

LA TROBEANA



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

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

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



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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

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Note

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

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

A Word from the President

The current edition of *La Trobeana* is the second issue devoted to the subject of Charles Joseph La Trobe and the Aboriginal People – the first was in March 2017. We are fortunate to have a number of eminent writers contributing to our journal.

Fred Cahir is Associate Professor in Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal Studies courses coordinator at Federation University. His doctorate focused on local Victorian Aboriginal history and he publishes widely in this field. In the peer-reviewed article in this issue, he pursues themes in Aboriginal-settler interaction, and the role of La Trobe's administration in managing them.

Maggie Black is an author based in Oxford. Her article on contemporary attitudes to the Aboriginal people among settlers in Victoria's Western District draws heavily on Niel Black's extensive archive held at State Library Victoria. She earlier examined her great-grandfather's pioneering life in Victoria in *Up Came a Squatter: Niel Black of Glenormiston 1839-1880*, published by NewSouth 2016.

Ian D. Clark is Professor of Tourism at Federation University. He has a doctorate from Monash University in Aboriginal historical geography, and writes extensively about the Aboriginal people of Victoria. His fascinating address at the Society's 2017 Annual General Meeting on the existence of Bunyips and Aboriginal mythology surrounding the creature is published as a peer-reviewed article in this edition.

Dianne Reilly has a doctorate in history from the University of Melbourne, and has written widely on Charles Joseph La Trobe. Her article examines a seminal work on Victoria's colonial history: *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, first published in 1898, a collection of fifty-eight letters to La Trobe from early settlers. These letters give first-hand accounts of the meetings of Europeans with the traditional owners of this land, and remain today of great significance in Victoria's history.

Clare Land has a doctorate from Deakin University on the Politics of solidarity with Indigenous struggles in Southeast Australia. She works at the Reichstein Foundation, and the Koori History Archive at Victoria University. Her peer-reviewed article for this journal discusses the haunting tale of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner who, in 1842, were the first people hanged in Melbourne following a conviction for the murder of two whale-hunters in the Western Port area.

It is with great regret that I record the death on 17 January 2018 of John Stanley-Rogers, a long-standing member of the La Trobe Society. John spent his career at State Library Victoria and, among his diverse interests, he was a book collector with a great love of history. He will be sadly missed.

The New Year is well underway and, as you will see from scanning Forthcoming Events towards the end of this issue, there are numerous events of great interest in store for us. I draw your attention to the Members Talk to Members program, now into its third year. Three members will discuss their research at the Winter Sunday afternoon talks, all at 2pm in Mueller Hall: Dr Rosemary Richards, 'Georgiana McCrae and her "favorite" music' on 10 June; Davydd Shaw, 'Edward Byam Wight: enterprising pioneer in the Port Phillip District' on 8 July; and Peter Hiscock AM, 'La Trobe and his Horses — Testing Times' on 12 August. Remember that our excellent website lists all the event details throughout the year.

To conclude on a very positive note, I know you will all join me in congratulating La Trobe Society member Diana Allen on the award of the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) 'For service to jazz music'.

The La Trobe Society Committee and I look forward to welcoming you to our various events during 2018.

Diane Gardiner AM
Hon. President
C J La Trobe Society

Charles Joseph La Trobe and his administration of the Wadawurrung, 1839-1853

Dr Fred Cahir

Fred Cahir is Associate Professor in Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal Studies courses coordinator (Mt Helen Campus) in the Faculty of Education and Arts at Federation University. His doctorate focused on local Victorian Aboriginal history and he publishes widely in this field, in addition to working as a teacher/consultant with a wide range of institutions and organisations. He has worked with Aboriginal communities in both Victoria and the Northern Territory in many capacities. His research interests include: Victorian Aboriginal history, Australian frontier history, Aboriginal heritage tourism history, traditional Aboriginal knowledge, and Toponyms (place names). In this peer-reviewed article he pursues themes in Aboriginal-settler interaction.

This article will chart several key issues in relation to Superintendent Charles Joseph La Trobe and the impact his governance had upon Wadawurrung people,¹ and their lands in the period 1839-1853. From the outset La Trobe was acutely aware that his instructions from Governor Gipps to minimise collisions between the Aboriginal people and colonists were largely untenable in light of the more clamorous instructions to carefully manage Port Phillip's finances — which in reality meant minimal interference in the total usurpation of Aboriginal lands by squatters. The first part examines La Trobe's influence on Wadawurrung people and their country, whose territorial boundaries include the cities of present-day Ballarat and Geelong, during the first wave of dispossession, generally known as the squatting period (1830s-1851). Following this is an examination of La Trobe's attitudes towards Wadawurrung participation in the Native Police corps and in particular the presence of the Native Police corps on Wadawurrung lands during the gold rush period (1851-1853).

The first wave of invaders

Gipps' instructions which emphasised minimising warfare in the fledgling colony, portended the inherently violent nature of British invasion at Port Phillip. Historians and writers including Gross, Reilly and Barnes have noted that La Trobe, less than five years before his arrival at Port Phillip, had written about the near extinction of northern American Indigenous peoples wrought by British invasion;² now he was tasked with preventing a similar tragedy.³ From the outset La Trobe was kept aware of the violent intercultural relations on the frontier — too aware for his liking at times, as he often complained of the prolix nature of reports by the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Port Phillip, George Augustus Robinson. Immediately upon his appointment, for example, Robinson advised La Trobe in December 1839 that he would be accompanied by a 'New Holland woman who had been abducted from her country by sealers, and her son a little boy about eight years of age'.⁴ La Trobe's diary reveals the vexing and perplexing nature of intercultural diplomacy.



He attended several large corroborees performed 'in his honour' immediately after his arrival, at the same time dealing with the bureaucracy associated with intercultural conflict.

The first fortnight's diary entries and correspondence consist almost entirely of attempting to make sense of the wrangling between the retinue of officials dealing with Aboriginal affairs. These included Police Magistrate Captain Foster Fyans, Crown Commissioner Henry Gisborne, Surveyor Charles Tyers, Mounted Police Officer Captain George Brunswick Smyth, Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson, and Assistant Protectors Edward Stone Parker and Charles Sievwright whose jurisdictions included Wadawurrung country.⁵ During the following five years La Trobe was inundated by reports, requests and petitions from settlers desiring to avoid the violent frontier wars that had plagued them in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania). That includes Alexander Thomson who had usurped Wadawurrung lands. He and other settlers at Port Phillip wrote reporting their earnest efforts to appease both the government and Aboriginal people:

Proposed by David Ramsay Pitcairn
seconded by Alexander Thomson and
carried unanimously, that all parties do
bind themselves to communicate to the
Arbitrator any aggression committed

upon or by the Aborigines, that may
come to their knowledge, by the
earliest opportunity, and that he be
empowered to proceed in the matter as
he may think expedient.

Proposed by John Helder Wedge
seconded by John Pascoe Fawkner
and carried unanimously that all
subscribing parties pledge themselves to
afford protection to the Aborigines to
the utmost of their power, and further
that they will not teach them the use
of firearms or allow their servants to
do so nor on any account to allow
the Aborigines to be in possession
of firearms.⁶

Among others seeking to indicate they
were acting in an honorable fashion towards
neighboring clans of the Wadawurrung was
Horatio Wills, a squatter who had usurped
Djab Wurrung land at Mount William. In
March 1842 he wrote of his efforts to pursue
'conciliatory measures' in dealings with local
clan owners, claiming beneficence by arguing
they were entitled to range in their country
unmolested: 'Now as I have frequently at the
hazard of my own life, used means to effect
a good understanding with the natives in my
immediate vicinity... I am willing to concede
the right of their hunting grounds to the



**Samuel Thomas Gill, 1818–1880, artist
Hamel & Ferguson, engraver
Corroboree [1864]**
Colour lithograph on white paper
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H10689

original possessors and my place for some considerable time back has been a general rendezvous for them'.⁷

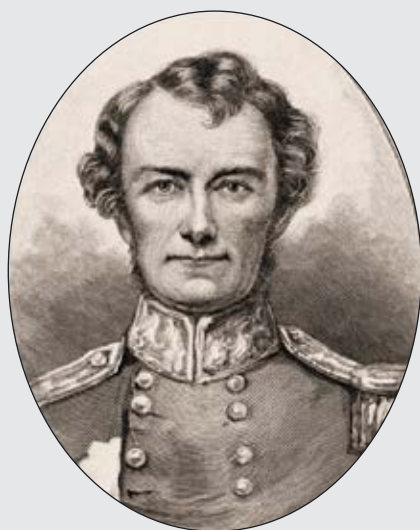
Specific local intelligence also reached La Trobe from Crown Lands Commissioners who on occasion noted how valuable Aboriginal workers were to the fledgling pastoral economy on stations close to Melbourne and Geelong. Their ability to allow valuable stock (generally worth £2 each) to wander in search of good feed and water without fear of losing them was held in high esteem. E.B Addis, Crown Lands Commissioner for the County of Grant (in Wadawurrung country), informed La Trobe in December 1841 that the Wadawurrung were not lacking in intellect and there was a peaceful relationship between them and the squatters. He added that young Barrabool men (Wadawurrung) are 'more disposed towards mak[ing] themselves useful to the settlers by riding in stray cattle and horses, cutting wood, and sometimes shepherding'.⁸

When relations with the Wadawurrung soured, public officials briefed La Trobe about the fine nuances of brokering peaceful relations with a people seeking to enforce their own laws and cultural mores upon the invaders. Fyans wrote of the angry response of the Wadawurrung when supplies given to them were deemed inadequate and unfairly distributed. In March 1838 a

large party had gathered at Geelong to receive government supplies expected as recompense for sheep being on their lands, and subsequently eating their staple foods such as murnong. Fyans feared the Wadawurrung were so disgusted that they continued to talk badly of him throughout the region. In his words:

When I issued the last of the things, only reserving a few blankets, and because I had not an ample sufficiency for all, to the number of I suppose about two hundred, there was much disgust. They left my place making use of many bad expressions and comparing me with Mr Langhorne [Government Missionary to the Aboriginals in Melbourne]. Since this occurrence I regret to say they have continued a strain of abuse on me through the country... I find when they come in any large number, if all are not equally supplied that it creates general disgust.⁹

He was subsequently castigated for not providing everyone with equal provisions. The author has previously argued that these incidents demonstrate the Wadawurrung's intense indignation about British possessiveness which they probably perceived as renegeing on the principles of reciprocity.¹⁰



W.A. Hirschmann, engraver
Charles Joseph La Trobe
 Wood engraving
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria,
 Picatlas/01/167
 Published in Pictorial Atlas of Australasia, 1886



Wilmot & Key, Geelong, photographer
The late Captain Fyans
 Wood engraving from photograph
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, IAN18/06/70/116
 Published in The Illustrated Australian News for
 Home Readers, 18 June 1870

A year later Fyans was solicited again for supplies by the Wadawurrung people around Geelong who made it clear they were not asking or begging, but in proper expectation that the Government would act on those principles of reciprocity. Fyans attempted to stress this point to La Trobe and Governor Gipps in Sydney: 'I do myself the honour to inform you, the tribe immediately at Geelong expect some gifts from me'.¹¹ La Trobe's diary and correspondence also instance some personal education by Wadawurrung and neighboring clans people. During his enjoyable, if sometimes arduous, travels through the Port Phillip District, La Trobe was often accompanied by the Native Police or select Aboriginal guides. Diary entries disclose occasions where he is at some parity with his guides such as: 'Lobster fishing with the blacks' in 1850 and eight years earlier, being instructed about Aboriginal place names in 1842:

Alone through the ranges leaving Waranceep [Mount Warrenheip, near Ballarat]...It was at Mollison's on the morning of the 2nd that my black trooper "Dr Bailey", gave me a lesson about native names — "Mititern, Mimiteden, Momiteden, Momitaten, Momateden, Momatzeden, Monmacedon!"¹²

Corroborees that La Trobe witnessed both in Melbourne and outside it were likely to have included Wadawurrung people, such as one at Mount Franklin in central Victoria in December 1843, where 'in the evening we had

a tolerable Corrobbery — 2 or 300 natives!'.¹³ He was also made privy to some Aboriginal reactions and adaptive responses on issues such as land tenure, dispossession, and their rationale for accommodative responses towards the colonisers. One example was the December 1841 report from Crown Lands Commissioner Addis of the explanation by Murordoruke, a Wadawurrung clan head, as to why he volunteered in July 1836 to assist the whites in searching for the murderer of squatter Charles Franks and his shepherd: 'It would end in the destruction of the whole tribe if the aggressors were not punished'.¹⁴ In the same report, Addis revealed familiarity with some aspects of Wadawurrung land tenure and recognised the conciliatory influence of Murrydeneek, an eminent clan head, on frontier relations, adding emphatically that settlers were very much at ease with the Wadawurrung: 'The inhabitants of the town and settlers of the district evince the kindest and most benevolent feeling towards the Aborigines and no distrust or fear as regards person or property appears now'.¹⁵

La Trobe's focus on dealings with Aboriginal people, changed from avoiding frontier violence to attempting to keep them out of the growing towns. Since large numbers congregating in Geelong and Melbourne were considered to constitute a health risk for both whites and Indigenous people, La Trobe ordered in 1840 that both towns be off limits to the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip.¹⁶ Robinson and William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines for the Western Port

district, were adamant that the ban was not only untenable, but also grossly unfair. Banning the Wadawurrung from Geelong also embroiled Protector Sievwright in terse communications with La Trobe about the 'arbitrary' and 'unwarrantable' order. La Trobe relented and ruled 'that a few individuals who could be trusted' would be allowed to work in Geelong, but only with Sievwright's sanction. Sievwright nevertheless continued to argue that La Trobe's ban amounted to 'oppression' and 'injustice'.¹⁷

In July 1842 La Trobe lamented that it had been futile to enforce the Wadawurrung and other Kulin confederacy people to stay in their home locality, as Melbourne was too big a drawcard for them to resist: 'attempts to make the natives settle down and conform in any degree to regular habits has signally failed. Mr Thomas justly attributes this failure in part at least to the vicinity of Melbourne. The town and neighbourhood are never free from a large number of the blacks either of the Western Port, Barrabool [Wadawurrung] or Goulbum tribes'.¹⁸

La Trobe also received reports which clearly signalled frontier hotspots in Wadawurrung country. Alexander Thomson, who had established a station at Indented Head, reflected in a letter written in 1853 to Governor La Trobe that just three pastoralists, including himself, had the whole Western district to themselves for eighteen months owing to others 'being all afraid of blacks'.¹⁹ Anne Drysdale, a squatter near Geelong, affirms the general perception when she noted in July 1840 that 'a number of gentlemen meeting with Mr Thomson about what to do about the Natives murdering shepherds'.²⁰ A subsequent letter to La Trobe stated that the 'increasing aggression of the Aboriginal population... have excited the deepest indignation and alarm throughout the community'.²¹

In September 1839, a notice in the *Government Gazette* decreed that pastoralists found giving firearms to Aboriginal people would have their squatting licenses revoked.²² In April 1840, La Trobe and Lonsdale sought further restriction on the use of firearms by the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip, instructing police magistrates and protectors to take any guns that were in their possession. William Thomas and Chief Protector Robinson repeatedly wrote about Wadawurrung warriors with guns who were reportedly about to descend upon Melbourne. In April 1840 an unspecified group who were obviously vexed about the new 'gun laws', harangued William Thomas about taking away their guns. He attempted to appease them by:

saying only sulky with guns, their cry was what for white man 's guns — big one hungry blackfellow by and by — no kangaroo — whiteman take away blackfellows country now gun, by and by all dead poor blackfellow. The blacks were very insolent for the rest of the day, would not let white man be near them, yangally, yangally [no good], bloody whiteman.²³

More than a year later, in September 1841, Thomas noted in his diary that their displeasure still burned brightly: 'the blacks this morning very dissatisfied; and talk much about no good white man, take away country no good bush, all white man sit down, gago [go away] kangaroo, black fellows come to Melbourne and white man sulky, no good that, no blackfellows sulky when few white men here...'²⁴

Sexual abuse of Aboriginal women

It was common knowledge that the capture and at times forced prostitution of Aboriginal women was often a cause of bloody conflict between whites and the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. There were other deleterious and compounding effects. Dr Jonathan Clerke, a surgeon employed by the Aboriginal Protectorate wrote to Sievwright in August 1839 deploring the health of the Wadawurrung people around Geelong and imploring him to act decisively and urgently:

I have been frequently called on, since my arrival in this Colony, to visit many of these poor creatures labouring under venereal and inflammatory affection. The former of these diseases rage to a great extent amongst them, proving fatal to some, and leaves others totally unable to provide for themselves... For me to enter into further particulars respecting the natives, I deem unnecessary, as being yourself a resident and surrounded by them, you must be aware of the urgent necessity of representing their deplorable state to Government, and entreating that proper means might be speedily adopted to ameliorate their sufferings.²⁵

The issue of Aboriginal health, especially venereal diseases, was flagged by the Protectors and public servants who had dealings with the Indigenous people of Port Phillip.²⁶ Robinson and Parker noted whilst on a survey of the Loddon Valley district that the incidence of venereal disease was prevalent among Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and a section of Burrumbeet Bulluk of the Wadawurrung people. Parker was able to secure the appointment of a

surgeon to the station, but minimal acceptance of Western medicine and sporadic attendance at Parker's station by clans local to the area resulted in sexually transmitted diseases taking a huge toll throughout Port Phillip. Fyans had written to the Colonial Secretary as early as June 1838 about the problem, stating that 'as far as I can learn, three years ago, venereal disease was unknown here. I regret to say the native population are now in the most deplorable state with it and also a number of the lower class of Europeans'.²⁷

The government in Sydney chose to postpone action on Fyans' urgent request for an alteration to the Crown Lands Act, which would disqualify a squatter from occupying his lease if any white men on the station were found to be co-habiting with Aboriginal women.²⁸ Governor Gipps' minute on Fyans' request for a stronger warning advised that 'I am only waiting on a favourable moment to publish a new and more comprehensive Notice on this subject'.²⁹ No further action was taken on medical supplies and the appointment of surgeons as requested by protectors and missionaries, nor on the legislative alteration urged by Fyans. Government acknowledgement and response was confined to instructions to Crown Lands Commissioners, stipulating the importance of preventing the sexual abuse of Aboriginal women: 'The duties of the commissioners of Crown Land, in respect to the Aborigines, will be to cultivate at all times an amicable intercourse with them... and particularly to prevent any interference on the part of white men with their women'.³⁰

The author and others have noted that government was more responsive to complaints of outrages by Aboriginal people in Sievwright's district than addressing the issues that directly impacted on the Indigenous people of Port Phillip.³¹

La Trobe was invariably alerted to the horrors of sexual abuse directed at Aboriginal women and children and the resultant violence meted out to white perpetrators. One instance reported by Robinson involved Agnew, a hutkeeper in the employ of Charles Urquhart, a squatter on Wadawurrung country, who had been beaten badly by Borrinegonnoworrer, a Wadawurrung man for mistreating his wife Cannibumim, after failing to comply with a mutually agreed law of reciprocity:

This man Agnew, an old soldier, had engaged the services of a black woman from her husband for three days. At the expiration of that period he was to give her a blanket and her husband a

blanket. He kept her two days, beat and ill-used her, and then turned her away without giving her anything. When the husband was informed of it he was incensed and vowed revenge... The man was found by the shepherd beaten most severely. He told his story to the overseer — a parcel of lies — which was reported to the government.³²

Benjamin Hurst, the Wesleyan missionary situated on Wadawurrung country at Buntingdale near present-day Birregurra, attempted to convince La Trobe of the seriousness of the problem shortly after arriving in 1839. Hurst was unequivocal that unless immediate steps were taken to ameliorate the situation the Wadawurrung would 'in a very few years be entirely extinct'.³³ Hurst was unrelenting, reiterating this most serious issue to La Trobe on numerous occasions. In May 1840 he wrote: 'The number of the natives in this district is decreasing. This arises principally from their connection with the lower orders of white people. Several have died of disease, the result of promiscuous intercourse with the shepherds and hutkeepers'.³⁴

A year later he warned that prostitution of the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip was occasioned by all classes of white people, significantly compounding the degree of their destruction in many guises. He surmised that venereal disease amongst the Wadawurrung and neighbouring peoples was endemic, thereby increasing the mortality rate exponentially. He also pointed out that the birth rate amongst the Wadawurrung and other groups in the region was considerably diminished due to:

the fact that the half cast[e] children are destroyed almost as soon as they are born... I would not easily come to conclusions upon a point upon which my countrymen are so deeply and disgracefully concerned but I have for my guidance in forming an opinion — first the statements of the natives as to who the persons are that are accustomed to descend to this abominable practice — secondly the almost universal prevalence among them of a loathsome disease, which brings many of them to an untimely end — thirdly — the testimony of medical men, as to the extent to which the same disease prevails among Europeans... there is every reason (excepting only absolute proof) to believe that the prostitution of the Native women is not confined to the lower order of Europeans.³⁵



In December 1841 Hurst again sounded the alarm about the spectre of the Wadawurrung's imminent demise if no action was taken to severely curtail contact between the Wadawurrung and whites. He made a number of suggestions that government could employ. La Trobe dutifully relayed this to the Colonial Secretary, but until he became Lieutenant-Governor of the separate colony of Victoria on 1 July 1851, he lacked the power to take action on the suggested strategies:

The Missionaries proceed to state that they at times almost despair of ultimate success: not so much from the difficulties interposed in their way by the wandering habits of the tribes, their quarrels, their cannibalism or degradation, as from the rapid decrease in their numbers, principally in consequence of their connexion with the Europeans, reasons for which they detail and they urge that if the Aboriginal race is to be preserved, and the money and the labor, devoted to their civil and religious improvement, to be made permanent blessings to them, they must be cut off by some means or other from all intercourse with Europeans, except those who are placed among them for their benefit. Mr Hurst concluded that it appears to be necessary that some very stringent measures should be adopted to prevent if possible the settlers and their servants from encouraging them about their stations, particularly the females.³⁶

In February 1842, Sievwright wrote to David Fisher, a squatter in the Geelong district, reminding him that the occupiers of Crown Lands were responsible for the conduct of their servants in regard to harbouring native women, intimating that he could 'direct the Commissioner not to recommend the renewal' of Fisher's pastoral licence.³⁷ This was no idle threat as Robinson, Fyans and La Trobe all considered the option of withholding squatting licenses 'from parties who show such a disregard in human life'. La Trobe reiterated his strong support of this perspective to the Colonial Secretary but could take no direct action.³⁸

By mid-1842 it could no longer be denied that the Protectorate system's objectives were not being fulfilled. Robinson had noted in March 1842 that he had seen 'a large group of natives at Geelong South near Dr Thomson's... A few others at Indented Head, others in the bush. No Barrabals at mission station', thus flagging the inability of protectors to coalesce and Christianise the Wadawurrung. Continual calls for the closure of the Protectorate system led to the establishment in 1845 of a Select Committee to consider the situation of the Port Phillip Aborigines. The evidence provided to the Committee was highly critical of the system. Thomas observed that Aboriginal people had not the least 'desire to conform to civilized habits'. Attendance at the Loddon protectorate continued to decline, Robinson reporting no Aboriginal people there when he visited in March 1848. In 1849 another 'Select Committee into the condition of the Natives' recommended the abolition of the system and no hasty replacement. Much good, it was felt, would be gained by concentrating on the religious and educational needs of whites in the interior, which would in turn benefit the Aboriginal people. The Protectorate system was closed on 31 December 1849.

The second wave of invaders

From an Aboriginal policy perspective the Victorian gold rush of the 1850s ushered in an era of ungenerous thought and lack of support by the La Trobe administration. The 1849 Select Committee's recommendation for abolition of the Aboriginal Protectorate was adopted in 1850 but its strong recommendations for the establishment of hospitals, schools and plots of land to be set aside for Aboriginal communities across Victoria were ignored. Newspapers described the piecemeal funding for Aboriginal people, principally rations and the appointment of William Thomas as Guardian of Victorian Aborigines, as parsimonious. As Clark and the author have argued, Victorian Aboriginal policy of the period is best described, as 'laissez faire'.³⁹



**William Strutt,
1825–1915, artist**
Black troopers
escorting prisoner from
Ballarat to Melbourne,
1851
Pencil and watercolour
Parliamentary Library
Victoria
From the album *Victoria
the Golden: scenes, sketches
and jottings from nature*

One of the few policy initiatives to impact on Wadawurrung people and their estates that was retained was the Native Police.

The Victorian Native Police Corps has been extensively researched by a number of scholars and writers. This author would argue that the role of the Corps in keeping order is one of the most significant and best documented influences Aboriginal people had on the goldfields.⁴⁰ As La Trobe learned at the outset of his administration, a major benefit of the Port Phillip (Victorian) Native Police Corps, initially established in 1837, was to have at the government's disposal a policing force superbly equipped at tracking criminals in the bush.⁴¹ In 1839 Charles Sievwright, the Assistant Protector in the wider Geelong district, reported to La Trobe that he had enlisted a number of Wadawurrung men into the Native Police including: Doregobel, Winerdera, Woolourong and Billy-Gong. Other Wadawurrung included in Fels' study of the Native Police are Bobby from Geelong and Barney and Kurnbarwatto [Jack], members of the Barrabool tribe, who enlisted in the mid-1840s. In July 1846 at least three more Wadawurrung are known to have joined the Native Police.⁴² With a renewed force from 1849, and the advent of gold discoveries, their role shifted towards patrolling the new gold finds, guarding official sites, providing order and even enabling the Port Phillip administration for a brief period to keep the gold discoveries a secret. It was also in this period that they began to take part in public celebrations such as the opening of the new Prince's Bridge, to perform guard duties at Pentridge Gaol and act as official escort to dignitaries, including La Trobe.⁴³

Members of the Corps also acted as the first official gold escort, ensuring the safe passage to Melbourne of large amounts of gold, on behalf both of private individuals and of government officials who had received gold as payment for licence fees. The Native Police Corps were the first police on Wadawurrung country, arriving at the goldfields of Ballarat on 20 September 1851. A main duty was to enforce the new measure of gold licensing initiated by La Trobe to augment revenue for the new Victorian Government and also deter people from flocking to the goldfields. Stephen Shelmerdine's study of the Port Phillip Native Police concluded that by 1851 the force was 'operating at its highest level with demands for its services being stimulated by the riot of bushrangers scouring the whole district and the excited fervour of the early goldrush discoveries.'⁴⁴ Fels' comprehensive study of the Native Police, with particular reference to their work on the goldfields, noted that in accompanying the commissioners on their rounds, their presence alone was important, along with their readiness to intervene in the event of any disorder.⁴⁵

The official start of Victoria's gold rush is usually given as the announcement of discoveries on Wadawurrung country at Buninyong near Ballarat on 8 August 1851. Prior to this, the Native Police were at several locations where gold had been found, their earliest stint beginning on 5 February 1849 guarding a discovery site at Daisy Hill, an outstation on Dja Dja Wurrung country located ten miles west of Deep Creek (one of the branches of the Loddon River).⁴⁶ F.A. Powlett, the Commissioner of Crown Lands

for the district, reported to La Trobe that he had left a party of native police at Daisy Hill Station to prevent any unauthorised occupation of Crown Lands in the neighbourhood.⁴⁷

When the major gold finds at Ballarat, Clunes, Buninyong, Mount Alexander and Bendigo became public knowledge in 1851, the Native Police were the only effective unit La Trobe had at his disposal to maintain order and represent the government on the goldfields. The miner cum artist, William Strutt, confirmed this from his own experiences on the Ballarat diggings:

Met on our way [to Ballarat] a prisoner and a villainous squint-eyed scoundrel he looked, handcuffed and escorted by two well mounted and smart looking black troopers (of whom I have made a drawing), on the road to Melbourne... the useful black troopers were for a time made to escort prisoners to town; these fine fellows were at first the only mounted police; and indeed performed all the police duty at the Ballarat diggings.⁴⁸

Captain Dana, the officer in charge of the Corps, frequently patrolled the early diggings at Buninyong, Ballarat, the Pyrenees and Mount Alexander, where miners' resentment of the licensing fee certainly contributed to the prominence of the Corps. An incident on the Ballarat field on 21 September 1851 illustrates both their success as a force prepared to intervene in case of disorder and their growing unpopularity in the eyes of miners. Commissioner Doveton and his assistant David Armstrong explained to the diggers the government's decision to introduce licensing fees, which drew an angry response from the crowd. A public meeting was convened on the spot. The first miners who applied to pay the fee were struck and pelted by 'the mob', as Dana referred to them. He reported that had it not been for the presence of the Native Police, 'those diggers would have been seriously injured'. A request was also made for the recall of Native Police stationed in the Goulburn district for redeployment to Ballarat.⁴⁹ Michael Cannon posits that the overbearing methods of the Native Police 'so antagonized the diggers that a flame of rebellion was lit, culminating in the Eureka Stockade three years later.'⁵⁰

The presence of Aboriginal police was condemned by some miners already angered by the expensive license system and methods reputedly used by Dana, with troopers and other officials firing upon diggers.⁵¹ Further fuelling the hatred was an incident reported in the *Argus*:

The redoubtable Captain Dana diversified his exploits on Saturday by knocking down a young man named Thomas with the butt of his whip; the young man fell into a pit from the effect of the blow. It is gratifying to record such a gallant military exploit — a repetition of the like of which will render it a matter of necessity to place him under the surveillance of his own satanic battalion of Black Guards — a suitable troop for such a commander.⁵²

Wadawurrung Native Police such as Timboo from Geelong are listed as going in pursuit of bushrangers in July 1852 and then being sent in September to Anderson Creek diggings to 'find out how many parties are working there'.⁵³ Attitudes towards the Corps differed widely as various letters to the *Argus* indicate. One letter to the editor on 26 November 1851 from an impassioned writer by the name of 'Bucknalook' defended the Corps' efficiency and deplored the crass miserliness of the government towards them:

A great deal has been said about Christianity and civilizing, this is all talk, talk! Talk of equality of rights!... The ambiguous captain of this very warlike regiment, it will be seen, figures with 300 pounds [per year] attached to his name... whilst the efficient part of the company, namely the natives themselves have (Oh! Whisper it not in the same breath with the word justice, mercy, Christianity or equality or rights!) THREE PENCE PER DAY!! Many of these blacks have as correct an idea of the component parts of a shilling, that it is composed of 12 pence as their redoubtable captain, and what must their impression be of this gross act of injustice...⁵⁴

Bucknalook's dire projection proved to be accurate. By early 1852 Dana was finding it difficult to keep the force at full strength, as he wrote to the Colonial Secretary: 'I have now the greatest difficulty in keeping the Troopers of the Native Police from absconding from the Service... I have endeavoured to induce others to join, but I find them mostly unwilling to do so which I can only account for from the facility they now have of making money, by working for the Settlers, and also from their frequenting the Gold Workings'.⁵⁵

An example was the sudden desertion of four troopers on Wadawurrung country at Buninyong in October 1851.⁵⁶ The author's study of Aboriginal people on the goldfields of Victoria highlights the Victorian Legislative

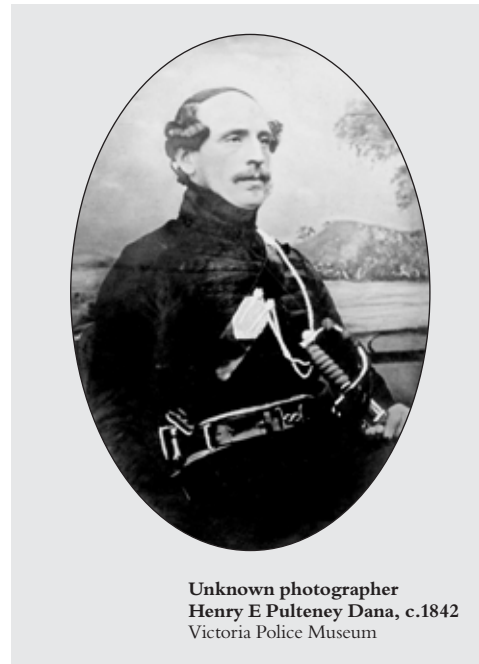
Council's decisive meeting in December 1851 where the function and future prospects of the Corps were discussed. Some councillors called for its cessation as being 'utterly useless', whilst others argued it was 'absurd to employ constables whose evidence could not be heard in courts of justice'. La Trobe's viewpoint was not reported in the newspapers, since, constitutionally, he chaired the meeting, but did not speak in debate. Nevertheless, the continuation of the Corps was secured by the support of both the Colonial Secretary and the Attorney General:

The Committee's erudite attention was directed to the impressive facts that no cases of improper conduct by the Native Police in executing a warrant had ever been reported and that in carrying out normal duties they were as reliable as white men... In conclusion the Attorney General put forward a thoroughly Australian reason for their continuation — there was no decisive reason for their disbandment at the present stage after so many years in existence.⁵⁷

By February 1852 Dana had secured the support of La Trobe to radically reform the Native Police Corps. Most important were the decisions to reduce the number of native troopers, increase the number of non-Indigenous troopers and recruit only native troopers from areas outside Melbourne or Geelong.⁵⁸ Dana also had La Trobe's support in using the Native troopers for tracking and escorting rather than policing. In Dana's view the need to enlist Aboriginal troopers had diminished as conflict between Aboriginal people and non-Indigenes had effectually ceased. By October 1852 the Victorian Native Police Corps had finished active policing duties in the field.

Why did neither Dana nor La Trobe, both long-term advocates of the Native Police Corps, see a continuing role for Aboriginal troopers? The author has argued that they may have foreseen a role as a kind of elite force, specialists in tracking, escorting and guiding, although correspondence between Dana and La Trobe holds no compelling evidence of this, other than a recommendation to the effect that they could be utilised in that guise. La Trobe made no marginal notes or offered clear directives for Dana to pursue this course.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly, Dana's death on 24 November 1852 exacerbated the inaction.

Largely through analysing public records this survey has highlighted some key issues in relation to Superintendent Charles Joseph



La Trobe and the impact of his governance on Wadawurrung people and their lands in the period 1839–1853. It has been demonstrated that La Trobe quickly became familiar with some Aboriginal cultural imperatives such as their insistence on freedom of movement in their own territory, the right to bear arms and the equitable distribution of valued goods. It is also clear that whilst genuinely sympathetic to Aboriginal people's plight, particularly in regard to protecting Aboriginal women and children from sexual predation by settlers, he did not press for measures strongly recommended by appointed officials including Foster Fyans and the Aboriginal Protectors. Another point of significance that has not been widely recognised, is that one of the longest associations Wadawurrung people had with colonial Aboriginal policy was through their active involvement in the Native Police Corps, and especially its presence on Wadawurrung lands during the gold rush period.

Endnotes

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- 4 *Historical Records of Victoria*, vol.2B. *Aborigines and Protectors 1838-1839* (hereafter HRV 2B). Editor: Michael Cannon, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1983, p.409.
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- 11 Ibid.
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- 17 Charles Sievwright cited in: Lindsey Arkley, *The Hated Protector: the story of Charles Wightman Sievwright, Protector of Aborigines, 1839-1842*. Mentone, Vic.: Orbit Press, 2000, pp.94-96.
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- 19 Thomas Francis Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers: a series of papers on the early occupation of the colony, the Aborigines, etc.*, Melbourne: Trustees of the Public Library, 1898, p.251.
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- 21 Thomson to La Trobe, July 24 1840 in Alexander Thomson, 'Papers dealing with Aborigines especially Geelong 1840-1844', 1840, Australian Manuscripts Collection. State Library Victoria, MS 9345.
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- 23 April 17 1840 in William Thomas, Thomas Journal. Papers. 1840-1842, MS 14624, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria.
- 24 Ibid, September 17 1841.
- 25 Dr Jonathan Clerke to C.W. Sievwright, August 19 1839 in HRV 2B, p.649.
- 26 Many colonial doctors and surgeons who had close associations with Aboriginal people in the Protectorate period (1839-1850) including Watton, Atkins and Cussen were categorical about their diagnosis of venereal disease and the prevalence of it in Aboriginal Victoria. Dr Horsburgh, medical officer at Goulburn River in 1849 reported that 'syphilis, gonorrhoea and scabies were the three diseases to which they were most subject', see Ian D. Clark, *Goulburn River Aboriginal Protectorate*, Ballarat, Ballarat Heritage Services, 2013, p.99. A decade earlier Dr Patrick Cussen noted the prevalence of venereal disease at the Aboriginal encampment on the Yarra River, see HRV 2B, p.524. Dr Baylie (Bayley) was one of the few colonial medical officers to dispute the prevalence and occurrence of venereal disease, see Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: a history since 1800*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005, pp.87-89.
- 27 Foster Fyans to Colonial Secretary, June 15 1838 in HRV 2A, p.309.
- 28 Fyans concludes his letter to the Colonial Secretary by asserting; 'if it [alteration to the Act] could be made stronger, it would be all the better', in HRV 2A, p.310.
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- 31 See Cahir, *The Wathawurrung* (2001)
- 32 Robinson's Journal, August 6 1841 in Ian D. Clark (ed.), *The Journal of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, 1839-1852*, [3rd ed.], Charleston, SC, Createspace, 2014.
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- 37 C.W Sievwright to David Fisher, October 2 1839 in *HRV* 2B, p.657.
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- 40 Fred Cahir, *Black Gold: Aboriginal people on the goldfields of Victoria, 1850-1870*, Canberra: ANU E Press and Aboriginal History Incorporated, 2012.
- 41 See PROV VPRS 4409 Copies of Correspondence Relating to the Establishment of the Aboriginal Protectorate 1839, P0000 Unit 1, Letter 56.
- 42 See Appendix D in: Marie Fels, *Good Men and True: the Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District, 1837-1853*. University of Melbourne, PhD Thesis, 1986.
- 43 La Trobe recorded many instances of the Native Police accompanying him on expeditions throughout Victoria including a journey from Melbourne to Gippsland in 1845, and another to the Otway Coast with a Wadawurrung guide 'Tommy'. See: Reilly (ed.), *Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes*, pp.130, 140.
- 44 Stephen Ross Shelmerdine, 'The Port Phillip Native Police Corps as an experiment in Aboriginal policy and practice, October 1837- January 1853', Thesis BA(Hons), University of Melbourne, 1972. Cited in: Cahir, *Black Gold*.
- 45 Marie Hansen Fels, *Good Men and True: the Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District, 1837-1853*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p.213.
- 46 PROV VA4579 Native Police Corps, VPRS 90, Day Book of the Native Police Corps 1837-1853, Narre Warren. P0001.
- 47 PROV VA856, Colonial Secretary's Office, VPRS 103, Outward Letter Book, Powlett to La Trobe 22 February 1849, unit 49, item 12
- 48 William Strutt, 'Off for Australia: emigration, every body, & every thing, now, all, is new: autobiography of William Strutt, 1850-1911', MS4294, National Library of Australia, p.63.
- 49 PROV VA856, Colonial Secretary's Office, VPRS 2878 Inward Registered Correspondence II [Land Branch], Dana to La Trobe 22 September 1851, unit 51, item 417.
- 50 Michael Cannon, *Black Land, White Land*, Port Melbourne: Minerva, 1993. p.239.
- 51 'The conduct of Captain Dana... at the Diggings continues to be commented on by every individual who comes to Geelong and nothing short of the appointment of a more fitting man in his place there will give satisfaction', *Geelong Advertiser*, 29 September 1851.
- 52 *Argus* 1 October 1851.
- 53 See: Fels, 1986, p.330.
- 54 Bucknalllook, *Argus* 26 November 1851.
- 55 PROV, VA856 Colonial Secretary's Office, VPRS 1189 Inward Registered Correspondence 1851-1863, unit 16, item 52/1510.
- 56 By leaving behind all their gear and equipment the troopers were clearly signalling their desire to leave the Corps, see Fels, 1988, p.88.
- 57 'Meeting,' *Argus* 5 December 1851.
- 58 PROV VPRS 1189, unit 52, item 1653, Dana to Victorian Colonial Secretary 14 May 1852. (See correspondence between Dana and La Trobe between July-November 1852 regarding transformation of Native Police Force and emphasis on tracking and escorting rather than policing.)
- 59 Cahir, *Black Gold*.

‘Quietly Slaughtered in Unknown Numbers’: the contemporary witness of Niel Black to the clash between settlers and Aboriginal people, 1839-1842

By Maggie Black

Maggie Black’s work as a writer has focused on disadvantaged people in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Her view of the damaging impact of contemporary forms of development on Indigenous societies is articulated in her book, *International Development: Illusions and Realities* (New Internationalist, 2015). This proved a useful basis for studying her great-grandfather’s pioneering life in Victoria. Niel Black’s archive found its way to State Library Victoria thanks to Margaret Kiddle, author of *Men of Yesterday* (Melbourne University Press, 1961), which also drew heavily on his remarkable voice. This article is a shortened version of a chapter in the author’s *Up Came a Squatter: Niel Black of Glenormiston 1839-1880* (NewSouth, 2016).

Niel Black began writing a daily journal soon after arriving in Melbourne in September 1839. A love-affair with the pen then flowered in his subsequent correspondence with his key partner, T.S. Gladstone.¹ Black’s records — journals, letters, maps, invoices, accounts — provide an unparalleled account of day-to-day life on Niel Black & Company’s sheep-run in the Western District, and a window onto his relations with ‘natives’, as well as their persecutors and Protectors, in the very early years. Black’s own attitudes changed over time — for the worse. Although he would not join his fellow settlers in killing, he failed to condemn them and his own ideas of ‘pacification’ were far from benign.

On 9 December 1839, Niel Black — an ambitious 35-year old Scottish tenant farmer recently arrived in Port Phillip — booked into the *Woolpack Inn*, Geelong. As managing partner of Niel Black & Company, he was responsible for delivering on the investments of well-heeled partners in Glasgow and Liverpool. This was Black’s first excursion to reconnoitre country

suitable for taking up on Crown license with a view to making profits — preferably large ones — out of grazing sheep. He was therefore anxious to learn as much as he could about the life of a ‘squatter’ on Crown lands.

Black’s original idea had been to take up ‘virgin’ land, beyond the existing settlement frontier. This was because land far from the putative towns of Melbourne, Geelong and Portland would not be put up for sale by the Crown in the near future. Bush in the distant interior would still be available for licensed grazing for many years; hence a larger tract with a longer ‘squattening’ life-span would bring the Company greater profits.

That evening at the *Woolpack Inn*, Black listened to the local squatters boasting of their exploits. What he heard caused him to re-think his original plan. He confided to his journal that night the realisation that anyone who carved out a new ‘run’ from untrammelled bush needed a conscience ‘sufficiently seared to enable him without remorse to slaughter natives right and left’.² For various reasons, some practical but most to do with his beliefs, this seemed to him not only distasteful, but morally abhorrent.

In a long entry, the first on this subject in a journal begun two months before, Black gave a status quo description of the conflict between intruders and those who had been lords of their own soil for thousands of years, and were now being forcibly displaced to make way for that wool-bearing unit of productivity, the sheep. He described how 'natives' not brought into subjection tended to spear and steal sheep, and that shot was apparently the only antidote. He was doubtful about the scale of deaths because those roistering at the Inn were inclined to 'bounce' or brag about their activities. This they did in 'hints and slang phrases' for fear of being reported to the Protector of Aborigines. But despite what he took to be exaggerated tales, he was nonetheless convinced that murders of 'these poor ignorant creatures' were sometimes carried out 'by whole sale'.

This entry in Black's journal is clear evidence that settlers were visiting indiscriminate violence of unknown dimensions on Indigenous groups. It also shows that, in Black's mind and from his perspective, the critical issue was to neutralise any threat such people posed to pastoral activity in a way that respected fundamental laws and Christian morality. The passage provides — as do subsequent journal entries and letters home to his key partner, T.S. Gladstone — a window onto one settler's view of the Aboriginal 'problem' and a relatively unvarnished account of his own interactions with their fate. What he described derived from ideas and perceptions indefensible by the standards of today, but in contemporary terms Black's outlook was not as remorseless as many.

At this stage of his pioneering venture, Black's views towards Aboriginal people seem benign, almost sympathetic. He had no wish to take up arms against defenceless humanity, and he believed that 'native' savagery had been grossly exaggerated. He was shocked that settlers should boast of their murderous behaviour as if discussing the bag at a shoot. 'I believe that great numbers of these poor creatures have wantonly fallen victims to settlers scarcely less savage tho' more enlightened than themselves', who cared not 'a single straw about taking the life of a native, provided they are not taken up by the Protectors'.³

From the first thought of his Australian project, Black would have known that existing dwellers of 'unsettled' lands would pose a hazard to his venture. This was the universal experience in British colonial history on American, Asian and African continents. But the issue did not feature in his early priorities. When he set off alone into the bush, he did so without qualm. Naturally, he carried a pistol — he would

have carried one in Scotland. It is only in the context of taking up territory, and questions as to whether it is pacified and cleared of danger, that the subject of 'natives' finally arises. To Gladstone in Liverpool, he wrote that 'they are deliberately thought quietly slaughtered in unknown numbers';⁴ he did not want such carnage on his own or his partners' consciences.

At this time, British colonial policy towards Indigenous peoples was undergoing change. A dehumanised attitude had for centuries accompanied the forced acquisition of alien land for white settlement. 'Black' or 'native' wars had routinely been fought by frontiersmen and gunslingers, with the complicity of the state. But by the 1830s, following the abolition of slavery, the extermination of Aboriginal peoples was being strongly protested. A House of Commons Select Committee made recommendations in 1837 on how colonial settlement could be pursued without inflicting 'desolation and ruin' on 'defenceless and uncivilized Tribes'.⁵ The idea that such behaviour was 'impious and atrocious' would have been familiar to the educated and churchgoing by the time Black left home.

In Black's native Argyll, a process of depopulation by only slightly less brutal means had been underway since his father's childhood. The 'clearances' that began in the mid-eighteenth century removed indigenous Gaelic-speaking farmers from land they had tended for generations, to make way for incoming 'improvers' and sheep. Such a parallel with the 'clearance' of Aboriginal peoples in Australia would not have crossed Black's mind; after all, the most impoverished farm labourer in Scotland had a soul, which could not be assured in an unchristianised 'black'. Besides, his family were 'improvers'. He had been raised to believe that improving the productivity of land and stock was a religiously sanctioned cause, leading to the betterment of all. The judicious application of capital upon the landscape was a core tenet of this creed. Indigenous populations had no role to play in this world view.

The lands of Australia Felix were claimed by the Crown as 'vacant',⁶ though they were nothing of the kind. This designation was the basis for the intruders' presence in them, yet their emptiness was belied by the fight put up by the existing inhabitants against that presence. To graze flocks without loss required settlers to have a strategy towards those being displaced by sheep. The alternatives were kill, drive off, pacify, domesticate or accommodate. Whichever combination was applied, the strategy must succeed in leaving the incomers masters of

2756 Sheep @ 23/6
 £3238-6
 Goods, improvements
 &c as per bill
 rendered — — — — — 473-11
 £4011-17

delivered to Mr Black
 by me - 14th Feb 1840
 and received the
 amount by a check
 on the Bank of
 Australasia —

Hutton

Receipt for sheep, goods, improvements, etc. 14 February 1840
 Shows £3,238. 6s for 2,756 sheep @ 23s 6d,
 total payment £4,011 17s
 Australian Manuscripts Collection, State
 Library Victoria, MS 8996/31

‘their’ domain: even those sympathetic to Aboriginal peoples’ plight did not doubt their own innate and Christian superiority, especially as ‘improvers’ of the environment. Left to themselves, the settlers would take the law into their hands, with the result that the peoples of pre-nineteenth century Port Phillip would be killed or die of sickness or want, with a few individuals surviving as workers, domestics or ‘pets’ on certain runs.

To avoid this, the colonial authorities had introduced a new arm of government to interpose between the ‘native’ inhabitants and the graziers: the Aboriginal Protectorate. In 1838, George Augustus Robinson, who had failed to arrest the extinction of such people in Van Diemen’s Land, was recruited as Chief Protector for Port Phillip. His four Assistant Protectors included Charles Sievwright for the Portland Bay district, a mere 15,500 square miles. The Protectors began work in early 1839. Settler takeover of terrain was already far advanced, with rivers, marshes and hunting grounds on which Aboriginal subsistence depended being rapidly taken over. The accompanying violence, including that between distinct Aboriginal language groups forced onto each other’s territory, meant that immediate conciliatory action was needed. Instead, the Protectors were asked to conduct an Aboriginal census — names, tribes, family size, customs, languages, locations.⁷ As the ‘grass rush’ of settlers into some of the most fertile land

in Australia accelerated, so too did the course of human devastation.

The Protectors’ task was complicated by the settlers’ attitude towards them. When whites had been few, Aboriginal groups might be allowed to stay on the periphery of their runs. But by late 1839, with the Portland Bay district fully stocked with Crown licensees, this had become impracticable. The Protectorate, an experiment never before attempted in Her Britannic Majesty’s colonies, was seen by many as ill-conceived and its emissaries as inept. Its officers were shunned socially, and portrayed as abettors of sheep thieves and murderers: Sievwright’s name was mud from the start. That a grazier might be asked to give up ‘his’ land for a native reserve was unthinkable. But in Sievwright’s view, the establishment of native reserves was of paramount importance. Unfortunately, his chances of gaining settler cooperation were negligible, as events were to prove.

One reason for Niel Black’s lack of mention of ‘natives’ early in his journal was that it was written for the eyes of his family only, and he wanted to reassure them about the risks to his person and his chances of success. He had no idea of conveying any view of policy towards ‘blacks’ — other than that he thought

all clashes with them should be dealt with under the law, not by summary action. His attitudes evolved over time as experience and other minds informed them. But there was one barrier that he personally would not cross: obedience to the Sixth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill'. He and his cousin Donald Black, who worked for him, both believed that only in extreme self-defence could they take a human life.⁸

Following a second reconnoitre into the bush at the end of December 1839, Black negotiated hard to gain possession of a run on Mount Emu Creek known as 'Taylor's Country' after its superintendent. In February 1840, Black took up the run and renamed it *Glenormiston*. Sheep, buildings and license cost his company over £4,000, more than two-thirds of his capital. An important attraction of the run, apart from the fact that he thought its soils and access to water 'unequalled in the colony', was that 'pacification' had already been effected. Having decided that he did not want to engage in 'affrays' himself, Black was content to gain from the local clans having been given a 'serious check', and saw no moral ambiguity in this position.

On *Glenormiston*, this 'check' had been performed by Frederick Taylor, a man well known for brutality against Aboriginal people.⁹ In October 1839, Taylor had organised an armed party of squatters and men. On the pretext of retaliating against sheep stealing, they murdered around fifty members of the Jarcoort section of the Kirrae people camping in a gully on Mount Emu Creek, all but wiping out the Tarnpirr *gundidj* or clan (Tarnpirr was their name for the creek). A few Jarcoort people camping nearby escaped, including a woman, Bareetch Chuurneen, who swam across Lake Bullen Merri with her child on her back.¹⁰

The massacre was too extreme to be ignored, and in November 1839 Charles Sievwright arrived and set about taking witness statements. Taylor fled to Van Diemen's Land for fear of arrest. His departure led to the decision by the owners of the sheep and grazing license for 'Taylor's country' to sell up. Black was told by the overseer that 'about thirty-five to forty natives have been dispatched on this establishment and there are only two men left alive of the tribe. ... He is certain we will never be troubled'.¹¹ This turned out to be over optimistic.

Black believed that the threat of violence was low. 'They are in general a very timid race, and a man's life is in little danger from them'¹², he wrote. Where a run was already occupied, 'the natives occasion as little annoyance, and I may with truth add less, than a party of three or four tinkers or Gypsies do at home'.¹³ Black



Unknown artist
Charles Wightman Sievwright, c.1825
Portrait miniature, oil on ivory, mounted
onto a gold brooch
Photograph, Pictures Collection,
State Library Victoria, H2007.67

believed that gunfire would extinguish any instinct for aggression, and he only expected to discharge his shot as a scare tactic, into the air. Disturbances between 'natives' and shepherds he blamed on the bad character and behaviour of ex-convict labourers. He thought 'natives' had few motives for aggression, no desire to cause bloodshed, and only injured settlers to acquire food or in retaliation for an injury to themselves.

With such sentiments he tried to allay his men's concerns, and any fears at home that he or his enterprise would come to grief at the hands of warlike braves: that was the image familiar from North America. He reacted with scepticism to the scaremongering rife in the district about Aboriginal aggression, and despite later experiences of attacks on his sheep and incidents with his men, he persisted in his pacifist views. He thought that he and other squatters should lead by example — by not wounding or killing — and trying to maintain good relations.

In no time, Black began to encounter occasional hunting groups or figures in the trees on parts of his run. He wrote of them as 'poor creatures' who would not hurt anyone unless provoked. His men came to believe him. One made a bark canoe and spent his spare time shooting wildlife on Lake Terang, knowing that old-time inhabitants camped there.¹⁴ Black attributed Aboriginal resentment to the worst type of station hand behaviour. 'Several of the men lately on this establishment are now very ill with the native pox,' he wrote to Gladstone. 'I am told it is not uncommon for these rascals to sleep all night with a *lubra* and if she offend



Thomas Hannay, photographer
Sheep wash, c.1859

Photographic print mounted on cardboard, albumen silver
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H2013.345/82
 Sheep were washed a few days before being shorn. Black's first
 sheep wash was in a small stream entering Lake Terang

him, shoot her before twelve the next day. How can the father or husband avoid resenting such usage?'¹⁵ He sacked Taylor's men and used ex-convict labour as little as possible, believing that good men and good management of men would keep relations peaceful.¹⁶ He was one of a handful of settlers noted by Chief Protector Robinson as having adopted this policy and made it work.¹⁷ But he did not feel kindly towards those he displaced: few incomers did.

Black armed the shepherds who managed his outstations, but they were instructed only to fire their guns as a scare tactic. Claud Farie, a neighbour and friend, wrote home to Scotland in July 1840 describing an attack at one of Black's outstations. The two shepherds were both well armed, each having a double-barrelled gun and a brace of pistols which, Farie believed, 'ought to have brought four of the black rascals to their bearings... and the rest would have taken to their heels'. Farie was surprised — even scathing — that they had not used their firearms, and assumed that 'Mr. Black's men are afraid of the natives'.¹⁸ But they were simply obeying orders. Black's frighten-away policy paid off: he only lost twenty-seven sheep to theft in 1840 — far fewer than his neighbours.¹⁹

When Black encountered Aboriginal groups in the bush, he often gave chase, terrifying them by riding down at full gallop, or discharging his gun into the air to scatter them. If he found empty camps, he did not destroy them but left clear indications that their occupants should

remove. He remained determined to keep them as far away as possible, not trusting in ideas of domestication, as this led to them 'hanging around the stations, half-civilised'. To keep those of the bush in the bush, Black regarded as 'the greatest mercy that can possibly be shown them';²⁰ then they would 'keep to their ways' and not steal from him. He must have known that he was stealing Aboriginal waterholes when he cut down vegetation so that his cattle and sheep could use them. The large black swan he shot, and the numerous 'cangaroos and emus' that threatened his crops were an indication of the plentiful wildlife on which those who had lived off this land used to thrive. But depriving them of the means for survival did not touch his conscience compared with the ill of physically harming them.

Although Black did not tolerate unprovoked assaults on Aboriginal people, the reactive 'hunt' for those who had killed a shepherd or stolen sheep, and the bringing of wrongdoers to justice, was different: after all, at that time, a British sheep-stealer might be transported. Such crimes were serious, whatever their motive. The settlers had a genuine need of security. According to their view, if the Crown dictated a policy of 'Aboriginal protection', it must also provide 'settler protection'.

In mid-1840, some of the Kirrae still camping near Mount Noorat became more desperate and their sheep-marauding more violent. A shepherd was killed on John Thomson's



Thomas Hannay, photographer
Glenormiston - Messrs Neil Black & Co. (1847), c.1859

Photographic print mounted on cardboard, albumen silver
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H2013.345/87

The five-roomed stone house replaced a dilapidated hut. It was enlarged into a twenty-roomed homestead soon after this photograph was taken

next-door run at Keilambete, and Black became involved in an expedition to hunt down the culprits. Thomson had spent nineteen years in Van Diemen's Land, employed ex-convicts, and was a blunter and rougher customer than Black.²¹ In late July 1840, Thomson waylaid Black on the Geelong road and recruited him to a party of settlers got up to go after the murderers of his shepherd. Having gone into Geelong and petitioned La Trobe against the 'undeserved indifference' to their right to protection, they accepted an offer from Captain Foster Fyans, newly appointed as Commissioner of Crown Lands, to accompany them to the scene of the crime with the mounted police.²² Fyans, whom La Trobe regarded as 'a very rough hand',²³ had no sympathy for Aboriginal people and took willing leadership of the expedition.

For several days this posse galloped about the country. In a long letter to Gladstone, Black was sardonic: 'After riding around in the bush for a week, our zeal began to evaporate'.²⁴ He thought the sight of twenty-one men thundering about on horseback must have a deterrent effect. But a quarry was eventually found. 'On riding home one evening, I had the fortune to find them camped in one of their old haunts near my vacated station. At day break next day I guided the party to near the spot.' A shepherd of Thomson's swore that two of three men hiding in the trees were guilty, and all three were taken off to Geelong in chains. To be dragged ninety miles by a man on horseback in the name of justice and then confined in a lock-up was indescribably harsh. But at least they were not shot on the spot.

Black credited himself with the prevention of bloodshed. This was the first attempt in the district to apprehend Aboriginal miscreants and take them into custody rather than kill them outright. Black believed it was essential that the accused were made subject to the law and its punishments, or 'this will become a scene of slaughter and bloodshed similar to what Van Diemen's Land was'. Settlers would not submit to being robbed and murdered without chance of redress. 'The Natives are (very properly) under the most rigorous protection of the laws.' But there had never been an instance of their 'being made sensible that they are amenable to the punishment the law accords. They are daily thus becoming more dangerous.' What, he asked, was the settler to do? 'He must take all the fearful risk of protecting himself.' And if that became the norm, the settlers would do their worst.

As time went on Black became less inclined to criticise his fellows and joined the general disparagement of 'blacks'. When the economic depression of the early 1840s deepened, settler contests over scabby sheep and boundaries became more bitter. But there was one issue on which they were all agreed: the need for security against 'native depredations'. Public opinion was on their side, and the issue was a glue that kept their comradeship intact.

In early 1842, settlers around Port Fairy, including Black, petitioned La Trobe for protection against 'enormous losses at the hands



Batchelder & O'Neill, photographers
Niel Black. MLC, c.1859
Victorian Parliamentary Library
Member for the Western Province to the Victorian
Legislative Council, 1859–1880.

of aborigines whose numbers, ferocity and cunning render them particularly formidable'. La Trobe received this at the same time as the report of a murder of three Aboriginal women and a child sleeping at Muston's Creek near Port Fairy. He was outraged, especially as the act was committed on the run of two of the petitioners, Messrs Smith and Osbery, and he demanded that the murderers be brought to justice.²⁵ By this time Black liked to think that those in his circle did not shoot people in cold blood. He no longer saw his fellows as 'bouncers' alluding to murder with a wink and a nudge, but as respectable men under duress. Squatters did not inform on one another, and it was unjust that all should be labelled complicit in a crime for showing solidarity.

The episode caused Black to expostulate to Gladstone that 'A Squatter here is worse off than the veriest serf in Russia'. His hyperbole stemmed from the belief that, at home, 'even the savage will excite the warmest sympathy on his behalf,' but little was felt for those like himself 'whose fate it is to contend with that savage and to guard against a nature so treacherous, that it can never be won by any amount of kindness'.²⁶ In two years his views had undergone transformation: no more 'timid race' and 'poor

creatures'. In fact, Black had put himself firmly in the wrong. Instead of cooperating with La Trobe, some settlers produced a story about 'a marauding party of men and women in whose possession was found stolen property' — for which there was no evidence. Black was one of those who signed his name to this trumped-up story of innocent retribution for Aboriginal misdeeds.

La Trobe was furious and brought in Governor George Gipps. Gipps threatened to cancel all squatting licenses in the Port Fairy district if evidence about the murders was not supplied. This elicited a mollifying response, signed by Niel Black and Claud Farie, saying that their supposition about the marauding party was 'not stated as a fact, nor as a rumour, but merely as a probable supposition...'.²⁷ However, Black's defensive letter to Gladstone indicated that he felt no contrition: 'The Governor's letter threw a stain upon every settler's name'.²⁸ The risk that all their licences would be revoked was minimal and they knew it — they were the principal men of Port Phillip and bastions of the wool economy.

Not until mid-1843, a year later, were the killers of the Aboriginal women and child at Muston's Creek finally apprehended. It turned out that a party of six had committed the atrocity. The party was led by two settlers; A.L. Boursequot, the most prominent, had brazenly lied, and his partner-in-crime absconded. Only the underlings were apprehended.²⁹

Although he shared the view that the Protectorate was an institution dreamed up by misguided visionaries, Black maintained cordial relations with Charles Sievwright from the moment they met. Sievwright's job put him in dispute with Foster Fyans, cost him his marriage, and — in Black's epithet — turned him into 'the most unpopular man that ever breathed'.³⁰ It seems that Black had some sympathy with this 'gentlemanly' person, whatever his reputation.

Siewwright had set up camp at Keilambete, the saltwater lake west of Mount Noorat that was the Kirrae people's favourite local place. Sievwright expected this site, as he had recommended, to be selected as a Native Reserve. He had warned John Thomson that his run, including the lake and surrounding forest, might be needed.³¹ But Thomson ignored Sievwright's warning. He built a hut for himself on the lake shore, and a hut for his shepherds on his boundary. It was one of these shepherds who was killed in July 1840, prompting the posse of squatters that thundered about the country.



Eugene von Guerard, 1822-1901, artist
Lake Bullen Merri, 1858

Oil on canvas

Private collection: Robert Gladstone, Dumfries, Scotland

Black sent the painting to T.S. Gladstone in 1859

The western banks of the lake were part of Niel Black & Company's run.
 Bareetch Chuurneen fled across this lake with her child in 1839

From Thomson's point of view, Sievwright was a menace whose charges stole his sheep and attacked his shepherds with impunity. By contrast, Black was amenable. When Sievwright was short of supplies, Black provided goods on credit, and he frequently lent him a dray or let him grind his wheat at the company store.³² Black's cordiality was not disinterested. He hoped to deflect Sievwright from any plan that would cost him part of his run. Sievwright promised not to 'trouble' him,³³ but Black was not entirely convinced and he knew Thomson would play tough. For months, a shadow contest took place between Black, Thomson and Sievwright, all using their influence with Robinson, La Trobe and Fyans to have the reserve put where the interests of each dictated.

As 1840 drew on, and the threat of interracial violence continued, Sievwright clamoured to be allowed to establish the Keilambete reserve to prevent his dependants from engaging in 'retaliation and revenge which must be a natural consequence of the rapid occupation of their country without either asylum or assistance being offered in return'.³⁴ Black wrote of 'the natives daily robbing settlers at a most alarming rate', and of hidden reprisals against them: he had found 'a Grave into which about 20 must have been thrown'.³⁵ La Trobe demanded that the Protectorate try harder to establish 'proper influence' over those they existed to protect, and ordered Robinson — who had yet to leave his desk — out of his office

and into the west.³⁶ Meanwhile Sievwright's efforts were ignored, and he became increasingly anxious about the threat of aggression from Thomson's men. He therefore appealed to Black, visiting the bush with him in a search for alternative sites.

Robinson finally arrived in the Western District in March 1841.³⁷ Around 300 men, women and children were then at Sievwright's camp at Keilambete, and had been clearing forest and starting to grow crops on the understanding that this was their future reserve. Thomson managed to turn Robinson, a champion vacillator, against Sievwright's plans.³⁸ Robinson then ordered Sievwright to move the camp to Lake Terang, causing pandemonium: fighting broke out between the menfolk.³⁹ Black protested vigorously against the 'invasion' of his run and the arbitrary takeover of his freshwater lake. Robinson persuaded him to accept the situation, because he was seriously afraid that if the camp remained at Keilambete, there would be violent confrontations between its occupants and Thomson's men.⁴⁰ Black then obtained a promise that if Keilambete was not taken for the reserve, neither would Robinson take Terang.

Thomson and Black both had recourse to La Trobe and managed to plead successfully. Although the Kirrae people, and Sievwright on their behalf, appear to modern eyes to have been grievously wronged by the two men's protestations, it is not surprising that the 'hated protector' lost his case. Not only was



Duncan Elphinstone Cooper, 1813/14-1904, artist
Panorama of Chalicum, Victoria, No.8, c.1850

Watercolour

National Library of Australia. PIC, vol.176, R315
 Western District landscape, north of Glenormiston, in which
 a shepherd and dog may be seen mustering a flock of sheep

his personal reputation dire, his wife having ruined it by making public complaints about his marital conduct, but the territory around Keilambete, Terang and Mount Noorat was among the best in Port Phillip. It was far too rich to be sacrificed to people whose system of living lightly off the land was the antithesis of investing capital to 'improve' it and make it commercially productive.

Over the months of the Aboriginal occupation of Terang, Black occasionally complained of thefts of potatoes and stores, and told Sievwright to keep his charges off his station. But these minor inconveniences seem to be all that marred good relations. In the spring, the decision on the reserve was finally made: it would be situated at Mount Rouse, over fifty miles to the north-west. It was another Aboriginal venue, and the squatter there was newer and less able to promote his case. In October 1841, Black wrote home that 'the Aboriginal Protector and his sable tribe have been ordered to leave my run, but the place is to be kept as a Reserve, although not at present occupied by the Natives'.⁴¹

In January 1842, Sievwright began to organise the move. Black lent bullocks and a dray to assist him, and supplied him with wheat and other stores. The departure of his 210 unwanted guests was a source of satisfaction to Black, and aiding their trek was the least he could do. His run had been definitively and peacefully cleared of Kirrae people. How they

and their families would fare on the reserve was not his concern. As it happened, Sievwright was initially pleased with how things went, even though food supplies were rarely sufficient, pulmonary diseases common, and blankets to ward off cold never appeared however often he requested them. But Sievwright had acquired too many enemies. Local settlers complained that his reserve sowed disorder and provided a shelter for marauders. He was removed from his post in late 1842, and thereafter the state of the camp and inhabitants rapidly deteriorated. Numbers dwindled, sickness and despair carried lives away, children became a rarity. Gradually, the reserve failed.⁴²

References to 'natives' appear rarely in Black's later correspondence. But when, in 1853, he wrote about his early experiences, his retrospective view had hardened into a standard trope of flocks under threat from 'Aborigines lurking in bodies near our stations', stealing sheep and 'gorging themselves and their dogs on well fed mutton'⁴³ — a far cruder picture than his accounts in the moment. By this time, he wanted to emphasise the courageous pioneer's travails, not suggest to his audience that they were easily overcome. The reality was that his — and others' — attitudes had become irrelevant. As contestants for land or hunting prey, the original dwellers of 'Taylor's country' had effectively disappeared. What the massacre at Mount Emu Creek had begun, Black's and Thomson's protestations, and Sievwright's removal of his protégés, to the reserves had completed.

Endnotes

- 1 Thomas Steuart Gladstone was a member of the successful Scottish mercantile family that also produced William Ewart Gladstone, the famous British Prime Minister, of whom he was first cousin. T.S. Gladstone met and got talking to Niel Black's brother Walter on a coastal ferry in Scotland while he was shooting on the estate of the other future partner, A.S. Finlay, and encouraged Walter to send Niel to Liverpool to meet him.
- 2 Niel Black, 'Journal of a few of the first months spent in Australia, commenced 30th September 1839, the day after his first landing in Sydney', published in Maggie MacKellar (ed.), *Strangers in a Foreign Land: the journal of Niel Black and other voices from the Western District*, Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2008, entry for 9 December 1839.
- 3 Ibid, 25 December 1839.
- 4 Niel Black to T.S. Gladstone, 6 January 1840.
- 5 *Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes (British Settlements)*, reprinted with comments by the Aborigines Protection Society, London: published for the Society by William Ball, 1837.
- 6 Proclamation by Lieutenant-Governor Arthur of Tasmania, 26 August 1835, *Historical Records of Victoria: foundation series*, Vol.1, *Beginnings of Permanent Government*, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1981, pp.12-14,
- 7 Jan Critchett, *A Distant Field of Murder: Western District frontiers 1834-1848*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990, p.6.
- 8 Journal, 23 February 1840.
- 9 Charles M. Gray, *Western Victoria in the Forties: reminiscences of a pioneer*, booklet, reprinted from the *Hamilton Spectator*, 1932.
- 10 Ian D. Clark (ed.), *Scars in the Landscape: a register of massacre sites in Western Victoria, 1803-1859*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1995, pp.105-112.
- 11 Journal, 21 February 1840.
- 12 Ibid, 9 December 1839.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid, 16 March 1840.
- 15 Ibid, 23 March 1840.
- 16 Kerry Vickers, *A Band of Gypsies: employees of Niel Black & Co. in the pre-goldrush era*, Noorat, Vic.,: Kerry Vickers, 2011 (accessible online)
- 17 Ian D. Clark (ed.), *The Port Phillip Journals of George Augustus Robinson, 8 March-7 April 1842*, Melbourne, 1988 (Monash Publications in Geography, no. 34), observations of 21 March 1842.
- 18 'Claud Farie: Sheriff of Melbourne', *Australian Postal History & Social Philately*, www.auspostalhistory.com/articles/66.shtml, (accessed 16 July 2017). Farie says ninety sheep were driven off, but in Black's correspondence only nine sheep were driven off.
- 19 Niel Black to T.S. Gladstone, 31 December 1840.
- 20 Journal, 13 March 1840.
- 21 Biographical note on John Thomson in *These Five and Seventy Years*, Thomson Memorial Church, Terang, Vic.: Terang Historical Society, 1936.
- 22 Lindsey Arkley, *The Hated Protector: the story of Charles Wightman Sievwright, Protector of Aborigines 1839-42*, Mentone, Vic.: Orbit Press, 2000, p.66.
- 23 La Trobe to Gipps, 14 June 1840, letter 17 in A.G.L. Shaw (ed.), *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence 1839-46*, Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 1989.
- 24 Niel Black to T.S. Gladstone, 5 August 1840.
- 25 Critchett, p.118, citing correspondence between La Trobe and the Gentlemen signing a Representation without date, 26 March 1842.
- 26 Niel Black to T.S. Gladstone, 5 August 1842.
- 27 Critchett, p.119, citing letter of N. Black and others to La Trobe, 1 August 1842.
- 28 Niel Black to T.S. Gladstone, 5 August 1842.
- 29 Claud Farie to Niel Black, 9 July 1843; James Webster to Niel Black, 9 June 1843.
- 30 Journal, 25 February 1840.
- 31 Arkley, p.65.
- 32 Four letters from Charles Sievwright to Niel Black 1840-1842.
- 33 Niel Black to T.S. Gladstone, 5 July 1840.
- 34 Report of Sievwright on proceedings from 1 June to 31 October 1840, cited in Arkley, p.75.
- 35 Niel Black to T.S. Gladstone, 9 September 1840.
- 36 Critchett, p.7.
- 37 On this tour the Chief Protector was accompanied by Tunnerminnerwait (aka Jack), one of the two Aboriginal men executed in January 1842. (Ed.)
- 38 Arkley, p.158.
- 39 Ibid, p.165, citing Clark (ed.), *Port Phillip Journals of George Augustus Robinson*, entries for 21 and 22 April 1841.
- 40 Niel Black to C.J. La Trobe, Melbourne, 15 February 1842; also to Foster Fyans, 15 February 1842.
- 41 Niel Black to A.S. Finlay, 9 October 1841. (See Note 1, Finlay was the other key partner in Niel Black & Company.)
- 42 Arkley, pp.263, 456-457.
- 43 Niel Black, 'Notes by an Occupier of Crown Lands in Victoria, Australia', London, 21 March 1853, note in draft, Niel Black papers, MS 8996.

A Fascination with Bunyips: Bunbury, La Trobe, Wathen, and the Djab Wurrung people of Western Victoria

By Professor Ian D. Clark

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Ian presented a version of this peer reviewed paper to the C J La Trobe Society Annual General Meeting, 2 August 2017 at the Lyceum Club, Melbourne.

This paper examines the interest of three men — Richard Hanmer Bunbury, Charles Joseph La Trobe, and George Henry Wathen — in the existence of bunyips, as well as examining Djab Wurrung¹ mythology surrounding the creature: its association with a rock painting in the Black Range near Stawell, a story concerning some swamps near Mount William, and the ground drawing of a slain bunyip near some waterholes on *Challicum* station. It highlights the serious inquiry into the existence of bunyips by scientifically-minded officials during La Trobe's administration, and La Trobe's own participation and agency in the debate.

Origins

Aboriginal water spirit beings throughout south eastern Australia are generally called 'bunyips' — some have been described as animal-like, and others as aquatic humanoid creatures.² Generally taken as a symbol of danger in inland waters, descriptions of bunyips often contain the theme of posing a threat to children who have strayed too close to the water's edge. The word bunyip is believed to derive from *banib*, the Wemba Wemba, Wergaia, Djab Wurrung and Wadawurrung word for this creature.³ The Wemba Wemba also knew them as *tanggal*. Other Murray River language groups knew



Duncan Elphinstone Cooper, 1813/14–1904, artist
Ramenong hut, Fiery Creek, Victoria, 1853

Sepia wash, National Library of Australia, NK10163/21
 From a series depicting Chalicum station at Fiery Creek

Ramenong waterhole, associated with the Chalicum bunyip, is shown in the middle and foreground

them as *Katenpai* (Wiradjuri); *Kyenprate* (Wadi Wadi); *Tinatpan* (Jabulajabula and Yorta Yorta) and *Dongus* (Barababaraba). In the Warrnambool district they were called *Torrong*, which is also the word for a canoe made of bark. In the Melbourne district they were called *Tooroodun* (Boon Wurrung) and in Gippsland *Tanutbun* (Ganai/Kurnai).⁴ Across Victoria just a handful of place names reference bunyips:

- Bukkar wurrung (middle lip), the bank between lakes Bullen Merri and Gnotuk. 'A gap in this dividing bank is said to have been made by a bunyip, which lived at one time in Lake Bullen Merri, but, on leaving it, ploughed its way over the bank into Lake Gnotuk, and thence at Gnotuk Junction to Taylor's River (Mount Emu Creek), forming a channel across the country'⁵
- Bunyip township and Bunyip River, which adjoin the *Buneeep-Buneeep* pastoral run, are derived from banib, the fabulous, large, amphibious monster⁶
- Bangyeno banip, waterholes on the Avoca River near Amphitheatre, meaning 'bunyip waterholes'⁷
- Tooradin, where the bunyip (Too-roo-dun) lives⁸
- Wurrung kilinkk (lip of waterhole) is the Keeray Woorroong name of a spring near the *Mount Fyans* pastoral run where a bunyip was reputed to live.⁹

Places in Victoria, where sightings of bunyips have been reported include Tooradin, the Yarra River near Melbourne, Phillip Island, the Barwon lakes, the Barwon River at South Geelong, Lake Modewarre, a spring at Mount Fyans, Lake Bullen Merri, Cape Otway, Mount William Swamp, Mount William Creek, Black Waterhole on Charleycombe Creek at Chalicum, Lake Hindmarsh, Lake Albacutya, the Murray River, and the Avoca River at Amphitheatre.¹⁰

The *Geelong Advertiser* first broadcast the discovery of a knee joint fragment of some gigantic animal in July 1845. When the bone was shown to an 'intelligent black', he recognised it as belonging to the 'Bunyip', a creature he declared he had seen.¹¹ He willingly drew a sketch, and when the bone and picture were shown to other Aboriginal people, all confirmed that it was the Bunyip. One stated that he knew where the entire skeleton of a bunyip could be found; another that his mother was killed by a bunyip at the Barwon lakes near Geelong, and that another woman was killed near where the punt crosses the Barwon River at South Geelong. One Wadawurrung man, Mumbowran, showed several deep wounds on his chest that had been made by a bunyip's claws. The Aboriginal people explained that the reason 'why no white man has ever yet seen it, is because it is amphibious, and does not come on land except on extremely hot days, when it basks on the bank; but on the slightest noise or whisper they roll gently over into the water, scarcely creating a ripple'.¹² The *Geelong Advertiser* journalist believed that the

bunyip combined characteristics of a bird and of an alligator. Its head was emu-like, and its body and legs were alligator-like. Barrett considers these large fossil bones were 'fossil remains of Diprotodon, and of giant kangaroo'.¹³

In 1846 E. Lloyd published an early account of the bunyip, noting that a friend in the Port Phillip district often questioned Aboriginal people on the subject and that 'their answers were always given with every appearance of faith in its existence'. They described the bunyip 'as tall as a gum tree... [a] big one gum tree'.¹⁴ It could tear trees out by the roots by grasping them with its arms.

Bunbury and bunyips

Captain Richard Hanmer Bunbury, like many early European settlers in the Port Phillip District and elsewhere, was fascinated by stories of the bunyip. As two letters to his father in 1846 and 1847 indicate, he believed the bunyip's existence was incontrovertible:

... the question of the existence of an unknown animal in this country is at last set at rest; the beast exists, but what it is remains to be decided & I would give a year's salary to be able to go and look for one. The blacks call it nearly the same name all over the country some 'Bunyeep' & some 'Banep' and they all sketch the same animal, something between an Emu and an Alligator; beating Jonathan's half horse half alligator hollow. Until lately no white man had seen one & it was considered to be fabulous and the extreme fear of them manifested by the blacks was attributed to superstition; but lately in some of the newly explored parts of the country they have been repeatedly seen & some points clearly ascertained: they are amphibious and move about solely at night, frequenting all the large rivers & lagoons and the deep waterholes of many of the creeks, though apparently soon leaving settled neighbourhoods as no traces of them have ever been seen by whites in many places said by the blacks to be frequented by them.

The letter continues:

Nothing will induce the blacks to go into some water holes where they expect them to be; and on the Murray two or three blacks have been seen who have been terribly mangled by them while fishing; their habitations appear

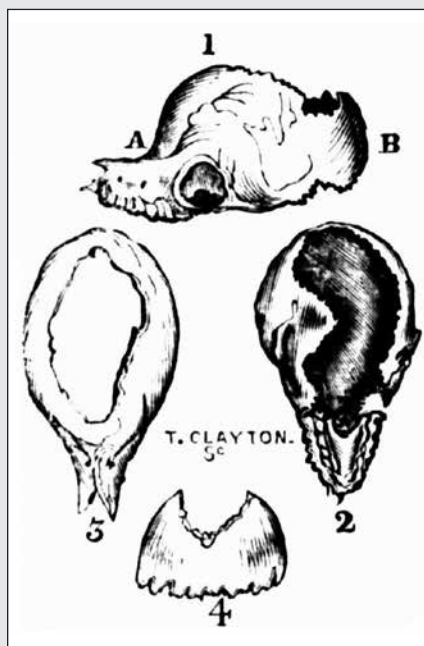
to resemble the otter, the entrance being below water. In the almost impenetrable country about Cape Otway a surveying party has lately seen numerous traces of them in the reedy swamps & heard the animals at night both in the water & out & describe them to be of considerable size & the traces to be of a four-legged animal walking on a very long narrow foot, no claw marks are to be traced.

The head is described by some as like that of a large mastiff or young calf and by others more like that of an emu with large eyes & long snout, the head altogether above a foot long, the neck is long & curves above the water & appears to be covered with feathers like the emu. A curved portion of the back has been seen once or twice & is said to have appeared serrated as if covered with large scabs. The size variously described by whites and blacks at from six to sixteen feet. I hope before long to be able to give you a more correct & minute account of this strange animal which at any rate I expect will turn out to belong to an entirely new genus.¹⁵

In his second letter, Bunbury gives a more detailed physical description obtained from reported sightings of the creature, and reproduced images published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by William Hilton Hovell, the gentleman explorer:

I wrote a long letter to Charles [his brother] a short time ago giving him a full account of the progress of our acquaintance with the 'Bunyep' with a rough sketch of the portion of a skull which had been found. Since then we have heard nothing further on the subject, and no steps have been taken by anyone of our settlers to procure a specimen. I believe it would be no easy matter to do so, and might require patience; watching & travelling; but what would that be for such an object. Why a live Dinotherium¹⁶ would be a common place animal to a 'Bunyep' at least if we can in any way trust the description given by the blacks & other sketchings & the head have proved to be correct with the exception of the large tusks pointing downwards which it is generally drawn with & cannot I think be reconciled with a small space occupied by the temporal muscle.

I should not at all wonder if I was to



Thomas Clayton, fl. 1844–1849, engraver
The skull of a Katenpai (Bunyip), 1847

Woodcut

(*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 1847 p.3)

Taken from drawings made under W H Hovell's
direction at Gwynne Brothers' station on the
Edward River

1. Side view of the upper half of the skull, length
from A to B about 9 inches (23 cm); 2. Internal
view of the upper half of the skull, inverted; 3.
Skull seen from above; 4. Skull seen from behind

start off myself some fine day & shoot
a Bunyip I fancy I should make as
much money by it as by my cattle.
In case my letter to Charles should be
lost, I give you a very rough idea of the
skull that has been found. Extreme
length about 15 inches to where broken
off. Extreme breadth of the cavity of
skull about $5\frac{1}{2}$, length of cavity $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.
Molars 3 on each side. No appearance
of false molars, but apparently a small
canine tooth about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in
front of molars. Molars covered by the
gum & membranes & had evidently
not been used in mastication, bone of
skull scarcely thicker than card board;
the animal must have been very young
if not uterine, yet the sutures of the
skull were firmly closed & scarcely
visible; query marsupial? Orbit of
eye remarkably large & very large in
the skull.¹⁷

La Trobe and bunyips

In February 1847 the *Sydney Morning Herald*
published a letter from settler and explorer
William Hilton Hovell, outlining his research

into the 'apocryphal animal'.¹⁸ Hovell explained
that a settler on the Murrumbidgee in 1846
named Athol T. Fletcher had been advised
by the local Aboriginal people that they had
killed a 'Katenpai' on the banks of a lake near
the Murrumbidgee in the Balranald district.
Fletcher went to the place described and found a
large portion of the skull of some kind of animal.
Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson
mentioned the discovery in his journal: 'The
bunyip found in lower Murrumbidgee.
I presumed a specimen of alligator. Elephant
matter'.¹⁹ Hovell's letter reproduced four
sketches of the skull (left).

Fletcher brought the skull to Melbourne
and loaned it to Edward Curr at *St Heliers*,
near Melbourne, who loaned it to his friend,
Tasmanian botanist Ronald Campbell Gunn,
who showed it to James Grant, a noted surgeon
and naturalist in Van Diemen's Land. Gunn
discussed the bunyip in a paper published in the
*Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science, Agriculture,
Statistics, Etc.*, of which he was editor. Gunn
had been private secretary to Sir John Franklin
when Franklin was Lieutenant-Governor of
Van Diemen's Land (1837–1843), and he was
a friend of Charles Joseph La Trobe. Their
correspondence on the matter of the bunyip is
held in the State Library of New South Wales,
and was edited and published by L.J. Blake
in 1975.²⁰

Charles Joseph La Trobe's interest in
the existence of the bunyip is shown in letters,
commencing 23 January 1847, to his friend in
Van Diemen's Land:

You have heard probably the constant
rumours of the existence of some
unknown beast in the rivers & lakes
of P. Phillip — under the native name
'*Bunyep*' or '*Bunyip*'. That there is such
an [*sic*] one whether round or square,
fat or lean — & that of tolerable size
— I have been long convinced. At last,
Lonsdale writes me word that they have
found the head of one in some stream
near Murrumbidgee & that it has been
brought down to Melbourne. According
to description it must be a long snouted
animal something of this shape:



a long bill-like snout the forehead
rising abruptly the eye placed very
low — strong grinders, cavity for
brain very large. The end of the snout
is broken off but the blacks who



Peter John Clark, photographer
Bunjil's shelter, 2013

have seen it say it ought to have two long tusks projecting downward at the termination.

It appears to be a recent skull as some of the flesh was on it when found — and search is going to be made for the bones. Now what can this be? They do not give me any dimensions — but state it must be a very large animal.²¹

After Gunn had been loaned the skull by Edward Curr, La Trobe wrote: 'The Bunyip's head you will have had in your hands—what do you make of it? I am convinced that we shall get more than one strange animal before we have finished'. (8 March 1847)

La Trobe then wrote an article for the Royal Society of Tasmania, but withdrew it from publication when later opinion suggested the skull was that of an aborted animal, possibly a foal:

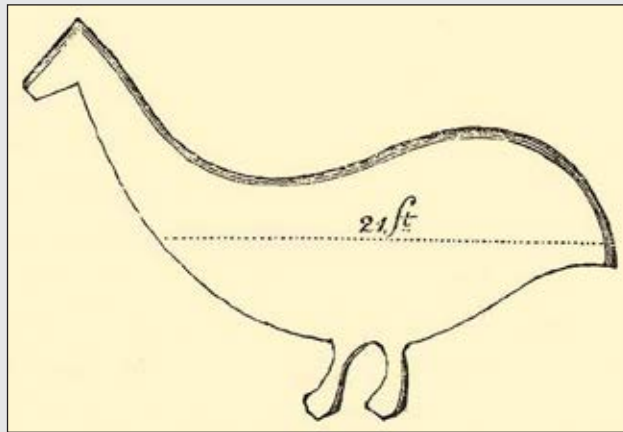
I saw the drawings of the Bunyip yesterday at Hobson's. He begins to have some strange misgivings—and really I have the reputation of the 'Tasmanian' so much at heart, that I think I should let the forthcoming number come out without 'the article'—& trust that before another emerges from the Press we may be able to tell you more. There is some jealousy about the skull itself of which neither I nor Hobson have as yet caught

a glimpse. I promise you that I will do my best endeavour to catch a whole one. It would not do to be caught describing & drawing an abortion. (26 April 1847)

During the same week, Chief Protector Robinson spoke with Dr Edmund Charles Hobson, a prominent Melbourne physician and vertebrate palaeontologist, and noted in his diary that 'La Trobe said bunyip head a foetal animal, a young horse, was clear that animal could not live in water'.²² La Trobe was relaying Dr James Grant's analysis of the skull which confirmed that it was of a young animal, possibly foetal, a large herbivorous animal, possibly a camel.²³ Gunn concluded his *Journal* paper, 'Every effort is now making to obtain an entire or living Bunyip, or ascertain whether it is to be classified amongst fabulous animals'.²⁴ Robinson, too, was unsure of the existence of the bunyip: 'must be true people say because all the natives agree in the description, so all are one; people and natives agree in description of the devil, yet none have seen him &c'.²⁵ By the end of 1848, Robinson was of the opinion that the bunyip was identical with the bittern.²⁶

In July 1847, having examined the Murrumbidgee skull which had been loaned to the Colonial Museum in Sydney, natural scientist William Sharp Macleay, reported his findings in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.²⁷ He was convinced that it was the 'skull of a *lusus naturae* [a freak of nature] on the ground of its being

**George Henry Wathen,
1816–1879, artist**
The Bunyip
(*The Australasian*, January
1851, facing page 302)
Breast to tail as marked
21 feet (6.4 metres)
Head to tail approximately
28 feet (8.5 metres)



absolutely identical with that of a foal', which had undergone some kind of malformation. He noted that if it should be proved to belong to a different species it would be placed between the horse and the llama, but he doubted this, as the bunyip is held to be a solitary aquatic animal, whereas the skull was that of a solipede, a mammal having a single hoof on each foot, which if full grown would have delighted in grassy dry land, and the society of its own species. William Westgarth, on a visit to London, showed a sketch of the skull to Professor Richard Owen, palaeontologist at the British Museum, who confirmed that it was a hydrocephalic skull of a foal or calf.²⁸ Given this outcome, it was not surprising that the word 'bunyip', quickly became synonymous with 'hoax' and 'humbug', as G.C. Mundy noted in 1852: 'A new and strong word was adopted into the Australian vocabulary: Bunyip became, and remains, a Sydney synonym for "imposter", "pretender", "humbug", and the like'.²⁹

Charles Joseph La Trobe can be credited with one of the earliest attempts to study and analyse bunyip sightings. He formed the view that three animals were likely candidates:

I can say little about the Bunyip! — beyond this, that I am more & more convinced that there are two large nondescript animals to be found in our waters — that of which our blacks give a description being quite distinct from that which appears to frequent the waters and lakes more to the north. A third animal of which glimpses have been seen occasionally in the waters directly communicating with the sea is I have no doubt a seal. I send you two sketches of the animal described by our blacks & these coincide in the main with those which I have seen delineated by the tribes N of Mt Macedon. No. 1 was sketched upon the sand in front of

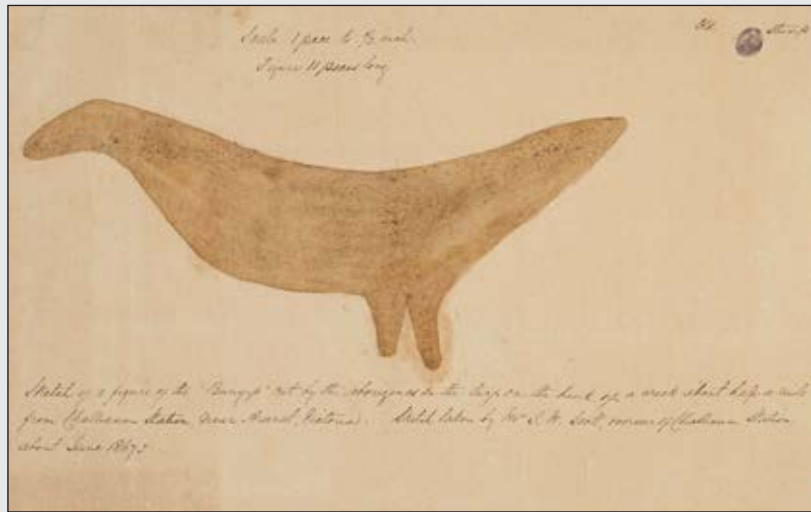
Capn Coverdale's cottage & tho' 10 or 12 ft. long was still said by the *artist* not to be quite as large as life. A few days after being at the Native Police Station, Dandenong, I have made some enquiries amongst the older natives — and No. 2 is the animal drawn by one of them. I send you the 'original'. The two sketches certainly are intended to portray the same animal. It is pretended that before the Europeans arrived the Yarra near Melbourne possessed many of them. We will catch him yet if he does exist.³⁰

This letter of 23 September 1847 held by the State Library of New South Wales does not contain any drawings or pictures, so unfortunately the sketches sent by La Trobe have been separated from the letter at some stage. In a subsequent letter to Gunn, La Trobe revealed his personal inclination by referring to: 'sea serpents or bunyips to other people' when he wrote: 'What a pity you and I are not idle men with plenty of loose time and spare cash. We should not have been catching sea serpents, or bunyips to other people, or even gold finding'.³¹

The Djab Wurrung, Wathen and bunyips

The Djab Wurrung Aboriginal people of the Ararat, Stawell, and Hamilton districts were in no doubt as to the existence of bunyips. Three of their stories relate to bunyips — the story of a clash between Bunjil and a bunyip; the death of one of two brothers by a bunyip at a swamp near Mount William; and the Challicum bunyip.

In their story of the creator spirit Bunjil, as painted in a rock shelter in the Black Range near Stawell, Bunjil had been cut to pieces in a clash with a bunyip, but had been pieced together and brought back to life by some birds. The rock



James W. Scott, 1849-1904, artist
Sketch of a figure of the Challicum Bunyip, near Ararat, Victoria, c.1867

Watercolour
 R E Johns Scrapbook no.1, Museums Victoria, XM 4709.1.1
 Inscribed: 'Sketch of a figure of the Bunyip cut by the aborigines in the turf on the bank of a creek about half a mile from Challicum station near Ararat Victoria. Sketch taken by Mr. J.W. Scott, overseer of Challicum Station about June 1867'. 'Figure 11 paces long'. Top right 'Old Stump'.

painting, a memorial to the episode, depicts Bunjil revived.³² In 1925 Rev. John Mathew published an article in *The Australasian* in which he presented information obtained during a visit to Lake Tyers in June 1924. Unfortunately Mathew does not identify his Lake Tyers source, other than she is 'a woman from the Wimmera'. The article is interesting as it brings together Bunjil's shelter near Stawell, Bunjil as creator, a clash with a bunyip, and mother-in-law

avoidance. It detailed an origin story explaining the killing of Bunjil by Bunyip, his restoration and why the commemorative painting was made in the Black Range rock shelter. From a theological perspective it is evocative of ontological dualism represented by the clash between good and evil, with core elements such as the death of Bunjil, his return to life and eventual transcendence into the heavens as a star. The 1925 article reads as follows:

Around the name of Bunjil (literally eaglehawk), a good deal of mythology has accumulated in Victoria. Bunjil is the name of one of the phratries, or exogamous classes, the other being, Wa, the crow. But Bunjil was also an ancient hero,³³ regarded by some as the father of the first man, and finally he was translated to the sky, where he now appears as a star, either Femalhaut or Altair.³⁴ We must not expect consistency in aboriginal or any other mythology, and preliminary to what follows it should be explained that no love is lost between a man and his mother-in-law. These relatives are not allowed to speak to each other, or even to look at each other. If a son-in-law looked at his mother-in-law he would turn grey.

A woman from the Wimmera told me this interesting story about an episode in which Bunjil and Bunyip figure, and which happened in the far back time when people were in the form of birds.

Bunjil, with his wife and two sons were one day at the top of a precipitous cliff on the Grampians. He caught his family in his arms, and jumped down with them safely. He was pretending to do the same with his mother-in-law, who was also there, but he dropped her and she was severely hurt. In this condition she was abandoned. Recovering somewhat, she bound up her broken limbs, and made her way to the Little Wimmera where the other natives were camped. Then Bunyip came along and wanted to take her. She said to him that if he would leave her alone, she would send him her son-in-law instead. He consented, so she dragged the river, and made a nest at the river

side, like that of a kangaroo rat. Bunyip hid his head in this. By and by her grandchildren came and proposed to catch Bunyip. She would not let them but told them to send their father, Bunjil. When he came he wanted to spear Bunyip, but she said: "Don't spear it, catch it!" So he caught hold of Bunyip, and Bunyip caught hold of him and rent him in two. A big tree, where the river cannot be bottomed, still marks the spot.

Bunjil's body was separated into fragments, and the birds came and tried to gather them together. One little bird used a small rainbow by way of a net, but it proved to be too small. Another bird used a bigger rainbow, and gathered up the pieces. Then they were spread out on a possum rug, and they gradually drew together, until Bunjil was whole and alive again. The other birds, namely, the natives of that age, were afraid that he might jump into the river again, so they caught him, and took him to the camp. As a memorial of this episode there is at a certain place a cave with a figure of Bunjil and two dogs. A native once told Dr A.W. Howitt that there was a figure of Bunjil and his dog painted in a cave behind a large rock near Stawell (V.).³⁵

James Dawson recorded in 1881 another Bunyip story concerning Djab Wurrung country as told by Morpor, the old 'chief' of the Morpor gundidj people of Spring Creek, to his daughter and her husband, two of Dawson's primary language informants. It concerned two brothers, one of whom was very tall, who went to a swamp near Mount William to gather swans' eggs. After gathering a great many and roasting them on the bank of a lagoon, the smaller brother returned to gather more. He was caught by a bunyip who held him aloft so high that his brother could see him. He approached the bunyip, exhorting it to "Be quiet, and let me take my brother". The bunyip gnashed its teeth and gave him up, but he was dead, and his entrails had been devoured'.³⁶ The corpse was carried to their home where they watched it for two days, placed it in a tree for a month, and then burned it, with the exception of the leg and arm bones, which were given to the friends of the deceased. Elsewhere, Dawson notes that when Aboriginal peoples in southwest Victoria first saw horses they took them to be bunyips and would not venture near them.³⁷

The third Bunyip site of significance to the Djab Wurrung was beside the Black Water Hole on Charleycombe Creek, Challicum. It was a ground drawing, originally about nine metres in length, of a bunyip that had once inhabited the waterhole and had captured a tribesman and devoured him. The bunyip was afterwards speared, placed on the bank where the Djab Wurrung traced around its carcass, and thereafter visited the site periodically to re-draw the figure. In 1849, English geologist George Henry Wathen, whose family were friends with the La Trobes, was encouraged to visit Port Phillip. Wathen, a geologist, author and magazine publisher, arrived on 12 December 1849 per the barque *Hamlet*.³⁸ It is believed that a letter from Charles Joseph La Trobe, a friend of his family's, suggesting he 'try his hand in the new colony' may have been the inspiration for

his visit.³⁹ In November 1850, Wathen visited *Challicum* station and talked with Aboriginal families who lived there about their bunyip traditions. He was taken to a series of waterholes, shown where the bunyip was taken and speared, its outline marked out, and the turf within the outline afterwards removed. Wathen sketched and measured the outline.⁴⁰

During 1850-51 Wathen published out of Geelong a quarterly magazine he called *The Australasian*,⁴¹ which reprinted articles from English magazines. The first issue appeared on 20 October and a total of four issues were published over a year. Wathen returned to England in late 1854. In 1855 he published *The Golden Colony: or, Victoria in 1854, with remarks on the Geology of the Australian Gold Fields*. The *Argus* published a favourable review of the work.⁴²

Wathen recorded his visit to the Djab Wurrung district as 'Notes of a Tour in the Australian Pyrenees, in November 1850', reproduced in *The Golden Colony*:⁴³

Sunday, November 24. — At Challicum.⁴⁴ There is now an encampment of the "mi-mis" of the Aborigines at this station.⁴⁵

November 25. — With T. I visited the mi-mis of the natives and talked to the loubbras about the traditions of the Bunyip, an apocryphal monster said to have existed once [upon] a time in a neighbouring water-hole. It happened, they said, "a long time ago," repeating the English words with a peculiar musical cadence. They had no chronology more exact than this... After breakfast we drove to three large water-holes, where, according to native tradition, the Bunyip was taken and speared; as it lay dead on the grass its

outline was marked out, and the turf within the outline afterwards removed. The shape of the cutting, now indistinct, is that of a bird, not a reptile. I sketched and measured it. Bunyips are supposed by the natives still to exist in the deep water-holes of the creeks.⁴⁶

Although Wathen considered this was the shape of a bird, it is equally identifiable as a seal.

Earlier, Wathen had published an article on 'The Bunyip of Challicum' in the January 1851 issue of *The Australasian*. In 1898 it was republished in the *Evening News*:

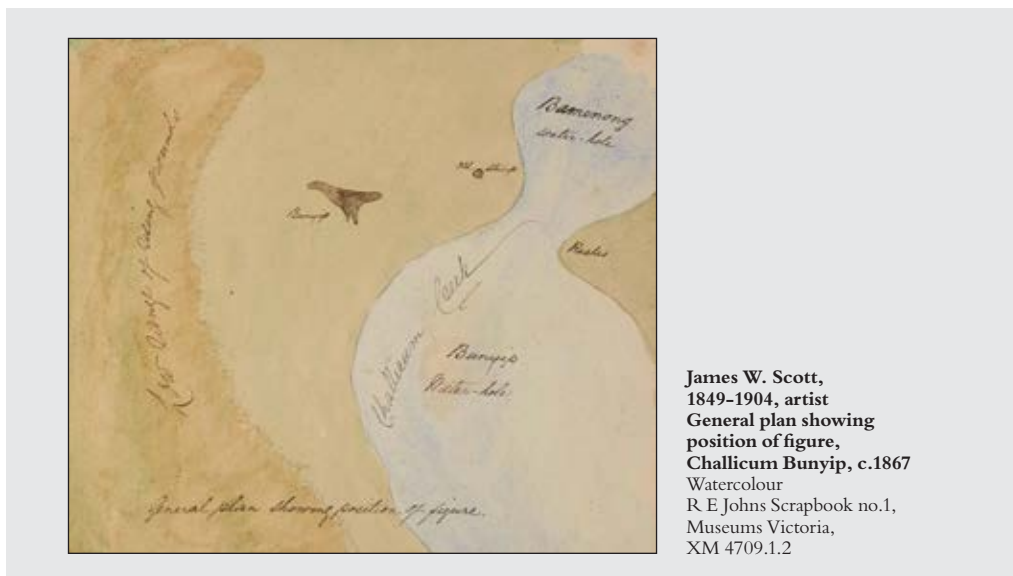
Probably no race of men have held possession of a country for ages, and yet left so few traces of their existence behind as the aborigines of Australia. Egypt has her pyramids, her temple, palaces, large as towns; her yet more wonderful tombs those subterranean labyrinths of painted chambers, rivalling the gorgeous creations of the Arabian Nights... But the Australian natives, what trace of their existence will they leave behind, when swept from the list of nations? We know of nothing besides than the pictures, rude and unintelligible, discovered by Captain Grey, in some caves in Western Australia, the 'camp ovens', where, in happier times, they roasted the kangaroo whole, and the object of the present article, the Bunyip of Challicum.

The Bunyip, it is well known, is a mysterious monster of undefined size and shape, supposed by the blacks, to inhabit the deep pools of the Australian rivers. Whether we view the report as founded upon the real existence of some unknown animal, or a pure creation of Australian fancy, a delineation of the Bunyip, by a native hand, cannot but be considered an object of interest. Such a delineation, with a legend attached to it, still exists, cut out on the turf, near the Fiery Creek, not many miles from the southern base, of the Pyrenees, about six and a half miles from the station of Messrs. Cooper and Thomson, for which they have retained the native name of Challicum.⁴⁷

The locality is not unsuited to the tradition. A vast treeless, shrubless, trapean plain, out of which the rock here and there protrudes; a little stream, stealing through the long grass on its banks, and here expanding into three large deep, waterholes;... The tradition, though very generally known to natives, is exceedingly meagre in its details. One of these water-holes was, it says, inhabited by a Bunyip, who one day got hold of and devoured a "blackfellow". The other blackfellows, on seeing this, speared the Bunyip and dragged him out of the waterhole. As he lay on the grass beside the pool, they marked an outline of his form on the turf, and afterwards removed the soil within this outline, leaving a figure of the monster in intaglio on the ground.⁴⁸ Such is the tradition; and we have preferred giving it in its native simplicity to, dressing it up with ornaments and incidents unknown to natives themselves. As to the period (when the event happened, nothing more can be learnt from the blacks than that it was 'a long time ago;' a phrase which they repeat and reiterate with that peculiar musical cadence which must be familiar to all accustomed to communicate with them. They seem to have no chronology more accurately marked than by phrases such as this. The space where the turf was removed is now partially overgrown, and the feet and extremities of the figure cannot be made out without much difficulty. It will, however; be seen from a glance at the sketch that it bears more likeness to a bird of the ostrich or emu family than to a reptile. Its dimensions are colossal. It measures about 28ft⁴⁹ from head to tail. It should be added that the natives maintain that many bunyips still exist in the large waterholes; so that we are not allowed the hypothesis of an extinct species, nor does the monster appear to have anything in common with the huge amphibious saurian of the pre-Adamite World... As to the story of the Bunyip of Challicum, even though we should consider it a mere fiction, it may still be viewed with interest as perhaps the single extant memorial of Aboriginal mythology, the only analogue in Australia (so sterile of romance) to the beautiful myths of Greece, to the gorgeous imaginings of Oriental fancy, to the fantastic creations of our own fairy-land of the north...⁵⁰

The *Geelong Advertiser* commented that Wathan's account was 'a very curious article', but found 'no reason to doubt' that the engraving was indicative of the existence of 'some huge and seemingly ferocious creature'.⁵¹

In July 1856, W.H. Wright, the Commissioner of Crown Lands based at Eversley, shared his knowledge of the Challicum ground drawing with R.E. Johns, the clerk of petty sessions at Moonambel, who had an interest



James W. Scott,
1849-1904, artist
General plan showing
position of figure,
Challicum Bunyip, c.1867
Watercolour
R E Johns Scrapbook no.1,
Museums Victoria,
XM 4709.1.2

in Aboriginal antiquities.⁵² Johns discussed the bunyip in his private papers:

I heard of it first in July 1856... from [W.H. Wright, the] Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Wimmera District, who informed me that the aborigines of the district were then in the habit of visiting the place annually and re-tracing the outlines of the figure, which is about 11 paces long and 4 paces in extreme breadth, and not unlike a rude tracing of a goose. The large water-hole near is said to be still the abode of a bunyip, and one old shepherd, who asserts that he saw it some years ago, could never afterwards be induced to leave his hut after dark.⁵³

In 1867 Johns obtained a sketch of the waterholes and the bunyip. A comparison of the general plan (above) with that of Duncan Cooper's sketch of *Ramenong hut* (see p.28) confirms that they concern the same waterholes.

In what may be one of the earliest known European attempts at protecting an Aboriginal cultural site in Victoria, Massola notes that 'The spot on which the drawing was cut was kept fenced off for a while; then the grass grew, and the outline became indistinct. Finally, it was decided that keeping a lot of grass fenced off served no useful purpose; so the sheep were fed on it, and their hoofs completely obliterated what was left of the drawing'.⁵⁴

Bunyip Myth and Tradition

Europeans brought their own myths of legendary monsters which they readily grafted onto Indigenous stories, especially those of

a sensationalist kind. Wathen is aware of the process of colonial mythogenesis surrounding the bunyip, and is eager to put a distance between himself and other commentators in the habit of embellishing Indigenous tradition with 'ornaments and incidents unknown to the natives themselves'. Wathen's contribution is one manifestation of the expanding bunyip story genre. Men of faith also concerned themselves with the existence of the bunyip. Father William M. Finn considered the Aboriginal notion of the 'Bunyip as a Satan of the Aborigines, that was once master of all he surveyed, as *bunkum*'. He believed that those who convinced themselves that they had seen it 'had mesmerized themselves with Jamaica rum'.⁵⁵ Reverend John D. Mereweather during his Anglican ministry in the Riverina district in the early 1850s was no less keen to get to the truth as to whether or not Bunyips were 'real'. For example, on the Edward River, he met an 'intelligent black fellow' named Charley and attempted to elicit information from him:

Some say it is an amphibious animal, which makes its home at the bottom of deep water-holes in the beds of rivers, and which draws down blacks, whilst bathing, to devour them; sometimes even pursuing them on the banks. Others assert that it is a beast, like the small hippopotamus, which lives among the reeds in the marshes by the side of rivers, and which causes great harm and loss to the indigenes, by sallying out at night and destroying the apparatus for catching fish: others declare that it is a gigantic, blood-thirsty otter, that eats children when it can catch them. When I asked Charley to portray me one on the dust

with the point of my stick, he drew a great bird. I suspect that this creature does not exist now, even if it has once existed. The savages, however, unanimously declare that some voracious animal exists in or about their rivers, and they have great dread of it. It may be a tradition that they have, just as we have of dragons.⁵⁶

Several months later at a Murray River station, Mereweather was told by a black fellow, that a carcass 'of that wonderful beast the bunyip' was 'lying rotting on a sand-hill nine miles off'. However, recent flooding prevented him from visiting the site. He also learned of 'a savage, voracious reptile, called the "mindei," which is said to haunt the Billabong [Billabong Creek] plains. It is, so they say, about twenty feet long, three feet in circumference, and has short legs'.⁵⁷ Several days later he noted hearing 'evidence which goes so far as to prove that the bunyip is but a large and voracious otter'.⁵⁸ On the Darling River, he was 'assured, that in these parts there is found an owl which barks like a dog; also a carnivorous kangaroo. I hear, too, tales of the mindei, or great snake with legs, which, as the blacks declare, eats the sheep; although I suspect it is a stalwart black biped that kills and eats them. The aborigines here, too, obstinately persist in their belief of the existence of the monstrous bunyip'.⁵⁹

In a recent study anthropologist Philip Clarke analysed accounts of bunyips in Victoria and finds that the bunyip appears to be an amalgam of several known creatures, with the emu being prominent.⁶⁰ An example of this is the description that it is 'a fearsome beast, as big as a bullock, with an emu's head and neck, a horse's mane and tail, and seal's flippers, which laid turtle's eggs in a platypus's nest, and ate blackfellows when it tired of a crayfish diet'.⁶¹ The emu/feather theme is found in Buckley's account and in the Boon Wurrung account of the 'tooroodun' in Western Port.⁶² It is possible that

the emu-like descriptions are trace memories of extinct giant birds or *Dromornithidae*, which the Dhauwurd Wurrung people of southwest Victoria knew as *mihurung paringmal* (literally meaning 'giant emus').⁶³ Dawson noted that these birds lived when the volcanic hills were in a state of eruption. They were described as so formidable that a kick from one of them could kill a person. 'These birds were much feared on account of their extraordinary courage, strength and speed of foot.... The last specimen of this extinct bird was seen near the site of Hamilton'.⁶⁴

Other possible candidates for accounts of bunyips include crocodiles and sea mammals such as seals and dugongs.⁶⁵ The Australian bittern, colloquially known as the 'Bunyip-bird', is another candidate for the sound that bunyips are purported to make. Gary Opit suggests there were two species of bunyip — one being short-necked, the other, long-necked.⁶⁶ He believes that Australian fur seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus doriferus*) or Australian sea lions (*Neophoca cinerea*) that had strayed inland through river systems are most likely fit for short-necked bunyips. A candidate for the long-necked bunyip is a Quaternary marsupial, *Palorchestes azael* which shared this country with Aboriginal people, before becoming extinct, some 20,000 years ago.⁶⁷ *Palorchestes* was the size of a large bull and may have been Australia's first tree-ripper. 'Its exceptionally powerful forearms, massive claws and bizarre head would have surely been enough to have inspired the legend of the Bunyip — or at least a few nightmares amongst Australia's first Aboriginal inhabitants'.⁶⁸ This view is consistent with that of the South Australian ethnologist, Thomas Worsnop, who considered bunyip stories were a relic of the time when humans and Diprotodon shared the continent.⁶⁹

The foregoing discussion of the bunyip tradition in Port Phillip and other parts of southeastern Australia can be seen as another indication of the 'deep history' we have inherited from Australia's first peoples.

Endnotes

- 1 The spelling 'Djab Wurrung' conforms with that adopted by the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages. The alternative 'Djabwurrung' is used in the author's previous publications. (Ed.)
 - 2 Phillip A. Clarke 'Water Spirit Beings' in Fred Cahir, Ian D. Clark, Phillip A. Clarke (Eds.) *Aboriginal Biocultural Knowledge of Southeastern Australia*, Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, in press.
 - 3 Robert M.W. Dixon, William S. Ramson, and Mandy Thomas, *Australian Aboriginal Words in English: their origin and meaning*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1992, p.109. Also see Frederick Ludowyk, 'There's a Bunyip close behind us and he's treading on my Tail ...' *Ozwords*, vol.17, no.2, Oct. 2008, pp.1-3.
 - 4 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 1847, p. 3. Heather Bowe, Lois Peeler, Sharon Atkinson, *Yorta Yorta Language Heritage*, Clayton: Department of Linguistics, Monash University, 1997, p.91. James Dawson, *Australian Aborigines: the languages and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western District of Victoria, Australia*, Melbourne: Robertson, 1881, p. lvii. Interestingly, Dawson classifies bunyips with reptiles in his vocabulary. For a discussion of equivalent names from other regions see Robert Holden, *Bunyips: Australia's Folklore of Fear*, Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001, p.2.
 - 5 Dawson, p. lxxix.
 - 6 Dixon *et al.*
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- 7 Ian D. Clark, & Toby G. Heydon, *Dictionary of Aboriginal Placenames of Victoria*, Melbourne: Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, 2002.
- 8 Robert Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria; with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia*, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printer, 1878, v. 1, p.436.
- 9 Dawson, p. lxxxiii.
- 10 See Clark & Heydon.
- 11 *Geelong Advertiser and Squatters' Advocate*, 2 July 1845, p.2.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Charles Barrett, *The Bunyip and Other Mythical Monsters and Legends*, Melbourne: Reed & Harris, 1946, p.9.
- 14 E. Lloyd, *A Visit to the Antipodes: with some reminiscences of a sojourn in Australia*, London: Smith, Elder, 1846, p.136.
- 15 Richard H. Bunbury letter to father, 30 December 1846 in Papers of Bunbury Family, 1824-1872, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 8098. Also, copy in Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria, MS 13530.
- 16 Dinotherium, an extinct late Tertiary elephant-like mammal.
- 17 Bunbury letter to father, 30 March 1847.
- 18 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 1847, p.3.
- 19 George Augustus Robinson's journal 18 December 1846 in Ian D. Clark (ed.) *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, 1 January 1839-30 September 1852, [3rd ed.] Charleston, SC., Createspace, 2014. Single volume edition, p.743.
- 20 L.J. Blake (ed.) *Letters of Charles Joseph La Trobe*, Melbourne: Government of Victoria, 1975.
- 21 La Trobe letter to Ronald Campbell Gunn, 23 January 1847, in Blake, pp.20-21. (The letters to Gunn are held in the State Library of New South Wales: Mitchell Library A249, A246, and Dixson Library DL DOC.)
- 22 Robinson 29 April 1847 in Clark, p.748.
- 23 Ronald C. Gunn 'On the "Bunyip" of Australia Felix', *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science, Agriculture, Statistics, Etc.* vol. 3, 1949, pp. 147-9. The *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 February 1847 claimed it was the skull of a severely deformed foal.
- 24 Ibid, p.149.
- 25 Robinson 24 May 1847, in Clark, p.752.
- 26 Robinson 21 November 1848, in Clark, p.788.
- 27 W.S. Macleay, 'On the Skull Now Exhibited at the Colonial Museum of Sydney, as That of "The Bunyip"', letter to the Editors, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 1847, p.3.
- 28 William Westgarth, *Australia Felix...*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1848, p.391; Barrett, p.12; W. Howitt, *A Boy's Adventures in the Wilds of Australia; or, Herbert's note-book*, London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Co., 1854, p.76.
- 29 Godfrey C. Mundy, *Our Antipodes; or, residence and rambles in the Australasian colonies, with a glimpse of the gold fields*, London: Richard Bentley, 1852, v. 2, p.19.
- 30 La Trobe to Ronald Campbell Gunn, 23 September 1847, in Blake, p.24.
- 31 Ibid, 2 March 1849, in Blake, p.35.
- 32 John Mathew 'Aboriginal Sketch — Gleanings in Aboriginal Magic', *Australasian*, 7 March 1925, p.66.
- 33 The newspaper article has the words 'ancient here', this is possibly a miss-publication of 'ancient hero'.
- 34 Mathew means *Fomalhaut*, the brightest star in the constellation *Piscis Austrinus*. *Altair* is the brightest star in the constellation *Aquila*.
- 35 Mathew. *Australasian*, 7 March 1925, p.66.
- 36 Dawson, p.108.
- 37 Ibid, p.99.
- 38 *Argus*, 13 December 1849.
- 39 Alan Dilnot, 'George Henry Wathen, 1817-1879'. *Margin 3*, Monash University, Clayton, 1979, p.8.
- 40 George H. Wathen, *The Golden Colony: or, Victoria in 1854, with remarks on the geology of the Australian gold fields*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855, pp.123-124.
- 41 Its full title was *The Australasian: a quarterly reprint of articles selected from periodicals of the United Kingdom; with original contributions chiefly on subjects of colonial interest*.
- 42 *Argus*, 23 July 1855.
- 43 Wathen, p.131. Also see G.H. Wathen, 'The Bunyip of Challicum', *The Australasian: a quarterly*, January, 1851, pp.302-304 (reproduced in the *Evening News*, Sydney, 10 September 1898, p.3.)
- 44 In 1850 *Challicum* station belonged to the Thomson brothers (Harry and George). The station had been subdivided in April 1848, with *Warrapinjoe* going to their former partner Duncan Elphinstone Cooper.
- 45 Wathen 1855, p.122.
- 46 Ibid, p.123.
- 47 Enoch R. Scott disputes this, claiming Challicum is a corruption of Charley Combe, the place Thomson came from in England. See Enoch R. Scott, *Bogamildi and Fifty Years in the North-West of New South Wales*, privately published, 1977.
- 48 The technique of creating an image by cutting, carving or engraving into a flat surface.
- 49 The *Evening News* reprint erroneously states 12 ft. The figure is corrected to that of 1851.
- 50 *Evening News*, 10 September 1898, p.3.
- 51 *Geelong Advertiser*, 1 February 1851. The Challicum bunyip is discussed in the following works: Reynell E. John's notebooks, R.E. Johns Papers, 1850-1910, MS 10075. State Library Victoria; Enoch R. Scott in *Sydney Mail*, 8 August 1934; Aldo Massola, 'The Challicum Bun-Yip', *The Victorian Naturalist*, vol. 74, October 1957, pp.76-83; Aldo Massola,

- Journey to Aboriginal Victoria*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1969; Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: the antiquarian imagination in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; Thomas Worsnop, *The Prehistoric Arts, Manufactures, Works, Weapons, etc., of the Aborigines of Australia*. Adelaide: Government Printer, 1897.
- 52 Worsnop, p.168.
- 53 Reynell E. Johns, 'The Bunyip and the Mindai', in R.E. Johns Papers, 7 September 1867, p.4. In Holden, p.176.
- 54 Massola, 'The Challicum Bun-Yip', p.83.
- 55 William M. Finn, *Glimpses of North-Eastern Victoria and Albury*, New South Wales, Melbourne: Catholic Bookselling and Printing Depot, 1870, p.12.
- 56 John D. Mereweather, *Diary of a Working Clergyman in Australia and Tasmania: kept during the years 1850-1853*, London: Hatchard, 1859, p.93f.
- 57 Ibid, p.182.
- 58 Ibid, pp.187f.
- 59 Ibid, p.197.
- 60 Clarke in press; and see William Blandowski, 'Personal Observations made in an excursion towards the central parts of Victoria, including Mount Macedon, McIvor and Black Ranges', *Transactions of the Philosophical Society of Victoria*, 1855, vol.1, p.73.
- 61 James Norman, 'Aboriginal Legends and the Bunyip', *Advertiser*, Adelaide, 24 February 1951, p.6. Also see Anonymous 'Bunyip is a Fable', *Daily News*, Perth, 6 February 1947, p.5.
- 62 John Morgan, *The Life and Adventures of William Buckley: thirty-two years a wanderer amongst the Aborigines of the unexplored country round Port Phillip*, Hobart: Archibald MacDougall, 1852, p.48; Smyth, v.1, p.436.
- 63 Dawson, p.92. 'meeheeruung parrinmall' = 'big emu'. Although generally perceived to be a Djab Wurrung name, presumably on the basis of the reference to the last bird in western Victoria being seen at Hamilton, which is in Djab Wurrung country, the words belong to the Kurnkopanooot dialect of Dhauwurd Wurrung language, which is south of Djab Wurrung: 'meheaaruung' (large) and 'kapping' or 'barringmall' is emu. The Djab Wurrung word for large is 'martuuk' and 'kowwirr' is emu.
- 64 Dawson, p.92.
- 65 See Peter Macpherson, *The Religion of the Aborigines of Australia as Preserved in their Legends and Ceremonies: a lecture*. Singleton: Argus Printing Works, 1883.
- 66 Gary Opit, 'The Bunyip', in Paul Cropper (ed.) *Myths & Monsters, 2001 conference papers*, Sydney, 20 October 2001, p.45f.
- 67 George M. Eberhart, *Mysterious Creatures: a guide to cryptozoology*, Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2012, p.76.
- 68 T.F. Flannery and M. Archer 'Palorchestes Large and Small Palorchestids, in P.V. Rich, G. F. van Tets, & F. Knight (eds), *Kadimakara: extinct vertebrates of Australia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p.236.
- 69 Worsnop, p.169.

Letters from Victorian Pioneers to Governor La Trobe, 1853

By Dr Dianne Reilly AM

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When Charles Joseph La Trobe departed from Melbourne on 5 May 1854, he left with some regret, despite the anxieties of office which had left him a dispirited and worn-out man. On La Trobe's last sighting of Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale from the deck of the modern steamer the *Golden Age* on 6 May 1854,¹ he noted sadly in his diary: '8 am, Leave the Heads 14 years 7 months and 6 days since I first entered them'.² He had grown to love this land and had decided that, in retirement, he would write a history of its earliest days. He had on 29 July 1853 sent a circular letter³ to a number of early settlers,⁴ requesting information about their experiences as new residents, describing the time and circumstances of their first occupation of various parts of the colony. Whilst the circular letter has not been located we know from the specific accounts of settler interaction with the Indigenous people in most of the letters that La Trobe had specifically requested information on the Aboriginal people. Thomas Learmonth, in responding to 'the... point on which Your Excellency desires information is with regard to the aborigines, their number and their demeanour towards the first settlers', wrote a detailed account of the experiences at *Buninyong*.⁵

It is not known how many people were sent the circular letter, nor if all recipients replied, but he took home with him 'at least fifty-eight letters or papers, detailing the personal experiences of the pioneers of Victoria'.⁶ His intention was to use these letters, together with material he had gathered over nearly fifteen years, to write his foundation history of the district he had governed so conscientiously.

La Trobe's broad-ranging education in the Moravian tradition gave him a continuing scholarly interest in many subjects,⁷ including history, which was ever present as he encountered the new world, and especially the Port Phillip District.⁸ La Trobe's instructions from the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, with his Evangelical leanings, had singled out the state of the Aboriginal people and the relations between them and the settlers as a significant responsibility for him. As we know, La Trobe's earlier experience in the West Indies had been a major determinant of his appointment.⁹ Hence, as La Trobe left Victoria in 1854 it is not surprising that he had stipulated the inclusion of references to the Aboriginal people in the circular letter which would allow him to record and reflect upon his legacy when he came to write his proposed history.



Alexander Denistoun Lang, 1814?-1872, lithographer
An exploring party looking for a sheep run, 1847
 Lithograph with hand colouring
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H29755

Through force of habit, La Trobe kept numerous fragmentary notes¹⁰ of many of his experiences and the people he met. Although over many years La Trobe had accumulated much material in preparation for writing his history, he had made little progress, apart from a document he annotated as 'Ch.II'.¹¹ This was a detailed account of the failed 1803-04 settlement at Sorrento under Lieutenant-Colonel David Collins, and he intended it to precede details of the years before and during his own administration in Melbourne. Although La Trobe's notes were mostly sketchy and disorganised, he had retained these to jog his memory when he came to write his book. In addition, his manuscript 'Australia: Memoranda of Journeys, Excursions and Absences, 1839-1854', and two volumes of 'Australian Notes, 1839-1854',¹² which amplified events to a limited extent, were recorded in more durable notebooks which he would have found useful for this purpose. These 'Memoranda' and 'Notes' were edited and published as *Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes* in 2006.¹³

La Trobe's time on his return to England was necessarily taken up with his growing family, lobbying the Colonial Office for a further appointment, continued travelling to and from Europe and extensive correspondence with many friends. However, in 1872, now blind and ailing, La Trobe had lost the energy for such a huge enterprise and wrote from his home *Clapham House* in the village of Litlington, Sussex, to his friend and executor, Melbourne merchant James Graham, that:

As I am in the prospect of a move, as you know, in the course of the autumn, so taking time by the forelock, and attempting to put my house in order, I have collected a number of documents, addressed to me...in 1853, by old colonists, to whom I applied for information respecting the early occupation and settlement of our Colony. I intended to have made a certain use of this information myself, but, from circumstances, was prevented doing so.¹⁴

La Trobe had become totally blind by October 1865 and relied on his daughter Eleanora Sophia, 'Nelly', to act as his scribe.¹⁵ On accepting the fact that he would never have the ability to complete his proposed history of Victoria, he went on to say that he was sending to his friend a small parcel of letters. La Trobe obviously realised the enormous historical value of this cache of documents since he took into account every important eventuality for their permanent security:

The day may come, however, when it may be considered of too great interest to be lost, and I therefore propose that the parcel should be deposited somewhere where it will be accessible when that day comes, say the Public Library or other public archives. On this point perhaps you will consult those who ought to be consulted. I think it may be a little early to make



Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875, artist
Mr Carfrae's Ledcourt, 1850

Pencil and sepia wash on paper — unfinished
 Collection: National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

Deposited on long-term loan in the Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria

unrestricted use of the contents of these letters. In sending them to you, however, I am securing their being deposited where they ought to go.¹⁶

Graham duly sought the advice of the Chairman of the Public Library Trustees, Sir Redmond Barry, and fellow trustee David Charteris McArthur. They wisely selected the Melbourne Public Library as the permanent home for this invaluable research collection about Victoria's colonial history. In fact, the arrival of these letters in 1872 marked the beginning of the acquisition of original Australian material by the library, and the formation of the Australian Manuscripts collection.

Publishing history

After long delays, Dr Thomas Francis Bride, then Librarian of the Public Library, was given the task by the Library Trustees of transcribing the letters, and preparing them for publication. Robert S. Brain, the Government Printer, published 1,500 copies of the work of 325 pages, complete with index, as *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* in March 1898. Although 58 letters are indicated in the table of contents, there is no letter No.57 included. As an addendum, *Specimens of the Language of the Barrabool Tribe, and List of the Members of the Tribe, collected about 1842* was incorporated. This document of six pages had been compiled by 'Mrs Davenport,

daughter of the late Capt. Sievwright [*sic*], Assistant-Protector of Aborigines'.¹⁷ This first unillustrated edition contained a 'Rough Sketch of the PORT PHILLIP COUNTRY', enclosed with Thomas Learmonth's letter from his residence at *Buninyong* where he and his brother had established a homestead in 1838. The map highlights the names of pastoral stations settled up to 1837, and also those occupied in 1838, thus showing the extent of settlement prior to La Trobe's arrival in the colony. The general importance of the book was considered to be the fact that it contained 'the first impressions of those who had ample opportunities of learning at the fountain head what could be learned amid the hardships of early colonial days'.¹⁸

In 1969, a new enlarged edition was published by Heinemann, much to the satisfaction of historians, such was the demand for the letters. It was meticulously edited and annotated by journalist and author Charles Edward Sayers. That same year, Sayers, who wrote for the Melbourne *Herald* and the *Age*, was the biographer of the founder of the *Age*, David Syme.¹⁹ He was also the author of twenty books, including numerous Victorian local histories.

In 1983, another edition of the work, enhanced with a large number of illustrations, was produced by Melbourne publishers Currey O'Neil. This and the previous edition, both of 455 pages, contained an introduction and notes



George Alexander Gilbert, 1815-1877, artist
**View of Station Peak - (Native You-Yangs), taken from the
 Point Henry Road Geelong, Victoria, 1856**
 Pencil with added watercolour and Chinese white on paper
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H1573
 William John Turner Clarke took up the Station Peak run in 1837

by Sayers, and the 1983 edition was embellished with a foreword by historian and writer Helen Vellacott, editor of *Diary of a Lady's Maid: Government House in colonial Australia* (MUP, 1991), and *A Girl at Government House: an English girl's reminiscences 'below stairs' in colonial Australia* (Currey O'Neil, 1982).

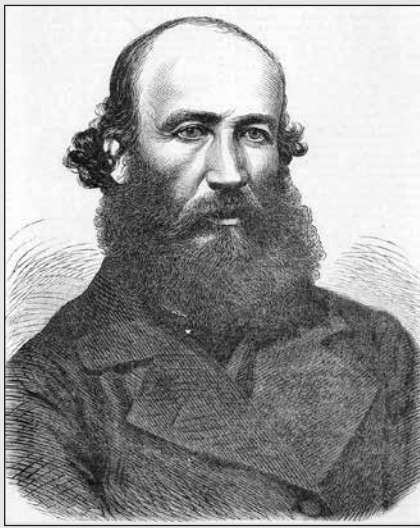
Sayers described the new edition as 'a republication, not a facsimile'. It differed from the 1898 volume in that a number of letters sent to La Trobe were not included, since they were considered to have contributed 'little importance to the theme of the work'. These were very brief letters dated August and September 1853 from John Carfrae of *Ledcourt* near Stawell, Charles Wade Sherard of Creswick's Creek, Henry Dwyer of Victoria Valley and Edward Grimes. Importantly though, the new edition included brief notes on persons and incidents mentioned, and short biographical descriptions by Sayers of each of the letter-writers. Sayers made the decision to transcribe the letters in full, but to delete all addresses, and the salutations to La Trobe at the beginning of each document, and the signatures at the end. These, however, appear in the 1898 edition. The editor changed the random order of the original volume, arranging it 'to present some chronological and district groupings'.²⁰ The headings he decided upon were: First Seekers; Portland Bay, Western

District; North-East and Gippsland; Central Plains, Wimmera; The Mallee and the Murray; Aborigines.

Joseph Tice Gellibrand

An important discovery made during C.E. Sayers' research for the preparation of the new edition of *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* was a complete transcript of Joseph Tice Gellibrand's memorandum of a trip to Port Phillip which is incomplete in the 1898 first edition. This is included in full in the new edition as the introductory document in the 'First Seekers' section. The complete document in Gellibrand's handwriting is held in the collection of the Mitchell Library in Sydney, while the incomplete copy used in the first edition is in the Australian Manuscripts Collection at State Library Victoria.²¹

Joseph Tice Gellibrand (1792?-1837) was born in England, and admitted as an attorney in London in 1816. By a warrant of 1 August 1823, he was appointed attorney-general of Van Diemen's Land, a position he held from his arrival in Hobart Town in March 1824, until his dismissal by Governor Arthur in 1826, charged with unprofessional conduct, a charge he fought for the rest of his life. He was a prominent member of the Port Phillip Association.



Batchelder, photographer
The late Peter Snodgrass Esq., MLA
 Wood engraving from photograph
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria,
 IAN20/12/67/13
 Published in *The Illustrated Australian News for*
Home Readers, 20 December 1867

His memorandum fully describes a journey he undertook from Hobart to and around the Port Phillip District from 17 January to 24 March 1836. The document details the journey and life on board the ship *Norval*, and the arduous overland journey from Westernport to the settlement on the Yarra River where, among other founding settlers, he met Henry Batman, John Batman's brother. His various excursions ashore are described as he travelled around Port Phillip Bay to Geelong and the Barwon River, and on the return journey, visiting the Anakie Hills, Barrabool Hills, the Maribyrnong — 'a large saltwater river', and the Plenty River which he named. At Indented Head, he recorded his meeting with the Aboriginal people there, and his long conversation with 'the wild white man'²² William Buckley 'who appears to be of nervous and irritable demeanour, and that a little thing will annoy him much...'.²³ Gellibrand noted that 'the country... far exceeds my expectations... and from the account given by Buckley, I have every reason to believe there are Millions of acres of equal quality extending to the westward'.²⁴ On a subsequent visit to Port Phillip from Hobart in February 1837, Gellibrand and his companion and fellow lawyer, George Brooks Legrew Hesse,²⁵ disappeared near Birregurra on an expedition from Geelong on an inland route to explore the hinterland of Port Phillip. Although an unsolved mystery for many decades, some contemporary accounts considered it likely that they had lost their horses and perished in the heat of summer,²⁶ or been murdered by Aboriginal people. However, a

recent study re-examines the historical evidence, and sheds new light on what might have become of them.²⁷

Importantly, Gellibrand documents some of the earliest accounts of European interactions with the Aboriginal people, 'a fine race of men' who impressed him with their 'strong and athletic appearance', being 'very intelligent and quick in their perceptions',²⁸ and well-disposed at the unexpected appearance of his party of Europeans. He also gives a vivid account of an incident when shepherds had abducted an Aboriginal woman and he had intervened.²⁹

Gellibrand's account of his arrival at Westernport and of the settlement on the Yarra has enormous historical significance not only for the detail of the early days of the new colony, but it is also a document which is close in time to John Batman's more well-known diary of 1835, and adds to descriptions conveyed in Batman's diary of what was to become the city of Melbourne.

The Letters

The majority of the letters to La Trobe comment on the interaction between the new settlers and the Aboriginal people whose land they occupied. The observations reveal a range of attitudes to the Indigenous people and to experiences of conflict on the frontier. It should be noted that there is no letter from Niel Black (1804-1880), well-known pastoralist on the *Glenormiston* run near Terang. In about 1852, he had returned to his native Scotland in search of a suitable wife, and remained there for five years until he married Grace Greenshields Leadbetter in 1857. It is therefore probable that he did not receive La Trobe's circular requesting details of his fascinating life in the Western District from his arrival there in 1839.³⁰ Some samples follow of the observations made by other recipients of the circular, although perusing all the *Letters* of course builds up a more complete perception of experiences and attitudes among the Europeans.

Thomas Learmonth of *Buninyong* observed that 'considering the wrong that has been done to the aborigines in depriving them of their country, they have shown less ferocity and have established the desire to retaliate less than might have been expected'.³¹ Rev. James Clow was of the opinion that: 'Like other savages, they are naturally revengeful, but it is to be feared that on too many occasions their atrocities have not been committed without grievous provocation'.³² Thomas Manifold at Warrnambool held the view that: 'Their manner towards the first settlers had generally the semblance of extreme friendship, but... whenever they got a chance,



Unknown artist
Aboriginal people watching sheep droving, c.1850
 Ink wash over pencil
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H26595

w[ould] plunder or murder even those from whom they had only a few minutes previously received presents and food'.³³

Foster Fyans (1790-1870), first Police Magistrate in Geelong, settled in 1837 at Fyansford at the junction of the Barwon and Moorabool rivers, one of the earliest places of settlement in the Geelong region. In 1840, he was sent by La Trobe to the Portland Bay District where he remained for some years as Commissioner of Crown Lands, before resuming the role at Geelong of Police Magistrate in 1849. In his letter, besides other graphic descriptions of clashes between settlers and the Aboriginal people, he gives a detailed report of the killing of a shepherd by an Indigenous man near Port Fairy. His Aboriginal guide, Bon Jon eventually shot the man who committed the murder, and was hauled before Judge Willis, whom Fyans described as 'a most disreputable old rip', and much to Fyans' displeasure, the charge was dismissed. Fyans predicted that: 'From long experience, particularly in Portland Bay District, I am convinced that the number of aborigines in 1837 in this district could not exceed 3,000, and I feel thoroughly convinced the race will be extinct in 20 years or less'.³⁴

The epic journey of Captain John Hepburn demonstrates this settler's courage and determination to make a living in an unknown land. In partnership with John Gardiner and Joseph Hawdon, he made his first overland journey to Port Phillip from New South Wales

in 1836 with sheep, cattle and horses which they sold to those already at the settlement. Two years later, on his second overland trip, this time in partnership with David Coghill, Hepburn again visited the settlement where no accommodation was to be had, meeting William Buckley, and noting that Captain Lonsdale was commandant, before going on to take up a run in the West Coliban district on 15 April 1838. This he named *Smeaton Hill* after a village in his native Scotland. He recounted numerous meetings with the Aboriginal people, acknowledging that 'a hostile feeling did exist' in his men.³⁵ There was much sheep stealing, and some murders on both sides, although 'I am happy to say I never injured one beyond thumping him with a stick'.³⁶

Charles Wedge recalled that, at the area around the Victoria Range near Dunkeld in the Grampians, the Aboriginal people began to attack sheep as early as 1836 and that 'these depredations did not cease till many lives were sacrificed, and, I may say, many thousands of sheep destroyed'.³⁷ Wedge, a nephew of John Helder Wedge of the Port Phillip Association, was brutal in his responses to sheep stealing, killing many Indigenous people on the land he occupied in his quest for wealth from wool.³⁸

Hugh Murray who settled the Colac region in 1837, claimed that the Aborigines 'never lost an opportunity of stealing our sheep...' and described the inhumane treatment inflicted on them by the settlers: 'In such cases the settlers assembled and pursued them,

and when their encampment was discovered they generally fled, leaving behind them their weapons, rugs etc., which, together with their huts, were destroyed'.³⁹ William Clarke recalled that at his run in the East Wimmera, 'when my people found it necessary to defend themselves, a number of blacks, I am sorry to say, was shot'.⁴⁰ George Faithful recalled a ferocious fight around present-day Benalla on 11 April 1838 in which between ten and fourteen servants and a very large number of Aboriginal people were killed in an all-day fight.

The reckless and hard-riding squatter Peter Snodgrass took up the station *Doogalook* on Muddy Creek, west of Yea, on his arrival in Port Phillip from Sydney in 1837. He, on the other hand, had a deep sympathy for the plight of the Aboriginal people in the district, noting: 'From their first acquaintance with the white population, their numbers have diminished from disease and other causes, until there are perhaps scarcely one-fifth of the [original] number... and it seems probable that in a few years they will become extinct'.⁴¹

An educated and adventurous young settler Edward Bell arrived at Melbourne late in 1839 and immediately left with cattle for the Western District. There he took up three stations in succession: *Mimamiluke* on the Devil's River, *Englefield* on the Glenelg River, and *Green Hills* near Mount Rouse. He recorded that: 'The collisions with the blacks, which I had heard of on almost every station after my arrival in the Western District, if they took place at all, were kept very quiet'.⁴² He did hear, however, of savage encounters by the settlers with some Aboriginal groups, and with devastation to his own cattle, was of the opinion that: 'It was scarcely to be wondered at that the settlers took the law into their own hands on such occasions'.⁴³ Later, Bell was to take up a civil service appointment and became La Trobe's private secretary before becoming a Commissioner of Crown Lands.

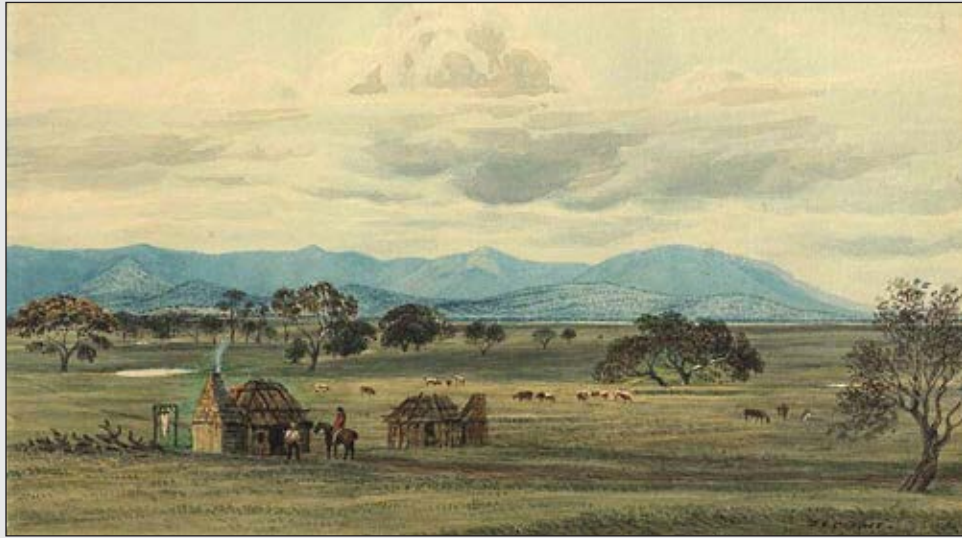
Thomas Winter, formerly a merchant in Hobart Town for a number of years, sent his 'Notes on Port Phillip' to La Trobe via a contact, William Swainson (not Swanston, as wrongly printed in the 1898 edition of the *Letters*). Swainson was a botanist who visited Victoria in 1852. He listed more than 600 species of eucalypt for the Victorian Government, and it may have been at this time that he passed Winter's Notes on to the Lieutenant-Governor. Swainson was a valuable member of Dr Ferdinand Mueller's expedition to the Dandenong Ranges in 1853. Thomas Winter came over to Port Phillip in 1843 to check on his pastoral investments. He had funded a venture with William Forlonge, a pastoralist professionally trained as a wool-sorter

in Leipzig before settling in Van Diemen's Land, to run stock in the two localities of Pigeon Ponds and Chetwynd on the Glenelg River, both in the far west of the Port Phillip District. Plagued by drought and the depression of the 1840s, the venture failed. Forlonge was bankrupted, and Winter was reported to have lost his £9,000 investment.⁴⁴ While Forlonge went on to great success as a grazier and politician in future years, Winter returned to Van Diemen's Land.

Winter's brief 'Notes on Port Phillip' describe his first sighting of Port Phillip Bay as a 'harbour resembling an inland sea'.⁴⁵ He found 'the situation of Williams Town... very pretty',⁴⁶ and 'Melbourne is also beautifully situated on a gently sloping hill, upon the banks of the Yarra, and surrounded by a lovely country, lightly covered with trees, chiefly eucalyptus and acacia'.⁴⁷ He was impressed that, in nine short years, about 150 wooden houses had been built on the site of Melbourne but, owing to 'the lack of large, sound timber fit for building... the greatest part of Melbourne is built with wood from Van Diemen's Land'.⁴⁸ As he travelled to the Western District to oversee his grazing land, he discovered that 'The sheep, cattle and horses, and indeed every animal that has been sent here, thrives in an extraordinary manner. Lambs three months old weigh as much as their mothers, while the cows are like fatted beasts'.⁴⁹

Of the Indigenous people he encountered, Winter noted: 'The natives are numerous and troublesome; indeed, they are the greatest drawback to the colony, since they cannot be trusted. Several murders have been committed by them, but not lately...'.⁵⁰ The Kulin had strongly developed concepts, 'totally different from the European understanding of land ownership, regarding the use of resources and the sharing of them... Alienating the land was literally unthinkable to them'.⁵¹ This showed itself in different ways from simple curiosity or amazement at the arrival of Europeans on their land, to retaliations with violence as the settlers took over. As historian James Boyce has noted: 'For settlers, the principal obstacle to realizing spectacular profits from wool exports was the Aborigines'.⁵² Thomas Winter observed that, already in 1843, the European influence in a material way on Aboriginal traditions, so obvious in later years, was starting to become apparent: 'The original clothing, both of men and women, seemed to be two mats made of skins joined together, the one hanging before, the other behind. Now most of them have some article of English clothing'.⁵³

Alfred Taddy Thomson, an educated young Englishman, brought his own disenchanted philosophy on the life of a squatter



Duncan Elphinstone Cooper, 1813/14 -1904, artist
First station and huts, Mount Cole & the Pyrenees in the distance, 1842
 Watercolour
 National Library of Australia. PIC B4 R9051
 From a series depicting Chalicum station at Fiery Creek

to his letter for La Trobe from Fiery Creek. He recounted that he had overlanded 4,000 sheep with John Whitehall Stevens from Yass to the Ovens in 1840, a journey of five months. After what he described as a miserable time without a permanent base, they made their camp near the head of the Broken River above Mansfield on a section of Watson and Hunter's *Barjang* run. He recorded that the Indigenous people were 'very troublesome', noting that several settlers had been murdered, and hundreds of sheep stolen. 'The effects of these atrocities upon the minds of the men... where nothing distracted their ideas or prevented their brooding upon the one subject, was great'.⁵⁴ In 1841, they took the run named *Yalla-y-Poorra*, a station on the (usually) rapidly flowing Fiery Creek north of present-day Streatham, which they held in partnership. A near neighbour was G.W. Thomson, a pioneer squatter who settled on the *Chalicum* station that same year. Alfred Thomson gave up the hardships and solitude of life in the bush, returning in 1854 to London where, for over twenty years, he acted as paintings selector for the trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria.

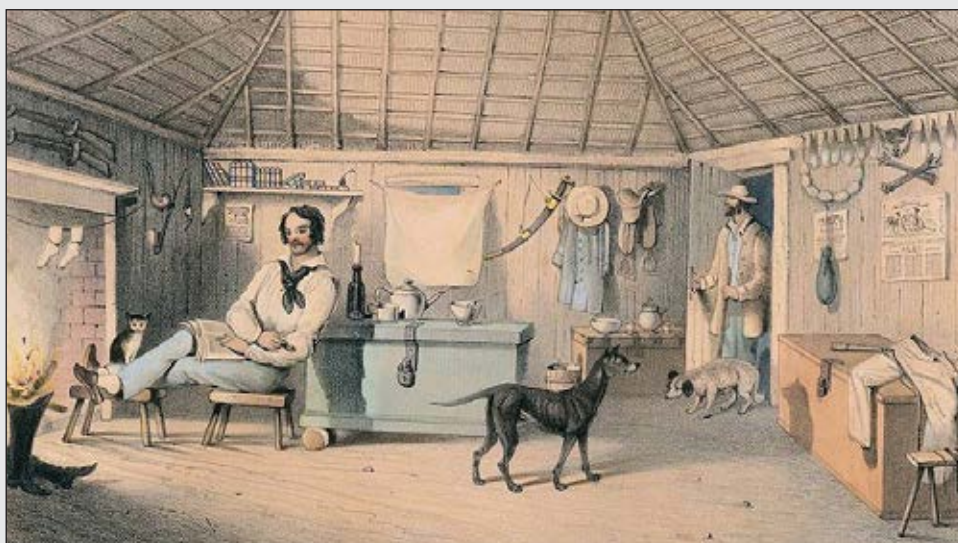
William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines

One of the many responses received by La Trobe was from William Thomas, a London schoolteacher when he was appointed in 1838 as one of four assistant protectors to George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District. He was allocated the Port Phillip, Westernport and

Gippsland districts and, in 1839, established his base at Narre Warren. Years of privation followed for Thomas and his family since he was often away from his wife and children while he travelled around the country with the Aboriginal people.⁵⁵ He had a warm sympathy for them, and focused on the practical tasks of keeping them alive, avoiding the perils of city life and maintaining harmony between black and white. He was not supported by Robinson in carrying out his self-sacrificing duties. When the Protectorate completely failed in 1849, La Trobe appointed him as Guardian of Aborigines, a role in which he was able to continue his activities in caring for the Indigenous people.

Until his death Thomas was chief government adviser on Aboriginal affairs and was the most influential witness at the 1858-59 select committee of the Legislative Council on Aborigines. His recommendation to establish reserves and supply depots throughout Victoria was accepted in a modified form and in 1860 became the policy implemented by the new Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines.⁵⁶

As John Mulvaney (1925-2016), renowned authority on the history of the first Australians, as well as on archaeology and anthropology generally, has noted: 'he was more successful than any other first generation settler in attempting to comprehend and sustain Aboriginal society... He had striking success in settling intertribal disputes and preventing racial strife. His bravery and moral conviction were undoubted, but his advocacy of Aboriginal causes made him



Alexander Denistoun Lang, 1814?-1872, lithographer
The squatter at home 1839: bad news from the outstations, c.1847
 Lithograph with hand colouring
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H17036

unpopular in colonial society'.⁵⁷ For nearly three decades, Thomas kept a daily diary of his life and work with Aboriginal Victorians through his journal entries. He also wrote long memoranda about Aboriginal society for Robinson, Sir Redmond Barry and La Trobe. His extensive diaries were edited and annotated by historian Dr Marguerita Stephens, and published in four volumes in 2014.⁵⁸

Two of his memoranda directed to La Trobe are included in *Letters to Victorian Pioneers*. The first of these, letter 13, a 'Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix', gives information in great detail about their itinerant way of life in search of food, the code governing the Aboriginal family and the group, and the conflict which arose when the Europeans took over. This includes the strict marriage arrangements made, punishment for such crimes as murder, theft and adultery, and the customs associated with the corroboree.

Thomas appended a list with biographical notes of each of the twenty-five 'Men composing the Native Police on 1st January 1843'. Billibellary, 'clan headman for one of three sections of the Wurundjeri-willam patriline of the Wurundjeri-balluk clan',⁵⁹ was one of these, and Thomas gives him credit that 'through his influence the native police was first formed'.⁶⁰ Useful and telling statistical returns are included with his letter: 'Return showing number of Aborigines committed and tried for offences against Europeans in the Colony of Victoria, 1849-1853' (four — with names, offences, locations, verdicts and sentences), Return

showing number of Europeans committed and tried for offences against Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria, 1849-1853' (one), and Aboriginal population statistics, including the number of deaths and births, to the end of 1853.

Letter 14, 'Account of the Aborigines', goes on to discuss 'Aboriginal traditions and superstitions'. Thomas had observed no trace of any ceremony analogous to the 'ancient ophiolatri' (the worship of snakes) which was believed by Europeans in some quarters at that time. He documented the legends concerning the creation of man and of woman, how man first came into possession of fire, and the fearful being Mindye, the Rainbow Serpent. Thomas' first-hand description of the speed and efficiency with which the Aboriginal people could construct a new camp site, exemplifies their energy and group spirit:

They commence barking and building; in one half hour I have seen one of the most beautiful, romantic, and stillest parts of the wilderness become a busy and clamorous town, and the beautiful forest marred for materials for their habitation, and as much bustle as though the spot had been located for generations.⁶¹

Although he is of the view that 'there is not a more peaceable community than the blacks when but one tribe is present',⁶² he did witness a fight between the Barrabool and Buninyong blacks north of Melbourne, but reported no deaths. 'My impression ever was, and is still the

same, that, from the blacks as a body, to Europeans there is no danger whatever; it is our damnable drink that has made them so nauseous even to ourselves, without our for a moment calculating the beam in our own European eye'.⁶³ Thomas viewed the ceremony of Murrum Turrukerook, or female coming of age, and the ceremony of Tib-but, or male coming of age, which he described in some detail. As a postscript to this letter, he inscribed a personal note to La Trobe, referring to his culturally sensitive report: 'You are a married man, or I would not have stated on the female coming of age. It will show you that these people have some respect for laws of nature; in fact, they are more delicate than white people in many respects'.⁶⁴

Henry Edward Pulteney Dana, Native Police Corps

La Trobe himself contributed to the collection the document concerning Henry Edward Pulteney Dana (for a portrait see p.14). Dana trained at Sandhurst with the prospect of a commission in the army of the East India Company. When this failed to eventuate, he went to Van Diemen's Land in the late 1830s, and on to Port Phillip in 1842. In Melbourne, he renewed acquaintance with Charles Joseph La Trobe whom he had met in London, and they became firm friends. La Trobe soon appointed him to set up a Native Police Corps under the general supervision of the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, William Thomas. His second in command was Dudley Charles Le Souëf, son of William Le Souëf, Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Goulburn River District.⁶⁵ The Native Police Corps was one of the earliest police forces in Victoria. It employed Aboriginal men to help impose British law across the colony and intervene in any frontier conflict between newly arrived European settlers and local Aboriginal communities. The aim of the corps was 'co-operative policing between settlers and Melbourne's Aboriginal inhabitants, and lasted until 1853'. Over the decade of its existence, 'about one hundred men joined the Corps, recruited initially from the Boon wurrung and Woiwurrung groups, but later from all areas of the Port Phillip District'.⁶⁶ Based at Narre Warren, the Native Police were a mounted, armed and uniformed corps, ably managed by their commandant, Captain Dana, who held their trust and, as a police officer, was concerned only that they carry out their duty satisfactorily.

The corps was mainly deployed on the margins of European settlement as a defence against sheep stealing, but the men also carried out some routine European police work. Problems arose, however, when the native police were directed to track and capture

known Aboriginal offenders.⁶⁷ The sending of Aboriginal police to search for and arrest their own people was demoralising to them. A notable weakness in the system was that Dana preferred to retain them as a troop of mounted police, and did not take advantage of their tracking skills. The Native Police Corps rendered valuable service to the squatters and to the administration as the main force representing the authority of the crown. It would seem to be a miscalculation that the native police were given the role of collecting licence fees from diggers even before they had a chance to strike gold, and Dana appeared to ignore or tacitly approve brutality used on occasion by the troopers against the defenceless miners. There were plans to establish a chain of police stations staffed by European and Aboriginal police across Victoria, but Dana's sudden death in November 1852 marked an end to this, and the Corps was disbanded in the following year.

The chronicle included is really La Trobe's commendation for Dana and for the Native Police Corps, written on 22 January 1853 to Sir John Pakington, Secretary of State for the Colonies. He described the circumstances under which he had been inspired to raise a unit of Indigenous men to police 'the collisions between the settlers and the aborigines [as they] became unavoidably more serious and fatal'.⁶⁸ Under Dana, the Corps 'at once formed a link between the native and the European, and gave many opportunities for the establishment of friendly relations'.⁶⁹ La Trobe had 'no hesitation in saying that the entire credit... is due to Mr Dana, for no one who did not bring to the work his tact, energy, firmness, and moral and physical powers of endurance, could have succeeded'.⁷⁰ Given the position in which his widow found herself with four young children, La Trobe recommended that a substantial gratuity should be paid to her by the British government.

Letters from Victorian Pioneers is an invaluable and absorbing record of the earliest years of settlement of the Port Phillip District. Many of the descendants of the pioneers who responded to La Trobe's request to document their early experiences still live in Victoria. Richard Zachariah interviewed a number of those who have connections to the Western District, an area that La Trobe knew well, and has written an interesting and challenging account titled, *The Vanished Land: disappearing dynasties of Victoria's Western District*.⁷¹

More importantly, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* is a first-hand account of the meeting of Europeans with the traditional owners of

this land. The peaceable contacts, as well as the inevitable clashes between the two are recalled and documented. It would be true to say that if La Trobe had not sent out his circular requesting information about the colony in its earliest days, most of the letters would not have been written. 'It is a tribute to his foresight that the documents he solicited have now been published three times and are still an essential source for the writing of early Victorian history.'⁷² Had La Trobe not ensured their safety for posterity in the secure environment of State Library Victoria, perhaps they would not have survived his own generation.

Note

Unless specified otherwise, references are to the first edition of Thomas Francis Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers: a series of papers on the early occupation of the colony, the Aborigines, etc., addressed by Victorian pioneers to His Excellency Charles Joseph La Trobe, Esq., Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Victoria*, Melbourne: Published for the Trustees of the Public Library by Robt. S. Brain, Government Printer, 1898 (digitised versions accessible via C J La Trobe Society and State Library Victoria websites).

Biographical notes

AITKEN, John (1792?-1858), pioneer sheep breeder and grazier; first settler 1836 in the Gisborne-Sunbury district at *Mount Aitken*. Bought *Mount Elephant* No.2 run, west of Geelong in 1852. Mentioned settlers who followed in Batman's footsteps to Port Phillip. Described his encounter with and fear of Mount Macedon Aboriginal people. Letter no.41, pp.206-208.

ARMYTAGE, George (1795-1862), grazier and landholder, held *Ingleby* station, near Winchelsea on the death in 1842 of his brother Thomas who arrived from Van Diemen's Land in 1836. It was Thomas' son who searched for Gellibrand and Hesse without success, then discovered Lake Colac, Buninyong, and the Stony Rises. Among numerous substantial runs and houses, George Armytage built the *Hermitage*, Newtown, Geelong in 1851. Letter no.21, pp.138-141.

BELL, Edward (1814-1871), overlander and grazier, later La Trobe's private secretary before becoming a Commissioner of Crown Lands, arrived Sydney 1839. Overlanded to Port Phillip with James Watson and Alexander McLean Hunter. After arrival at Melbourne, held *Mimamiluke* run on the Broken and Devil's Rivers near Eildon in 1841. Later in 1841, settled *Englefield* station on Glenelg River, taking up *Green Hills* station near Mount Rouse in 1846. Described 'troublesome' episodes with Aboriginal people when his cattle were speared. Private Secretary and aide-de-camp to La Trobe 1851-1853. Letter no.34, pp.168-182.

BLAIR, James (1813-1889), police magistrate, arrived Sydney from Ireland 1835. Became police magistrate at Portland Bay in 1840, and Commissioner of Crown Lands for Portland Bay District 1843-1846. He bought *Clunie*, near Harrow 1844, and he owned other property in the district. Noted that he found 'the natives aggressive'. Director Union Bank 1846 and Bank of Victoria 1863-66. Letter no.32, pp.163-165.

CAMPBELL, Archibald Macarthur (1817-1897), pastoralist, arrived Port Phillip from Glasgow 1841. Took *Ganawarra* run on Murray River near Koondrook 1844-1855, and in 1850s held other properties in western Victoria. Describes Aboriginal aggression and his own calm reactions. Letter no.24, pp.143-145.

CAMPBELL, Colin (1817-1903), grazier at *Mount Cole* and *Buangor* near Ararat from 1840. Educationist, Anglican priest. Took a deep interest in culture, education and welfare of the Aboriginal people, employing them on his properties. Opposed anti-Chinese hysteria in late 1850s. Appointed 1853 to inaugural council of University of Melbourne. Letter no.44, pp.222-227.

CARFRAE, John (1821-1885), pastoralist, held *Ledcourt*, oldest pastoral residence in the Stawell region from 1848-1858. La Trobe visited in March 1850 and sketched the house. He apologised to La Trobe for lack information since he had lived on the station for only five years and knew little of its history. Appears only in 1898 edition. Letter no.5, pp.10-11.

CHIRNSIDE, Thomas (1815-1887), grazier, arrived Adelaide with brother Andrew in 1839, reaching Sydney two months later. Overlanded cattle to Adelaide. Took *Point Cooke* (later Point Cook) sheep run (1852), *Loddon* run and *Mount William* station (both in 1842). They went on to acquire numerous other properties including *Mokanger*, *Victoria Lagoon* in the Grampians, *Kenilworth South*, *Wardy Yallock*, *Curnong*, *Mount Elephant*, *Wyndham* (Werribee) and *Carranballac* (near Skipton). Letter from Thomas discussed characteristics of settlers in the different colonies. Described Port Phillip as 'the Eden of the colonies'. Letter no.48, pp.233-238.

CLARKE, William John Turner (1805-1874), known as 'Big' Clarke, pastoralist. Took up *Station Peak* in the You Yangs between Melbourne and Geelong, and some of the Little River area early in 1837. Moved to Dowling Forest near Ballarat and then to the Pyrenees. Owned *Woodlands* on Wimmera River from 1841, not making his home in Port Phillip until 1850. Described hostility of the Aboriginal people. Letter no.33, pp.165-167.

CLOW, James (Rev.) (1790-1861), arrived Port Phillip from Scotland 1837. Held first Presbyterian service in what was later Melbourne. Assisted first resident Presbyterian minister Rev. James Forbes. Settled *Corhanuarrabul* run, Woivurrung name for Mount Dandenong, 1838. Homestead *Tirhatuan* on Narre Warren Creek. Described settlement of area, and earthquake felt at Dandenong. Considered atrocities by Aboriginal people would not have 'been committed without grievous provocation'. He and his wife moved to *Oakhill* on Bellarine Peninsula near Queenscliff in 1855. Letter no.15, pp.100-107.

CLOW, James Maxwell (1820-1894), son of Rev. James Clow, grazier, occupied fine sheep country at *Balerook*, near Nhill in the Wimmera district, from April to October 1847, where he experienced 'a friendly reception from the Aborigines of this isolated tract' until an accidental shooting some months later. Letter no.16, pp.107-108. Owing to ongoing scarcity of water at *Balerook*, he explored into the desert in search of pastoral country. Most of Wimmera district settled before his arrival. Took up a licence in November 1847 to graze sheep on remote *Pine Plains* station, north of Lake Alacutya on southern edge of the Mallee, now part of Wyperfeld National Park. Described murder by tribesmen of 'Geordie', Aboriginal leader, on the station. Letter no.17, pp.108-114.

DANA, Henry Edward Pulteney (1820-1852), Commandant, Native Police Corps 1842-1853. Held *Nangeela* on Glenelg River north of Casterton 1840-1844. In 1842, La Trobe offered him the role of organising a corps of Aboriginal police. This document is a commendation of Dana and the Native Police Corps, written by C.J. La Trobe after Dana's sudden death on 24 November 1852. Letter no.53, pp.266-269.

- DAVENPORT, *Frances Anna* (1823?-1897), daughter of Charles Wightman Sievwright (1800-1855), Assistant Protector of Aborigines. Mrs Davenport's document 'Specimens of the language of the Barrabool tribe and list of members of the tribe, collected about 1842' appears only in the 1898 edition, pp.307-311.
- DRYDEN, *Edward* (1808-1886), grazier at Mount Macedon, one the first settlers in region in 1839 with Charles Peters. *Dryden's Station* was marked to the west of Diogenes Mount (Hanging Rock) on Hoddle's map of 1844. Dryden and Peters divided their property in 1840s; Dryden named his newly formed station *Newham*, after which the settlement near Hanging Rock was named. Letter no.8, pp.20-21.
- DWYER, *Henry* (fl. 1841-1855), settled *Victoria Valley* run near Dunkeld in Grampians in 1841. Built a slab hut, later replaced by *Barra Head* homestead. Dwyer held run until 1855. Cryptic very short letter describing problems in raising sheep and encounters with Aboriginal people. Appears only in 1898 edition. Letter no.22, p.141.
- FAITHFULL, *George* (1814-1855), first settler in 1838 of *Bontherambo* on the Oxley Plains (Wangaratta). Wrote of a battle with Aboriginal people near Benalla in 1838 with deaths on both sides. Letter no.27, pp.150-154.
- FISHER, *David* (1801-1879), grazier and pioneer of Geelong, ran his flocks over the future site of the city, while managing the Derwent Company for the Mercer brothers. By March 1837, when Governor Bourke arrived on a tour of inspection, had built 'the first house worthy of the name' on land by Barwon River. In 1850, he subdivided part of William Robertson's *Roslin* estate into 58 allotments, creating village of Ceres. Letter no.6, pp.11-19.
- FOSTER, *John Leslie Fitzgerald Vesey* (1818-1900), civil servant, landowner and author, arrived Port Phillip from Dublin and Sydney in 1841. In 1844, took sheep to *Natte Yallock* on Avoca River in Victoria's central highlands; went into partnership with his cousin, William Stawell, on neighbouring property, *Ratherscar* 1847-1850. Represented Port Phillip in New South Wales Legislative Council 1846-48 and 1849-50. He served as Colonial Secretary under La Trobe 1853-May 1854, and then acted as administrator of the colony until Governor Sir Charles Hotham arrived in June. His letter listed various fellow pastoralists on the Avoca, and he had no trouble with the Aboriginal people. Letter no.36, pp.185-186.
- FYANS, *Foster* (1790-1870), first Police Magistrate, Geelong, settled 1837 at Fyansford at junction of the Barwon and Moorabool rivers. Sent by La Trobe in 1840 to Portland Bay District as Commissioner of Crown Lands; resumed as Police Magistrate, Geelong 1849. Reported on clashes between settlers and Aboriginal people, predicting 'the race will be extinct in 20 years or less'. Letter no.18, pp.114-129.
- GARDINER, *John* (1798-1878), overlander (1836 with Hepburn and Hawdon) and pastoralist, established in 1837 the large station *Brushy Park* at Mooroolbark on the Yarra. Returned to England 1853. Brief biographical note about him by C. J. La Trobe. Letter no.25, p.146.
- GELLIBRAND, *Joseph Tice* (1786-1837), pastoralist and explorer. 'Memorandum of a Trip to Port Phillip' in 1836: incomplete text in 1898 edition (held at State Library Victoria); complete text in new edition (held in Mitchell Library). Letter no.56, pp.279-301.
- GRIMES, *Edward* (1772-1858), pastoralist, took up *Benalla* pastoral run in 1842. Auditor-General of Victoria 1853-1855. His very brief letter lists eleven names of settlers who could be followed up for information. Appears only in 1898 edition. Letter no.45, p.227.
- HALL, *Charles Browning* (1817?-), first settler of Hall's Gap, Grampians 1841; followed Mitchell's route northwards, establishing a station *La Rose* near Lexington 1841 and *Mokepilly* east of Grampians 1842; occupied *Glenmona* run near Clunes 1842-1852. Detailed account of Aboriginal lifestyle; shared cordial relations. Appointed Assistant Commissioner of the Goldfields at Castlemaine. Letter no.43, pp.210-222.
- HART, *John* (1809-1873), sea captain, trader and politician, overlanded several times from Portland Bay to Adelaide via Kangaroo Island, and returned by sea. Numerous sealing expeditions; explored Darling River. Entered South Australian Legislative Council 1851, and went on to be Premier three times. Letter no.58, pp.302-306.
- HENTY, *Stephen George* (1811-1872), arrived at Portland from Swan River Settlement June 1836. Met Major Mitchell, explorer, at Portland 29 August 1836. In his letter, described settling *Merino Downs* run August 1837, and soon stations adjoining *Merino Downs*, *Sandford* and *Connell's Run*. Stephen Henty was the first white man to visit the Blue Lake, Mount Gambier. Letter no.52, pp.260-265.
- HEPBURN, *John* (1800-1860), overlander and pastoralist. In partnership with John Gardiner and Joseph Hawdon, made overland journey to Port Phillip from New South Wales in 1836 with sheep, cattle and horses. Took *Smeaton Hill* run near Creswick in West Coliban district in 1838. He built *Smeaton House* 1849-50, and was the area's largest landowner. He recounted numerous meetings with Aboriginal people. Letter no.12, pp.43-64.
- HUTTON, *Charles* (1808-1879), pastoralist, overlanded to Port Phillip 1838; took *Campaspe Plains* run near Heathcote 1840; established *East Strathdownie* run on Glenelg River near South Australian border 1845. In his opinion, influenza responsible for diminution of Aboriginal people on his run. Letter no.40, pp.204-206.
- JAMIESON, *Hugh* (1817-1887), pastoralist, arrived Port Phillip with brothers 1839; settled at Tallarook near Seymour 1840; later *Vale of Tempe* (later *Tarcomb*) cattle run nearby. Ran with his brother *Yerre-Yerre*, (*Mildura Station* from 1858) on River Murray 1847-1878. In his letter, addressed to Bishop Charles Perry, gives a full account (typical of contemporary views) of Aboriginal people as a rapidly disappearing race. Letter no.54, pp.269-275.
- JAMIESON, *Robert* (1812-1894), pastoralist, arrived Port Phillip 1838. After overlanding to Sydney to conclude arrangements, settled *Jamieson's Run* at Cape Schanck 1839, before exploring and taking up *Yallock*, in 1839, later *Tobin Yallock*, now Lang Lang on Westernport 1839-1845. Other runs he held were *Eumeralla*, near Macarthur in Western District, and *Stoney Point* on Mount Emu Creek near Darlington. Worked well with Aboriginal people before going to *Yallock* where conflict with them caused much damage. Letter no.30, pp.159-160.
- LEARMONTH, *Thomas* (1818-1903), and his brother, Somerville Livingstone Learmonth (1819-1878), pastoralists, brought sheep in 1837 from Van Diemen's Land, occupied land at Inverleigh, and then at *Buninyong*. Settled at *Erildown* on the north of Lake Burrumbeet in 1838, renowned for merino sheep and fine homestead. They named Mount Elephant and Mount Misery. Included map of district with letter to La Trobe. Thomas considered rapid disappearance of Aboriginal people due to the 'vices introduced by the white man', and to the change in their traditional way of life. Letter no.11, pp.37-43.
- MACKAY, *Dr George Edward* (1811-1888), pastoralist, settled first at *Myrthee*, then at *Whorouly* on the Ovens River. Purchased *Traravinee* run near Wangaratta 1853. Attacked by armed Aboriginal men in 1840; servant killed; buildings, crops destroyed; thousands of cattle and 4 horses killed. Letter no.37, pp.186-188.
- MANIFOLD, *Thomas* (1809-1875), landed sheep at Point Henry from Van Diemen's Land 1838. With brothers John and Peter, settled on Moorabool River at Geelong, before taking up *Purumbete* (Camperdown), raising cattle, sheep and horses. Thomas bought *Grasmere* on Merri River near Warrnambool 1844. Unfavourable attitude to Indigenous people. Letter no.20, pp.135-137.

- McLEOD, *John Norman* (1816–1886), arrived with sheep at Indented Head, Port Phillip from Van Diemen's land 1837; established pastoral runs *Borhoneyghurk* on the Moorabool River, north of Geelong, and *Moreep* near Steiglitz. About 1849, McLeod sold these runs; purchased *Tahara* and *Winninburn* stations on the Wannon River between Merino and Coleraine. These he sold, purchasing *Castlemaddie* near Portland 1853. Letter no.1, pp.1–3.
- McMILLAN, *Angus* (1810–1865), explorer and pastoralist, made three journeys through Gippsland bush to open up land for pastoral settlement from Port Albert to Mitchell River. The first of these is documented here as 'Memorandum of Trip by A. McMillan, from Maneroo District, in the year 1839, to the South-West of that District, towards the Sea-Coast, in Search of New Country'. He relied on Omeo black trackers to find cattle trails to Port Albert. He settled *Bushy Park* cattle run on the Avon River north of Maffra in 1840 where he reported two attacks by local Aboriginal people in his first year. Letter no.51, pp.254–259.
- MERCER, *George Duncan* (1814–1884), grazier, one of a family of brothers, sons of George Mercer, partner in Port Phillip Association, arrived Port Phillip from Van Diemen's Land 1838. Initially took up runs on Leigh River. After demise of Port Phillip Association and its successor the Derwent Company, took over in 1841–1842 some properties, including *Weatherboard* station, near Geelong, and *Mount Mercer* on Yarrowee River. Observed the Aboriginal people and found them 'occasionally troublesome'. Letter no.28, pp.154–157.
- MOLLISON, *William Thomas* (1816–1886), pastoralist, followed his brother Alexander Fullarton Mollison to Port Phillip 1836; by 1837, they had squatted on the Coliban River grazing their cattle between Mount Macedon and Mount Alexander. Seven stations comprised their vast run by 1838, including *Pyalong* near Kilmore. Assistant Protector Parker occupied their *Loddon* station as a reserve for Aboriginal people. Letter no.35, pp.182–185.
- MURRAY, *Hugh* (1814–1869), grazier, Colac district's first permanent white settler, arrived in Colac from Van Diemen's Land with sheep in 1837, when he was 23. He settled a run of 6,000 acres on the shores of Lake Corangamite where he built his fine homestead *Borongarook* in 1840. Murray mentioned sheep-stealing of Colac tribe of Aboriginal people. Letter no.2, pp.3–5.
- PATTERSON, *John Hunter* (1810–1859), took up *Greenhill* station, Bacchus Marsh district 1836. Held *Tourbouric* (Toorboorac) settlement on the Campaspe Plains from 1843. *Moorabee* taken up in 1851. Sold his tuition to diggers on adjacent Heathcote goldfield. He found the Aboriginal people hostile, all his efforts to improve their condition unsuccessful. Letter no.3, pp.5–7.
- PYKE, *Thomas Henry* (1808–1861), landholder, arrived from England 1838; took over *Upper Werribee* run, Ballan, and purchased *Morton Plains* station in Wimmera in 1850; house destroyed by fire 1854. During the gold rush, sold mutton to diggers. Favourably disposed to Aboriginal people. Letter no.7, pp.19–20.
- RAYMOND, *William Odell* (c.1810–1859), sheep and cattle grazier, took *Stratford* run on Avon River and *Strathfieldsaye* on the banks of Lake Wellington, both in Gippsland. Relied on Aboriginal people on exploratory journey in 1842 through Gippsland to Western Port. Letter no.19, pp.129–134.
- ROBERTSON, *John George* (1803–1863), grazier, botanist and naturalist, settled *Wando Vale* near Casterton in 1840, a property adjoining *Muntham*, a run taken up by the Henty brothers in 1837, and occupied by Edward Henty. *Dergholm* and *Roseneath* stations taken up by Robertson 1841. Letter no.9, pp.22–35.
- ROSE, *Philip Davis* (fl. 1842–1852), grazier, took up *Rosebrook* station 1842 on north side of the Grampians, with a view to Rose's Gap which was named after him., holding it for ten years. Lengthy description of his interaction with Aboriginal people. Letter no.26, pp.146–150.
- SHERARD, *Charles Wale* (1820–1889), Creswick Creek, spent two years 1841–1843 in Jamieson's run at Westernport, before moving to various areas in Port Phillip. He was at Creswick's Creek (named Creswick from 1858) near Ballarat as an actuary from 1870. He gave a detailed list of early settlers in a brief letter to La Trobe. Described settlement of country on road to Melbourne from eastern head of Western Port Bay. Appears only in 1898 edition. Letter no.10, pp.36–37.
- SIMSON, *Hector Norman* (1820–1880), landholder, arrived Melbourne 1839; settled *Charlotte Plains* run on the Loddon River with his brothers. They squatted along the Loddon River and Deep Creek, increasing their holdings enormously — now covering sites of the towns Maryborough, Carisbrook, Bet Bet, Timor, Havelock, Laanecoorie, with *Castlemaine* on its east boundary. Found the Aboriginal people 'very troublesome, constantly taking sheep in large lots by force from the shepherds'. Letter no.4, pp.7–10.
- SNODGRASS, *Peter* (1817–1867), reckless and hard-riding squatter, arrived from Sydney in 1837. Took up *Doogalook* station, on Muddy Creek west of Yea. He challenged two Melbourne men to duels: William Ryrie on New Year's Day 1840, and Redmond Barry in August 1841. In both cases, Snodgrass fired too soon, his opponents nobly firing into the air. Indicated in his letter to La Trobe his deep sympathy for the plight of the Aboriginal people. Letter no.42, pp.208–209.
- SPLATT, *William Francis* (1810–1893), merchant, arrived with brothers at Port Phillip 1840–1841 and established business as Splatt Brothers. A family of land speculators in Wimmera, Mallee and north-east Victoria. Letter no.29, pp.157–158.
- STURT, *Evelyn Pitfield* (1816–1885), brother of explorer Charles Sturt, arrived Sydney 1836. In 1837, aged 21, he was appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands for the huge Murrumbidgee District. Resigned 1839, overlanding sheep to Adelaide, before taking up the *Compton* run at Mount Gambier. Went to Melbourne 1849, becoming Superintendent of Melbourne and County of Bourke Police in 1850, and Police Magistrate 1853–1878. His long, philosophical document describes the beauty of the country he traversed. Letter no.49, pp.238–250.
- TAYLOR, *William* (1818–1903), grazier, arrived Port Phillip 1840. With a friend, squatted on land along Moorabool River. Settled first at *Longerenong* in the Wimmera until they subdivided it four years later, and selling to the Wilson brothers. In 1846, he bought *Overnewton* run on the Keilor Plains. His letter to La Trobe took the form of a 'Statement of Progress of the Settlement of that portion of the Wimmera District around and beyond Mount Zero, during 1843–46'. Letter no.38, pp.189–192.
- TEMPLETON, *John* (1836–1870), overlanded aged 18 months with his mother, Janet Templeton, to the *Seven Creeks* run, near present-day Euroa, where they remained until 1843. He later took *Hurdle Creek* near Myrtleford. Despite address of his letter to La Trobe, he never held land at Kyneton. Letter no.46, pp.228–229.
- THOMAS, *William* (1791–1867), Protector of Aborigines, sent to La Trobe his 'Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix' describing their form of government, daily life, marriage rites. Listing of men composing the Native Police Corps, January 1843. Statistics relating to Aboriginal population. Letter no.13, pp.65–83. His second letter describes Aboriginal traditions, ceremonies and superstitions. Arrangement of native encampment. Fight between the Barrabool and Buninyong tribes. Letter no.14, pp.84–100.

- THOMSON, Dr Alexander (1800-1866), surgeon, arrived Port Phillip March 1836 and settled in the village on the Yarra, preceding John Batman by two months. Met first clergyman to visit Wesleyan Rev. Joseph Orton. Moved to Geelong 1836. Built his house *Kardinia* on the Barwon River at Belmont 1837. Deplored the decrease in Aboriginal population. Letter no.50, pp.250-253.
- THOMSON, Alfred Taddy (1818?-1895), Yally-y-Poora station, Fiery Creek near Streatham 1841-1854. He did not enjoy the privations of the squatting life, and retired to London in 1854, acting as selector of pictures for the National Gallery of Victoria for more than twenty years. Letter no.47, pp.229-233.
- TYERS, Charles James (1806-1870), surveyor, magistrate and Commissioner of Crown Lands for Gippsland; appointed surveyor in charge of the Portland district 1841. He laid out the town and completed a marine survey of the bay. He attempted to find a route to Port Albert in 1843; succeeded by sea 1844. Spent 31 years in the Port Phillip District. Letter no.39, pp.193-204.
- WEDGE, Charles (1810-1895), surveyor, nephew of surveyor John Helder Wedge, was in Port Phillip establishing the Werribbee run for his father Edward Davy Wedge in 1836. Parents and sister were swept away and drowned in 1852 flood of the Werribbee River. Charles Wedge was brutal in his responses to sheep stealing and the killing of many Indigenous people. Letter no.31, pp.161-163.
- WINTER, Thomas (fl. 1840s), merchant in Hobart, came to Port Phillip in 1843 to check on his pastoral investments with pastoralist William Forlonge in the two localities of Pigeon Ponds and Chetwynd on the Glenelg River, in the far west of the Port Phillip District. Plagued by drought and the depression of the 1840s, the venture failed. Forlonge was bankrupted, and Winter was reported to have lost his £9,000 investment. Pessimistic about future of the Aboriginal people. Letter no.55, pp.275-279.
- YOUNG, Sir Henry Edward Fox (1808-1870), Governor of South Australia 1848-1861; enthusiast for development of river navigation on the Murray. Describes voyage on the *Lady Augusta* from Swan Hill in September 1853. Letter no.23, pp.142-143.

Endnotes

- 1 The *Golden Age* actually sailed from Melbourne on the evening of 5 May 1854. *Argus*, 6 May 1854.
- 2 Dianne Reilly (ed.), *Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes 1839-1854*, Yarra Glen, Vic.: Tarcoola Press, State Library of Victoria and Boz Publishing, 2006, p.226, 5 May 1854.
- 3 Referred to in La Trobe's Letter to James Graham (included in preface to first edition of *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*) regarding the return of the letters to Melbourne.
- 4 It is established that this privately printed flyer was despatched on three particular dates: a few on each of 26 and 27 July, and most on 29 July 1853. Ref. C.E. Sayers Preface to new edition (see endnote 20) p. xii.
- 5 Thomas Francis Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers: a series of papers on the early occupation of the colony, the Aborigines, etc., addressed by the Victorian pioneers to His Excellency Charles Joseph La Trobe, Esq.*, Melbourne: Trustees of the Public Library, 1898, p.42.
- 6 Ibid, Preface, p. v.
- 7 Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: the making of a governor*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, p.27.
- 8 Reilly Drury, pp.23-31; John Barnes, 'A Moravian "Among the Heathen": La Trobe and the Aboriginal people', *La Trobeana*, vol.16, no.1, March 2017, pp.14-24.
- 9 Reilly Drury, pp.124-126; John Barnes, *La Trobe: traveller, writer, governor*, Canberra: Halstead Press, in association with State Library Victoria and La Trobe University, 2017, p.232.
- 10 Charles Joseph La Trobe, Notes on Early Settlement, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 10749.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Charles Joseph La Trobe, 'Australian Notes 1839-1854; Memoranda of Journeys, Excursions and Absences, 24 March 1839-5 May 1854', Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, H6944.
- 13 Dianne Reilly (ed.), *Charles Joseph La Trobe: Australian Notes 1839-1854*, Yarra Glen, Vic.: Tarcoola Press, State Library of Victoria and Boz Publishing, 2006.
- 14 La Trobe to James Graham, 19 March 1872, in L.J. Blake, ed. *Letters of Charles Joseph La Trobe*, Melbourne: Government of Victoria, 1975, p.77.
- 15 Blake, op. cit., p.67.
- 16 Ibid (included in preface to the first edition of the *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p. v).
- 17 Mrs Frances Davenport was the eldest child of Charles Wightman Sievwright (1800-1855), Assistant Protector of Aborigines, with responsibility (from 1838 until his dismissal in 1845) for the whole of what would later become the Western District of Victoria.
- 18 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, Preface, p. vi.
- 19 C.E. Sayers, *David Syme: a life*, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1965.
- 20 Thomas Francis Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers: a series of papers on the early occupation of the colony, the Aborigines, etc.* edited with an introduction and notes by C.E Sayers, Melbourne: Heinemann, 1969 (Currey O'Neil, 1983), p. xi.
- 21 'Memorandum of a trip to Port Phillip', Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS8614.
- 22 Title given to Buckley by Marcus Clarke in his *Old Tales of a New Country* (Melbourne: Mason, Firth and McCutcheon, 1871), previously published in the *Australasian* newspaper.
- 23 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p.288.
- 24 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* (1969), p.32.
- 25 'QueenscliffStreetNames', Bellarine Historical Society Inc., <http://zades.com.au/ganddd/index.php/bellpen/towns2/qucliff/qustreet> (accessed 22 January 2018).

- 26 P. C. James, 'Gellibrand, Joseph Tice (1792–1837)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 22 January 2018).
- 27 Paul Michael F. Donovan, Ian D. Clark and Fred Cahir, 'The Remarkable Disappearance of Messrs Gellibrand and Hesse': what really happened in 1837? A re-examination of the historical evidence', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol.87, no.2, December 2016, pp. 278–297.
- 28 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* (1969), p.31.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp28–29.
- 30 Maggie Black, *Up Came a Squatter: Niel Black of Glenormiston, 1839–1880*, Sydney: NewSouth Publishing in association with State Library Victoria, 2016, pp.149, 170; Maggie MacKellar, *Strangers in a Foreign Land: the journal of Niel Black and other voices from the Western District*, Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2008, p.25.
- 31 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p.43.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p.104.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p.137.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p.124.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.56.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p.59.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p.163.
- 38 Ian D Clark, *Scars in the Landscape: a register of massacre sites in Western Victoria 1803–1859*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1995, pp.157–158.
- 39 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p.4.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p.166.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p.209.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p.177.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p.177–178.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p.27.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p.276.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Ibid.*, p.277.
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- 49 *Ibid.*, pp.277–278.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p.278.
- 51 Bain Attwood, *Possession; Batman's treaty and the matter of history*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009, p.52.
- 52 James Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2008, p.246.
- 53 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p.278.
- 54 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p.231.
- 55 D.J. Mulvaney, 'Thomas, William (1793–1867)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967, Vol.2, pp.518–519.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p.519.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 Marguerita Stephens (ed.), *The Journal of William Thomas: Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip & Guardian of the Aborigines of Victoria 1839 to 1867*, Melbourne: Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, 2014. 4 vols.
- 59 'Aboriginal History of Yarra', www.aboriginalhistoryofyarra.co.au/5-billibellary (accessed 8 January 2018).
- 60 *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p.70.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p.93.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p.97.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p.78. Refers to St Matthew's Gospel, 7.5: 'Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote [speck] out of the brother's eye' (King James Version).
- 64 *Ibid.*, p.100.
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- 66 Marie Fels, 'Native Police Corps', *Encyclopedia of Melbourne Online*, www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM01048b.htm (accessed 12 January 2018).
- 67 *Ibid.*
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- 69 *Ibid.*, p.267.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p.268.
- 71 Richard Zachariah, *The Vanished Land: disappearing dynasties of Victoria's Western District*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2017.
- 72 Tony Marshall, 'The Australian Manuscripts Collection', *La Trobe Library Journal*, vol.12, nos.47 & 48, 1991, p.76.

The Haunting Story of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner

By Dr Clare Land

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In 1841, only seven years after the colonial occupation of the Port Phillip District began, Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, two Palawa — Indigenous people from Trouwanna/Van Diemen's Land — were convicted of the murder of two whale-hunters in the Western Port area. On 20 January 1842 they became the first people hanged in Melbourne.

This event is now commemorated at the site of their execution in Franklin Street, Melbourne, by a permanent public artwork, *Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner*. This work, by artists Brook Andrew and Trent Walter, speaks also of Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner, who were tried with Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, and of another countryman, Probelatenner.¹ This permanent public commemoration came after ten years of lobbying by the Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner Commemoration Committee. This community group, led by long-time activist Joseph Toscano, wanted the men's stories honoured as well as permanently elevated in mainstream public consciousness.

That two Palawa were executed in the earliest years of Victoria's colonial history is as haunting as it is illustrative of its colonisation. Scarcely 100 Palawa had escaped extermination in the Black War of the 1820s in Van Diemen's Land; the death of two of these survivors in a public hanging was devastating. It is also a clear reminder to many of Melbourne's current-day inhabitants that Palawa and colonists from Van Diemen's Land were deeply involved in key events of Melbourne's and Port Phillip's founding. Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner's time in the settlement was extraordinary yet to date it has not attracted the sustained, fully contextualised academic focus it deserves.

A history of histories

This article is based on research conducted for the City of Melbourne during the process which led to its decision to commission the artwork commemorating Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner and the stories connected with them. There must have been many questions and concerns for the councillors making this



Brooke Andrew and Trent Walter, artists
Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, 2016
 Bluestone, aluminium, steel
 City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection
 Located corner of Franklin and Victoria Streets, Melbourne

decision, not least because they had to make it in the context of the history wars. To the key question, ‘Was this particular episode in Melbourne’s early history significant enough to be singled out by the City of Melbourne for public commemoration?’, the booklet *Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner: the involvement of Aboriginal people from Tasmania in key events of early Melbourne*² answers a resounding ‘yes’. This was established through historiographical analysis of whether there was a sustained view over time in cultural and historical treatments of Melbourne’s history from the nineteenth century to the present that the execution of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner was historically significant.

In relation to the question that captures the imagination of interested observers — that of the Palawas’ motive for the series of raids on settlers’ huts and the killing of the two whale-hunters during a six-week period in late 1841 — the booklet highlighted two key elements, the second of which was a completely new interpretation. Firstly, the booklet drew attention to the highly significant fact that Tunnerminnerwait, Maulboyheenner, Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner embarked on the fateful expedition that led to the hanging immediately after Tunnerminnerwait returned from a journey of several months witnessing testimony about frontier violence in the Western District.³ Secondly, it introduced to the story for the first time a new element: the involvement of a sixth person, Pyterruner’s husband Probelattener. Probelattener is evoked by the sixth brightly coloured form in the artwork *Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner*.

Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner in Port Phillip

Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner lived during the most horrific periods of Tasmanian and Victorian colonisation. The treatment of Aboriginal people in Van Diemen’s Land during their lifetime was characterised by ‘psychopathic sadism’ and ‘punitive man hunts’.⁴ The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre records that the 1803 Indigenous population was perhaps 4,000 people:

By 1860, only 15 of the tribal people were left alive, herded together in concentration camps, first at Wybalenna on Flinders Island and finally at Oyster Cove, in the south of mainland Tasmania. About a dozen women escaped the camps. Most of these had been captured to work for British sealers living in tiny enclaves in the Furneaux island group off the north east tip of Tasmania. There they established a cohesive and self-sufficient family based community from whom most of today’s Aboriginal population descend. Two other Aboriginal women, one of them the sole survivor of Oyster Cove, were married to European men on the Tasmanian mainland; their families complete our community. None of the Aboriginal men survived.⁵

During Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner’s time in Melbourne, a frenzy

of land selection had just been unleashed, and the impact on Aboriginal people was catastrophic. As James Boyce observes: 'Port Phillip had become such a terrible place for Aborigines that within fifteen years of the founding of Melbourne almost all of them were dead. This does not diminish (but rather magnifies) the extraordinary achievement of those who somehow survived the onslaught'.⁶

But what brought Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner to Melbourne? Along with Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner they were part of a group of seventeen Palawa and Kurna who came to Port Phillip from Van Diemen's Land in 1839, sixteen brought by George Augustus Robinson.⁷ All the Palawa were 'survivors of the notorious Black Wars'.⁸ During the 'Black War' Robinson, who had attained the title 'Protector of the Aborigines', travelled around Van Diemen's Land on a so-called 'friendly mission' to arrange the expulsion of all the Aboriginal people from the main island to the smaller offshore Flinders Island in Bass Strait. As a method of 'protection', Robinson's experiment failed, resulting in a rapid and disturbing death rate at the Wybalenna mission established there. However, for the work of organising the expulsion, Robinson had already been richly rewarded in wages and land. In late 1838 he was appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines in the District of Port Phillip, a position he held until 1849. As soon as Robinson's 'friendly mission' was accomplished and the mainland of Van Diemen's Land was almost entirely emptied of Aboriginal people, the value of land in Van Diemen's Land increased dramatically.⁹ Soon, Robinson proposed to bring all eighty-nine surviving Palawa from Wybalenna to Port Phillip.

Authorities in Van Diemen's Land were enthusiastic about the remaining Aboriginal people of Van Diemen's Land being taken to Port Phillip. Those in New South Wales were not.¹⁰ Robinson said they were civilised and peaceful,¹¹ and argued that they would be 'most useful auxiliaries in conciliating the natives of Australia'.¹² However, Planobeena, at the time of her emancipation from sealers, had been known to say that 'she would teach the black fellow to kill plenty of white men'.¹³ The fact that she was the sister of the formidable resistance fighter Eumarrah has been highlighted in support of the theory that a similar spirit of resistance also motivated Planobeena.

Eventually Robinson gained permission to bring 'one family' with him to Port Phillip. However, Robinson interpreted the notion of family broadly, handpicking those he wanted to bring. Governor Gipps only reluctantly supplied

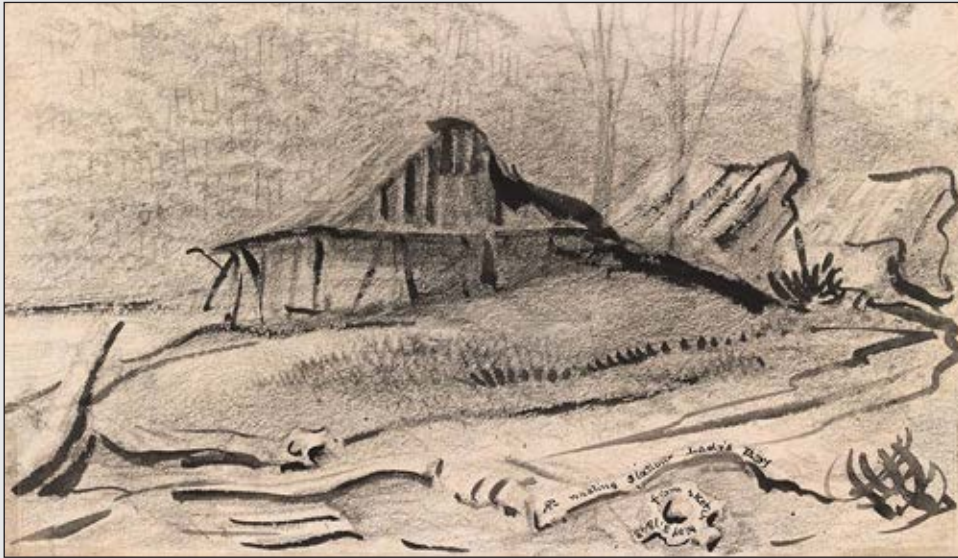
Robinson with rations for four of the group he brought to Melbourne.

The short time between March 1839 and mid-1842 that these sixteen Aboriginal people spent in Melbourne and the wider colony was extraordinarily eventful. By the end of that period five of the group, including Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, were dead, and half the group had returned to Van Diemen's Land when Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner were sent back to Flinders Island in July 1842 following their trial. Wooraddy, David Bruny, Water and Mary Ann Arthur returned with Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner. Tragically, Wooraddy (Truganini's husband) died en route. Another countryman, John Allen, returned then too; he had come to Port Phillip with John Batman, who had himself since died.¹⁴ At least two of the group whom Robinson had brought over from Van Diemen's Land remained in the Port Phillip District after 1842: Peter Brune and Johnny Franklin.¹⁵ However Peter Brune died in 1843 and was buried in the grounds of Robinson's house in present-day Prahran, along with Rebecca who died in 1841.¹⁶ More research would be needed to get clearer information on the fate of each person in that group of fifteen.¹⁷

Those that did make it back to Flinders Island were later influential in orchestrating the earliest known Aboriginal petition to the British Sovereign.¹⁸ Arthur was the leading signatory, and David Bruny and Jack Allan also signed the petition.¹⁹ As Henry Reynolds argues: 'The petitioners of 1846 gave voice to a political tradition which was carried forward by the community on the Bass Strait Islands... [and] re-emerged in the land rights movement of the last generation. The continuity of people, belief and rhetoric is striking'.²⁰

Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner at large

During their time in Melbourne, the Palawa gradually gained a degree of independence from Robinson and absconded frequently from his supervision.²¹ However, they remained very much associated with Robinson's household, even after Robinson was 'relieved' of responsibility for them in October 1840.²² Therefore it did not reflect well on Robinson when Tunnerminnerwait, Maulboyheenner, Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner hit the press having left Melbourne and embarked on a series of raids of settlers' huts, and killed two whale-hunters. They had set out towards the Dandenong-Western Port area in August-September 1841.²³ There was nothing eventful about the first few weeks of their



Robert Russell, 1808-1900, artist
Whaling station Lady's Bay, Wilsons Promontory, 1843
 Pastel and ink on paper
 Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H2007.50/1

journey, but after their first raid the daring group managed for about six weeks to evade the large and numerous parties that were sent out to catch them. When they were eventually caught it was discovered that they had amassed a significant arsenal.²⁴

Why did they do it?

Why did Tunnerminnerwait, Planobeena, Maulboyheenner, Truganini and Pyterruner embark on their fateful journey into Western Port? Several historians have addressed this question. Palawa historian Patsy Cameron believes that their purpose in setting out from Melbourne was to head home; to journey to Victoria's southernmost promontory and then across Bass Strait.²⁵ Vivienne Rae-Ellis suggests that their apparent decision to abscond from Melbourne reflected their disenchantment with their 'Protector', George Augustus Robinson.²⁶ Robert Cox concluded that the group decided to launch 'mayhem against whites'.²⁷ Leonie Stevens' work contains evidence that suggests they may at times have been interested in taking up opportunities to forge an independent existence away from Melbourne.²⁸

Stevens also suggests, convincingly, that there were many good reasons for the group to leave Melbourne and to burn settlers' huts and take up arms. After all, the journey into the bush of Tunnerminnerwait, Maulboyheenner, Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner and their raids against settlers occurred during one of the most intense periods of frontier violence

in the history of the Port Phillip District. Their activities were very similar to the forms of resistance employed by Aboriginal people at that time in all areas of what is now Victoria, including Geelong, the Western District, Gippsland, Swan Hill and along the Murray and Goulburn Rivers, and to forms of resistance employed back in Van Diemen's Land. Estimates of the number of Aboriginal people in Victoria murdered by Europeans around 1835-1850 range from a minimum of 400 to around 2,000.²⁹ Aboriginal people allegedly killed at least eight colonists in the Western District between 1836 and mid-1837.³⁰ Massacre and murder was regularly occurring in all districts prior to and following the Palawas' raids, as discussed by various historians and noted by the Governor of the day.³¹ Guerrilla warfare and settler attacks went on for about thirteen years, until the 1850s, the time of the gold rush.³²

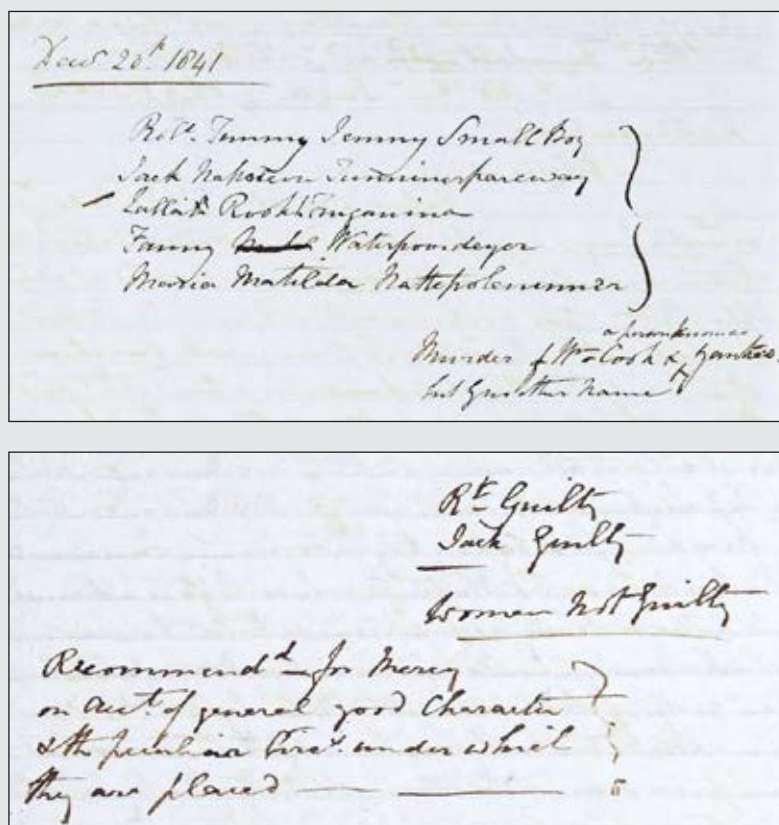
Two things strongly point to the conclusion that the group was a part of — and saw themselves as part of — the widespread Aboriginal armed resistance to colonisation of the day. First, is the context of the prevailing war over land which threatened the complete extermination of Aboriginal people. This context was well known to the group. Second, is their friendship with many local Aboriginal people and the group's presumed solidarity with their situation. The views and knowledge of Aboriginal people in New South Wales, Port Phillip and Van Diemen's Land about their own experience of colonisation and that of each other is an important part of this story.

Indeed, the five Palawa embarked on their expedition immediately after Tunnerminnerwait returned from a journey of several months with George Augustus Robinson witnessing testimony about frontier violence in the Western District.³³ Robinson had been ordered by La Trobe to conduct the tour and to 'establish a friendly communication with the strange tribes'.³⁴ This reflected the Superintendent's concern about the frontier violence besetting the area: violence that was obvious during the tour. During this journey, from March to August 1841, Robinson, accompanied and assisted by Tunnerminnerwait, investigated scores of massacres during the six-month period, including the Convincing Ground massacre, in which between 60 and 200 members of a Gunditjmarra clan were killed by whale-hunters at Portland Bay. This was the first recorded massacre in Victoria's history, therefore documenting its occurrence may have suggested to Robinson and Tunnerminnerwait that Victorian Aboriginal people were undergoing an attempted extermination similar to that in Van Diemen's Land — at the hands of essentially the same group of people.³⁵

An explanation for their attack on the whale-hunters is that the group of five knew the whale-hunters had previously attacked Aboriginal people in massacres and/or abductions. Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner had witnessed or experienced violence at the hands of sea-faring Europeans. Judge Willis was aware that Planobeena and Pyterruner 'were emancipated from the sealers in Bass's Straits'.³⁶ As well as experiencing violence at the hands of sealers herself and witnessing violence against her family, Truganini had various interactions with whale-hunters on Bruny Island in the late 1820s and early 1830s.³⁷ Conflict between Aboriginal people and Europeans — in particular sea-faring ones — in the Western Port area was well known; accounts from 1820 and 1836 establish this.³⁸

Another explanation is that it was pre-emptive self-defence. The atmosphere at the exact time and place of the shooting of the two whalers was tense; the whalers had earlier had shots fired towards them by the resident Europeans. It seemed that William Watson, the overseer of the coal mine at Cape Paterson where the two whalers were shot, was prepared to shoot on sight anyone he encountered that day. In the account given by Samuel Evans, one of the whalers: 'I met Mr Watson the Miner and two of Mr Anderson's men. I held up my hands for fear they would fire at me; one of them fired over my head'.³⁹ It is possible that the group of five shot the whalers in self-defence, knowing they could be shot on sight themselves if they met anyone.

There is also evidence to suggest that Tunnerminnerwait, Maulboyheenner, Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner had a reason for killing someone at Cape Paterson, perhaps not specifically the two whalers in question. They might, it seems, have been intending to shoot William Watson. Pyterruner's husband, Probelattener, had disappeared in the Western Port area in May 1840,⁴⁰ and there is evidence that Truganini, with Kurna woman Kalloongoo/Charlotte,⁴¹ and perhaps other women from the 'Robinson household' went out looking for him on several occasions, including in June and July 1840 and in late 1841.⁴² Perhaps Truganini, Planobeena, Pyterruner, Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner departed Melbourne together because Probelattener was still missing and they wanted to find him — or find out what happened to him. There is some evidence that the group of five heard that Probelattener had been killed, and went searching for his assailant. While in gaol awaiting trial Maulboyheenner had a conversation with Robinson which Robinson mentioned in his diary: 'Bob said Mr Horsfold told them Watson shot Isaac [Probelattener] and he meant to have shot Watson'.⁴³ According to Ian Clark, who annotated Robinson's Port Phillip diaries, Horsfold is 'presumably James Horsfall superintendent for H.G. Ashhurst, Balnarring'. In the Judge's notes of the trial, according to evidence given by William Johnson of the Border Police, Maulboyheenner had also said to Johnson when asked why he shot him, that 'he had thought it was Mr Watson.' It seems significant that the group made no 'trouble' for the first couple of weeks of their journey, and that they then 'stole a gun from a Mr Horsfal [*sic*] of Dandenong'.⁴⁴ The group's first incendiary action seems to have been stealing a gun from Horsfall; this may well have been immediately after he apparently told them that Watson had killed Isaac (Probelattener). The group may then have determined to find, confront or kill Watson — himself a possible murderer. To do this, it was necessary to obtain a gun. Interestingly, some other researchers, aware of the quote from Maulboyheenner that links Isaac, Horsfall and Watson, have not made a connection between the quote above and the encounter with Horsfall early in the group's Western Port experiences. Is it the same Mr Horsfall? If not, does it matter? The quote suggests a motive for finding or even killing Watson; they had some chance to talk to Mr Horsfall prior to setting out in the direction of the Cape Patterson coal mine; and Probelattener disappeared in the Western Port area in 1840. On 6 November 1841, the day the whalers were shot, the group had been 'engaged in firefight' with Watson but they did not leave the area; they may even have been lying in wait for Watson when the whalers wandered past.



John Walpole Willis – Transcript of trial 20–22 December 1841
 Extracts from Notebook 12, pages 108 and 121
 Royal Historical Society of Victoria, MS 000195,
 Box 055 (Vol 22–26), Willis case books, 1838–1843,

When captured, Tunnerminnerwait 'told police they had murdered the sailors in the belief that they were Watson and his son-in-law who had shot at them when they robbed their house only a few hours previously'.⁴⁵

Probelattener, who was also known as Isaac and Lacklay (also spelt Legallé),⁴⁶ was an artist, the creator of the only surviving/known drawing created by an Aboriginal person from Tasmania in the nineteenth century. This sketch titled 'Cockatoo' depicts a Tasmanian native hen.⁴⁷ The drawing was made in about 1835. It is thought that Probelattener was born around 1819. In 1840 Probelattener would have been twenty-one years old. Lyndall Ryan's description of the group who came to Port Phillip with Robinson in 1839 suggests that Isaac/Probelattener and Matilda/Pyterrur were by then a couple.⁴⁸ It seems that the Palawa, for a period of about a year and a half from mid-1840 onwards, were concerned about Probelattener's whereabouts, perhaps coming to fear that he had been 'shot by Watson'. However, by December 1841, Robinson had information that Probelattener had likely drowned, having been 'taken by a Western Port settler in a small

[vessel] which is reported foundered at sea and all on board perished'.⁴⁹

Each member of the group of five may have had a range of reasons for setting out on the journey to Dandenong and on to Western Port; there may not have been consensus amongst the group. Their motive or motives may, in fact, never be known. While historians can continue searching for direct evidence of motivation, and commentators will no doubt continue to debate anything that historians find, an important piece of indirect evidence can be seen in the way the judge and the Governor responded to the killings. They insisted that Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner should be subjected to the most overt possible display of state violence, and that local Aboriginal people should witness this.⁵⁰ This is very revealing in that it indicates the political meaning and importance of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner's actions, and shows what issues the judge and the Governor thought were at stake. That is, from the point of view of the colonial authorities, the actions of the group of five Palawa were deeply politically disturbing and a strong message needed to be sent to local Aboriginal people that

they should forget any similar plans. By insisting on public capital punishment, the colonial authorities also revealed much about themselves: that colonial sovereignty was based on force of arms not peaceful negotiation and consent. Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner were subjected to capital punishment at a time in history when race relations were characterised by guerrilla war and, at times, martial law. Their execution, therefore, has a particular meaning and function in relation to war and colonisation that does not attach to most hangings of non-Aboriginal people at that time.

Why were they hanged?

Once they were brought to Melbourne the group of five initially appeared before Police Magistrate Major St John who committed them to trial: Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner for murder, and Truganini, Planobeena and Pyterruner as accessories.⁵¹ The group was tried on 20-22 December 1841, having spent nearly a month in gaol following their arrival in Melbourne on 26 November. The jury found Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner guilty, but with a recommendation of mercy. The recommendation was rejected by Judge Willis because of the 'atrociousness' of the crime.⁵² Superintendent Charles La Trobe, when forwarding the judge's trial notes to Sir George Gipps, the Governor in Sydney, wrote that he was unable to 'advance anything in favour of the two male convicts, now in gaol awaiting His Excellency's decision in any degree calculated to strengthen the recommendation of the jury, or to lend force to the natural disposition, which I am sure His Excellency feels in every case, to exercise the prerogative of mercy delegated to him, whenever it be possible for him to do so'.⁵³ Gipps found no grounds for mercy, hence by mid-January the sentence of death was certain.

Further, the court system which tried Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner was tainted by colonial prejudice, and was unfair even by the standards of the day.⁵⁴ Kate Auty and Lynette Russell have shown that the judge, who had an erratic history and who was replaced after two years, conducted the trial in an unacceptable manner. He conversed with parties to the trial in its lead-up, allowed inadmissible evidence, overruled the prosecutor in bringing the murder charge, overruled various pleas and applications to spare Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner capital punishment and excluded the testimony of key witnesses who could have testified as to whether they confessed and in what circumstances: crucial, given they were condemned on their confession.⁵⁵ Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner were also let down by their legal representative

Redmond Barry, the newly appointed standing counsel for Aborigines. Barry did attempt to have the group's case heard by a jury of their peers, but this was rejected. He also invoked the Black War as a motivation for their attacks on settlers in what was both a credible explanation for their anti-colonial style raids and an attempt to reduce the punishment they would receive. However, Auty and Russell point out that Barry did not interject or challenge witnesses and accounts even where there were obvious inconsistencies. Redmond Barry although under-qualified at the time to defend Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner later became a judge, in which capacity many years later he sentenced Ned Kelly to death.

The hanging of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner was intended by their judge to communicate a strong message to Aboriginal people considering armed resistance to colonisation. Both the *Port Phillip Gazette* and the *Port Philip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser* published the words of Judge John Walpole Willis as he sentenced Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner: 'The punishment that awaits you is not that of vengeance, but of terror, that others by the example you will afford may be deterred from similar transgressions'.⁵⁶ In other words, their public execution was designed to terrorise local Aboriginal people and discourage them from following suit.⁵⁷ In the judge's mind the message would have been even more effectively underlined if he had been able to arrange for an Aboriginal executioner to conduct the hanging. As Robinson noted in his diary a week before the execution, 'Judge wanted a black to hang the VDL natives'.⁵⁸

The execution of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner was attended by thousands of spectators. For months the public had followed the case. Reports of their activities, their capture and then their trial was the biggest story of the day in the newspapers.⁵⁹ By all accounts, the execution was shockingly mismanaged; poor planning, inexperienced staff and poorly-built equipment resulted in a cruel and painful process which was apparent for the crowd to see.⁶⁰ In fact, this seems to have caused public sentiment about capital punishment to waver during the actual hanging. After another four people were executed in public in the same fashion (though with upgraded equipment) that year, public hangings were confined to the gaol, and by 1854 public attendance at executions was forbidden in Victoria. Even at Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner's execution the *Port Phillip* press, the *Gazette* and the *Patriot*, voiced 'strong opposition to the principle of capital punishment and its application to Aborigines'.⁶¹ That said, they 'did not question the justice of the sentence itself'.⁶²

‘The punishment that awaits you is not that of vengeance, but of terror’ – Judge Willis
Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser,
23 December 1841, p.3

The punishment that awaits you is not that of vengeance, but of terror, that others by the example you will afford may be deterred from similar transgressions. The civilization and instruction imparted to you when under the kind protection of Mr. Robinson, who brought you to these shores, has not, I lament to say, been attended with the salutary consequences that might reasonably have been expected. You are not like the wild aborigines who inhabit the native forests of this district; you are not “ignorant savages about to be made amenable to a code of which you are absolutely ignorant, and the spirit and principles whereof are foreign to your modes of thought and action;” you for years have associated with, and become familiar to the manners, customs, and ordinary laws of the British people; sufficiently so at least, to know, that the crime of which you have been convicted, could not be committed with impunity.

While Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner were tried for and found guilty of murder, it does not necessarily follow that they were ‘murderers’ and that their commemoration amounts to rehabilitating a pair of criminals, as argued by some writers.⁶³ The events for which they were tried took place during a war over land. The colonial authorities in Sydney regarded the invasion of Port Phillip from Van Diemen’s Land as illegal, as it was beyond the boundary they had set for available settlement; however, facts on the ground,⁶⁴ combined with lobbying by well-connected land speculators made them retrospectively endorse the invasion.⁶⁵ Reflecting this endorsement, they began to appoint various officials to the District, including police, courts and judges; the first was Captain William Lonsdale in 1836 who was to act as police magistrate. Each development in the legal system represented further solidity and deeper roots for the colony that had begun as trespass by business interests from Van Diemen’s Land.⁶⁶ ‘Summary justice’ — indiscriminate killings and massacre of Aboriginal people by settlers in revenge against presumably Aboriginal perpetrators of sheep theft — was ‘not uncommon on the frontier’.⁶⁷ Cameron points out this double-standard: ‘our men and women in that time are called murderers, and the people who were fighting and dispossessing them of their homelands were just called settlers’.⁶⁸

In conclusion

In September 2017, a feature in *The Age* reviewed the latest developments in memorialisation within Melbourne, citing curator and academic Genevieve Grieves who pointed out that of ‘520-odd memorials, statues and monuments... only a dozen were not “dead, white, men”’.⁶⁹ This numerical imbalance is worthy of critique. Until *Standing by Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner* was commissioned, it was only the white people involved in their apprehension who were memorialised: Auty and Russell note that there has for a very long time been a memorial, a street, a river, an inlet, a creek and a town named for various white protagonists.⁷⁰ Also worthy of critique is the simplicity of the representations of the dead, white historical figures our city commemorates. High-profile representations of John Batman within Melbourne make no reference to his role in the roving parties of the Black War and the abduction of Aboriginal children.⁷¹ Our public historical landscape remains overwhelmingly one-sided.

Endnotes

- 1 Each of these people had a European name by which they were known in colonial Melbourne — see Note below (Ed.)
- 2 Clare Land, *Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner: the involvement of Aboriginal people from Tasmania in key events of early Melbourne*, Melbourne: City of Melbourne, 2014.
- 3 See also Leonie Stevens, ‘The Phenomenal Coolness of Tunnerminnerwait’, *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 81, 2010, pp.18–40.
- 4 Rhys Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, Thesis (PhD), Department of Archaeology, University of Sydney, 1971, p.9, cited in Rebe Taylor, ‘Reliable Mr Robinson and the controversial Dr Jones’, in *Reading Robinson: companion essays to Friendly Mission*, edited by Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls, Hobart: Quintus Publishing, 2008, pp.111–125.
- 5 *Free Exchange or Captive Culture? : the Tasmanian Aboriginal perspective on museums and repatriation*; paper presented at the Museums Association Seminar, Museums and Repatriation, London, 4 November 1997, Hobart: Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, 1997, p.5.

- 6 James Boyce, *1835: The Founding of Melbourne & the Conquest of Australia*, Collingwood, Vic: Black, 2011, p.192.
- 7 The seventeenth was Jack Allen, brought to Port Phillip by John Batman, but returned to Van Diemen's Land with Palawa from the Robinson group in 1842.
- 8 Jeff and Jill Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne: a secret history*, Melbourne: Vulgar Press, 2001, p.178.
- 9 Boyce, pp.139–140.
- 10 Ian MacFarlane (ed.), *1842, the Public Executions at Melbourne*. Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office on behalf of the Public Record Office, 1984, p.5.
- 11 Ibid, p.8.
- 12 Boyce, p.140.
- 13 See Stevens, 2010 p.20. The comment was recorded in 1839.
- 14 Janine P. Roberts, *Jack of Cape Grim: a Victorian adventure*, Richmond, Vic.: Greenhouse, 1986, p.95.
- 15 Ibid, p.95. Johnny Franklin was Kalloongoo's son (both Kaurna).
- 16 Ian D. Clark and Laura Kostanski, *An Indigenous History of Stonnington: a report to the City of Stonnington*, [Ballarat, Vic], Ian D. Clark and Laura Kostanski for the City of Stonnington, 2006, p.57.
- 17 For a brief summary see Land, Appendix, p.34.
- 18 See Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history*, St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1999; Penny Van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: early Aboriginal cultures of writing in Australia*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006; Chiara Gamboz, 'Australian Indigenous Petitions: emergence and negotiations of Indigenous authorship and writings', Thesis (PhD), University of New South Wales, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, 2012; Henry Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1995.
- 19 For a detailed study of the writing and activism of the Palawa who lived on Flinders Island at this time see Stevens, Leonie 'Me write myself: the free Aboriginal inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land at Wybalenna, 1832-47'. Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Publishing, 2017.
- 20 Reynolds, p.191.
- 21 Roberts, p.59.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid, p.60.
- 24 Stevens, 2010, pp.19, 26, 28.
- 25 Refer Clare Rawlinson, *Melbourne's Invisible Indigenous History* [a five-part radio documentary], Melbourne: ABC Radio, 2015.
- 26 Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *Trucanini: queen or traitor?* Hobart: OBM Publishing Company, 1976, p.93.
- 27 Robert Cox, *Steps to the Scaffold: the untold story of Tasmania's black bushranger*, Pawleena, Tas.: Cornhill Publishing, 2004, p.121.
- 28 Stevens, 2010, p.24 (Tunnerminnerwait receives an offer of employment) & p.31 (the party of five camp peacefully for two weeks before the mayhem begins).
- 29 Nance Christie cited in Susanne Davies, 'Aborigines, Murder and the Criminal Law in early Port Phillip, 1841-1851 (includes an appendix listing murder trials heard at the Melbourne Supreme Court, 1841- 1851)', *Historical Studies*. vol. 22, 1987, p.320.
- 30 Davies, p.320.
- 31 See Davies; also Roberts.
- 32 Roberts, p.105.
- 33 Ian D. Clark, 'In Quest of the Tribes: G.A. Robinson's unabridged report of his 1841 expedition among western Victorian Aboriginal tribes; Kenyon's "Condensation" reconsidered', *Memoirs of the Museum of Victoria*, vol.1, 1990, pp.97-129.
- 34 Ibid. p.97.
- 35 Colonial frontrunner the Port Phillip Association 'was a bastion of respectability, whose political and economic influence went to the heart of the small ruling elite of Van Diemen's Land...', Boyce, p.55 and pp.47-56; see also p.149 (in relation to Henry Batman).
- 36 RHSV, John Walpole Willis, MS 000195, Box 055 (Vol 22-26), Case books, 1838-1843, Notebook 12,
- 15 September 1841-22 December 1841, 'Robert, Timmy, Jimmy, Smallboy; Jack Napoleon Tunninerpareway, [and others]'. (Transcript and commentary by Paul Mullally accessible via www.historyvictoria.org.au/willis/book%2012.html#37)
- 37 Lyndall Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines: a history since 1803*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012, p.155.
- 38 J.H. Wedge to John Montagu, from Bearport, Port Phillip, 15 March 1836, 'Westernport bark strippers shoot Aborigines', in *Historical Records of Victoria*, vol.1, *Beginnings of Permanent Government*, ed. by Pauline Jones, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1981, pp.34-35; and Ruth Gooch, *Seal Rocks and Victoria's Primitive Beginnings*, Hastings, Vic: Warrangine Word, 2008, p.16.
- 39 PROV, State Coroner's Office, VPRS 24/P0 unit 1, item 1841/43 Male, whalers' case, Inquest depositions, Samuel Evans deposition.
- 40 Marie Hansen Fels, *I Succeeded Once: the Aboriginal Protectorate on the Mornington Peninsula, 1839-1840*, Acton, A.C.T.: ANU E Press, 2011, p.262.
- 41 Kalloongoo/Charlotte was kidnapped as a child by sealers in the Port Lincoln area of South Australia, and taken to the Bass Strait Islands and eventually to Port Phillip. Robinson called her 'the New Holland woman', Rob Amery, 'Kaurna in Tasmania: a case of mistaken identity'. *Aboriginal History*, vol. 20, 1996, pp.24-50; *Historical Records of Victoria*, vol.2B. *Aborigines and Protectors 1838-1839*, Editor: Michael Cannon, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1983, p.409.

- 42 Ian D. Clark (ed.), *The Journal of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, 1839-1852*, [3rd ed.], Charleston, SC.: Createspace, 2014; Roberts, p.60, quotes Assistant Protector William Thomas saying: 'I am informed by the Blacks... that the two Van Diemen's Land women are gone to Western Port after Isaac', citing 'Note', undated, PROV Unregistered Inward Correspondence to the Chief Protector of Aborigines, VPRS 11, unit 7, doc.291.
- 43 Robinson, entry of 2 December 1841.
- 44 Rae-Ellis, pp.102-109; Ian McFarlane, 'Pevay, a casualty of war', *Papers and Proceedings, Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, vol.48, 2001, p.300; *Port Philip Herald*, 26 November 1841.
- 45 Rae-Ellis, pp.102-109.
- 46 Clark and Kostanski state that Isaac is Lacklay/Probelattener.
- 47 Sayers, pp. 84-85, 117. (*Cockatoo* may be viewed in the author's 2014 booklet, accessible at www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/tunnerminnerwait-and-maulboyheenner.pdf, p.25)
- 48 Ryan, p.237.
- 49 Stevens, 2017, p.211, quoting a list created by Robinson of the name and position of each of the Palawa he had brought to Port Phillip, enclosed by C. J. La Trobe with his letter to Sir George Gipps, 'Recommending Van D Land Blacks may be returned to Flinders Island', 24 December 1841, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 8454 Box 650/17.
- 50 *Port Philip Gazette*, 22 December 1841, p.3; *Port Philip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 23 December 1841, p.3; Davies, pp.318-319.
- 51 Pyterruner was injured when they were captured. She was apparently treated by Hugh Anderson, a settler and doctor, although in Horton and Morris's account of the Anderson family's story it was Truganini he treated. (Thomas Horton and Kenneth Morris, *The Andersons of Western Port*, Bass Valley Historical Society, 1983, p.80.)
- 52 MacFarlane, 1842, p.10.
- 53 PROV Superintendent Port Phillip District, VPRS 16, Outward letter books to local and Sydney, vol.12, p.244, cited MacFarlane, p.11.
- 54 Only wealthy middle-aged men could sit on juries; only people of certain religious faiths could give evidence (See Davies, pp.316-317; also Kate Auty and Lynette Russell, *Hunt Them, Hang Them: 'the Tasmanians' in Port Phillip 1841-42*, Melbourne: Justice Press, 2016, p.13.). Husbands and wives were considered to be 'one and the same person' and therefore unable to give evidence about the other (Paul R. Mullaly, *Crime in the Port Phillip District 1835-51*, Ormond, Vic., Hybrid Publishers, 2008, p.172).
- 55 Auty and Russell, pp. 65-69, 72-73.
- 56 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 22 December 1841, p.3; *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 23 December 1841, p.3.
- 57 Davies, p.319.
- 58 Robinson journal 14 January 1842, in Clark (ed.), p.28.
- 59 Stevens, 2010, p.30.
- 60 'Garryowen' (Edmund Finn), *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852: historical, anecdotal and personal*, Melbourne: Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888, pp.394-396; James W. Dredge, 'The Hanging of Two Aborigines, 1842: manuscript', *La Trobe Library Journal*, vol.7, April 1971, pp.77-78.
- 61 Davies, p.318.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Marie Hansen Fels, David Clark and Rene White, 'Mistaken Identity, not Aboriginal Resistance', *Quadrant*, vol. 58, no. 10, October 2014, pp.74-83.
- 64 Boyce, p.130.
- 65 Ibid., pp.134, 148, 204.
- 66 Ibid., p.127.
- 67 MacFarlane, 1842, p.39.
- 68 Refer Rawlinson, radio documentary.
- 69 Miki Perkins, 'Historic Statues: where Indigenous people and women go missing', *Sunday Age*, 3 September 2017, p.8.
- 70 Auty and Russell, p.73.
- 71 Perkins.

Note

Each of the Palawa (and Kaurna) had a European name, as recorded in the primary sources, for example:

Tunnerminnerwait (also known as Pevay/Peevay): Jack, Napoleon

Maulboyheenner: Bob, Timmy, Jimmy, Smallboy

Truganini: Lalla Rookh

Planobeena, wife of Tunnerminnerwait: Fanny, Martha

Pyterruner, wife of Probelattener: Matilda

Probelattener, husband of Pyterruner: Isaac/Lacklay/Legallé/Jemmy

Kalloongoo, Sarah, Charlotte (a Kaurna woman, i.e. from South Australia, see note 41)

Portraits — watercolours by Thomas Bock (1790-1855) — may be viewed in the author's 2014 booklet, accessible at www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/tunnerminnerwait-and-maulboyheenner.pdf. Also in photographs of the Bock paintings by John Watt Beattie (1859-1930), accessible via TROVE.

Forthcoming events

MARCH

Sunday 18

La Trobe's Birthday Celebration

Time: 4.30–6.00 pm

Venue: La Trobe's Cottage Garden

Guest Speaker: Jo Reitze, artist

Topic: Art exhibition featuring

La Trobe's Cottage

Refreshments

Admission: \$5 per person

Bookings essential*

JUNE

Sunday 10

Members Talk to Members and Friends

Time: 2.30–4.00 pm

Speaker: Dr Rosemary Richards

Topic: Georgiana McCrae's

'Favorite' Music†

Tuesday 19

Joint La Trobe Society/ RHSV AGL Shaw Lecture

Time: 6.30–8.00 pm

Venue: Royal Historical Society of
Victoria, Cnr William and A'Beckett
Streets, Melbourne

Speaker: Major-General Michael O'Brien

Topic: Charles La Trobe and Hugh
Childers: the ladder of success in Victoria

Refreshments

Admission: tba

Bookings essential*

Friday 30

Melbourne Rare Book Week Lecture

Time: 6.30–8.30 pm

Venue: Tonic House, 386 Flinders Lane,
Melbourne, tbc

Guest Speaker: Shane Carmody, historian

Topic: The remarkable library of Bishop

Goold: its creation, loss and rediscovery

No charge. Bookings essential*

JULY

Sunday 8

Members Talk to Members and Friends

Time: 2.30–4.00 pm

Speaker: Davydd Shaw

Topic: Edward Byam Wight:
enterprising pioneer in the
Port Phillip District †

AUGUST

Wednesday 1

La Trobe Society Annual General Meeting and Dinner

Time: 6.30 pm

Venue: Lyceum Club, Ridgway Place,
Melbourne

Guest Speaker: Dr Monique Webber

Topic: La Trobe and the
FitzRoy Gardens, tbc

Invitations will be sent in July

Sunday 12

Members Talk to Members and Friends

Time: 2.30–4.00 pm

Speaker: Peter Hiscock AM

Topic: La Trobe and his Horses —
Testing Times†

Forthcoming events (cont.)

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 9

**Members Talk to Members
and Friends**

Time: 2.30–4.00 pm

Speaker: Irene Kearsey

Topic: Gulf Station: one of the National
Trust's La Trobe-era properties, tbc[†]

Tuesday 18

**Friends of La Trobe's Cottage Annual
Lecture**

Time: 6.00–8.00pm

Venue: Mueller Hall, National
Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens

Speaker: Lorraine Finlay

Topic: Eliza Nelson and
Dr John Singleton: eventful lives in
colonial Victoria

Refreshments

Admission: tba

Bookings essential*

NOVEMBER

Friday 30 (tbc)

Christmas Cocktails

DECEMBER

Sunday 2

**Service to mark the Anniversary of
the Death of C J La Trobe**

Venue: St Peter's Eastern Hill.

***General Bookings**

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

† Members Talk to Members and Friends

Venue: Mueller Hall, National
Herbarium, 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.

For the latest information on upcoming events, please refer to the Society's events page,
www.latrobesociety.org.au/events.html

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.

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BACK COVER

La Trobe Family coat of arms

INSIDE FRONT COVER

Charles Joseph La Trobe's coat of arms,
taken from his bookplate

