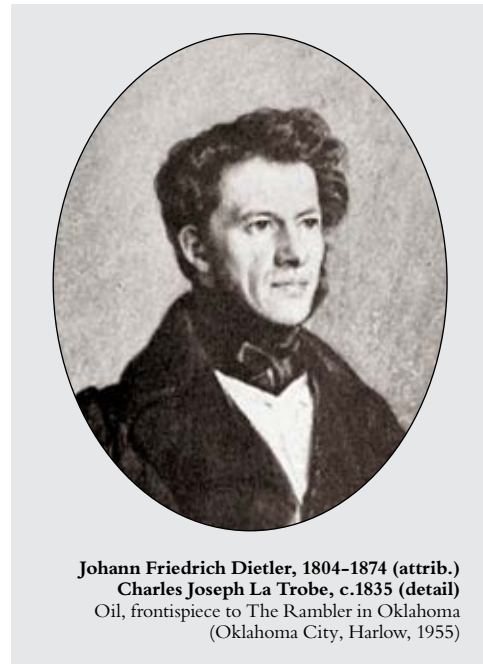
Johann Friedrich Dietler, 1804–1874 (attrib.)
Charles Joseph La Trobe, c.1835 (detail)
Oil, frontispiece to The Rambler in Oklahoma
(Oklahoma City, Harlow, 1955)

one. The pedigree and background of a new settler made a difference to his business and family prospects.

In 1839, when Russell was a member there, the Melbourne Club was located on the corner of Market and Collins streets; in 1841 it moved to the corner of William and Bourke streets. In 1859 it moved to its present site (36 Collins Street) where Leonard Terry designed a handsome building in the Italian style. The Club was well known because of the behaviour of some of its first members who were frequently very high spirited; duels were fought and horsewhipping was administered. Long after the gold era the Club remained a stronghold of pioneer families. As de Serville writes: 'Socially it constituted the supreme body of Victorian society.' Members of established families joined it as a matter of course, and newer families marked their arrival in society when they appeared on its list.[40] Various economic depressions saw numbers fluctuate when members could no longer afford the fees.

Arrival of Superintendent Charles Joseph La Trobe

By far the most significant event to take place in Melbourne at the close of the 1830s was the arrival in early October 1839 of Superintendent Charles Joseph La Trobe and his Swiss wife Sophie. La Trobe, of Moravian background, had previously undertaken a fact-finding mission in the West Indies for the Colonial Office.[41] A widely travelled and highly sophisticated man, his arrival here must have been something of a culture shock.

At 1pm on 3 October he landed at Port Melbourne with his family. He was present at a land sale at 3pm and later received a welcome address from the inhabitants. In the evening he was welcomed with a fireworks display. Days later, the local newspaper, the *Port Phillip Patriot,* proudly described Melbourne as:

> a flourishing town, with a population of between two and three thousand souls, and containing most of the appendages of an advanced civilization. It has five places of worship of different denominations of Christians, a Court of Justice, two Schools, two Banks, one Club with sixty members, a Fire and Marine Assurance Company, and two newspapers are efficiently supported. Of the learned professions there are six Clergymen, twelve medical men, and five lawyers. Such is the present state of Melbourne.[42]

Clearly the paper expressed a widely held view: that the people of Melbourne were very proud of all that had been achieved in such a short space of time.[43] Between 1836 and 1839, Melbourne had become a thriving commercial centre and chief port to the rich pastoral districts that surrounded it. Its population had grown from 224 in 1836 to nearly 3,000 in 1839.[44]

How had Russell fared in the meantime? When he was not attending either of his clubs, Russell worked as an independent surveyor and architect. By December 1839 his architectural practice was progressing well, but Russell's career may not have been what he would have wished. On the brighter side, between jobs he was able to paint and draw. Perhaps the best-known of his architectural work is the St James' Church, now St James' Old Cathedral, designed and built under his direction. He also designed various residences and several other official buildings around Melbourne, now demolished.

A commissioned architect and surveyor

Russell married Mary Anne Collis Smith on 17 December 1839 in St James' Church. Her sister Catherine married Daniel Stodhart Campbell the same day; the following day Nelly Smith married Charles Nantes also at St James'. Through their marriages, a network of inter-relationships between the Smith sisters and three leading colonists – an architect, an entrepreneur and a businessman, began.

During the 1840s as the population grew, so did residents' lack of confidence in the Colonial government in Sydney. The first petition to separate from New South Wales was drafted and presented to Governor George

Gipps (who had replaced Bourke) in 1840. The first Melbourne market was opened in 1841 and the Melbourne Municipal Corporation Act was passed in Sydney; it established the Melbourne City Council. Few escaped the effects of the Depression of 1841–1843 and Russell's practice was certainly affected because he relied on the patronage of speculators. Russell's brothers-in-law, Daniel Campbell and Charles Nantes, both suffered through ambitious banking investments that failed.

As a contractor, Russell applied to the Colonial Office in Sydney to undertake surveys in Port Phillip but his applications were rejected. However, in 1843 he accepted a commission to survey the interior of Gippsland, Port Albert and Wilson's Promontory. This appears to have been a private survey. It is likely that Russell began writing his novel, *The Heart*, while he was on surveying trips. The story is the tale of shipwreck and a white woman captured by local Aboriginals, later also told as *The White Woman of Gippsland*. When he returned to Melbourne in 1843, Russell noted that money was scarce and that people had difficulties obtaining the bare necessities of life.[45] Russell was so impressed with Port Albert that he returned there several times, purchased land there, and conducted private surveys. For this reason he was known as the founder of Port Albert. Other surveying jobs came his way. At one stage in 1845 he visited artist and diarist Georgiana McCrae on his way to Mount Martha on the Mornington

Peninsula. Georgiana wrote that he refused breakfast, saying that he had six thousand acres to survey and 'breakfast wasted time'.[46]

All the while, buildings and bridges were being constructed in Melbourne. In 1845, a wooden trestle bridge across the Yarra River was built with government funds. The foundation stone for a new bridge designed by David Lennox was laid in 1846. It was a single span 150 feet (46 metres) bluestone and granite arch bridge and was opened in 1850. At the time it was one of the longest, flattest stone arch bridges in the world.

The now famous Royal Botanic Gardens were founded in 1846 by Superintendent La Trobe. The first curator was John Arthur; he was followed by John Dallachy. Ferdinand von Mueller was appointed Director of the Gardens in 1857. He and Russell became good friends, and von Mueller was a frequent visitor to Russell's home in Richmond.[47]

In 1851, just fifteen years after official settlement, the population in the Port Phillip District had increased to more than 77,000.[48] To the joy of its inhabitants, on 1 July 1851, the Port Phillip District separated from New South Wales. Less than a fortnight later, gold was 'discovered' at Anderson's Creek near Warrandyte and at Clunes, ninety miles north-west of Melbourne.[49] We know of course that gold had been discovered well before this, and

that the announcement was somewhat staged. Nevertheless, this was the most momentous event to occur in Port Phillip since it was opened for settlement fifteen years earlier. In 1851, possibly after July, Russell was once again employed on official country surveys by Robert Hoddle, perhaps because no other surveyor was available. Once again Russell appears to have exhibited a serious lack of enthusiasm for the work and he was dismissed in 1853 for making unsatisfactory progress.

Russell continued to conduct various country surveys until his licence was revoked under the *Land Act* of 1873 when he was sixty-five years old.[50] In retirement he continued to paint and record the progress of the settlement. When he died in 1900, he had lived in Melbourne for almost the entire Victorian era. He saw, participated in and captured in literature and painting, drawings and portraits, the development of the Port Phillip District.

Remembering Lonsdale and Russell

Despite the negative manner in which their paths crossed in the early years of settlement, in many ways, it is an interesting co-incidence that Lonsdale and Russell Streets intersect. Lonsdale Street and Point Lonsdale were named after William Lonsdale; Mount Martha was named after his wife. Naming these places after Lonsdale was a testament to the major contribution he made as the first Police Magistrate of the Port Phillip District. Russell Street was not named after Robert Russell as many Melburnians still assume. It was named instead after Lord John Russell, British Home Secretary, leader of the House of Commons in Lord Melbourne's cabinet and later Prime Minister. However, the error still places Russell in the public's eye. We also remember Robert Russell for the construction (1839-1842) of St James' Church, now St James Old Cathedral, relocated to King Street. Sadly, his large collections of paintings, pen and ink drawings and portraits held at the State Library are less well known.

William Lonsdale and Robert Russell were two men who made significant contributions to the settlement of Melbourne from the time they arrived in 1836. With perseverance, presence of mind and great passion, they made their mark in very different ways.

1 Richard Broome, *Arriving*, McMahon's Point, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1984; Tony Dingle, *Settling*, McMahon's Point, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1984; Susan Priestley, *Making Their Mark*, McMahon's Point, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1984. (*The Victorians*, 3 vols.)

2 B.R. Penny, 'Lonsdale, William (1799–1864)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967, vol. 2, pp.124-126.

3 James Theodore Ivan Rangelov, 'The Port Phillip Magistrates 1835-1851', Thesis (PhD) Victoria University, 2005, p.189.

4 Ibid, p. 189.

5 Penny, p.125.

6 Rangelov, p.192.

7 Civil Instructions, pp. 49-52 quoted in Rangelov, p.193.

8 Rangelov, p.194.

9 Penny, p.125.

10 Harley Preston, 'Robert Russell (1808-1900) "The Father of Melbourne" ', Thesis (BA Hons) University of Melbourne, 1955, p.2.

11 Ibid, p.201.

12 New South Wales Archives, Colonial Architect 1839 4/2439 and to Col. Sec. Attention of Governor Gipps, no. 39/6280, 14 May 1839.

13 Ernest Scott, 'The Administration of Captain Lonsdale', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, v.6, no.4, September 1916, pp.158-159.

14 Scott, p.142.

15 Michael Cannon, *Old Melbourne Town: before the gold rush,* Melbourne: Loch Haven Books, 1991, p.423.

16 Penny, p.126.

17 La Trobe to David Charteris McArthur, L.J. Blake (ed.), *Letters of Charles Joseph La Trobe*, Melbourne: Government Printer, 1975, p.47.

18 Preston, p.2.

19 *Port Phillip Government Gazette,* 21 September 1836, p.1.

20 Surveyor-General to Robert Russell, 10 September 1836; Police Magistrate's In Correspondence 1836-1840, VPRS 4 36/9 (i) (a) quoted in Robert Foote, 'The Life and Work of Robert Russell', Thesis (B.Arch.) University of New South Wales, 1981, vol.1, p.27.

21 Ibid.

22 Surveyor-General to Robert Russell, 14 & 25 November 1836, VPRO VPRS Series 2 Box 5, Unit 1, 36/105, 36/204.

23 Confidential letter Captain Lonsdale to Governor Bourke, 1 November 1836, VPRO VPRS Series 2, Unit 1, M 518.

24 Patricia Hawkins, *Robert Russell: artist of early Melbourne*, Lancefield: Hindsight, 2017, p.32.

25 Russell to Surveyor-General, 25 November 1836, VPRO, Box 5 Unit 1, 36/204.

26 Confidential letter Lonsdale to Governor Bourke, 8 December 1836, VPR Series 2, Unit 1, M 5187.

27 NSWA, Surveyor-General papers 1834–36, Part 3.

28 Marjorie Tipping, 'Robert Hoddle (1794–1881)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966, Vol.1, pp.547–548.

29 Hawkins, pp.14–15.

30 A.G.L. Shaw, 'Foundation and Early History', *Encyclopaedia of Melbourne*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 205, pp.284–286.

31 Hawkins, p.28.

32 Shaw, p.286.

33 'Melbourne's First Land Sales', *Stamford Sentinel and Briagolong Express*, 30 August 1912, p.3.

34 Preston, p.5.

35 Robert Russell papers, MS Box H16488, 15 July 1839, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria.

36 Paul de Serville, 'Port Phillip Club', *Encyclopaedia of Melbourne*, p.558.

37 Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age: a history of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861.* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1963, p.381.

38 June Senyard, 'Cricket', *Encyclopaedia of Melbourne*, p.180.

39 Paul de Serville, 'Melbourne Club', *Encyclopaedia of Melbourne*, p.460.

40 Ibid.

41 Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: the making of a governor*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, pp.110–125.

42 *Port Phillip Patriot*, 7 October 1839, p.3.

43 Reilly Drury, p.140.

44 Peter McDonald, 'Demography', *Encyclopaedia of Melbourne*, p.200.

45 Hawkins, p.50.

46 Georgiana McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*: *Melbourne 1841-1865,* edited by Hugh McCrae, Canberra: Halstead Press, 2013, p.242, 11 June 1845.

47 Hawkins, p.58.

48 Serle, p.382.

49 Don Garden*, Victoria: a history*, Melbourne: Nelson, 1984, p.69.

50 Foote, vol.2, p.174.

Impressions of Victoria 1852: 'a collection of everything from every place'

By Susan Priestley

Susan Priestley MA (Melb), RHSV Fellow and committee member of the La Trobe Society, is a practising historian with an interest in recovering lives and solving enigmas about people. Her biography of the activist and feminist Henrietta Augusta Dugdale 1827–1918 was published in 2011. 'Identifying Ellen Clacy' appeared in the June 2014 issue of the Victorian Historical Journal. The following article evolved from a reference in the British Library's digitized collection of 19th century newspapers to yet another immigrant to Victoria during the La Trobe period.

On 10 February 1853 the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette,* a regional English newspaper owned and edited by George Simpson,[1] published a column headed 'Australian Events'.[2] It comprised extracts from a letter written about five months earlier by:

> a gentleman of talent and energetic habits, who emigrated in the year 1851, and who has been engaged, as a civil engineer, on the boundary survey of the new province of Victoria… It is written in such a genuine spirit, with so much originality, and contains so many local references, that we regret we cannot publish it *in extensor.*

While modern readers would share that regret, the letter as edited is still full of interest, even if not all of its 'news' or 'opinion' is verifiable.

The best match for the identity of the letter writer is Albert Purchas, who began his Victorian career with about eighteen months as assistant government surveyor. From January 1853 he built up an extensive private practice in Melbourne that included mapmaking, engineering patents, contract design of public spaces such as the Zoological Gardens and Melbourne General Cemetery, and some private architecture.[3] A long career in the Victorian militia culminated in his elevation to the rank of major in October 1884.[4] From about 1864 his family home was *Fernhill* in Fitzwilliam Street Kew, where he died on 26 September 1909 aged 84, survived by two sons and two daughters. The family grave is in Boroondara General Cemetery, designed in mid–nineteenth century 'garden' style. Purchas was a cemetery trustee, and some buildings, including the tower near the entrance with a gently muted chiming clock, are attributed to him. The gravestone

encapsulates fragments of his personal life with his first wife, Eliza Anne née Swyer, whom he married at St Kilda, Victoria on 1 November 1854. Installed after her death at the end of 1869, as becomes evident from the bottom inscription, it has later additions and now reads from the top:

Marion Eliza PURCHAS
b 16 Aug 1855/ d 26 May 1875
In memory of/ Albert PURCHAS
b 25 March 1825/ d 26 Sep 1909
Eliza Anne/ wife of Albert PURCHAS
b 1 July 1826/ d 24 Dec 1869
[text follows]
& in memory of their infant children
Beatrice & Lillian 1864/ Adeline 1867
Violet PURCHAS
b 25 Nov 1860/ d ?1 May 1875
Elaine Alberta PURCHAS
7 Mar 1868/ d 2 Mar 1891
This tablet was erected by the servants
& Dependants of a kind, indulgent &
Christian Lady/ 1869

Purchas was born at St Arvan, a Welsh village near Chepstow in Monmouthshire. At the 1841 census, his father Robert Whittlesey Purchas was a land agent and farmer at Pilstone House, Llandogo, halfway between Chepstow and Monmouth, with an older second wife (or sister), two sons as land surveyors, and fifteen-year-old Albert as farmer. Family expertise in surveying, and experience with the initial Monmouthshire railway canal project, which was aborted in 1848, appear to have confirmed Albert's training as a civil engineer.[5]

After his father's death in 1849, with two brothers established in businesses at Ross-on-Wye and Worcester, he decided to emigrate. Another brother, Arthur Guyon Purchas, had been a Church of England minister in New Zealand since 1846.[6] In September 1850, well before news of any Australian gold discovery, Albert took passage on the barque *Anglia* bound for Adelaide and Port Phillip. Albert Purchas Esq. was one of fifty-three passengers who signed an 'unsolicited and heartfelt' testimonial, printed in the *South Australian Register* of 7 March 1851, to Captain Charles Gardner's 'many estimable qualities,' ensuring their 'safe and comfortable passage' despite 'long-continued calms and unfavourable winds' that had protracted the voyage to 168 days. Thirty-seven of the signatories, including Purchas, were among passengers who disembarked from the *Anglia* at Melbourne at the end of March.[7]

On 16 June 1851, two weeks before Victoria's separation from New South Wales came into formal effect, he was appointed Assistant Surveyor at £200 per annum; a

Johnstone, O'Shannessy & Co., Melbourne, photographer
Albert Purchas in his captain's uniform, c.1870
Carte de visite
Photograph courtesy Mike McDermott, Essex

50 per cent salary increase was recommended for all twelve men at his level on 8 January 1852. These matters are detailed in a government report on 'Gold Despatches' dated 10 September 1852, and printed in *Parliamentary Papers* for the 1852-53 session. An added note conveys something of Victoria's rampant gold-fever in 1852: 'At present there is difficulty in procuring laborers for the officers employed in the field'.[8] Albert Purchas was fully cognizant of that situation when he penned his letter to George Simpson at the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* eighteen months after his arrival.

Headed 'Tallisker Cottage, Barwon-terrace, Geelong, Victoria, Sept. 1, 1852', the extract begins: 'When I had my family snugly settled here, I set out on my journey through the western district'. His reference to family is puzzling since he came alone, but a possible connection was Thomas Purchas, 'late of 78 Gray's Inn lane, London' who was admitted to practice as a solicitor in the colony of Victoria on 4 June 1851, and advertised money to lend for land purchases, a not uncommon sideline for solicitors. However, Thomas's career ended in suicide, as an alcoholic vagrant who had abandoned his wife and surviving child.

Albert Purchas's western district journey would have been in relation to the border survey mentioned in the introduction to the 'Australian Events' column. Since the pioneering survey team led by Edward Riggs White had reached the Murray in December 1850, the newcomer's duties must have been some finishing detail

at its southerly end, assisting Lindsay Clarke, government surveyor at Portland from 1848.[9] The letter continues:

> You will see by the map that Port Fairy is about 300 miles west of Melbourne, and Portland about 50 miles further on. The land is the best I have ever seen. What appears to be a dense forest at a distance can be ridden through with safety at the top of a horse's speed. As you may imagine, there are no ditches or drains here, nor is it likely to be for centuries to come. The ground appears as if the process of consolidation had scarcely begun – as if the vessel was used by over-anxious man before it was even well heated by the sun.

This pottery-making allusion is an indication of surface soils not yet hardened by the hoofs of flocks and herds. Other marks of civilization were equally agreeable:

> The inns by the way side are very comfortable, and the charges very reasonable. They are about twenty five or thirty miles apart [charging] 1s. for a nobbler, 4s. breakfast, 4s. dinner, 4s. tea, 4s. supper, 4s. feed of oats, 4s. bed. Now, a 'nobbler' is half a glass of brandy and half a glass of water. A nobbler is the staff of life, or rather of death in Australia. In a word, brandy and indolence, sheer indolence, are the curses of the country. In considering the prices of articles, you must calculate that 1d. with you more than represents 1s. here, that is, 1d. is harder to be obtained in England than 1s. in Australia.

> When I called to a station on the road, the squatter and family were invariably kind and hospitable; but those stations are mostly 60 or 100 miles apart, and almost always off the main track, for the driving of sheep or cattle along the road always occupies some eight or ten miles in breadth of country, and the squatter is sure to go back far enough to avoid being trespassed on when he cannot keep the trespasser otherwise off. I may as well mention here how cattle are brought up to market. Literally, nothing is done in the hot weather, but 'nobblering'. In the cool months, two drivers with two horses will start a flock of sheep of one or two thousand, proceed on their road about five or six miles every day, driving over fresh ground, sometimes in a grassy country stopping a week or a fortnight, and by those means get to town with the sheep or cattle much improved in condition. I rode each day about 60 miles. The horses are light limbed, very endurable and hardy – they never enter a stable, nor are they ever wiped down. After a day's journey they get a small feed of oats, more generally of flour, being the cheapest, and are then turned out for the night on a tether or in hobbles.
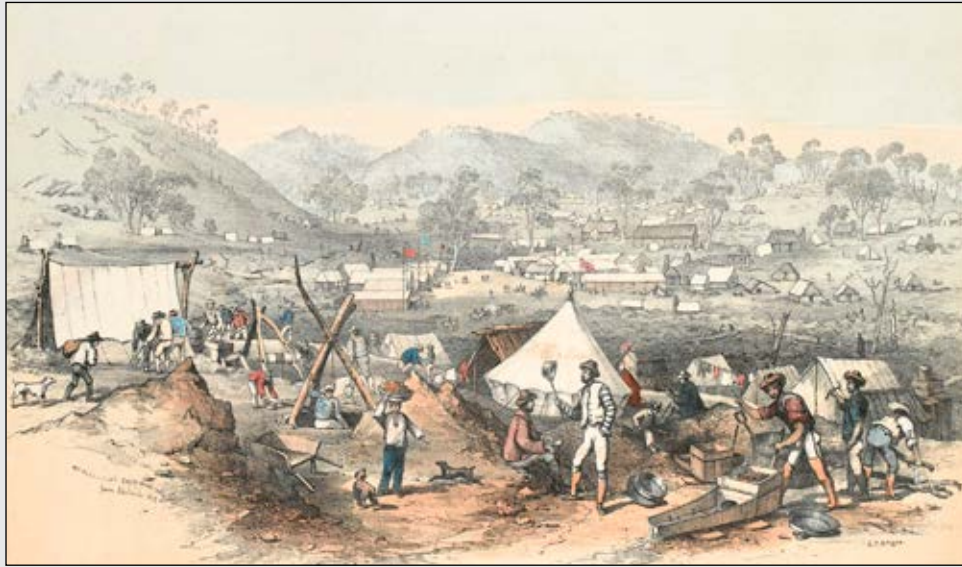
Purchas then turns to more general comments on Victorian society, a significant group being former convicts, although he extends the definition well beyond accepted boundaries. Apart from Melbourne's city engineer, the other thirteen position holders cannot be accurate according to known records. A level of irony can be detected, while his 'political convict' label may have a meaning no longer understood:

There are men and women who were fortunate enough to draw the notice of her Majesty's officers, and who were therefore afforded the advantage of a passage to Van Diemen's Land. Those people are scattered nearly over the whole of Port Phillip district, and certainly they can be favourably contrasted with the free settlers and recent arrivals from the mother country. They are now the aristocracy, if anything approaching to the pompous, arrogant, idle and beggarly (second class) 'aristocracy' with you, exist here at all. The city of Melbourne civil engineer, with £1000 a year, is a convict.[10] The Crown prosecutor, nine members of the Legislative Council, the governors of the gaols of Melbourne and Geelong, the Government printer, and a host of others [are] political convicts, who are treated here with great respect. The best hotel between Melbourne and Portland is at the crossing of the Umeralla River, between Portland and Belfast. The owner is a Mr Fitzpatrick, a Queens county convict, of not more, I believe, than seven years' date. I was struck with the 'Fitzpatrick Arms', emblazoned in a superb gilt frame in the principal room.[11]

The letter continues with his more recent experiences, and a particularly vivid account of the Forest Creek section of the Mount Alexander diggings:

Geelong contains about ten thousand inhabitants now. There is one daily paper[12] and one printing office — the paper some weeks does not come out, the men making to the "diggings". Although dating this letter from my residence in Geelong, I am in fact writing it in my tent on Forest Creek, the far famed Mount Alexander. Within my view there are upwards of 5,000 tents, and perhaps 20,000 people, of all nations and all classes "gold digging". The California miner, in his scarlet blouse and scarlet cap; the active Malay, in blue and white; the poor stupid looking Chinese, with his turban and clogs; the merry Italian, alive and life like, frugal and persevering, and happy looking; John Bull and his neighbour, the Scotchman, plodding away silent and selfish enough, and Poor Paddy may well be known with
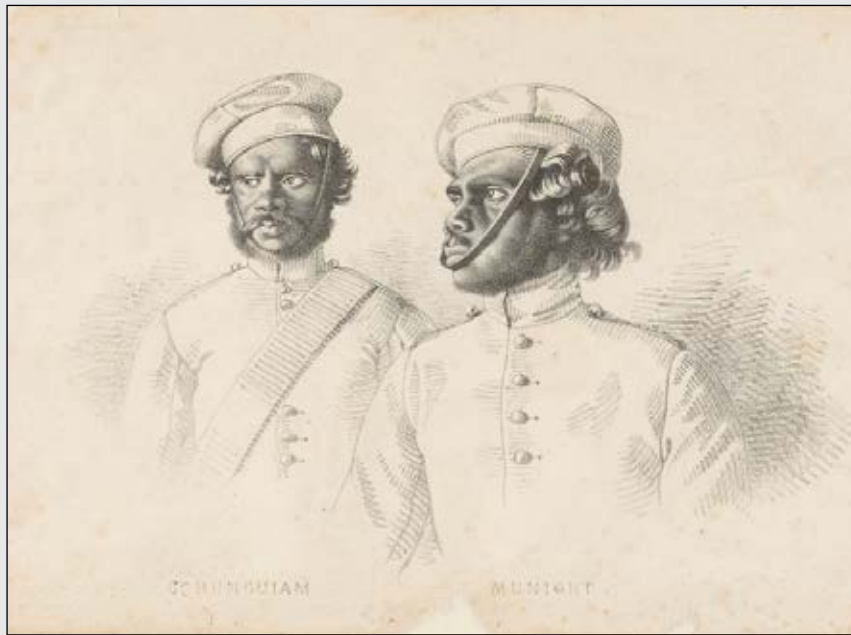
the torn cabbage tree hat, his hearty laugh, and broken bottles outside his tent. It is a strange gathering, and a truly meaty one. Just here you see a neat tent with a sprightly flag, the floor carefully gravelled, and a walk all round; and here and there one of the native flowers growing luxuriantly. That is George Stephenson's tent, the proprietor and editor of the celebrated Adelaide Mining Journal.[13] Mrs Stephenson and two older children are within; the younger ones are playing rolling-away-down-the-slope. Mr S. is digging in the gully just hard by. The next tent belongs to the late Attorney General, who found it more profitable and healthful to be here than among his law papers.

The digger law officer was most likely Edward Eyre Williams who spent three months as Victoria's Solicitor-General before being displaced in July 1852 by James Croke, formerly Crown Prosecutor. Williams was later appointed Supreme Court judge in compensation.[14] That prompted a short digression to local politics and the turbulence brought by gold:

The Government here is very weak, unlike everything and almost everybody else here, very indolent.

The few officers that were induced to remain at their posts made their own terms, and are doing, perhaps almost as well as middling gold diggers. There is nothing creditable in holding a first class Government appointment; on the contrary a person is only asked couldn't he do better; still by a little perseverance, an officer may have his hands full of many matters; a gold buyer, a sleeping partner to a store on the diggings, and a land jobber in the most extensive sense. In fact, a Government appointment is now only thought of being kept as long as it can be made subservient to other purposes of money-making.

The correspondent then resumes his account:

To go back to myself and tent. Forest Creek is in my district, and this is my third visit to it.[15] I am here four weeks, and I hope to have one of my assistants up next week, when I will return home to Geelong; my two tent men have walked off to the diggings, while I remain, and I may consider myself fortunate if they come back in time to return with me. They even didn't condescend to say how long they proposed to stay away, nor will

they attempt to make any excuse if they come back; but they will expect their salaries just as well as if they were not absent. To blame them for being absent would be unpardonable. They took two of my six shirts with them, and as much rations as they thought fit. You will say that you would soon be done with such servants but you would not. It is a matter of the greatest moment to have the tent and rations, &c., conveyed safely from place to place, and where there are good bushmen who know several points to meet at, much anxiety and sufferings are avoided. For I can tell you it is no comfortable prospect to be looking out at the close of the day for your tent and rations.

A further example of topsy-turvy Victoria in 1852:

Another instance occurred a few weeks back that may illustrate 'man and master' in Australia, since gold-digging began. Mr La Trobe, the governor, who bye-the-bye is a very amiable man, and one that might succeed over a school of seven year old boys, but who finds it rather difficult to attempt managing a collection of everything from every place. He was riding in company with his trooper about eight miles from Melbourne, on a station of his; by some mischance he let his horse slip from him at a place he had occasion to dismount. The trooper did endeavour to catch the horse but of course failed.

Then how was his excellency to get home? – Why on the trooper's horse – not a bit of it, 'you see's, the trooper couldn't 'hunderstand why when he lost that there hos himself, that he shouldn't walk here home or until he got an hos'. And Lieutenant-General [sic] Charles Joseph La Trobe, Governor of Victoria, was bound to walk six miles to get a horse. Did he dismiss the trooper? Not a bit of that either, he couldn't get a better! I am fortunate in having a young man, a native, who comes with me and appears attached to me. He has all the characteristics of his race, restless, light-hearted, and lazy; he is nevertheless, very clean in his person, and full of tricks when in good humour. He will clean one of my boots if I clean the other; but if I stop brushing, he stops too. If any one

Maclure & Macdonald, London, lithographer
Edward Wilson, c.1859
Lithograph, sepia toned
Collection: National Library of Australia
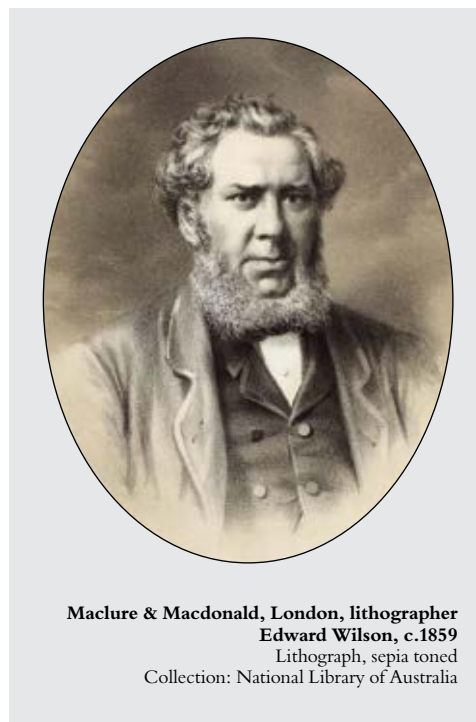
comes in, he will sit as I sit, and watch the newcomer closely, and, when the stranger goes away, is sure to mimic every turn that was given.

The extracts end there somewhat abruptly. It is fortunate that the last two vivid word sketches of individuals remain, revealing in Purchas's juxtaposition that both were probably local Aboriginal men. His own laid-back assistant is not further identifiable, but La Trobe's trooper could well have been one of the last-serving members of the Native Police corps, taking on the role adopted by Tuggendun who had died in November 1845. The 'station' they were visiting was not La Trobe's personal property but probably the reserve at Nerre Nerre (now Narre) Warren that became the depot for the Native Police. Marguerita Stephens spoke about Nerre Nerre Warren in her 2016 AGL Shaw lecture, published in the March 2017 issue of *La Trobeana*, along with another article by John Barnes on La Trobe's approach to Christianising Aboriginal people, and in particular Murrumwiller (Charles Never) and Tuggendun. Since La Trobe's personal notebook for 1852 has no entries at all between 5 May and 18 November, the episode is not otherwise recorded. Nevertheless, a William Strutt drawing circa 1851 in the State Library is labelled *Cohunguiam [and] Munight* and inscribed on the verso in pencil 'Some of Mr La Trobe's Black Police'.[16]

Purchas' overall assessment of Victoria's government in 1852 is unforgiving, especially in

Albion Tavern, 153 Aldersgate Street London
Source: www.bowyers.com/meetingPlaces_albion.php
Peter Cunningham's *Handbook of London* (1850) says the Albion was famed for its good
wines and good dinners, public and private. It was generally the venue for farewell
dinners to new Governors of India hosted by the East India Company, and for annual
dinners hosted by the leading publishing houses that were followed by trade sales.

the light of his short time in the colony when a 'blended' nominated and elected Legislative Council was struggling to find its feet, inaugurate a range of new measures of independent administration, and deal with the gold-seeking flood.[17] C.J. La Trobe is acknowledged as being 'very amiable' but out of his depth in 'managing a collection of everything from every place'. The government as a whole was deemed 'very weak… very indolent', with officers prepared, even expected, to pursue their own business interests on the side. That raises the ghost of complaints aired at various times during La Trobe's term of office. The *Argus* newspaper, forcefully directed by Edward Wilson, its 'sole proprietor' between 1848 and 1853 and continuing editor until 1855, was renowned for leading the most extreme charges. One gauge is Wilson's vitriolic comment on the letter from 'A Stranger' mentioned in John Barnes' article.[18] It reads:

> If our correspondent had known Mr La Trobe as long as we have, he would have been aware that he has as little claim to the title of a 'good' man, as he has to that of a great one… [H]e is and always has been weak, shifty, truckling to the Home authorities, treacherous, insincere… the patron of the negligent, the incapable, and the corrupt...[19]

While such claims were not detailed or tested during La Trobe's term of office, nor indeed universally held, echoes nevertheless resounded through the colonies and even as far as the English press. A correspondent for the *Bristol Mercury*, not far from Purchas family territory, wrote at the end of 1853:

> Mr La Trobe has been coarsely abused by one of our papers – indeed such vituperative malignity has it exhibited that something more than mere difference of political opinion is assigned to account for it; his whole administration has been characterized as a continuous swindle – a 'dynasty of decrepitude' – and himself personally alluded to in a style which in England would speedily have attracted legal notice. Mr La Trobe erred, I believe, in not throwing the colony open to cultivators who were waiting to come in; but that he has been guilty of any acts that would justify the epithets bestowed upon him remains yet to be seen. The *Argus* has promised to write his life.[20]

That promise was not fulfilled, with Wilson's softened stance already apparent at the farewell by *Argus* staff on his retirement in September 1855:[21]

> He expressed his surprise and amusement at the extraordinary statements in reference to the influences brought to bear upon the *Argus* which some people had made, and even found others to believe. He referred to the statements that

he had been personally hostile to Mr La Trobe, and to the squatters, and that the *Argus* had more recently been brought under Government influence. To Mr La Trobe he had only spoken twice in his life. The trifling requests then made had been complied with, and no possible ground of personal antipathy existed.

The *Argus* critic and his chief target may have met up again in London through the General Association for the Australian Colonies, initially set up in 1855 to lobby for better postal communication between Britain and Australia.[22] It initiated the Australian Anniversary dinners held on 26 January each year from 1858 to 1862, at which the Secretary of State for the Colonies was the prize guest. C.J. La Trobe certainly attended the first dinner, being named among the seventeen guests along with Sir Roderick Murchison who had sponsored his membership of the Royal Geographical Society. Held at London's Albion Tavern in Aldersgate Street, a 'tavern of the highest class', the dinner celebrated the 70th anniversary of founding the first Australian colony in 1788.[23]

Later in 1858 the Association took premises in the commercial heart of the city, Jerusalem coffee house, Cornhill, comprising a large reading room with newspapers (including the major Australian ones), books, maps, and other sources of information, as well as a committee room and a correspondence room. Its three objects were to be a convenient meeting place for 'those connected with the Colonies, mercantile or other', to be 'the chief source of information [about the Colonies], whether statistical, commercial, scientific, political or otherwise', and to assist in facilitating 'British support to undertakings initiated in the Colonies'.[24] The Association was a forerunner of 20th century High and Trade Commissions.

The second Anniversary Dinner was attended by about 160 people. Among those noted by the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s correspondent were a dozen or more colonists or former colonists who were well known to La Trobe.[25] They included E.P.S. Sturt (later named as an executor of his will) who was Victoria's representative on the chairman's table, merchants David Benjamin and his brother Solomon, civil servant John Leslie Fitzgerald Foster, settler Alfred Langhorne, Captain Mills (from Port Fairy) and Edward Wilson, who was called to propose the rather surprising toast of 'Our Fatherland', meaning Victoria. He said it was:

> a toast which he felt some claim to the honour of proposing, inasmuch as, although absent for a short time in this country, he still regarded Australia as his home… there was a time when misgovernment and neglect of the colony had almost made him a rebel; and he was prepared to recommend that the connection between it and the mother country should be severed; but now so much had been conceded by the Imperial Government, which the colonists had justly demanded, that he felt more than ever attached to the Government of the old country. (Cheers)

Wilson's recantation of this aspect of his colonial rebellion, which could well have been transmitted through E.P.S. Sturt, might have brought a wry smile to the face of the Lieutenant-Governor against whom he had railed so bitterly. The *Argus* denunciations had also coloured the opinion of at least one new immigrant, Alfred Purchas, who sent his colonial impressions to the editor of the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*.

1   'Happy Birthday *Gazette and Herald:* 200 years old today' (formerly *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*), 4 January 2016, website archive (accessed 13 April 2016).

2   *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, 10 February 1853, p.3, *British Newspapers,* Part III: 1780-1950, Gale Document Number: K3224218895.

3   Information from *Argus* advertisements, 26 January 1853, p.7 and 5 February 1853, p.8; Boroondara General Cemetery website; Albert Purchas: architect, soldier, inventor, State Library Victoria Blog by Paul, 19 June 2013.

4   *Victorian Government Gazette*, no.119, 10 October 1884, p.2854.

5   Genealogical information from Ancestry.com, Macbeth Genealogical Services consolidated index to Victorian births, deaths and marriages, Purchas' obituary, *Argus*, 30 September 1909, p.7.

6   'Purchas, Arthur Guyon (1821-1906)', *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, 1966*, edited by A.H. McLintock, http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/purchas-arthur-guyon (accessed 30 October 2016).

7   Departure date in 'Ship News', *Morning Post*, London, 17 September 1850, 19th Century British Library Newspapers, Gale Document Number R3214819805; *South Australian Register*, 7 March 1851, p.2; 'Shipping Intelligence', 108 days as printed is a typographical error or misreading; Melbourne arrival, *Argus*, 31 March 1851, p.2.

8   *Gold Despatches: copies of despatches from His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, return to address, Mr. O'Shanassy, 10th September 1852*. Melbourne: Government Printing Office, 1852, p.50, 'Return of Surveyor General's Department on 8th January 1852'.

9 *Geelong Advertiser*, 6 June 1851, p.2; *Melbourne Daily News,* 22 May 1851, p.3; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 September 1874, p.3; Clarke's obituary, *Portland Guardian,* 19 October 1891, p.2.

10 Harley Preston, 'Blackburn, James (1803-1854)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966, vol.1, pp.109–110.

11 Fitzpatrick cannot be further identified, but the road between Portland and Belfast (Port Fairy) crossed the Eumeralla River at what is now Macarthur (once Eumeralla) where the Eumeralla Inn is recorded as licenced to Luke Carter in 1849, *Argus*, 27 April 1849, p.4.

12 *Geelong Advertiser* began in November 1840.

13 See 'Stevenson, George (1799-1856)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967, vol.2, pp.481–482.

14 *Argus* 24 February 1853, p.4; comprehensive account of official appointees in Ray Wright, *A Blended House: the Legislative Council of Victoria 1851-1856*, Melbourne: Parliament of Victoria, 2001.

15 His duties probably included surveying the new road along Forest Creek, overseeing its repair, and construction of a wooden post office and quarters. See 'From our own correspondent', *Geelong Advertiser*, 6 and 10 May 1852, p.2.

16 Dianne Reilly (ed.), *Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes 1839-1854*, Yarra Glen, Vic.: Tarcoola Press in association with the State Library of Victoria and Boz Publishing, 2006, p.357.

17 See Wright.

18 John Barnes, 'In Search of La Trobe', *La Trobeana*, vol.16, no.2, July 2017, p.10

19 *Argus*, 11 February 1853, p.5.

20 *Bristol Mercury*, 8 April 1854, Supplement, 19th Century British Library Newspapers, Gale Document Number Y3206686086.

21 *Argus*, 1 October 1855, p.5, also in *Empire*, Sydney, 5 October 1855, p.5; Geoffrey Serle, 'Wilson, Edward (1813-1878)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1976, vol.6, pp.412-415.

22 Association's first annual report, taken from *Australian Gazette*, *The Age*, 4 November 1856, p.7.

23 Report from *Portland Guardian*, 17 May 1858, p.2; 'Aldersgate Street and St Martin-le-Grand', in Walter Thornbury, *Old and New London: a narrative of its history, its people, and its places,* London: Cassell, Petter &Galpin, 1872, vol.2, pp.208-228. *British History Online,* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london/vol2/pp.208-228 (accessed 31 October 2016).

24 Account from *Courier*, Hobart, 11 February 1859, p.2.

25 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 May 1859, p.2.

# Victoria's First Bushrangers: a rousing tale of colonial times

By Margaret Anderson

Margaret Anderson became General Manager at the Old Treasury Building Melbourne in December 2015 after a long career as a public historian. She worked at the Western Australian Museum, as foundation director of the Migration Museum in Adelaide, and most recently as CEO of the History Trust of South Australia. In the late 1980s-1990 she taught history and Australian studies at Monash University. Her interests include the history of women and the family, Australian demography and the practice of public history. She is a Councillor of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, a Board member of the History Council of Victoria and a Fellow of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies.

This address was given in April 2017 when the La Trobe Society viewed the Wild Colonial Boys: Bushrangers in Victoria exhibition at the Old Treasury Building Museum.

Is it possible to grow up in Australia and not know about Ned Kelly? I doubt it. Of all the bushrangers in Australia, and there were a great many of them, it is Ned who dominates the public imagination. Whole monographs have been written about why this might be. Indeed Ned's Wikipedia entry (incidentally, one of the most extensive of any Australian figure) claims that he is the subject of more biographies than any other Australian, which is quite extraordinary. Oddly enough the exploits of the Kelly Gang came right at the end of the era of the bushranger. With closer settlement, better transport and faster communication, 'the bush' was less of a sanctuary than it had been. It might be said that the era of the Kelly Gang was both the zenith of Australian bushranging, and the moment of its decline. With Ned's execution in 1880 the age of the 'heroic outlaw' effectively came to an end, but the stories lived on in the public imagination, and show no sign of diminishing.

When we first considered presenting an exhibition about the history of bushranging in Victoria at the Old Treasury Building, including the story of the Kelly Gang was a given. I should confess that I had reservations about the wisdom of presenting yet another exhibition on this topic. So much is presented elsewhere about Ned Kelly — in particular at the State Library, at the Old Melbourne Gaol, and at Glenrowan itself of course — that I wondered if museum
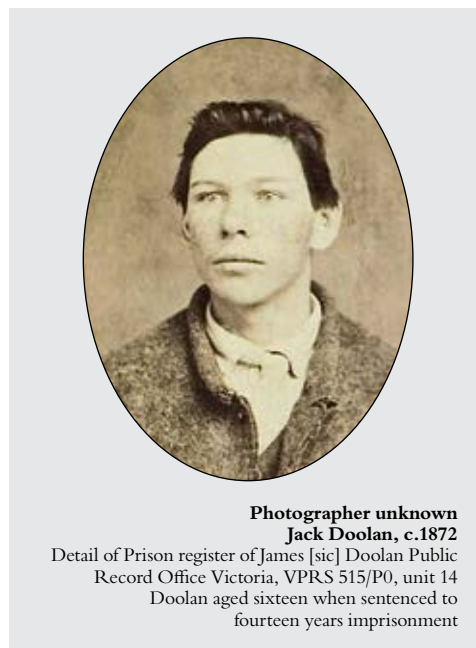
**Photographer unknown
Jack Doolan, c.1872**
Detail of Prison register of James [sic] Doolan Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 515/P0, unit 14 Doolan aged sixteen when sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment

visitors might have reached saturation point. But I need not have worried. There is such an enduring fascination with these stories that there is no sign of visitor fatigue and the exhibition has been very popular, with locals and tourists alike. We called the exhibition *Wild Colonial Boys* after the very popular song of that name, which drew in part on the life story of John Dooling aka Jack Doolan, the youngest bushranger ever convicted.

In researching this exhibition, curator Kate Luciano and I found the most interesting stories were of the lesser known bushrangers, some that most of us had never heard of. They included the earliest recorded bushrangers in Victoria: the Plenty Valley Gang. The Plenty Valley Gang was significant for several reasons, not least because they were the first Europeans to be executed in the colony, but also because the very public nature of their exploits and the level of community fear and anxiety engendered presented the young Superintendent Charles La Trobe with his first crisis in law and order.

This is a story that has a lot to tell us about Victoria in its early days. The year is 1842, just two years before Assistant Surveyor Robert Russell made his famous sketch of the village of Melbourne from across the Yarra at the Falls. He made three sketches from the same location at different times, in 1837, 1844 and 1854. They make a fascinating study of the expansion of the little town.[1] And just the year before, architect Samuel Jackson had made the first panoramic sketch of Melbourne from the partly-built walls of Scots Church. It is almost impossible to imagine Melbourne as it was in 1841. Hoddle's grid is set out on paper, but only partly in place on the ground, and the streets seem to meander about around trees and houses. Bourke Street in 1841 still had more than 1,000 tree stumps in it and some of these stumps can be seen in the panorama. The sketches reveal the settlement at that time, as a tiny isolated village, with next to no infrastructure, on the edge of a vast hinterland. In 1842 Superintendent La Trobe had been in residence for just over two years and the first of many property booms was over. In fact the settlement was on the brink of its first major economic depression, which may have been part of the impetus for the robberies in the first place.[2]

By all accounts it was a hard drinking, unruly, frontier town,[3] and it was growing at an extraordinary rate, even before gold. In 1841 the European population was about 4,500: by the following year it was approaching 10,000.[4] In the town itself roads and foot paths were little more than dusty tracks, or muddy tracks, depending on the season, and anyone on foot was soon covered in muck. We tend to forget the scale of Melbourne's growth in those pre-gold years, probably because it was eclipsed so dramatically during the gold rushes, but it was extraordinary. And it was a very masculine society. In the early 1840s men outnumbered women by about seven to one,[5] many of them young, unmarried men, far from home. It was a hard drinking town from the outset. By 1839 there were three breweries

Samuel Thomas Gill, 1818–1880, artist
Bushranger's flight, c.1856
Lithograph
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H12630

and over twenty pubs. In 1842 1,500 people were charged with public drunkenness. Some said that the police were as bad as those they arrested. There was a small gaol, hastily built in Collins Street after the first wooden structure was burnt to the ground by its inmates, but maintaining law and order was a major challenge, especially in outlying areas. Respectable Melbournians complained about the number of Vandemonians in the town and tended to blame them for everything, sometimes unfairly. But all of this placed both Police Magistrate William Lonsdale and Superintendent Charles La Trobe under constant pressure. La Trobe was also under strict instructions from Sydney to limit spending, which must have made his task doubly difficult. Infrastructure was rudimentary to say the least, and the state of the roads was another source of constant grumbling. The Yarra was an essential source of fresh water, but also a barrier to movement of both goods and people. Until the first bridge was built over the river in 1845, Melbournians depended on punts and ferries.

This was the background to the first incidence of bushranging. In April 1842 a gang of four men went on a five-day spree, robbing thirteen properties in the Dandenong district and the Plenty Valley, some fifty kilometres north of Melbourne. There was immediate panic. Until this point bushrangers had been known in New South Wales and Tasmania, but not in Victoria. The *Port Phillip Gazette* went into overdrive calling for immediate action. 'It is justly dreaded that this scourge of the older settlements will become prevalent in Port Phillip, unless put down with a strong hand'.[6]

Those outside Melbourne felt particularly vulnerable. Individual farms were often far apart, and surrounded by thick forest. It made perfect conditions for bush ranging. Residents of the Plenty Valley immediately petitioned La Trobe for permission to form a local militia.[7] He was justifiably reluctant to do so. As much as anything he probably feared the potential impact on local Aboriginal people from what amounted to a vigilante group. But it did increase the pressure on him to find the criminals quickly and to reassure the settlers that the police force could protect them.

In fact La Trobe faced practical difficulties in mounting any pursuit outside Melbourne. There were few police, those few were poorly equipped, and they struggled to catch up with the perpetrators. La Trobe even had to hire horses for several of the troopers to allow them to pursue the thieves, by which time they had invariably moved on. On the other hand, taking to the bush was also a risky undertaking. Europeans were not very good at living off the land, and the four members of the Plenty Valley Gang were relatively new arrivals. Contrary to all expectations, only one of the four was a former convict. Two were bounty emigrants and one, Daniel Jepps, was an American sailor. While their chances were not good in the long run, that was little consolation to La Trobe in the short term.

The story goes that he appealed in desperation to the gentlemen of the Melbourne Club for help in catching the gang, and five gentlemen volunteered. There is no documentary

evidence to support the tale, but certainly five gentlemen were sworn in as special constables and did assist in capturing the bushrangers after a shoot-out at a farm house. They were greatly applauded as the 'Fighting Five'. It was certainly a thrilling tale of derring-do, related in great detail in the colonial newspapers,[8] with the returning party welcomed as heroes as they entered Melbourne with their three prisoners. One of the bushrangers had been shot dead during the siege and one of the Fighting Five was injured quite seriously. The gentlemen were later feted at a grand dinner, hosted by the gentlemen and businessmen of Melbourne, and were each presented (appropriately it was noted) with a brace of pistols and a double-barrelled rifle.

Not surprisingly, justice was swiftly enacted: the public mood was definitely in favour of making examples of the three. They were tried at the Supreme Court on 12 May and pronounced guilty of intent to murder. The jury convened for a mere ninety minutes. Sentence was pronounced the next day.[9] From existing correspondence it seems likely that notorious Judge John Walpole Willis had already made up his mind before the trail even began that the men would be found guilty of attempt to murder. He wrote to Superintendent La Trobe advising that 'he had taken steps to advance the Criminal session of the court to deal out speedy justice to the Bushrangers', and urged La Trobe to seek permission from Sydney to carry out any death sentence on those convicted quickly and without the usual recourse of sending the proceedings for consideration by the Executive Council in Sydney.[10] La Trobe duly sent the request, but with a rider of his own indicating that he thought the Governor's agreement unlikely. Not surprisingly, Governor Gipps took a dim view of this attempt to encroach on his prerogative and rejected the suggestion out of hand.[11]

Nevertheless the three were duly found guilty and condemned to death. Judge Willis and Superintendent La Trobe both declined to plead for mercy for them, though in the end there was quite a public campaign to spare the American Jepps. Several of the gang's victims argued that he had saved their lives, intervening to restrain other members of the gang. But to no avail. In the event, even with the necessity of agreement from the Executive Council in Sydney, justice was swiftly served. The three were tried and convicted on 12 May, sentenced to death on 13 May and within a month the sentences were confirmed. Preparations had already begun for their execution.

At this point in the colony's history executions were still public affairs, and preparations began for the construction of a gallows on the site of the present Old Melbourne Gaol. This was not cheap. The contractor in question, George Beaver, submitted a quotation for the work valued at £60.[12] After a good deal of grumbling this was agreed. We included his design for the gallows in the exhibition. Meanwhile the hangman began practising, using straw effigies. This may sound rather ghoulish, but not surprisingly the hangman had little experience of this most exacting task, and his first attempt earlier in the year had been bungled. In January 1842, just four months earlier, two Aboriginal men doomed for execution were slowly strangled to death, to the great distress of all present and round condemnation.[13] Not surprisingly, the hangman was anxious to avoid another failure.

Historians have written about the grim ceremonial surrounding public executions at this time.[14] They were intended as public events to provide a clear warning to the populace about the consequences of serious crime. But they were complex spectacles, capable of interpretation on many levels, and sometimes they seem to have been regarded more as public entertainments. 'Dying a good death' was part of the heroics of the hanging for the condemned. For the authorities, there was always the danger that execution could transform criminals into popular heroes. The condemned had been known to use the scaffold to express their defiance against the authorities, turning the intent of the public lesson on its head. There was always an element of unpredictability. Perhaps that was part of the attraction too.

Certainly there was an element of the public occasion in Melbourne on 28 June 1842. The *Port Phillip Gazette* suggested that about 1,000 people attended the hanging — a sizeable crowd by early Melbourne standards — with gentlemen cantering about on horses, and women and children lined up to watch. Proceedings began at the gaol near the corner of Collins and William Streets where the handcuffed men were collected and seated in an open cart on their coffins. They were then driven through the streets to the place of execution on the hill at the north end of Russell Street. Ministers of religion accompanied them on the cart. Although there were only three prisoners, four ministers of religion were in attendance: representatives of the churches of England, Scotland, Rome and Wesley (Methodist) — all bases covered. The *Gazette* recorded that the American sailor Daniel Jepps gave a stirring speech from the scaffold, an English tradition that seems to have been adopted on this occasion at least:

> Fellow Christians! You see before you
> three young men in the prime of life
> and strength about to suffer on the

scaffold for the crime of bushranging. I trust you will take warning by our untimely fate, and avoid those crimes which have brought us to this end. Good people, I most humbly beg your prayers to the Almighty on our behalf. I die in the faith of our salvation through the blood of our Divine Redeemer.[15]

Good rousing stuff, and just the lesson the authorities might have hoped for. After this, apparently everyone shook hands, to show that there was no bad feeling. The hangman shook everyone's hands twice — perhaps that was for good luck! Thankfully this time the drop worked and it was all over instantly. The bodies were left hanging, as required by law, for an hour, after which they were cut down and buried outside consecrated ground.[16] That was also part of the punishment for heinous crimes. These men were the first Europeans to be executed in the settlement, and until the execution of Ned Kelly, the only bushrangers to be executed. The rest were sentenced to various prison terms, with or without hard labour.

And that was largely the end of the story. Except that poor La Trobe still had to pay the bills, and they were quite extensive. There was the £60 for the gallows, the hangman's fee, the

fee for the surgeon, the bills for the horse and cart, and the bills for the horses hired for the pursuit in April. Not to mention the cost of the trial itself. No doubt he hoped fervently that there would be no more bushranging in Victoria.

But then came the gold discoveries. And overnight Victoria was overrun by gold seekers. It must have seemed like La Trobe's worst nightmare. Melbourne still looked like a peaceful town in a third painting by Robert Russell looking over Melbourne from the Falls in 1854, but it was bursting at the seams. Thousands were camped in a sprawling Canvas Town on the southern banks of the Yarra. And along with the hopeful, law-abiding, gold seekers, came others to prey on them. Stretches of road on the way to the diggings became notorious: the Black Forest en route to Bendigo and Castlemaine was especially feared. S.T. Gill depicted the difficult conditions on these roads especially in winter, when stranded wagons could be very vulnerable to attack.

Even St Kilda Road, on the very outskirts of Melbourne, was not safe, as reported in October 1852 when William Keel and William Robinson, two residents of Brighton, were driving in a dray down the St Kilda Road in present-day Elwood:

William Strutt, 1825–1915, artist
Bushrangers, Victoria, Australia 1852 (1887)
Oil on canvas
The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne
Painted in London from the artist's sketches of c.1855 made
when he was living in Melbourne, in the suburb of Prahran

… they found themselves surrounded; guns were placed at each of their heads, and that of the horse… The attack was so outrageous, that they thought it was a joke; but as they were addressed in the most abusive language and told that their brains would be blown out if they delayed, they got out of their cart and submitted to be rifled — the one of £23, the other of about £46.[17]

It was an audacious crime. As well as the draymen, seventeen other people were robbed in two and a half hours. At sunset, satisfied with their loot, the bushrangers galloped off into the bush. The following week John Flanagan and Thomas Williams were in custody. Charged with highway robbery, they were sentenced to thirty years imprisonment. Unlike the Plenty River Gang, they were not charged with attempted murder, and so escaped the noose. Williams was later hanged for his part in another murder.

The story of the Plenty River Gang, and the public response to that crime spree in early colonial Melbourne, has all the trappings of an adventure tale in a frontier society. There is the sense that the young bushrangers themselves may have imagined themselves outside the reach of the law in this rough and ready land, and for a time, indeed, they were. Charles La Trobe's tiny, ill-equipped police force struggled initially to keep pace with the thieves, let alone to capture them. The Superintendent must have felt great anxiety with this challenge to his authority, as he was besieged on all sides by anxious settlers threatening to take the law into their own hands. The response of the Fighting Five is also reminiscent of a 'boy's own annual' adventure story. Perhaps perpetrators and pursuers were not so very different in seeking the thrill of adventure and the exhilaration of risk-taking. But ultimately the rule of law prevailed and exacted its heavy price. The awful culmination of the legal process, performed in full public view, was intended to leave the citizens of Port Phillip in no doubt that colonial justice would be swift and harsh if violent theft and murder was attempted. Whether the lesson was heeded is another matter. The gold rush that followed proved an irresistible lure in more ways than one.

1 A later version of Russell's 1837 sketch is reproduced in Fay Woodhouse, 'Politics, Power and Passion: Port Phillip before the gold rush', *La Trobeana*, vol.16, no.2, July 2017, p.15. The sketches of 1844 and 1854 may be accessed on the State Library Victoria website. (Ed.)

2 A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003, (first published 1996), pp.164–169.

3 See Robyn Annear, *Bearbrass: imagining early Melbourne*, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2005, pp. 66–70 for an amusing account of early drinking habits. See also Shaw, p.233.

4 Don Garden, *Victoria: a history*, Melbourne, Nelson, 1984, p.37.

5 Garden, pp. 51-52.

6 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 30 April 1842, p.3.

7 'Petition to His Honor C.J. La Trobe from the residents of River Plenty', 5 May 1842, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) VPRS 19/PO unit 29.

8 *Melbourne Times*, 7 May 1842, p.1.

9 Reported in *Geelong Advertiser*, 16 May 1842, p.2.

10 VPRS 19/box 31: file 42/1163

11 VPRS 16/box 31: file no. 42/1163

12 VPRS 29/P.O. unit 4. Beaver had previously built the dining room extension to La Trobe's prefabricated cottage at Jolimont, see Miles Lewis, *La Trobe's Cottage: a conservation analysis*, Melbourne: National Trust of Australia (Victoria), 1994, p.33.

13 A.G.L. Shaw (ed.), *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence, 1839-1846*, Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 1989, p.114, n.6. The events surrounding the execution of these Aboriginal men have been reassessed recently with calls for a memorial. See: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-20/plans-to-recognised-the-first-two-aborigines-executed-in-melbou/5208972 (accessed 12 May 2017).

14 E.P. Thompson et al, *Albion's Fatal Tree: crime and society in eighteenth-century England*, London: Pantheon, 1976; Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: crime and civil society in the eighteenth century*, 2nd edition, London: Verso, 2006.

15 Finn, Edmund ('Garryowen'), *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852: historical, anecdotal and personal*, Melbourne: Fergusson & Mitchell, 1888, vol.1, p.397.

16 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 29 June 1842, p.3.

17 *Argus*, 19 October 1852 (as reprinted in other colonial newspapers; the page in the *Argus* is missing from the national collection).

Walking on Water: Melbourne, the Yarra River, its punts, ferries and bridges

By Dianne Reilly AM

Dianne Reilly is an historian who was La Trobe Librarian at the State Library Victoria from 1982 to 2008. An Honorary Fellow of the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne, and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, her doctoral thesis was titled 'Charles Joseph La Trobe: the Making of a Governor'. Dianne has published extensively on La Trobe, including three books: La Trobe: the Making of a Governor (2006), La Trobe: Australian Notes, 1839-1854 (2006) and La Trobe: Landscapes and Sketches (1999) and she is working on a second volume of his biography. Dianne is a co-founder of the La Trobe Society, and is currently its Secretary.

The agreeable and convenient city that is present-day Melbourne spreading along both banks of the Yarra River has several river crossings along the middle reaches that make for easy travel between the north and south banks. But it was not always like this. Early settlers who lived on either bank experienced huge inconvenience in getting about and in carrying out the simplest of tasks. Their solution was to develop a crossing system of boats and punts, and this became part of their day-to-day living. Gradually, this arrangement was replaced by more permanent structures: the bridges which traverse the river today.

Melbourne and the Yarra: beginnings

The Yarra River, 242 kilometres in length[1] (not very long when compared with the Amazon 6,992km,[2] Murray-Darling 3,672km,[3] or the Thames 346km[4]), flows though the city of Melbourne. Its major tributaries are the Maribyrnong River, Moonee Ponds Creek, Merri Creek, Darebin Creek, Plenty River, Mullum Creek and Olinda Creek.

The river was called 'Birrarung' by the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation who occupied the Yarra Valley and much of Central Victoria before European settlement. 'Birrarung' derives from the Woiwurrung language, spoken by members of four Koori clans in the Port Phillip region,[5] and means 'river of mists'.[6]

For the Wurundjeri people who had occupied the lands around Port Phillip for at least 30,000 years, the Yarra River was a life-source that had been etched into the landscape by the ancestral creator spirit Bunjil, the wedge tailed eagle. Through a calendar of countless

seasons, Birrarrung, the 'river of mists', was the dreaming path they followed and camped beside. Numerous sites along the river and its tributaries were important meeting places where corroborees were held.

The first detailed survey of Port Phillip was carried out in February 1803 by New South Wales Surveyor-General Charles Grimes who reported unfavourably to Governor Philip Gidley King on settlement possibilities in the bayside region, largely because the only permanent fresh water he found was upstream of low rock falls across what became the Yarra. Then, early in 1835, a syndicate of fifteen Vandemonian investors keen to establish a permanent settlement across Bass Strait, formed the Port Phillip Association. Responsibility of establishing a base for the Association's enterprise fell to John Batman, a member of the Association. He headed the party that sailed from Launceston in the schooner *Rebecca* in May 1835, and he soon began exploring the Yarra River above the Falls.

The river was named 'Yarra Yarra' on 13 September 1835[7] by surveyor John Helder Wedge, another of the Port Phillip Association, who had arrived at Port Phillip in August of that year. He was under the mistaken belief that 'Yarra Yarra' was the Woiwurrung name for the river, having confused the Woiwurrung words for the rapids at the falls on the river – 'yarro yarro' meaning 'falling water' – with the name of the river itself.[8] His misunderstanding determined the river's enduring name.[9]

Before Batman's departure, the Hobart lawyer and explorer Joseph Tice Gellibrand, another of the Association members, had prepared deeds for the transfer from the Aboriginal people of portions of Port Phillip land in exchange for the payment of a tribute. John Batman took copies of the deeds with him in May 1835. On 6 June 1835, possibly on the banks of the Merri Creek in present-day Northcote, Batman signed a treaty with eight Wurundjeri elders, in which 600,000 acres (2,400 km²) of land around Melbourne and another 100,000 acres (400 km²) around Geelong on Corio Bay were supposedly bought from eight 'chiefs', whose marks he acquired on his treaty, in exchange for a quantity of 'blankets, knives, tomahawks, scissors, looking-glasses, flour, handkerchiefs and shirts'.[10]

Two days later, on 8 June, Batman wrote in his journal: 'So the boat went up the large River... and I am glad to state about six miles up found the River all good water and very deep. This will be the place for a Village – the Natives onshore'.[11]

Batman then returned to Van Diemen's Land. Incidentally, it was at the Indented Head camp that the convict William Buckley, who had escaped from the Collins' settlement at Sorrento in 1803, made contact with Batman's men in July 1835. Meanwhile in Launceston, Batman showed John Helder Wedge some sketches of the territory he had explored at Port Phillip. From these details, Wedge with the assistance of his nephew, surveyor John Charles Darke,

prepared in June 1835 the first map of what was to become Melbourne and surrounding area. This map shows the location chosen as the site for the 'village' on the Yarra, to which Batman planned to return with a large expedition to establish a settlement.

However, another syndicate of settlers financed by John Pascoe Fawkner, beat Batman to the prize, entering the Yarra on the *Enterprize* on 15 August 1835. Captain Lancey had warped or pulled the schooner up the river to the Yarra Falls (near the present Queens Bridge), the tide barrier that provided access to fresh water. On 30 August (now celebrated as Melbourne Day), he moored the schooner alongside the bank at the foot of present-day William Street where the Immigration Museum, formerly the Customs House, now stands. Over three days, he discharged his cargo, built a store for it and began to clear five acres (two hectares) for planting wheat and vegetables. When Lancey sailed for Van Diemens Land on 3 September, seven of the Fawkner party remained to look after the little settlement.[12] Just days after that, the Batman party relocated from their first base at Indented Head on the Bellarine Peninsula to the Melbourne site only to discover that Fawkner's group had already established their station on that spot. John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner are credited as Melbourne's original pioneers, but the question 'who really founded Melbourne?' has long been a subject of much discussion. One of Melbourne's first historians, Edmund Finn – known as 'Garryowen' – recorded the facts of the matter, as far as he could tell:

> There has been much disputation as to whom should be accorded the honour of the 'white foundation of the colony', and, after much consideration of the question, I have arrived at the following conclusion, which, to my mind, appears irresistible:-
>
> That the Grimes party were the first European arrivals at the site of the future capital,
> That William Dutton was the first resident at Portland,
> That Batman was the first prospector of Melbourne and Geelong, and
> That [not Fawkner, but] Fawkner's party – five men, a woman, and the woman's cat – were the bona-fide founders of the present great metropolis.[13]

This is echoed by the historian A.G.L. Shaw who, with typical considered reasoning, points out in his *A History of the Port Phillip District* that the argument stems from 'confusion between the idea of establishing a pastoral settlement in the Port Phillip District and that of establishing a village or township on the site of Melbourne'.[14] John Batman may be credited as an explorer, entrepreneur and one of the earliest settlers in Melbourne.

In September 1836, Governor Bourke formally instituted the Port Phillip District of New South Wales with the settlement as its administrative centre, appointing Captain William Lonsdale as Police Magistrate. The issuing of 'two sets of instructions, military and civil… granted Lonsdale additional powers almost equivalent to those of a commandant or superintendent'.[15]

Bourke visited Port Phillip in March 1837, and named the settlement Melbourne after the then British Prime Minister William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne. On his return to Sydney, he commissioned Robert Hoddle to replace Robert Russell as surveyor in Melbourne. His first plan for the town of Melbourne, completed on 25 March 1837, which came to be known as the Hoddle Grid, was done in preparation for land sales by public auction to develop the district. To Governor Bourke, the river was 'perhaps the finest river I have seen in New South Wales… The Yarra abounds in fine fish and the water is of very good quality'.[16]

The site near Queensbridge became Melbourne's main landing place, with direct access to the town's main streets and to the Customs House. The river connected it with the bay anchorage, initially off Williamstown and then at Sandridge or Port Melbourne.

Punts

During the first years of 'The Settlement', the rock 'stepping stones' at the Falls were the only means of crossing the Yarra River. The Aboriginal people had long waded from bank to bank using the rocky shelf that once separated the fresh water at the Falls from the brackish water below, or they would travel across in their bark canoes. Those few settlers who owned rowing boats, canoes or rafts could do the same, but often, this was fraught with danger on both sides, from erratic currents above the Falls, and the tides below. The Falls, located just upstream of today's Queens Bridge,

> were formed by the outcrop of a reef which barred the river, but there was a passage among the rocks large enough to admit small boats at high water, and the salt water from the Bay frequently flavored the Upper Yarra. To prevent this contamination of the water supply,
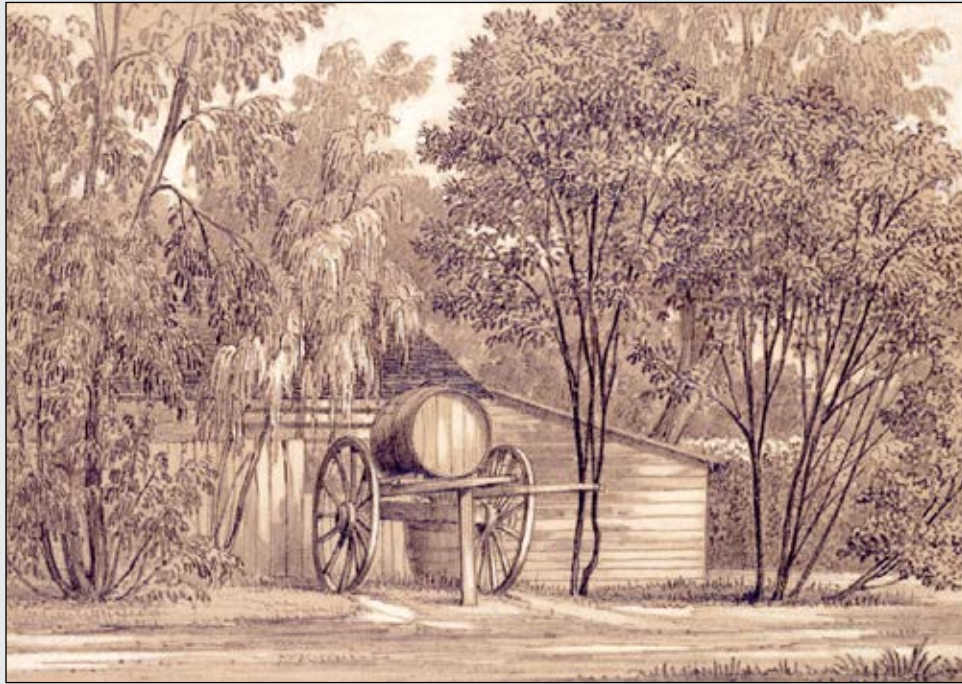
a dam was made on the rocks by convict labor in 1839, but it did not last long, and another work to serve the same purpose was also a failure…[17]

As immigration to Melbourne increased, passengers offloaded from ships at Williamstown faced an uncomfortable fourteen kilometre journey by horseback or bullock dray from Hobson's Bay to actually reach the settlement, while those coming ashore at Sandridge, only five kilometres from the town, walked to the south bank of the Yarra, and then had to find a way across.

Access to the Yarra's fresh water determined the site of what was to become Melbourne. . The Yarra then became the conduit for shipping up to the turning basin at the Falls, and supplied fresh water for the inhabitants from above the Falls. Access to fresh water lasted only until this stretch of the river became too polluted from the discharge of tanneries and abattoirs endangering the inhabitants' health. In very few years, the noxious trades along the river numbered six tanneries, three boiling-down works rendering fat to produce candles, four soap manufacturers, slaughterhouses, fellmongers (dealers in hides and skins) and brickmakers, in addition to six breweries, four flour mills and the Langlands Foundry in Flinders Street.[18] Water sourced from elsewhere was marketed by private entrepreneurs who:

> developed a primitive system of water distribution. Numerous pumps along the northern bank of the Yarra from Russell Street to the Falls lifted water into horse-drawn tanks that delivered it to individual households, filling the family butt (large cask) with 120 gallons of what many complained was expensive and increasingly polluted water.[19]

An improved system of delivering fresh water to households only became a reality after 1857 when the Yan Yean Reservoir had been completed, and a pipeline built. La Trobe it was who had turned the first sod for the essential reservoir in 1853.

Bringing goods up the river using ships and lighters (flat-bottomed barges) was a very laborious process. Both public and private capital had a role in early port development. The official town wharves, constructed of unsuitable timber, and with inadequate storage, were often damaged by floods. In 1841 Captain George Ward Cole was granted permission to build a private wharf and dock between William and Queen Streets from which he operated a very

successful business. However, owing to lack of drainage that was not remedied until 1848, the road approaches to it were extremely dangerous when freight was being loaded onto carts on the slippery river bank. Improvements to allow better access to warehouses were urgently called for.

Before any bridge was built, punts operating commercially facilitated traffic across the Yarra River. The best-known were at the sites of the present Princes, Punt Road and Hawthorn bridges. Cross-river services began informally, with small-time entrepreneurs offering to take people across for a fee, in their rowing boats. However, by 1838, there was enough demand for a regular service. William Watt[20] constructed an improvised punt to transport stock, wagons and passengers all loaded together across the Yarra, where the Queen Street Bridge now spans the river.[21] He had petitioned the Governor in Sydney, Sir George Gipps, for permission to operate the service. Signed by sixty-five householders, including John Batman, the request was approved. Watt launched Melbourne's first punt, hauled by ropes across the river, with great celebration as Garryowen reported: 'Watts [*sic*] launched his punt on the 15th April, 1838, and it was christened "The Melbourne" by his daughter breaking a bottle of champagne against one

of its sides, after which there was a plentiful distribution of grog on the spot.'[22]

John Hodgson began a punt service upstream from Chapel Street, Prahran around 1844, and from the mid-1850s, another punt crossed the river at Richmond, thus giving the name Punt Road to the track that formed the western boundary to the municipal area which became the City of Stonnington.[23]

In 1839, William Lonsdale had set the site for a punt servicing the road from Williamstown to Geelong on the Saltwater (Maribyrnong) River,[24] a little above its junction with the Yarra at the site of present-day Footscray. First operated by the same enterprising William Watt, the punt was taken over in 1840 by Benjamin Levien in association with his Victoria Hotel on the western bank of the river.[25] The original punt could only transport up to two horses or a light cart, but with increased traffic of various conveyances, Levien soon replaced it with a larger one. 'Levien's river punt was almost as lavish as his hotel. It was capable of pulling a ten-bullock team, and was fitted with lamps for night crossings'.[26] However, Levien did not operate the hotel for long, selling out in 1843. After changing hands three times, the inn came to an abrupt end, burning to the ground early on

Henry Gilbert Jones, ca. 1804–1888, artist
Bridge over Yarra at Melbourne, 1845
Etching: Melbourne Fine Art Society, 1934
Roy Morgan Research Centre Collection

17 January 1848 after 'a drunken servant left a candle burning'.[27]

Though running a punt was a profitable vocation in Melbourne's early years, it could also be very trying as the 'punters' could often fall prey to drunken exploits:

> The puntman [at Punt Road] (an irascible old fellow) resided in a hut at the southern side, and every night before retiring the punt would be hauled over and made fast round a tree-stump. The larkers would cross by the 'Falls' or in a boat, and, creeping round, unwarp the punt quietly, pull across on it to the northern side, and then, by shouting and yelling, break the slumbers of the old punter, who would rush out to find himself powerless, with a large amount of insult added to the inconvenience, for he would have to get a boat next morning wherewith to cross, and take possession of his raft…[28]

Sir James Palmer, later Mayor of Melbourne and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, established a punt at Hawthorn, which operated from 1842 until it was replaced by the first Hawthorn Bridge ten years later, and a rival punt ran nearby. Historian James Bonwick in his 1883 book *Port Phillip Settlement*, wrote:

> Our worthy speaker, Sir Frederick James Palmer, the aforetime Dr. Palmer, had the honor of first constructing a punt for the convenience of Boroondara settlers. This was in 1840. The machine was entrusted to the trustworthy care of Mr. Trainor,

now of the *White Horse* [*Inn*], Nunawading. An old settler told us he used to dislike paying 4s. 6d. for the passage of his dray. But even that was poor return for the man who waited half a day for it with an idle rope…
It was private property only, and the proprietor simply paid to Government an annual rental of £10, in the form of a Squatting License.[29]

Much later, two other points were sufficiently important to warrant steam punts. The first of these, linking Spencer Street and Clarendon Street, the site of the present Spencer Street (Batman) Bridge, operated from 1884 until the late 1920s. The most recent was from Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, to a point near Newport power station. Three steam-powered punts, each larger than its predecessor, ran here between 1873 and 1974, and were guided across the river on a chain.

Ferries

Ferry services for longer water journeys also commenced early. The *Fire Fly* ran the first ferry service from the Yarra to Williamstown in October 1838. For two years from June 1857, ferries met the Geelong trains at Greenwich Point, the temporary rail terminus at Newport, before completion of the line to Spencer Street in 1859.

The first Hawthorn bridge, replacing a punt in 1852, opened up the area, 'and the lovely banks of the Yarra became sites of some original market gardens and later, of tea gardens… The most famous of [these]… were the Hawthorn Tea Gardens opened in 1898'.[30] But prior to this, 'One of the most popular

riverside resorts was Brander's Ferry, near the present site of the Swan Street Bridge…'.[31] It operated from the mid-1850s until it fell into disuse prior to the First World War. The *Australasian Sketcher* newspaper described it in its hey-day in 1883:

> The building where the ferryman lives, situated among thick foliage, is quite picturesque. On Sundays, when the little tables with which it is surrounded are crowded with visitors, who, with the aid of a glass of wine or a cup of coffee, and the help of the soothing weed, criticise the boating men who flash by in their spider-like outriggers, or lazily pull a substantial boat-load of ladies long the shady banks, the scene is a very pretty one.[32]

Waterman Jesse Barrow started a punt between Burnley and Grange Road, Toorak in 1880, thereby linking the area with Hawthorn. This soon developed into the Twickenham ferry service which operated for 50 years until it was replaced by the MacRobertson Bridge in 1934. Named for the Twickenham Ferry on the Thames, Barrow's ferry is commemorated in the name of Twickenham Crescent at Burnley. The MacRobertson Bridge, a three-span steel truss construction, was built in 1934 as part of Victoria's centenary celebrations. It was funded by a grant from confectioner Sir Macpherson Robertson.[33]

From 1868 until 1911, a significant service was provided between Port Melbourne and Williamstown across Hobsons Bay, principally by the paddle steamer *Gem*, which gave its name to Gem Pier at Williamstown. The *Gem*, under Captain Robert Watson, connected directly with the Port Melbourne railway. The *Rosny*, the last ferry boat on the service, operated between 1919 and 1931.

But bridges[34] were always the desirable alternative to Yarra punts and ferries.

Bridges
1st Bridge: at Swanston Street 1845

South of the river, difficulty of communication and flooding in low-lying parts of Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) restricted settlement at first, though there were a number of substantial properties, including a few vineyards facing the river at South Yarra. A few settlers were established near the beach at St Kilda (population 60 in 1846), but Prahran remained a forest and Emerald Hill a stock run. A bridge across the river was urgently needed for development along St Kilda Road and to areas beyond.

Division of the town on either side of the river was not in the best interests of future development, as Superintendent La Trobe's letter of 31 October 1844 demonstrates. However, once the decision to build the first bridge had been made, there was still the difficulty in choosing the most appropriate site:

> …With regard to the precise site to be chosen, I am aware that opinions have differed, and still, no doubt, will differ considerably. Some say the 'head of the basin,' where the natural stone dyke which traverses the river, now covered by the dam, would give an undoubted solid foundation, is the proper place; the more so, as it is adjacent to the business part of the town. Others who are interested in the central portion of Melbourne, and have property perhaps in Elizabeth-street, which is the central and lowest street in town, will say – 'opposite Elizabeth-street by all means,' for that very reason... Next comes the vicinity of Swanston-street. In favor of this locality may be said that although not exactly central… here [is] a dyke... which offers, as far as has been ascertained, a good foundation; and that at this point the sound and rising land on either bank is in nearer proximity to the river than at any other point… [enabling ease of access][35]

By the end of the year, the matter appeared to be resolved. The Melbourne Town Council at its meeting of 28 November 1844 referred to its application to La Trobe demanding a voice in the selection of the site. La Trobe's response was to inform council 'that His Excellency the Governor,[36] when in Melbourne, had selected Swanston-street as the proper locality, in which opinion he fully concurred'.[37] It was clear that the decision had been made to go ahead with the Swanston Street location which became the central gateway to the city, linking Swanston Street with St Kilda Road.

The Melbourne Bridge Company, established as early as April 1840, was given the go-ahead to construct a wooden trestle bridge across the Yarra. Built by Alexander Sutherland in 1845, in accordance with the plans prepared by the Superintendent of Bridges, David Lennox, it was completed in 1845 at a cost of £630.

R.A. Balbirnie, a large landowner in the Hawksburn area, had originally operated a punt service near the original Watt's punt. When the wooden bridge was ready to operate, Balbirnie

leased it and collected the tolls, 'this being the rule of practically every bridge and main road of the period',[38] the cost being 2s.6d. for drays, 1s. for lighter vehicles, and 2d. for pedestrians.[39]

2nd Bridge: Princes Bridge 1850

No sooner had the first bridge over the Yarra been completed than the design, format and negotiations for funding of a sturdier replacement bridge were begun. The Superintendent of Bridges submitted three proposals to La Trobe:

> SIR, – I do myself the honor to submit… the estimates of the probable expenses for a bridge with one arch… thirty feet in width; of a bridge with three arches forty feet in width ; also a bridge with three arches thirty feet in width…

> …If the bridge is built of one arch, it would require a span of 150 feet – the same as one that I superintended over the Severn, at Gloucester, in England, of which I possess of Mr Telford's plans and specifications; I am still greatly in favour of a one arch bridge, if the expense is not too great…

> A bridge of one arch at this place will have the finest appearance of any in the British Dominions, the banks of the river being so low that the bridge will all appear above the surface… I have [tried] to arrive at a true estimate of the cost, but it is impossible to calculate the exact amount that may be required to complete a bridge like the one required at Melbourne…[40]

At a time when the Port Phillip District was still a part of New South Wales, income generated in Melbourne had to be forwarded to the treasury in Sydney. It was an enormous bugbear to La Trobe that he had to plead the cause for any funds he needed for vital infrastructure and public works in Melbourne and District, such as the essential bridge.

The Melbourne *Argus* in July 1846 acknowledged 'the undoubted claims of the [Port Phillip] District to a liberal expenditure in works of utility', and advocated 'the immediate commencement of this important undertaking… In fact, the plan having been selected — the site chosen — and the money voted, we see no reasonable excuse for further delay'.[41]

The work eventually went ahead, and the stone bridge, having cost more than £15,000, had been completed for some months, but it could not be opened until the earthwork approaches were completed. The official ceremony, with
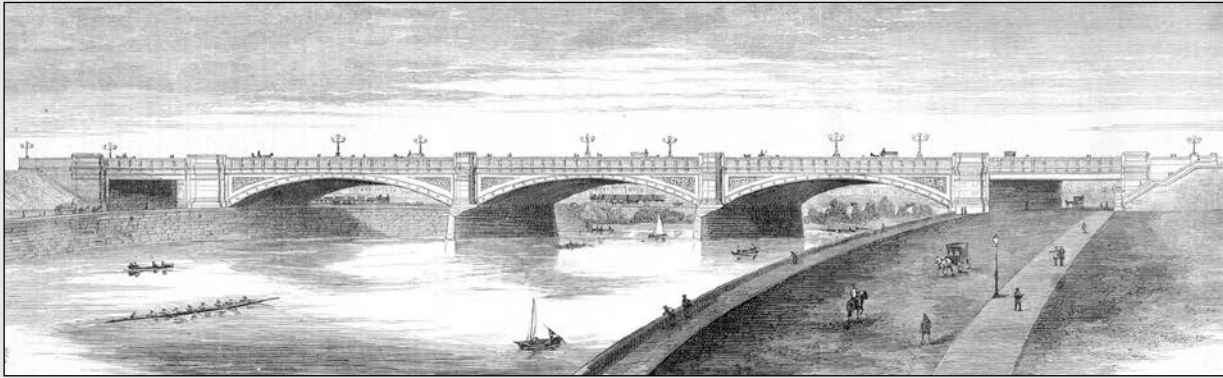
Charles Joseph La Trobe officiating, took place on 15 November 1850 amidst great excitement and ceremony.

Melburnians were justifiably proud of their new bridge. Two admiring visitors in 1853 praised it in glowing terms:

> This bridge is thrown over the river about 500 yards above the dam, and is a great ornament to the city. It is built of very hard stone of a most durable kind. The span of its single arch is but a few feet less than the centre arch of London Bridge, and the balustrade is very handsome. The causeway to this arch, over the flat land on the opposite side of the river to the town, is of a considerable length, having under it several small arches to carry off the floods, which are sometimes very heavy…[42]

The bridge was named for the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, (b.1841) and the name Princes Bridge has survived to this day.

3rd Bridge: Princes Bridge 1888

The opening of the stone Princes Bridge (originally Prince's Bridge) in 1850 provided a great stimulus to development south of the river. The Gold Rush and proclamation of the new colony of Victoria in 1851 saw a massive increase of population in Melbourne, with 'tent cities' of new migrants lining the Yarra, especially on the south bank adjacent to the town.

In addition to the increase in traffic crossing the bridge, there was also a need to handle increased shipping traffic on the Yarra, and the river was widened to cope with this. By that time, the Yarra had been heavily modified both upstream and downstream, and the major floods of the early years were becoming less common, though still a problem. A replacement bridge was certainly needed. It was not until Como Island, now Herring Island, an artificial island, was created in 1928 by cutting a new path for the Yarra River through an old basalt quarry,[43] that the flooding of the river was effectively controlled.

The new third bridge was designed by Jenkins, D'Ebro and John Grainger, the father of the Australian composer Percy Grainger, and built by the engineer David Munro. As with many historic buildings in Melbourne, it is constructed on solid bluestone bulwarks, with much cast iron fabricated by the local Langlands foundry in Flinders Street.[44]

In 1885, seven municipalities – South Melbourne, Prahran, St Kilda, Malvern, Brighton, Caulfield and Moorabbin – agreed to contribute to the cost of the bridge. Architectural details of particular note are the arched girders and the cast iron spandrel panels which contain the coat of arms of each municipal council – except Malvern, for some unknown reason.[45]

Built between 1886 and 1888, the bridge is 'of historical importance as it represents a boom period in Melbourne, when a tremendous increase in traffic stimulated the requirement for a new, larger bridge'. Princes Bridge is 'of architectural significance for its substantial size and for the skilled stonemasonry demonstrated in the construction of the abutments and piers'.[46] It was completed in time for the second

Melbourne International Exhibition held in 1888, and was officially opened on 4 October, retaining the name Princes Bridge, after Edward, Prince of Wales.

Princes Bridge is 'of aesthetic and social significance as Melbourne's grandest bridge',[47] and a symbolic entrance to the city of Melbourne. It played a significant role in linking port, recreational and industrial facilities with the city, facilitating the economic, suburban and demographic development of Melbourne. In 1924, the bridge was reinforced to take the weight of the electric trams which were soon to replace the previous cable trams along St Kilda Road and the side-streets.

Princes Bridge is a notable example of the work of bridge builder David Munro, who was also contracted to build the 1890 Queens Bridge over the Falls (replacing an 1860 wooden bridge), and for the Sandridge railway bridge, opened in 1888. The original 1853 Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Company rail line from Sandridge (Port Melbourne) to Flinders Street – the first passenger railway line in Australia – was updated in 1858 by a wooden trestle bridge which carried two railway lines to Sandridge and to St Kilda. The Sandridge Railway Bridge replaced the trestle bridge in 1888, and was last used in 1987.

Punt Road Bridge

Although local punt services connecting roads across the river were established quite early, river transport remained an alternative for some early settlers to travel in their own boats along the river. The Bell family, for example, who lived at *Avoca*, in Gordon Grove, South Yarra, on the banks of the river in the 1850s, travelled by boat for their weekly trip to church in Melbourne.[48]

In 1866, a footbridge was erected near Punt Road, but the punt itself continued to operate until a bridge was opened downstream at Anderson Street, South Yarra. Constructed in1899 by the firm of Monash and Anderson using the Monier concrete construction technique, it was built on dry land, the Yarra being diverted under it to eliminate a sharp S bend in the course of the river, and to create space for an ornamental lake at the Botanic Gardens. An engineering feat, it was named in 1936 the 'Morell Bridge' to commemorate the contribution of Sir Stephen Morell as Lord Mayor of Melbourne from 1926 to 1928.

Hawthorn Bridge

The Hawthorn Bridge connecting Bridge Road and Burwood Road, a wrought iron truss bridge, is the oldest extant bridge over the Yarra, and one of the oldest iron bridges in Australia, opening

in February 1858. It replaced a narrow wooden bridge which had been erected there in 1851. The site was one of the earliest crossing points on the river, having been the site of Palmer's punt which operated from 1840 until the first wooden bridge opened. In 1885 Hawthorn Bridge was the destination of Melbourne's first tram service, and was widened and strengthened in 1890.

<div align="center">***</div>

The obstacles which confronted the founders of settlement in the Port Phillip District as they shaped the new land to meet their requirements were progressively overcome by their ingenuity. Based on their vision for a better future, Melbourne now is an enjoyable city in which to live, where relatively easy transport connections from one area to another are something we take for granted, where an enviable good water supply is 'a given', and access to a city renowned for its amenities and cultural events and situated on the banks of a healthy river, is accepted as normal.

1 'History of the Yarra River', melbournewater.com.au/aboutus/historyandheritage (accessed 19 April 2017)

2 'Rivers', www.newworldencyclopedia.org/amazon (accessed 19 April 2017)

3 'Longest Rivers', Geoscience Australia, www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/national-location-information/built-environment-and-exposure (accessed 19 April 2017)

4 'Thames', *Encyclopaedia Britannica online* (accessed 19 April 2017)

5 Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) 'Woiwurrung', www.vaclang.org.au/languages/woiwurrung.html (accessed 23 May 2017)

6 Bain Attwood and Helen Doyle, *Possession: Batman's Treaty and the matter of history,* Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009, p.315.

7 Percival Serle, 'Wedge, John Helder' in *Dictionary of Australian Biography*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1949, pp.472-73.

8 Ibid.

9 'History of the Yarra River', www.melbournewater.com.au/aboutus/history (accessed 24 May 2017)

10 A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 1996, p.46.

11 John Batman, Journal 8 June 1835, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS13181.

12 Henry Gyles Turner, *A History of the Colony of Victoria*, vol.1, Melbourne: Heritage, 1973, p.123.

13 'Garryowen', *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852: historical, anecdotal and personal,* Melbourne: Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888, vol.1: 'The Unnamed Village and its beginnings', p.10.

14 A.G.L. Shaw, 1996, p.55.

15 *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol.1: *Beginnings of permanent government,* editor: Michael Cannon, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1981, p.44.

16 'Yarra River', Ferries *eMelbourne: the city past & present* (accessed online 27 May 2017)

17 'The Falls Bridge – the Old and the New', *Age*, Melbourne, 15th April 1890.

18 Shaw, 1996, p.215.

19 Tony Dingle and Helen Doyle, *Yan Yean: a history of Melbourne's early water supply,* Melbourne: Public Record Office Victoria on behalf of Melbourne Water, 2003, p.6.

20 Colin Jones, *Ferries on the Yarra*, Melbourne: Greenhouse, 1981, p.10. (The name in official licencing records is Thomas Watt.)

21 Susan Priestley, *Making their Mark*, McMahon's Point, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1984, p.34.

22 Garryowen, vol.2, p.499.

23 Priestley, p.41.

24 'Saltwater Crossing Site', Victorian Heritage Database, vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au (accessed 10 February 2017)

25 'Punts and Ferries' *eMelbourne: the city past & present* (accessed online 10 February 2017)

26 Michael Cannon, *Old Melbourne Town*, Main Ridge, Vic.: Loch Haven Books, 1991, p.107.

27 Barry O'Mahony, 'The Role of the Hospitality Industry in Cultural Assimilation', in *Hospitality: a social lens,* editors Conrad Lashley, Paul Lynch and Alison J. Morrison, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007, p.78.

28 Garryowen, vol.2, p.772.

29 James Bonwick, *A Sketch of Boroondarra,* Melbourne: J.J. Blundell, 18858, p.5.

30 Jones, p.15.

31 Ibid.

32 *Australasian Sketcher,* 17 January 1883.

33 City of Stonnington, Heritage Citation Report 2013, www.stonnington.vic.gov.au (accessed 10 February 2017)

34 There were already two earlier bridges in the District: at Cowie's Creek on the Melbourne Road near Geelong, 1842, and Moonee Ponds Creek at Pascoe Vale, 1843. Then, after the first bridge across the Yarra, two more were built further afield: at the Broken River at Benalla, 1847, and the Barwon River at Geelong, 1848. (A.G.L. Shaw, 1996, p.210.)

35 'Bridge over the Yarra Yarra', *Melbourne Weekly Courier*, 31 November 1844, p.3.

36 Governor Sir George Gipps.

37 'The Yarra Bridge', *Melbourne Weekly Courier*, 30 November 1844, p.3.

38 J. Alex Allan, 'The Story of a Century – When La Trobe Arrived…', *Argus*, Melbourne, 16 October 1934, p.24.

39 'Princes Bridge Centenary', *The Age*, 16 March 1946.

40 'The Yarra Yarra Bridge*'*, *Port Phillip Patriot, 9 Oct 1845*.

41 Ibid.

42 Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister, *Australia Visited & Revisited: a narrative of recent travels & old experiences in Victoria and New South Wales*, London: Addey & Co., 1853, pp.98-99.

43 Parks Victoria, *Park Notes – Herring Island*, www.parkweb.vic.gov.au, (accessed 30 May 2017)

44 'Langlands Foundry', *eMelbourne: the city past & present* (accessed online 10 February 2017)

45 'Princes Bridge', Victorian Heritage Database, www.vhd.heritagevictoria.vic.gov.au (accessed 10 February 2017)

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 John Butler Cooper, *The History of Prahran: from its first settlement to a city*, 2nd ed., Melbourne: Modern Printing, 1924, p.53.

La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor

By John Barnes

Canberra, Halstead Press, in association with State Library Victoria and La Trobe University, 2017, 384 pages hardback, $59.95.

Reviewed by Dr Andrew Lemon[1]

Biography is the most exacting of the sub-disciplines of history. Scrupulous biographers – and few are as scrupulous as John Barnes – carry a strong moral responsibility to the life with which they are dealing. There can be no short cuts.

Charles Joseph La Trobe, from wherever he now watches, should be eternally grateful that John Barnes chose to be his biographer. Or perhaps La Trobe chose Barnes. Early in the book the author explains the motivation.

As Emeritus Professor of English at La Trobe University, John Barnes had trodden this path before. His masterful study *The Order of Things: a life of Joseph Furphy* (1990) was followed by his work on Henry Hyde Champion, *Gentleman Socialist* (2007). Meanwhile Charles Joseph La Trobe had begun sparking his interest. After retirement, Barnes had a distinguished innings as editor of the State Library Victoria's scholarly *La Trobe Journal* from 1998, lifting it to new standards. Under his editorship a special issue was published in 2003 on La Trobe's life and work to mark the re-naming of the refurbished Domed Reading Room.

Barnes's original intention in tackling a full biography, he says, was 'to tell the story of his life as a whole, making him known in a way that I do not think has been attempted previously,

and to represent his beliefs and motivations more fully'. In this he is entirely successful. He also succeeds in shifting emphasis from La Trobe's fifteen years in Australia, 'to place his colonial experience in the context of his life, and show what that experience meant to him'. Although he did not set out to challenge 'the received view of La Trobe's governorship', writing history is an organic process, and Barnes discovered new insights into La Trobe's challenges, achievements and failures, as founding Superintendent and first Lieutenant-Governor.

Carefully reviewing the literature on La Trobe at the outset, and recapitulating contemporary and historical assessments in a final chapter, Barnes structures his book as a narrative that gives nine chapters to La Trobe's life before Australia, eight thematic chapters to his time in Victoria, and two to the twenty remaining years after the 'End of Exile'. To his dignified dismay, La Trobe was never rewarded with further government office. This was despite acquitting himself in Victoria with courage, dignity, forbearance and probity in his public and private life. Even extracting a modest pension from the British government proved no easy feat.

The great strength of this book, in addition to its clear and elegant prose, is its fair-mindedness. Its great originality is its lucid
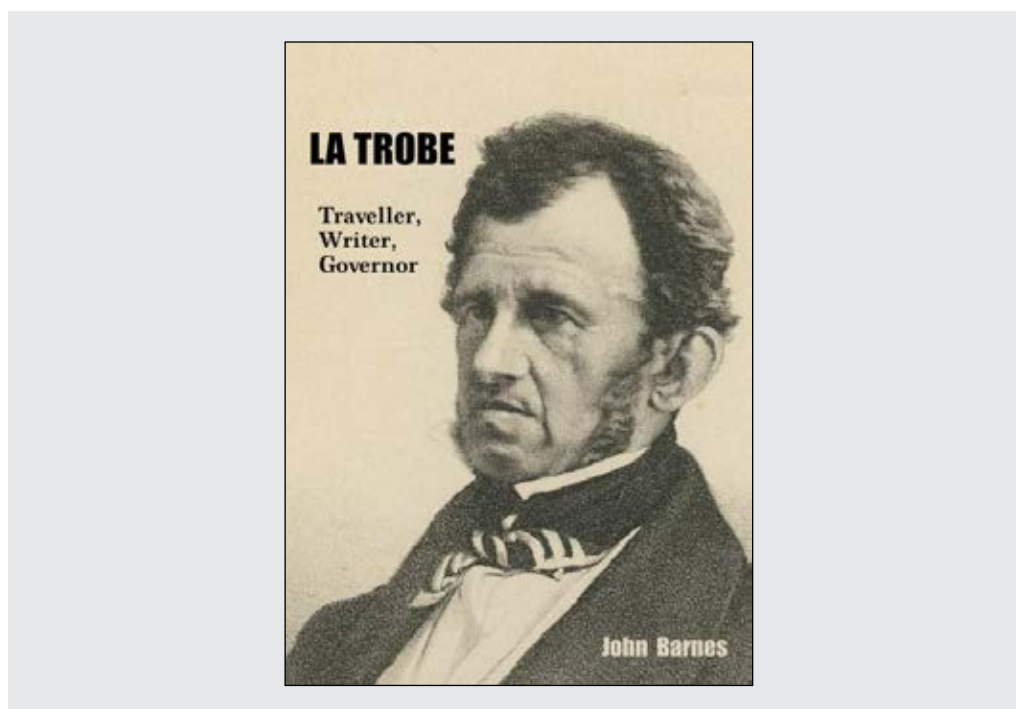
literary analysis which helps us understand the man. Barnes is ideally placed to evaluate La Trobe as writer, in published works (La Trobe's series of 'Rambling' in the Alps, in North America and Mexico), in official reports (beginning with his report on education in the West Indies following the emancipation of slaves), his correspondence in Port Phillip, family letters and surviving journals and notebooks. Barnes is intrigued by La Trobe's own formulation when not yet thirty: 'I still have many thoughts that are not prose, and see many things through a medium, that if not strictly poetic, is somewhat akin to it: yet I find year by year that I have more prose and less poetry measured out to me'. Barnes searches out the hidden poetry.

It is not necessary here to outline the events of La Trobe's life. Readers of *La Trobeana* will be well versed in these but will find that Barnes's biography gives a fresh, well-rounded view of a civilised man. His detailed research clears earlier confusions. Much is to be learned here about La Trobe's actual ancestry and family, the influence of the Moravian faith in which he was raised and the role of England, Switzerland and America in his life. And much is to be learned about the vicious, sustained and unwarranted hostility levelled against him in Victoria, notably by J.P. Fawkner and by Edward Wilson of the *Argus*, and which skewed subsequent historical evaluations.

Barnes is commendably generous in acknowledging the labours of others. He acknowledges his indebtedness to Dr Dianne Reilly, not least for her work in the copying of thousands of pages of La Trobe material in Switzerland for the State Library Victoria. Her doctoral thesis and book *La Trobe: the Making of a Governor* (2006) was the first to bring to the fore the formative experiences behind La Trobe's personality and outlook. Barnes occasionally takes issue with her 'on some points of interpretation', but says his 'admiration for her tireless promotion of scholarly research on La Trobe is undiminished'. Many of Barnes's references are to articles from *La Trobeana*, inspired by Reilly's enthusiasm. In that way the C J La Trobe Society can share in the credit for this impressive book. La Trobe has the biographer he deserves.

---

1   Dr Andrew Lemon, former President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, has published widely in Australian biography and history as an independent historian. He wrote the epic three volume *History of Australian Thoroughbred Racing* (1987–2008). He was awarded a Doctor of Letters from the University of Melbourne for his published works.

La Trobe's Cottage volunteers, 2017

La Trobe's Cottage report

La Trobe's Cottage Volunteer Property Manager, Lorraine Finlay, has resigned from the positon as from 1 May. She has provided dedicated service to the Cottage over the past seven years, managing Cottage openings, tours, maintenance and events, and liaising with the National Trust over all these matters. The volunteer group thanked Lorraine at a meeting on 28 April when she was presented with a framed print of a sketch by Charles Joseph La Trobe. A management team of the volunteers, under the Chair of the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage, will administer the Cottage for the National Trust.

The Chair of the Friends, John Drury, has had contact with new National Trust CEO, Simon Ambrose, about various matters of concern to the group, including the management of the Cottage, and developments surrounding it. Simon Ambrose was the guest speaker at the Friends' annual lecture on 9 May when he talked about 'An Eye to the Past, Plans for the Future', and outlined the Trust's long-term strategies for its portfolio of properties.

Cottage gardener, Sandi Pullman, is back managing the garden after a short break. She is now employed by the National Trust as the Cottage Gardener and the garden is responding accordingly.

The first wedding to be held in the La Trobe's Cottage garden was celebrated on the first Sunday in May. Another wedding is booked for the summer, with a further enquiry pending.

Lorraine Finlay in the Cottage garden, 2017

The Cottage volunteer group continues to strongly support the Cottage openings. Two new guides have joined the group over the past summer season. Combined tours with Government House continue; group bookings in particular are welcome, see www.foltc. latrobesociety.org.au/visiting.html. We ask our members to recommend these tours to their friends and to groups that they may know; the tours provide a most pleasurable outing and the income from them supports La Trobe's Cottage.

Helen Botham
Volunteers Coordinator

Forthcoming events

JULY

Sunday 9
 Members Talk to Members and Friends
 Time: 2.30–4.00 pm
 Speaker: Dr Walter Heale MBBS FRACP
 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
 Speaker: Professor Ian Clark
 Topic: A Fascination with Bunyips
 Invitations will be sent to members

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
 Christmas Cocktails
 Time: 6.30 – 8.30 pm
 Venue: Royal Society of Victoria 8 La Trobe Street, Melbourne
 Guest Speaker: Dr Tom Darragh
 Topic: The Royal Society and its History
 Invitations will be sent closer to the time

DECEMBER

Sunday 3
 Service to mark the Anniversary of the Death of C J La Trobe
 Time: 11.00am
 Venue: St Peter's Eastern Hill, 15 Gisborne Street, Melbourne
 Refreshments
 No Charge

★ 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 talks@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
PO Box 65
Port Melbourne Vic 3207
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 cerca, la trova"