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Richard Broome, Chair, RHSV Publications Committee

John Adams Prize Winners

2017–18

Nicola Cousen,

‘The Legend of Lalor’s Arm: Eureka Myths and Colonial Surgery’,

Victorian Historical Journal,

vol. 88, no. 2, November 2017, pp. 212–34.

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Weston Bate protesting on Dendy Street Beach, September 2016.

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**CREATIVE
VICTORIA**



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Introduction

Judith Smart and Richard Broome

The six articles in this issue of the *Victorian Historical Journal* range from heritage protection (including our cover) and interpretation, through aspects of the social history of the gold rush in Melbourne and Bendigo, and a discussion of the role of the historian as sceptical detective, to a forgotten but formative bushfire in Gippsland in 1926. The five historical notes also range widely. Three uncover some of the dynamics of a new colonial society revealed in accounts of early voyaging and exploration, drawing on journal reflections, close documentary analysis of suspicious contemporary claims, and meticulous scientific record keeping. The other two are concerned with religious and moral values, in one case relating to the successful career of a young woman in rural Victoria, and, in the other, to the decision of several young men to resist conscription for war service in Vietnam.

The RHSV was privileged this year to hear the Hon. Simon R. Molesworth AO, QC, who has led the Australian National Trust at both state and federal levels and was the inaugural chairman and president of the International National Trusts Organisation. His Wolskel Lecture on 19 February, published here, was titled ‘History in the Round: The Evolving Role of Heritage Conservation—Taking History to the People.’ It briefly discusses the growth of the heritage conservation movement in Australia after World War II through the National Trust movement before turning to the challenges heritage protection and appreciation face today. While agreeing that traditional ways of conveying the history and significance of heritage places remain important, he urges practitioners to recognise the changing expectations, interests and backgrounds of a new generation and cultural mix in the potential audience for heritage by diversifying and expanding definitions as well as utilising new technologies to augment heritage experiences.

The Second Weston Bate Oration was delivered in May by the current chair of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Board of Directors, Kristin Stegley OAM, who spoke on ‘Making History by Saving It.’ Like Simon Molesworth, Stegley stressed the need to recognise changing audience values in making heritage relevant. In defining heritage as an ‘extraordinary window that allows us to walk through

the landscape of history, providing an experiential opportunity to more deeply understand it, she drew a distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power. She then noted that presentations of history and heritage have traditionally focused on and reflected ‘hard’ power—military, political and religious institutions and dominance tied to and exercised by the elites. A new emphasis on ‘soft’ power—persuasion, attraction, empathy—can be employed to convince a new generation and a more diverse audience of the relevance of heritage to their everyday lives, not just to those of powerful individuals and institutions. While funding and employing new technology, she agrees, are important to protecting places and attracting a new audience to them, so too is an emphasis on the stories that ‘make people feel connected to the places they visit. Heritage places belong to the people.’ And they can only be protected if the people value them.

The third article, by James Lesh, is titled ‘Cremorne Gardens, Gold-rush Melbourne, and the Victorian-era Pleasure Garden, 1853–63’. It examines Melbourne’s ‘premier leisure attraction’ for ten summers at the height of the gold-rush period, a time of massive population growth and social instability. Lesh places the gardens in the context of this fluidity and volatility as well as in the ‘global network of mid-nineteenth-century pleasure gardens’, and, through detailed description, shows us how Cremorne came to represent ‘a more perfect version of urban modernity than that which could ever exist outside its gates’.

Andrew Lemon also writes of Melbourne’s culture and society in the late 1850s in an elegant forensic examination of the provenance of one of the rarest books in the RHSV library, the first work printed by the significant Melbourne publishers Clarson, Shallard and Co. and published in 1859. The article, titled ‘The Swordsmen’s Tale: The True Story of Robert Meikle and *The Fencer’s Manual*’, seeks to discover the identity of author Robert Meikle, meticulously tracing him through contemporary sources but warning against embellishments and ‘the perils of relying on family legend as historical source material’.

Charles Fahey’s contribution to this issue deals directly with the Victorian gold rush and its aftermath in the Bendigo region. Titled ‘Happy Valley Road and the Victoria Hill District: A Microhistory of a Victorian Gold-mining Community, 1854–1913’, this article employs microhistorical techniques to mine an extremely rich archival heritage of personal papers as well as public records. These help compensate for

the loss of housing fabric in order to give some meaning to ‘open cuts, engine beds and other mining remains’ and thus ‘reconstruct the lives’ of ‘a once vibrant [mining] community in a level of detail that is rarely possible in other communities.’

John Schauble’s “‘Where are the others?’ Victoria’s Forgotten 1926 Bushfires’ takes us into the twentieth century and the overlooked significance and tragedy of the bushfires that swept through Gippsland in 1926. Schauble writes that these fires ‘killed more people as a proportion of Victoria’s population than any before or since, except for those of 1939’ and describes the destruction of families, properties, communities and towns over a period of weeks. He also shows how ‘the fires of 1926 signified a turning point in the relationship between Victorians and their environment’, resulting in the formation of the Bush Fire Brigades Association in 1928 on the principle of mutual self help. They were not funded, however, and it took three more major fire emergencies before the Country Fire Authority was created in 1944.

The ‘Historical Notes’ section of the journal begins with Anne Marsden’s ‘John Norcock’s Voyage to Australia on HMS *Rattlesnake* between 1835 and 1837, and his Reflections on Early Port Phillip’, providing an intimate view through Norcock’s journal of the Lonsdale family and describing his changing opinions of the settlers in this raw settlement. Ian D. Clark provides a new perspective on an iconic story of exploration in ‘Expedition Deceit: The Fabulists Who Claimed an Association with the Burke and Wills Expedition’, in which he carefully unmaskes the claims of nine imposters by reference to publicly available documents and reports. In ‘Ferdinand von Mueller in the Victorian Grampians’, Benjamin Wilkie adds to our understanding of the significance of this great government botanist, whose collection and recording of the flora of the Grampians/Gariwerd ranges from 1853 onwards ultimately led to nation-wide recognition of Gariwerd as a unique botanical reserve. The last two notes examine religious values as a driving force in individual case histories. Jennifer Hammett, in ‘The Impact of Religion on Eva West, Trailblazer in Local Government and Accounting’, discusses the part played by religion in building the confidence and competence of one of the first women to qualify as an accountant and to find a career in local government administration in Victoria. Geoffrey Sandy’s article, ‘Conscientious Objectors: The Vietnam War Years’, also nominates religion as a key motivating force

and indeed the dominant ground on which conscientious beliefs against participating in war were claimed by the individuals he describes.

We hope you enjoy the variety of articles published here as well as the many book reviews that follow. And we encourage you to submit articles or notes to this journal that draw on your own research into our rich and varied history.

History in the Round: The Evolving Role of Heritage Conservation – Taking History to the People*

Simon R. Molesworth

This lecture begins with a brief overview of the National Trust movement, its origins and how it evolved. I then move to an examination of the differing approaches by which heritage conservation, practices and principles, are taken to ‘the people’ for the people. I suggest that the changing approaches to promoting heritage conservation are strategically essential if the heritage conservation movement is to remain relevant and supported by its communities around the world. Heritage conservation, being necessary to meet intergenerational objectives, must strive to build support and commitment from each successive current generation. Complacency with this endeavor will lead to an undermining of the conservation cause, thereby rendering heritage places more vulnerable.

The Beginnings of the National Trust Movement

The first National Trust-like organisation was the Society for the Preservation of Norwegian Ancient Monuments established in Norway in 1844; the second was The Trustees of Reservations in Massachusetts, USA, founded in 1890; and the third was the National Trust of England, Wales & Northern Ireland (NTEWNI) founded in 1895. This simple chronology will surprise many as, within the heritage movement, the almost omnipresent NTEWNI has always been credited with being the fountainhead, frequently referred to as the ‘Mother Trust’. The influence of the NTEWNI on the evolution of the National Trust movement most probably excuses this misconception as to which was the first heritage preservation organisation, as there is little doubt that it was the English National Trust that became the model, spawning the spread of National Trusts across the globe, specifically in the English-speaking world.

The move to create a National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland began in the 1890s when Octavia Hill, Sir Robert

* The Hon. Simon Molesworth AO, QC, delivered this paper to the RHSV as the 2019 Augustus Wolskel Lecture on 19 February 2019.

Hunter and Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley began campaigning against the destruction of the English landscape and historically significant buildings. The Lakes District was their initial focus, and they achieved much success there. However, the loss of the seventeenth-century home of the diarist John Evelyn, Sayes Court, drove a new determination to prevent other such losses and led to the foundation of the National Trust in January 1895.

The term 'National Trust', used in England to describe a voluntary, membership-based, non-government organisation for heritage preservation, sparked a world-wide movement.

What was the underlying rationale for this emerging movement? The answer is found well expressed, albeit years later in 2011, in the *Victoria Declaration on the Implications for Cultural Sustainability of Climate Change*, wherein it was stated in clause 4: 'The destruction of culture is a fundamental breach of the principle of intergenerational equity, in that a culture destroyed or diminished within the time of the current generation will deprive members of future generations of their right to their cultural inheritance'. That statement expresses the essence of the rationale for the creation of National Trusts. Although the sustainability concept of 'intergenerational equity' was not coined until the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (known as the Rio Declaration), formulated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or Earth Summit, it nevertheless reflects the concerns of all the founders of the National Trust movement, be they in the UK, in Australia or elsewhere, that something had to be done by each present generation to preserve the best of the past for the benefit of those who were/are to follow. (The Victoria Declaration was adopted by the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO), when it met in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada in 2011, as a declaration expressing the need to safeguard cultural heritage in the context of climate change.)

The Formation of the National Trusts in Australia

The oldest Australian National Trust was founded in NSW in 1945, 74 years ago. The energy and determination of a remarkable woman, Annie Wyatt, was the catalyst. She wrote decades later: 'It had to be some new organisation pledged to perpetual responsibility and had to arise among the people themselves.' The movement arose out of a growing concern about the demolition of early colonial houses in Sydney.

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) was founded on 23 May 1956. The exponentially increasing loss of historic buildings across Melbourne led to a growing awareness that the formation of a membership-based organisation with influential leaders was required. The loss of one of Melbourne's most extraordinary and beautiful mansions, Werndew in Toorak, spurred key individuals in their efforts. The preservation of Como in South Yarra was the final catalyst, it being identified from the outset as the Trust's flagship property. The founders included Robin Boyd, Professor John Turner, Professor Brian Lewis, Joseph Burke, Dr Norman Wettenhall, Sir Daryl Lindsay, Joan Lindsay, Kenneth Myer, Maie Casey, Aubrey Gibson, Everard Baillieu and many other notable people. These individuals constituted a veritable who's who of influential people in Victorian society of the day.

In Australia we have seen the foundation of eight National Trusts, one in each of the six states and in each of the territories. In an effort to coordinate the Trusts into an effective national voice of influence, the Australian Council of National Trusts was established in 1965, primarily to lobby the Commonwealth government on national heritage policy and greater financial support for the heritage movement nationwide.

The National Trusts across Australia have been most visible as custodians of signature properties. In Victoria's case the range and contrasts of heritage properties open to the public have included grand mansions such as: Como and Rippon Lea in Melbourne; country properties like Barwon Park at Winchelsea (Figure 1) and Mooramong at Skipton; or the more prosaic humble places like the portable iron houses in Coventry Street, South Melbourne (Figure 2), and the modest pioneer farm Gulf Station near Yarra Glen; and iconic items such as the 1885 barque *Polly Woodside*, which has graced the Yarra River since her restoration began with her purchase in 1968 (Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 1: Barwon Park, Winchelsea (Courtesy National Trust of Australia (Victoria))



Figure 2: Portable iron house, Coventry Street, South Melbourne (Courtesy National Trust of Australia (Victoria))



Figure 3: Polly Woodside, Yarra Bank, Melbourne (Courtesy National Trust of Australia (Victoria))



Figure 4: Children enjoying the Polly Woodside, Yarra Bank, Melbourne (Courtesy National Trust of Australia (Victoria))

The eight Australian National Trusts are membership-based organisations independent of government, although the Western Australian National Trust is a hybrid entity with its staff paid by the state government. All the Australian National Trusts, reflecting the influence of their founders, secured tax-deductible charity status in their early years, not by simply falling into an eligible defined category of ‘worthy’ entity but rather by being specifically identified and listed by name in the Commonwealth taxation legislation. Tax-deductible donations to the Trusts have been an immeasurable benefit over the decades since inception, as has been the extraordinary contribution from sustained volunteer input.

All these Trusts have also been recognised, to varying degrees, in heritage and planning legislation in each jurisdiction, giving them specific rights and responsibilities to participate in planning issues when heritage conservation considerations are relevant. Six of the National Trusts were actually given the added benefit of being legally created by statute, although remaining at arms length from government. In particular, either in their founding legislation or in the local planning and heritage legislation, all the National Trusts are accepted as having the right or ‘standing’ to be consulted or to intervene in legal disputation or merit hearings regarding heritage matters.

The Foundation of the International Voice of the National Trust Movement

Following the formation of an interim steering committee at the 11th International Conference of National Trusts in Washington DC in October 2005, the formal launch of a new global entity in the heritage movement occurred in New Delhi, India, on 3 December 2007. This occasion marked the foundation of INTO, the International National Trusts Organisation, of which I had the honour to become the inaugural chairman and president.

As stated in its foundation charter, the mission of INTO is: ‘To promote the conservation and enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage of all nations for the benefit of the people of the world’. Over its first decade, INTO grew to represent National Trusts and similar heritage organisations in some 68 countries, with a combined supporter base of some 6.5 million members.

National Trusts know that the physical manifestation of cultural heritage, such as sites, buildings and the multiplicity of things contained

within and around them, provides insights into history—insights into the adventures, triumphs and sorrows alike of a place. Heritage can and must be shown to be interesting, thereby enlisting wider support for its conservation. Heritage places are a physical means of telling stories about the steps that have led to nation building or the evolution of societies, whether laudable or regrettable. Consequently, preserved heritage has the ability to explain to the observer the twists and turns of history. With the tangible experience it offers, our physical heritage can enable us all to learn from history, good or bad.

Heritage places can engender pride and a sense of achievement; they remind people of involvement; they excite ‘connected’ tourism, where a person’s visit is enriched by a connection or affinity; and they provide memorable experiences that can lead to follow-on visits to similar heritage places and attractions that focus on similar themes or were created in similar periods. Concurrently, in experiencing the physical recounting or portrayal of the passage of history, communities can learn from the past. In short, the heritage experience of the visitor to a conserved historic place provides the opportunity to embed lasting messages, not just memories. Lasting messages gained from heritage places can be part of life’s learning experiences, not just for the present generation but for those that follow us.

The preservation of cultural landscapes became a key part of the heritage conservation movement from as early as the 1960s in Australia. In the UK, of course, with the NTEWNI, it was never otherwise since it was founded with the immediate objective of saving the landscapes of the Lakes District in North West England, and with its purposes always focused on preserving natural beauty. This focus is clearly expressed in its objects:

The preservation for the benefit of the Nation of lands and tenements (including buildings) of beauty or historic interest and, as regards lands, for the preservation of their natural aspect, features and animal and plant life. Also the preservation of furniture, pictures and chattels of any description having national and historic or artistic interest.

Contrary to the common misunderstanding and criticism that National Trusts are just concerned with ‘old buildings’, the majority of National Trusts across the globe have also focused on the natural values of cultural landscapes. With the popular growth of the ‘green

movement' in more recent decades, many National Trusts have endeavoured to bring the cultural heritage movement closer to the natural heritage movement, with the intention of forging strategic cooperation and mutual strengthening. This trend could be said to be less apparent in some Australian National Trusts. But this is not so with respect to Australian regulatory regimes. When the Australian Heritage Commission was established by the federal government in 1975, charged with the task of establishing a Register of the National Estate, there was no questioning within government of the parallel intent and importance of safeguarding the natural as well as the built heritage. With this context prevailing, the work of the National Trusts has increasingly reflected the need to develop a mutually supportive relationship with government heritage agencies.

Commencing in the late 1970s, through the 1980s to the mid-1990s, cultural heritage received the greatest level of popular support within the Australian community, which in turn encouraged Australian governments to provide commensurate financial and institutional support. Those were comparatively golden years for Australian heritage. As government administrations have since come and gone, the support for cultural heritage within the states and at the Commonwealth level has waxed and waned, more the latter. With the enactment of the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), the tide began to turn away from proactive support for cultural heritage. This became starkly apparent to many in 2003 when the *Australian Heritage Council Act 2003* passed into law. That Act replaced a statutorily independent Australian Heritage Commission with the Australian Heritage Council, an entity far more amenable to the directions of both the relevant federal department and the minister responsible for heritage. Concurrently the legislative regime for cultural heritage was brought within the EPBC Act, with the processes largely fused. With an effective wholesale delegation of heritage review, listing and responsibilities to the states and territories, and with the Register of the National Estate deprived of a role and conveniently lost to sight, many have said the Commonwealth all but abandoned the heritage field. The changes that occurred in 2003 are too many to describe within the parameters of this lecture, but, all in all, heritage across the nation lost out in subsequent years. From the years of Prime Minister Abbott onwards, even the word 'heritage' was removed

as a descriptor of the responsible federal minister's role, there no longer being a minister for heritage by title. At the date of this lecture, many in the heritage conservation field have observed that the level of support for cultural heritage, within both the private and the public sectors, has now reached its nadir.

Many National Trusts have grasped the reality that at the core of their founding goal of intergenerational equity with respect to heritage is the need to engage with younger members of their communities. In the hands of the younger generation lies the future of the heritage legacy they will inherit. Accordingly, it has become essential for National Trusts to strive for a broader appeal to a wider cross-section of their country's or state's population. Ensuring that their own continuing operations are sustainable has meant that National Trusts must seek a wider appeal. Adopting such a course is not only pragmatic, it is, in my view, the correct approach to adopt. National Trusts, if they wish to secure and retain legitimacy and relevance, must strive to secure the widest support by seeking the widest participation. No longer just focusing on displaying and opening properties to passive observers, National Trusts must be pro-active, pursuing supportable policies that resonate with a broad community base.

Many images of activities, events and activities at National Trust properties around the world demonstrate how engagement with younger generations is being pursued. To the reader of this lecture, even the most superficial search of the websites of the near 70 National Trusts around the world will produce a myriad of encouraging images of children participating in events at heritage properties worldwide. It is the differing approaches of heritage organisations such as the National Trusts to engagement with the wider community that is now my focus.

The traditional approach of a National Trust in past decades has been the presentation of a museum house, normally retained and presented in a part-restored manner, so that the visitor can discern the difference between original building fabric and restored elements. Often the process of restoration itself is part of the narrative that is on display, describing the objectives of the restoration project and the processes that were followed. Comparisons are often made between the before and after states, focusing on the materials used to bring the historic place to the state that is now being viewed. The presentation of historic places in this manner will normally be of greatest interest to

those involved in the conservation effort, those who contributed to its evolution through the stages of repair and presentation, and to those whose intellectual interests or professional practice is stimulated by such 'studies' in conservation.

Another category of people appreciating heritage place museum houses for their inherent values arises from the historians amongst us, both professionals and enthusiastic amateurs. Historians can re-imagine the events as they happened and were played out within the many heritage places in the public domain. The many photographs of National Trust properties included in the PowerPoint version of this lecture depicted museum houses in the USA, Canada, the Netherlands (Gelderland), Malta, India, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Bermuda, St Lucia, Fiji, Nigeria, Malaysia and, of course, Australia. I simply list those featured countries to illustrate the diversity of nations with National Trusts across all continents that have followed the precedent set by the NTEWNI 'mother trust'. All have found legitimacy in portraying their histories through the instrument of a museum house on display.

To the broader community, perhaps those with an untrained or lesser trained eye, it is often not the bricks and mortar of the historic place that excite but rather the stories that the historic place can physically depict through presentation of the building and display of its contents. This is the kind of audience that can be encouraged to have an emotional response, perhaps a feeling of excitement, to their presence at a place where a particular event in history occurred. Examples include: standing in the room where someone or an event influenced the course of history (as in Court Room 1 in the National Heritage Listed Old High Court Building in Little Bourke Street in Melbourne); or viewing the desk where a famous novel was written (as in the case of the Victorian National Trust property 'Lake View' at Chiltern, where Henry Handel Richardson wrote her novels); or standing under the arching branches of an ancient mulberry tree where a notable person used to pick fruit (as I have done in the gardens of NTEWNI property, Chartwell, where Winston Churchill, a keen gardener, feasted on berries from the tree he grew).

This traditional approach to presenting heritage places still has a role in our society, but the question I ask is whether that approach remains sufficiently alluring, interesting or relevant to be sustainable in the long term. Our social mores have changed over the last few decades.

Long gone are the days when a traditional nuclear family would pack up the family car with a picnic hamper and rug and drive out to a National Trust heritage property to while away a sunny weekend day resting and playing on the lawns. Undeniably there will be some who still continue such practices, but those who do will now probably be parents and very young children, perhaps even babies still in their prams; rarely if ever do we see teenagers of a family in the group, let alone young adults in their twenties.

This change in family recreation has had another consequence—the demographic of those volunteering for National Trusts is now almost entirely devoid of those who, when I first became aware of the National Trust movement in the 1960s through to the 1980s, comprised the Junior Group or Young Trust. These groups were established by and for young people ranging from late teens to early thirties in age. Whereas, in the past, young people spent time with their families visiting heritage properties as part of family excursions, with some moving on to becoming volunteers in restoring projects or at Trust events, today there is little sign of anything equivalent. The magazines of the Victorian National Trust in its first three decades have plenty of photographs of young people actively engaged with Trust activities, both participating in working bees and attending fundraising social events. I doubt if there has been anything akin to a Young Trust dance in Victoria for about 25 years. I would venture to guess that the same observation could be made with respect to the other seven National Trusts in Australia. Let me hasten to add that the absence of Young Trust dances is simply raised here as an instance of reduction in young person engagement and, consequently, the cessation of such activities as a stream of fundraising.

There is another social dynamic at work that has implications for the conservation and presentation of heritage places. Putting aside the inherent values of a place arising from its structural or architectural elements, the historical or social significance of a place might offer little of interest to those who have come from another country with a differing culture. When the National Trust was being founded in NSW in the 1940s, just under 10 per cent of the national population was born outside Australia, whereas the 2016 census reveals that almost 29 per cent of the population was born overseas, representing some 6.9 million people. If a census were conducted in 2019, it would show that the percentage of the population born outside Australia is now even greater. This is

an evolving social dynamic of some considerable significance. When a heritage organisation such as a National Trust seeks external support for its activities from both government and community, it must show it is aware that a growing percentage of the community has no emotional attachment to much of the heritage and the history it seeks to conserve and present. 'Whose history?' becomes a relevant rhetorical question when determining heritage conservation strategies in modern-day Australia. The challenge for the National Trusts, as has been the case in other countries built upon migration like Canada and the USA, is to widen their appeal beyond our British colonial heritage and extend their inclusiveness to a broader community spectrum by drawing upon the eclectic mix of cultures that came with successive waves of immigration. As different ethnic communities have made Australia their home, it is essential that the National Trusts and others in the heritage fraternity respond to and embrace rather than exclude the rich variety of cultures that are now part of this multicultural nation. With this ever-increasing diversity, National Trusts in Australia, in order to remain relevant and of interest to the broad community, must look to opportunities to bring persons new to this country into their midst and help celebrate and appreciate the multiplicity of cultures and historical experiences they have brought with them.

In responding to this challenge, many heritage places managed by organisations like National Trusts have increased the entertainment component so that the heritage place becomes, in effect, a theatre-in-the-round. In response to criticism in some circles that this represents a dumbing-down of heritage, I would instead argue that it is an instance of finding clever and different ways to tell the stories embedded in the heritage place. Re-enactments of historic events, or just dressing in costume and going about the business of everyday life in earlier times, has proved to be popular with some demographics in our society. Historic theme parks such as Sovereign Hill at Ballarat or Coal Creek Community Park and Museum at Korumburra in Gippsland have a real role to play. Some purists in the heritage movement have, in the past, been critical of such re-creations, asserting that they have no more legitimacy than theatre sets, but I have long held the view that those wishing to excite the interest of the wider community in heritage and its stories should feel free to embrace whatever popular platform is available, providing the information conveyed is authentic.

Being cognisant of what appeals to different age groups is an important step in fostering better awareness of our history. An excited child might subconsciously become a convert to heritage conservation later in life simply because of a memorable experience whilst viewing a sound and light show of the Eureka Stockade story. I have always been impressed with how Sovereign Hill has striven to ensure that the depiction of living and working on the Ballarat goldfields is as historically accurate as possible, using actual heritage artefacts and memorabilia to help tell the stories that bring previous generations to life. National Trusts have often worked in partnership with such historic theme parks, providing original items for display. Victoria's National Trust has passed carriages to Sovereign Hill, and two of its nineteenth-century portable corrugated houses, notably Loren, were moved to the Coal Creek Museum Trust.

Many images of National Trusts around the world confirm that this active 'theatre-in-the-round' approach is popular, especially with the younger members of our respective communities. Examples include knightly jousting re-enactments in the grounds of a castle owned by the Gelderland Trust; sail riggers in action on the Victorian National Trust's barque *Polly Woodside* in the Yarra River (Figures 3 and 4); old farm hands at work with Clydesdale horses at Gulf Station, the Victorian National Trust farm at Yarra Glen in the Yarra Valley; and colonial guards and ladies in period dress walking the streets of historic Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, a listed US National Historic Landmark. In short, these approaches to 'bringing to life' bygone eras earn their legitimacy in engaging with a wider community.

Those entertained may not be historians or architects, but the point is that people from all walks of life can be brought to appreciate the value of such historic places for the stories they tell that link past and present. Broadening the audience also has a strategic imperative, for the more people who appreciate and understand 'our' history—however 'our' is defined—the more chance we have of creating a constituency capable of influencing political decision-makers in relation to critical decisions on resource allocations. Further, some of those people who have had an inspiring or stimulating experience at an historic place may have influence in the private sector or may themselves become benefactors. Bequests from such individuals and organisations are important in assisting the upkeep of heritage places.



Figure 5: Period re-enactment by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (USA) (Courtesy International National Trusts Organisation)

For these reasons heritage organisations need to become more effective at conveying the stories of heritage places to a wider audience. In an era when public funds for heritage conservation are becoming increasingly scarce, the community or private sector must step into the breach to ensure that historic places are preserved for future generations. In this context the heritage conservation movement needs to be seen, to be heard and to be relevant. Only in this way can organisations such as the National Trusts sustain, or preferably increase, the necessary supporter base for achieving their objectives.

History has shown that the obliteration of a culture, at its most serious, can lead to social annihilation, for instance where the connectivity between a people, their place and their history has been destroyed. The intangible importance of cultural relationships, such as ‘a sense of place’, is critical to a people’s social identity, their appreciation of diversity and their community’s sustainability. It has been an age-old tactic of warfare to drive a stake into the heart of those to be conquered by destroying their culture. Iconic places of symbolic importance to

a vanquished people have been destroyed throughout history, with the certain knowledge that ripping out the heart and soul of a people makes them more compliant. With the ability to view wars in real time through modern technology, we have all been shocked in recent decades by the horrific extremes of warfare embodied in cultural cleansing. From the destruction of the ancient World Heritage Buddhist statues in the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan by the Taliban in March 2001, to the burning by insurgents of the World Heritage Kasubi Tombs of the kings of Buganda in Kampala, Uganda, in March 2010, to the seemingly continual desecration of World Heritage sites in Iraq and Syria by ISIS, we have constantly been reminded that an awful but effective weapon of warfare is the determined destruction of cultural heritage.

Reference to the ‘intangible importance of cultural relationships, such as “a sense of place” as ‘critical to a people’s social identity’, sense of diversity and community sustainability, also appeared in the 2011 Victoria Declaration referred to earlier. Although less dramatic than warfare, poor planning that pays insufficient heed to cultural connectivity in a developed country such as Australia can undermine the sense of place a community once enjoyed. This neglect can be as drastic as leaving no remaining physical vestige. National Trusts and heritage organisations know only too well how effective poor planning can be in undermining a community. Thus successful heritage conservation should reinforce the importance of retaining a sense of place. To achieve this objective, heritage organisations must enlist the community and ensure that it is vigilant and aware of the consequences of the loss of historic fabric, including natural places that have cultural or social significance. In other words securing the eyes and ears of an ever-widening community is essential. In short, National Trusts must strive to secure committed recruits for the cause of heritage conservation.

Traditional ways of conveying the history of heritage places remain important, but the need to augment the experience utilising the opportunities offered by new technology has become increasingly apparent. Heritage place managers have come to accept that their presentation of heritage places needs to evolve to reflect the changing expectations, interests and backgrounds of the audience. Audio presentations through headphones worn by visitors as they move from room to room in an historic building, or electronically triggered surround-sound voices and filmed images projected onto walls, are now

commonplace in well-funded heritage properties the world over. It is necessary to add that qualification of 'well-funded' since these wonderful advances in technology do come at considerable expense, and this has seriously challenged the budgets of smaller heritage organisations and National Trusts everywhere. Sadly, the anticipation of technological enhancement has given rise to unreal expectations among visitors, who now demand such standards of presentation, complaining if the 'old school' approach to a museum house is all that is on offer. Consequently, the expense of managing and presenting museum houses and their collections has risen exponentially in recent years, far exceeding any growth in funding for the heritage sector in Australia and elsewhere.

I have displayed here a range of approaches to the presentation and depiction of heritage places, from the traditional approach through to the latest technology. In all instances, irrespective of the era from which the approach was derived, the common theme is to encourage 'heritage awareness', moulded to meet the differing backgrounds, ages or expectations of the target audience. The aim has always been to provoke and stimulate thought, even if the comparison between today's assisted approaches and the common approaches of the past shows a somewhat stark contrast. Another critical and common aspect of the presentation of heritage places over the decades has been the need to be historically accurate.

The key purpose of the presentation of heritage places is to excite the interest of the visitor or viewer. However, the exercise of 'exciting interest' must involve more than mere entertainment; rather it should seek to increase awareness of the importance of heritage, to encourage those visiting a heritage site or viewing an exhibition within such a site to be stimulated by what they have seen and heard. The aim should be to ensure that the visitor experience is thought provoking, exciting an interested response. In achieving this, the heritage place performs the function of being 'history-in-the-round'.

The photographs shown during this lecture demonstrate a wide spectrum of approaches adopted to convey information of interest about historic places. These range from the traditional information board to the more modern graphic depiction utilising embedded photographs in information boards. At Richmond Bridge, constructed in 1825 to link Hobart to the Tasmanian east coast and Port Arthur, an informative board conveys both architectural and social history, together with a

snippet about a ghost that allegedly frequents the bridge. Clearly the intent is to serve a range of interests. Down the street, a wall painting, obviously a couple of decades older, depicts a town crier's scroll announcing the key dates and historic events of old Richmond town. It serves its purpose well. Basic and rather quaint, it is nevertheless informative. Another image in my presentation, taken along the Burke and Wills Expedition trail, is of simple black and white painted boards tacked onto an ancient river red gum trunk. These convey basic unadorned facts, such as: 'This tree marks the site of one of the camping places of the Burke and Wills Expedition.' Oddly, this basic signage, attached as it is to that ancient red gum, needs nothing more to convey the sense of place. Indeed, the atmosphere of the location combined with the deliberately simple presentation of information about its significance is sufficient to move most visitors and to embed memories of their visit to a very special place (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Basic information signage about the Burke & Wills Expedition, Menindee Lakes, NSW (Courtesy Simon R. Molesworth, photographer)

Public art, largely comprising sculptures in the public domain, also plays an important part in connecting people with the origins of places and raising awareness of historic events that occurred there. As with other means of educating people about heritage, public art

designed to depict matters of historic significance must be interesting, thought provoking and focused on representing an aspect of historic truth. Examples include the stylistic sculptures of seedpods in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, conveying messages about colonial exploration around the world, spreading exotic plant species from continent to continent, and transforming environments globally. Among other examples are the bronze sculptures of huskie dogs astride snow sleds outside the Mawson's Huts Replica Museum in Hobart, reminding the viewer of the critically dependent relationship between Antarctic explorers and their dogs (Figure 7). Similarly, the sculpture of the urchin boy in the banking precinct of Martin Place in Sydney reminds one of the harsh reality of street life and social inequality in colonial Sydney. Equally thought provoking are the bronze sculptures titled 'The Late Edition' on the footpath in the Melbourne bayside suburb of Hampton; these comprise stacked newspapers, no longer published, to remind us of the pre-digital age when we all relied on banner headlines for the daily news. Perhaps the best known example is the iconic dog sitting on the tucker box at Gundagai, described as a tribute to pioneers, reminding us of bygone years when a drover and his dog might be seen on remote dusty roads walking from station to station looking for work. All these examples of public art instantly evoke memories, reminiscences and associations, or the recalling of particular items of poetry and literature that have in turn aided us in our understanding of our nation's history.

There are common threads in all these instances of 'history-in-the-round', with heritage places concurrently performing an instructional purpose and fulfilling a social need. Such heritage places when adequately conserved and then explained, through signage or other means of triggering interest, perform multiple functions. They connect us with our traditions; they connect people within their local communities giving rise to a sense of belonging; and they create meaningful linkages between people and their places—places that, in one way or another, are significant to them. Importantly, such places help to foster passion in heritage, and it is passion that inspires action.

It has been found that markers, erected at or on heritage places, are a good means of increasing awareness of heritage. People find them thought provoking and stimulating, especially if they are part of a heritage trail. The process of walking, of moving from one designated spot to another, creates an overall experience that tends to connect



Figure 7: Sculpture of Mawson's huskies outside the Mawson's Huts Replica Museum, Hobart, Tasmania (Courtesy Simon R. Molesworth, photographer)

participants emotionally with the trail of sites they are viewing. In the past, when funds were more freely available, owners of listed or registered historic properties would receive a bronze plaque from the National Trust, which would be attached to the wall of the place. Although limited to a few basic facts of date of construction, property name and associated person, these plaques collectively conveyed a wealth of information about the greater body of classified heritage properties. Further, many owners of heritage places would proudly affix the plaque to their property, thinking it was rather like receiving a prestigious award.

Heritage trail markers have also been popular, not just with tourists, but with local communities proud of their association. Melbourne still has a trail of informative small blue enamel plaques on heritage buildings throughout the CBD, a project funded by the then State Bank of Victoria. In the Bicentenary year, the gold trail was created in Melbourne's CBD, with small bronze pavement plaques tracing events and places in the city's early history. In Sydney throughout the CBD there are fairly large pavement plaques marking the location of largely demolished heritage properties and telling the story of what once stood on adjoining sites. In Broken Hill, the streets in the main commercial precinct, particularly Argent Street, have pavement plaques naming each of the well-known artists of the district, such as Pro Hart and Jack Absalom. This very

successful initiative clearly follows the American precedent of the stars in the pavement in the Walk of Fame along Hollywood Boulevard.

One challenge of heritage management is to capture oral histories relating to place. The recorded reminiscences of persons associated with a place provide a wonderful means of bringing it 'alive'. As mentioned earlier, the popular surround-sound voices, triggered when one enters a room in a heritage property, work well in many places. To hear the voices of people who actually lived or worked in a place, rather than the voices of actors, brings greater reality and meaning to the experience. What is at the heart of the meaningful nature of such experiences is an appreciation of intangible heritage. Bricks and mortar are important, but the storylines associated with a place will truly bring heritage 'alive'. Where funds are available to heritage property managers, capturing oral histories has become a priority. In short, it seems that everyone loves the 'human' or personal side of history.

Many of us are familiar with the technology of a headphone and audio pickup system, which has been popular in art galleries, museums and heritage places over at least the last couple of decades. Shortage of funds has caused the National Trusts in Australia to be tardy in their uptake of such technology, with only a very few heritage properties offering such a visitor experience. By contrast, one can hardly imagine visiting a heritage property in the United Kingdom, in Europe or in the USA where such audio guides are not readily available in heritage properties open to the public.

Technology is moving still further ahead with the emergence of smart phone apps, which perform a similar function to the audio tour with headphone and audio pickup, but with much greater flexibility and real-time convenience. We now have the means of greatly expanding the freedom of visitors or viewers to conduct their own tour of heritage places via their smart phones, which pick up presentations triggered by the precise GPS location of the phone. As the reach of smart phones is so extensive, interested individuals now have the ability to link into heritage place information wherever and whenever they are in range. I have apps on my mobile phone set up by English Heritage, the NTEWNI and Cadw—the heritage agency of Wales. In each instance, when I have travelled around the UK, these apps have sprung to life advising me what heritage place is in the next town, or across the countryside landscape as I travel through it. The app can then provide me with details of a given

place such as opening hours, precise directions and description of the place. Once at a chosen heritage place, these apps can then link into guided tours or a range of other informative links. They can be updated in real time, changing the information as circumstances change, such as warning that a heritage garden may have just been closed owing to storm damage that day. This flexibility makes for an extraordinarily powerful and useful tool.

The National Trusts in Australia, invariably under-resourced, have not yet developed the capacity to provide smart phone apps of the same sophistication as those available in the UK and in Europe. Nevertheless, promising advances are emerging. In Victoria, the National Trust has developed a phone app called ‘Trust Trees’, which provides access to the Significant Tree Register of the Trust. Using GPS locational technology, one can simply open the app and, once it locates your position, it will then direct you to significant heritage trees in proximity to you. Via this app you can open up a photograph and full description of a tree as listed in the register.

The next stage of advancement in heritage technology is virtual reality. Traditional approaches to conveying information about Aboriginal rock art can be demonstrated by the Ngurrampaa rock art figures at Mt Grenfell, one of the parks under the care of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. The attractive new signage, seen in late 2018, was colourful and informative, providing good information about the traditional owners, their artwork, their methodologies and traditions. Nevertheless, it was static and vulnerable to the harsh Outback climatic conditions. Some signage was already weathering. The presentation of this heritage place is adequate for the time being, but the future holds better options.

In Canberra, Indigenous woman Mikaela Jade won a 2018 national award for a rock art app that she created utilising virtual reality. Her award was for entrepreneurs using 21st-century technology, in her case bringing alive the ancient stories of Indigenous people, including those embedded in rock art thousands of years old. Ms Jade has established an entity called Indigital Storytelling through which she uses augmented reality. The phone app has cleverly embraced this technology, bringing to life static rock art figures, which then perform the storyline seen in the artwork in 3D animation.

In closing this lecture, I wish to emphasise to heritage custodians that each heritage place has the capacity to engender interest, to be a theatre-in-the-round telling the stories that are embedded in the historic fabric of the place. The heritage movement needs to expand its audience, continually looking for ways to engage with a greater diversity of people. It needs to appeal to differing ethnic communities, respecting the cultural heritage that they have brought to Australia whilst inspiring them to embrace the cultural heritage that preceded them here, most particularly that of Australia's first people. We need to appeal to the full spectrum of age groups in our community, seeking ways we can connect with those who expect to have technology at their fingertips enhancing their life's experiences. And we need also to be imaginative, appealing to sentiment, utilising humour, being provocative and always stimulating, whilst at the same time adhering to historical accuracy and engendering mutual respect across our diverse cultural communities. In adopting these approaches, we can ensure that heritage conservation in Australia has a sustainable future.

Making History by Saving It: The Second Weston Bate Oration

Kristin Stegley

It is an honour to have been invited to deliver the 2019 Weston Bate Oration. I admire historians generally and admire deeply the great historian, Weston Bate. Weston was my hero. I was not a student of his in the traditional sense; rather, over many years of discussion and campaigning together, Weston came to teach me a great many things. It was our mutual interest in the history and heritage of Brighton that first brought us together. Weston was my mentor. I listened. I learned. It was Weston who said to me, sometime around 1998, 'Kristin, we make history by saving it'. This was a pearl of wisdom. In honour of Weston Bate, let's talk about that, and more. History and heritage are not the same things. Historians record, analyse and interpret the fascinating events, happenings and social evolutions of the past and present. Heritage, on the other hand, is the extraordinary window that allows us to walk through the landscape of history, providing an experiential opportunity to more deeply understand it, to be touched and shaped by history and, ultimately, to come to the knowledge of why it is important and why it matters.

An understanding and appreciation of history and heritage is, I suspect, what drives many of us in this room. It is certainly what drives the National Trust. It drives our core advocacy work and the Trust's programs in education as well as its wide offering of events. Let me give you just a few examples of what I mean by making history by saving it.

A particularly notable event was the historic occasion in the 1970s when 10,000 people mustered in protest on the lawns of Rippon Lea to save them from a Commonwealth takeover that would have seen both the lawns and the garden subsumed into the neighbouring ABC complex. The Commonwealth backed down. Many years later, the success of that historic protest paved the way for another historic achievement with the elevation of the Rippon Lea Estate to the Australian Heritage List, largely on account of the significance of its garden, deemed to be one of the most important in the country.

Another example is the 1973 Trust-led campaign to save the Commercial Bank of Australia in Collins Street. Had this building been

destroyed, an important record of Australia's banking history would have been lost.

The saving of the Regent Theatre was another important battle, won through a wide coalition of campaigners, including the trade union movement whose ban on the place played a pivotal role. The Regent Theatre episode is a fascinating part of the history of the 'Preservation Wars' of the 1970s and an example of the power of communities working together for historic heritage outcomes and change. The campaign to save the Regent was just one of the numerous battles of the 1970s that led to the history-making moment when Premier Rupert Hamer introduced the first heritage legislation in Australia, the *Historic Buildings Act 1974*. It may be less well known that it was the Victorian National Trust that drafted the first heritage bill in 1969 and presented it to the then state government. Regrettably, another five years passed before a preservation measure became law.

Two further examples of making history by saving it include the Windsor Hotel and Melbourne's W-class trams. It is hard to believe today that the Windsor Hotel was threatened with demolition in 1976. The Windsor is not just a significant heritage place, but also a place where Australian history was made, for it was at the Windsor, then known as the 'Grand Hotel', that delegates to the Australasian Federation Conference stayed and met informally to discuss aspects of the final version of the Australian Constitution drawn up early in 1898. W-class trams, on the other hand, remind us that it is not always about buildings. If state governments of any colour truly had their way, all of the W-class trams would be off the network, and what would that mean for our transport history and heritage? The National Trust has led Melburnians' determination to keep the trams rolling against fierce opposition.

A very recent example of making history by saving it is Federation Square. Heritage Victoria's rejection of a demolition permit for the Yarra Building is historic. So too is the elevation of Federation Square to the Victorian Heritage Register through a decision of the Heritage Council. The case was mounted by the National Trust and won. Federation Square is Melbourne's greatest monument to Federation. It is now deemed to be a place of cultural and social significance as Victoria's premier civic and cultural space.

What is the unifying common thread to all this making of history by saving it? Undoubtedly, it is people coming together, joining forces

and, in doing so, making their voices louder and stronger. They are effectively messaging that history and heritage are important, that they matter and deserve to be an ongoing part of our lives. It is regrettably true, however, that many think of significance as lying in the past when, in actual fact, it lies in the present. It is significant now because we are in the present and it connects us now. That is a message that needs to be more widely championed.

Following another line of inquiry, I wish to show the significance of heritage in representing both ‘Hard’ and ‘Soft’ power and thus complicating and extending our understanding of memorialisation. Most written world histories have been the recording and analysis of what we might label ‘Hard Power’. Gripping accounts of the great ‘Hard Power’ forces of might have shaped our understanding of the world and dominated its history; such ‘Hard Power’ forces include the power of the military, the power of the ruling elite, the deeds of powerful individuals (usually men), the mighty power of religion and the churches, and the power of the state. It is not surprising then that the vast majority of historic monuments all around the world are celebrations or immortalisations of these ‘Hard Power’ forces.

As this is an illustrated lecture, I have chosen some obvious examples of ‘Hard Power’ such as: the naval complex at Greenwich; the Queenscliff Fort, closer to home; the Tower of London, an impregnable image of ‘Hard Power’; Parliament House; St Peter’s Basilica, Rome, illustrating the mighty power of the Catholic church and stamping its religious authority worldwide; and magnificent mosques such as Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, signifying the power of Islam. Famous painted images of Napoleon and Wellington show how the arts have been co-opted into the service of ‘Hard Power’, depicting the deeds of powerful men and their quest for dominance—to wage war, to win, to rule and, ultimately, to exercise power.

Let me flip the narrative now to the concept of what can be called ‘Soft Power’. I do so because I think it is one of the game changers that is required to strengthen both history and heritage and cement the interconnections between them. The term, ‘Soft Power’ was first coined by international relations expert Joseph Nye to refer to the influence that countries can have in global geopolitics outside of the military or economic might that constitutes ‘Hard Power’. ‘Soft Power’ is the ability to influence people through persuasion, attraction, or setting the

agenda. It is about encouraging people to want what you want and to act accordingly. ‘Soft Power’ is most credible when conducted by civil society organisations—which is why it is important for us that we are aware of it and engage with it.

Historic and heritage places can be sources of ‘Soft Power’. We need to tap into that. We can strengthen both history and heritage by changing the narrative from Hard Power Past to Soft Power Future. We saw this potential for a changed narrative realised in 2014 when the moat of the Tower of London was transformed into the blood-swept lands of Europe during the Great War. The installation of nearly a million ceramic poppies created a sea of red, representing the British and colonial lives lost in World War I and signifying the true price of war. The ‘Hard Power’ tower was transformed for the purpose of influencing: to persuade as well as to stimulate new ways of understanding the history of war and its consequences.

Heritage places are landmarks and places with the power to influence people through exhibitions, programs, their collections and their research. In the nineteenth century, Kingston Lacy House in the UK was formerly owned by William John Bankes. In the 1830s, William Bankes was forced into exile after a homosexual liaison became known. Bankes had to flee for his life. On a visit to Kingston Lacy today, one might expect to find on display the ‘usual suspects’—items of Chippendale furniture and portraits by Gainsborough and Reynolds on the walls. Indeed these are to be found, but a display that most would not expect lies in Kingston Lacy’s basement, which is chillingly lined with hanging nooses. This exhibition, first displayed at the house in 2018, paid tribute to the 51 men hanged under the laws of the day that criminalised same-sex acts during Bankes’s lifetime. It was a moving, unsettling and powerful installation. In setting it up, the UK National Trust was telling a story that is integral to the house and its human history.

Changing the heritage and history narrative through art, creativity, technology and engagement is what we must do to be relevant and contemporary. Some of this ‘Soft Power’ approach has been happening for some time. Melbourne’s White Night is a good example of ‘Soft Power’ at work. It is a fun-filled, playful way for hundreds of thousands to engage with heritage places and thus to make heritage relevant in their lives. We win if we make people feel connected to the places they

visit. Heritage places belong to the people. The ‘Soft Power’ of heritage places lies in its ability to connect the places with people.

Another outstanding tool for generating ‘Soft Power’ engagement is 3D virtual reality. This is not just a new form of storytelling, but a means of creating an interface for all ages—children, parents and grandparents all very much enjoy the transformation of familiar landmarks and welcome the opportunity of sharing the experience. At a National Trust Exhibition in 2016 titled ‘Virtually There’, people were able to experience a number of historical insights through 3D virtual reality. Such experiences are also offered at several Trust properties including Old Melbourne Gaol and Rippon Lea as well as on the Trust’s website. As the website explains, ‘this application lets you wander around our sites and see them just as though you could really walk around from room to room or place to place’. The website offers a tour of the Polly Woodside and the Old Melbourne Gaol.

My last and greatest example of ‘Soft Power’ is located in our own backyards. Look no further than Australia’s Indigenous people. Not a single building or monument. Instead, 60,000 years of cultural heritage through dance, ceremony, rock art, sand painting, song lines, storytelling and land use. The landscape of Budj Bim (Lake Condah), owned by the Gunditjmarra and recognised in a native title decision in 2007, gained UNESCO World Heritage status in July 2019, the first site in Australia to gain such a distinction on Aboriginal cultural grounds alone. This decision will enhance the Gunditjmarra people’s cultural heritage by more effectively promoting knowledge and understanding of their 3,000-year-old ancient engineered eel traps and stone house remains. It will also enhance the revitalisation of the Gunditjmarra language and culture and enable the people to showcase the story of the Eumerella War and the Convincing Ground massacre.

Aside from actively engaging through ‘Soft Power’, what else can we do to strengthen our sectors? Part of the necessary analysis involved in developing new strategies is to identify our weaknesses. The National Trust can identify many. The first is a lack of funding for heritage. A key factor underlying the paucity of funds is the absence of leadership in the halls of power to advocate for heritage protection and promotion. Few would be aware that neither major political party went to the recent 2019 federal election with a heritage policy. Second is the failure of politicians at all levels to understand the economic and

tourism benefits of heritage places and events. Third, the underfunding of heritage puts it at extraordinary risk. All around the world, accidents and catastrophes threaten to inflict serious damage on heritage places that are increasingly fragile because of under-investment in their upkeep and protection. Australia is no exception. Fourth, there are multiple flaws in our planning system in Victoria. The review of the Heritage Act two years ago was a lost opportunity for positive heritage outcomes. Little, if any, reform was introduced to strengthen the heritage aspects of planning legislation. Loopholes have not been closed, and conflict between planning and heritage laws persist. Fifth, local government remains chronically underfunded to deal adequately with heritage issues, including the employment of heritage advisers.

Strengthening the planning system with respect to heritage protection is possible. The National Trust will continue to advocate for the required reforms. Meanwhile, our greatest strength continues to lie in collectively and cooperatively working together. There is enormous support, passion and energy for heritage advocacy across Australia. A key question for all of us is how do we best harness that energy and support, and how do we make it efficient? The National Trust Advocacy Toolkit launched last year is one step taken that helps advance this support. It contains carefully crafted advice, provides essential and useful information, and is clearly presented. The Toolkit is empowerment.

Learning from each other and transferring the principles of successful advocacy leads to great strengthening. Analysis of why a campaign worked well is essential in order to use it again with success. For example, why did people get involved with the Fed Square campaign? We know the following reasons were important: for some it was because of social connection to place, for others it was architectural value and integrity, while many expressed social and cultural reasons. For still others it was the importance of public open space, and many were just white hot with anger at the injustice of no consultation. All, or some, of these reasons can be transferred to campaigns currently raging across Victoria against threats to heritage places.

Being savvy and absolutely engaged with the technological world is now critical to strong and effective advocacy. A plethora of new technology plays right into our hands to enhance 'Soft Power'. Let us all grab it. Social media is huge. It has never been easier to get a message out. Social media is a tool that reaches a great many and engages with a

very broad demographic. This medium means that we can take history and heritage to huge audiences—they do not have to come to us.

New technology gives heritage advocacy a nimbleness and an immediacy that previously did not exist. Large numbers of people can quickly be gathered to support a cause, sign a petition, do things easily and co-opt others. However, let us be careful not to rely too much on the latest technology because change in this area is so rapid that new technologies are often only effective in the short term. For these reasons, organisations like the National Trust and the RHSV remain important—we are here for the long term. Long after the others have moved on, we will still be fighting to preserve and protect heritage.

One of the most important things we can do to ‘make history by saving it’ is to repeatedly press the case for increased heritage investment for urgent action, and for changed thinking with regard to the social, economic and cultural benefits of heritage preservation. Decades of inaction have led to huge heritage loss. Steps must be taken to prevent both purposeful and inadvertent neglect. All around the country we see heritage places falling into disrepair through ‘demolition by neglect’. Laws need to be introduced to stop this.

We need the Commonwealth or state government to establish a heritage skills training program. Heritage skills are being lost at an alarming rate. These skills need to be passed on to the next generation. What good is saving heritage and historic places if the future holds no capacity to keep them well conserved? Surely if ‘jobs and growth’ are as important to the economy as the politicians declare, then employment in the heritage sector should be provided and supported.

Indeed, there are a number of actions that governments could take that would either cost nothing or add very little to the bottom line over time. One action would be to introduce a Heritage Lottery Scheme similar to the one that has operated in the United Kingdom for decades, contributing over a billion dollars to heritage conservation. Another action would be to properly establish and underwrite a ‘Heritage Revolving Fund’, with the sole purpose of purchasing endangered heritage places across the state. Such a fund would work quite simply, relying on a four-step program. Purchase the endangered place, restore it, sell and make a profit, go out and do it again, thus saving another heritage place. Repeat steps 1–4. Revolving funds work successfully all over the world. We urgently need one in Victoria.

None of the above suggestions for action are pipe dreams. They are all doable. We should be demanding such actions because our heritage and history are not only deserving but essential to our sense of national and community identity. Nor are these actions big calls. We must stay focused on these strategies and be agents for change. Collectively, we have great agency and capacity to raise our community's awareness, understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of heritage and historic places—perhaps even to touch people's hearts and minds. This is what Weston Bate would want. He would say, 'keep on making history by saving it'.

I conclude with this image of Weston campaigning on his beloved Dendy Beach, Brighton, against an inappropriate over-development that would have a destructive impact on the heritage and cultural values of the place. Unsurprisingly, I was with Weston at the time and overheard his response to a journalist who posed the following question: 'So, what do you say to people seeing this as progress and you can't stop progress?' I watched as Weston inhaled deeply and then boomed out, 'BOOOOOOOOO PROGRESS!' Weston then lent closer to the journalist and quietly said, 'True progress is having the wisdom to leave it alone. To know that to change it is to destroy it.' This was yet another pearl of wisdom from Weston Bate. We must keep his passion and insight alive.

Cremorne Gardens, Gold-rush Melbourne, and the Victorian-era Pleasure Garden, 1853–63*

James Lesh

Abstract

For ten summer seasons, from 1853 to 1863, Cremorne Gardens—gold-rush Melbourne’s premier leisure attraction—welcomed thousands of visitors. A desirable modern pleasure garden, Cremorne, this article argues, was at once a space of modernity for its host colonial city, and a remarkable node in a global network of mid-nineteenth-century pleasure gardens. Cremorne’s three proprietors, including the prominent businessman and politician George Coppin, carefully arranged this commercial venture. Cremorne became an alluring urban space that engendered new social experiences and provoked contested responses, inflected by contemporary standards of social etiquette and public morality. Cremorne thus reflected broader urban, social and cultural patterns of the era.

As the “Cremorne” was so frequently the theme of everybody’s discourse, I naturally made it my business to pay a visit ... The glitter of lamps, gas and Chinese ... gleamed through the gentle waving branches of trees, the sweet strains of music as they rose and fell, groups of well-dressed persons gliding to and fro, the distant sheen of the lake, and the subdued hum of voices, made a very pleasurable complement of the vanities of this wicked world ... Dancing was carried on with great vigor at the Rotunda ... The refreshment room was one blaze of subdued light, illuminated flags made of colored glass graced the different avenues with elegant effect ... About midnight the train whistles up, Cremorne is deserted, and the Melbourne “Arabian Night’s Entertainment” vanishes into thin air.¹

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When journalist William Anderson Cawthorne travelled to Melbourne in 1861, he made sure he visited Cremorne Gardens. This urban space was the city's premiere leisure attraction and a must-see destination for visitors to gold-rush Melbourne. After his return to Adelaide, Cawthorne penned his newspaper report, spreading word of this at once idyllic and euphoric space. Cremorne was characterised by Cawthorne as otherworldly, operating in sharp relief to the outside world. Cremorne was also visualised by Cawthorne as thoroughly modern: perfectly laid out, charmingly decorated, and boasting thrilling entertainments, abundant food and drink, and excellent transport links. Many others characterised Cremorne in a similar way, though its moral detractors did not. Yet Cawthorne might also have been describing a visit to a contemporaneous pleasure garden in London, Chicago or Copenhagen. The pleasure garden was a nineteenth-century urban phenomenon, and this was a particularly notable Australian rendering.

The proprietors of Melbourne's Cremorne Gardens manufactured modern experiences for visitors. Cremorne's successive principal proprietors, the imprudent James Ellis and the brilliant George Coppin, were inspired by the most up-to-date global entertainment trends. They wanted Cremorne to be an alluring—and profitable—leisure attraction. As a commercial operation, Cremorne attracted visitors by providing novel entertainment. Cremorne operated between 1853 and 1863 in the context of gold-rush Melbourne, a period during which Melbourne was transformed, in the words of historian Graeme Davison, 'from a small and unknown pioneer settlement into a proud metropolis.'² It was an era of spectacular growth for the city in terms of population, wealth and physical size. Population increased more than four-fold from 30,000 to 125,000 people. The newfound wealth of Melbourne's residents funded the expansion of the city, building up the central Hoddle Grid and then laying suburbs along the new road and rail routes. With the discovery of gold and the large-scale migration that followed, the city's development was rapid, and the suburbs and streets had a capricious atmosphere. The gender imbalance was stark, with young men outnumbering women almost two to one. In 1854, for instance, metropolitan Melbourne housed 25,710 men between the ages of 20 and 39 but only 14,931 women in the same age group.³ In historian David Goodman's account, Cremorne appears as a haunt for young people, married and unmarried, reflecting the intemperance, moral instability and lawlessness of the era.⁴

Cremorne Gardens' urban setting was distinctively colonial (Figure 1). As was the case with other pleasure gardens, Cremorne also provoked a range of responses; while the new leisure attraction was praised by Cawthorne, temperance reformer Richard Heales condemned the 'demoralising scenes witnessed in Cremorne Gardens'.⁵ These conflicting responses reflected the unstable place occupied by Cremorne in the social imagination of its host city, ranging from innocent pleasure to illicit gratification.

Exploring Cremorne Gardens through the lens of urban history provides insights for the global history of nineteenth-century pleasure gardens and, more specifically, gold-rush Melbourne. Cremorne was bound to global historical developments in leisure, commerce, colonialism and technology. This article draws on wide-ranging archival research and is the first substantive study of Cremorne Gardens and its historical, social and cultural significance for 1850s and 1860s Melbourne. The sources on which it is based include local and international periodicals, municipal records, published memoirs and manuscript collections containing correspondence, diaries and ephemera. The research was undertaken at the State Library Victoria, the Public Record Office Victoria and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. Adopting a lens of urban modernity, this article first locates Cremorne Gardens within colonial Melbourne and the history of pleasure gardens. It then considers the ways Cremorne's entrepreneurs created innovative and exciting experiences for patrons, thus defining the gardens as a significant and progressive urban space for the expanding colonial city.

Welcome to Cremorne Gardens

Established in 1853, Cremorne welcomed up to 10,000 visitors every day and night during its annual summer season. Over the gardens' ten-year life more than 10 per cent of the city's population may well have been there at any one time during the height of the season.⁶ A diverse throng of colonial settlers visited this increasingly accessible and popular entertainment precinct. Men and women, young and old, children and families, members of the social elite, officials and diplomats (though not necessarily their wives), professionals, working-class people and diggers, recent arrivals, locals and tourists all attended.⁷ Among the crowds drawn to Cremorne were newly arrived migrants living in the crowded hotels and boarding houses of central Melbourne. Some were



Figure 1: Extract of Cremorne Gardens from James J. Blundell & Co., ‘Electoral Plan of Melbourne and its Suburbs’, c. 1856 (Courtesy Maps Collection, State Library Victoria)

more likely to be attracted to this theme park than others. Carefree and raucous young men found it particularly alluring. As argued in the accounts of Goodman and Davison, this demographic also shaped the broader social and cultural life of Melbourne in the 1850s.

The price of admission to Cremorne Gardens fluctuated from season to season, typically settling at one shilling to pass through the gate, with an additional charge for food and drinks and some amusements.⁸ Cremorne was affordable but not cheap; one shilling represented around 10 per cent of a worker’s day wage at the time. Visitors enjoyed refined daytime entertainments such as promenading the tended gardens, performances (including at the 1,500-seat Pantheon Theatre), an American-style bowling saloon, a hedge maze and a menagerie replete with goldfish, white swans, lions and camels.⁹ The painted panoramas—which historian Mimi Colligan explored—were particularly spectacular.¹⁰ Although writer Louisa Anne Meredith did not attend, she relates that her politician husband Charles and their son returned with ‘marvellous accounts of the acrobats, dancers, variegated lamps, fireworks, and pyrotechnic tableaux’¹¹ Cremorne hosted fêtes for colonial elites, and—as the terminus for the annual eight-hour-day marches—it presented ‘The Working Men’s Fête’, along with festivals for the German community.¹² Yet Cremorne was most exciting at night. As

the sun set, the gas lamps were lit and the day-trippers departed, leaving young women and men to revel late into the night.¹³

Melbourne's Cremorne Gardens captured the popular imagination through both its social life and its entertainments—as with nineteenth-century pleasure gardens across the world. Established during the Elizabethan period, London's Vauxhall Gardens were perhaps the most illustrious, and certainly the most enduring, pleasure gardens; historian Wolfgang Schivelbush has called Vauxhall the originator of modern nightlife.¹⁴ Although it had lost its lustre by the mid-nineteenth century (and closed in 1859), it persisted in the Victorian-era imagination. There were many other nineteenth-century pleasure gardens. Modelled after the Parisian eighteenth-century *Jardin de Tivoli*, which shut in 1842, the oriental-themed Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen were founded in 1843 and continue to open every summer to the present day.¹⁵ London's Cremorne Gardens was an exemplar of the nineteenth-century pleasure garden and the namesake of Melbourne's Cremorne for reasons explored shortly. Dublin, Chicago, Sydney and many other cities and towns boasted their own pleasure gardens too.¹⁶ New York's Coney Island, along with the twentieth-century theme park, found its precursor in these pleasure gardens.¹⁷ The features that made pleasure gardens appealing included the opportunity for strolling in a semi-controlled and semi-regulated environment, incidental encounters with friends and strangers, enjoyable entertainments and modish hospitality. These features made a commercial pleasure garden more appealing than a public park or garden, spaces that also signified nineteenth-century 'rational' recreation.

In his 2013 edited collection, historian Jonathan Conlin suggests that the rapid emergence of pleasure gardens across the world in the nineteenth century was a consequence of the Industrial Revolution and, in turn, bound to the modern city with its leisure-seeking residents.¹⁸ As a form of popular, accessible, even transgressive entertainment, pleasure gardens provoked contradictory responses, imagined at once as dystopian dens of vice and as enchanting and fantastic paradises, depending on the perspective of the respondent. These were affective spaces, immersive environments facilitated by local and broader social, cultural and urban transformations. Rapid urbanisation led to growing numbers of city residents with time, money and an appetite for leisure. They produced a global demand for privately owned,

concentrated and diverse entertainment spaces, and one form this took was the pleasure garden. Historical geographer Miles Ogborn argues for Vauxhall Gardens in London that the pleasure garden reflected the modernisation, democratisation and commodification of urban life.¹⁹ In other words, pleasure gardens appeared in modernising cities, embraced the latest technologies, dissolved social hierarchies, and made leisure a chargeable activity.

Pleasure gardens were intricately bound up with nineteenth-century urban modernity. At its most simple and literal, to be modern means to be up-to-date and novel, criteria that Melbourne's Cremorne Gardens certainly met. But this article also draws on theoretical notions of modernity (way of being and ontology), modernisation (historical and social process), and modernism (cultural and artistic expression) elaborated by Marshall Berman in *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1983).²⁰ Berman wrote, 'To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.'²¹ Inspired by Berman, art historian Lynda Nead in *Victorian Babylon* (2000) posits London's nineteenth-century Cremorne Gardens as a 'schizophrenic social space' amid the city's 'night time world of sensation and sensuality'.²² London's Cremorne exemplified the ambiguities and paradoxes, the unresolvable tensions intrinsic to modern urban life. Like its London namesake, Melbourne's Cremorne Gardens at once reflected and embodied these historical shifts.

Modernity has a special resonance for Australia and its cities. Historian John Hirst follows Keith Hancock's dictum that Australia was 'born modern' as a product of nineteenth-century colonialism.²³ Davison has suggested that if Australia was 'born modern' it was also 'born urban'.²⁴ Cities therefore emerge as a critical component of Australian modernity. The themes of modernity and urbanism in Australia collide in Robert Dixon and Veronica Kelly's edited collection *Impact of the Modern* (2008) and Jill Matthews' *Dance Hall & Picture Palace* (2005).²⁵ For Matthews, modernity has to be understood as a global force in which Australian experiences were central rather than peripheral, at once influencing and influenced by changes elsewhere, an interpretation of modernity that resonates for Cremorne Gardens. This article therefore maps Cremorne as an active node in various global leisure networks. Crucially, Melbourne's Cremorne Gardens is unique

within these networks for its rapacious settler-colonial context and the remarkable significance that this site of pleasure held for its rapidly developing host city.

As Andrew May wrote in 2008, the ways Australian spaces have connected to various urban networks since the nineteenth century demand further examination.²⁶ Transnational studies have been part of the broadening horizons of urban history and its inseparable association with modernity, evidenced by historians Nicholas Kenny and Rebecca Madgin's edited collection *Cities Beyond Borders* (2015).²⁷ Following historians Catherine Hall, Alan Lester and others, this article seeks both accords and discords across cities and their spaces, forcing a reappraisal of colonial identity and presumptions of unidirectional flows from the metropole to the colonial city.²⁸ Like urban historian Richard Dennis in *Cities in Modernity* (2008), a comparative study of London, New York and Toronto, this article argues that modernity emerged out of transnational urban networks.²⁹ The proprietors of Melbourne's Cremorne Gardens imported ideas, structures and entertainments. To a lesser degree, entertainments, experiences and stories were exported from Melbourne's Cremorne Gardens, circulating within the British world and the United States and thus suggesting the possibility of reciprocal influence.³⁰ For instance, the 'Maori Warrior Chiefs' who performed at Melbourne's Cremorne would later appear in London.³¹ This article demonstrates that the innovative and transgressive form that Cremorne took was a product of both its immediate colonial Melbourne context and its global links to cities and pleasure gardens elsewhere.

Establishing a Colonial Pleasure Garden

City visionaries in colonial Melbourne desired a pleasure garden. The anonymous 1850 pamphlet *Melbourne as it is, and as it ought to be*, likely written by Redmond Barry, recorded that among the features of 'our ideal of a city' there would be a 'pleasure ground or public park'.³² A decade later, the *Argus* newspaper suggested Melburnians were still 'echoing the English cry for excitements of this nature', and that they lived in 'a "sweet south" climate, in which music, and the dance may be indulged in *al fresco*, without fear of cold or rheumatism'.³³ Green spaces such as parks, gardens and other recreational reserves were regarded as desirable inclusions in colonial urban planning at this time.³⁴ Physically, green spaces were characterised as picturesque, beautiful, light and airy. Ideologically, they suggested education, wellness and

moral improvement. The 1850 pamphlet argued that such spaces would ‘contribute greatly to the health and comfort of the inhabitants.’³⁵ Green spaces were, indeed, provided for in early Melbourne, with Governor Charles La Trobe reserving public land for parks from the 1840s,³⁶ including the Botanic Gardens. On the opposite bank of the Yarra River, further east, were the private Cremorne Gardens, which, despite the admission charge, were ‘more a people place than the snobbish Botanic Gardens,’ according to historian Weston Bate.³⁷ As Melbourne was flush with money on account of the gold rush, the entry charge of generally one shilling has not been interpreted by historians—nor by contemporaries—as an explicit barrier to entry. The promenades and tended gardens were, however, only one component of the Cremorne offering.

Gold-rush Melburnians also desired amusements, performances and hospitality: novel forms of leisure and entertainment. British cultural historian Peter Bailey has suggested that the growing numbers of people living in cities during the Victorian period perceived these emergent forms of leisure as a ‘frontier zone’: exciting and dangerous, less restrained by the past social order.³⁸ Historian Richard Waterhouse has provided similar insights concerning popular leisure activities in Australia, where social hierarchies were less defined or stable than in Britain.³⁹ In both contexts, people sought varied entertainments and diverse places, and, according to historian Geoffrey Serle, Cremorne Gardens ‘far surpassed all other attractions.’⁴⁰ A memoirist wrote in 1910:

Melbourne, you will please remember, was in the zenith of its golden glory then, and amusements of any sort were in demand. The digger population was “single”, and required amusement ... Melbourne was full of money; it ought to be said, in fact, that the gutters were running over with it.⁴¹

Cremorne supplemented and extended the entertainment zone along and in the vicinity of Bourke Street, where theatres, hotels, restaurants, bowling alleys and brothels clustered. Reports on the life of Cremorne appeared weekly in the metropolitan newspapers during the summer season.

When Cremorne was founded in 1853, Melbourne barely extended beyond the original Hoddle Grid. In this rapidly growing city, and after less than two seasons, Cremorne swiftly secured its place in the urban

landscape and the local consciousness. It appeared from 1855 onwards on most of Melbourne's significant maps and surveys.⁴² In Nathaniel Whittock's lithograph of central Melbourne 1854 (Figure 2), Cremorne was made present via 'The Cremorne Garden Steam Boat', which paddled along the Yarra, transporting guests to the gardens. Unlike 'The Theatre' and 'The Amphitheatre', Cremorne was labelled with its trading name. The other commercial enterprise explicitly identified by Whittock was the P&O Shipping Company (the British transport firm). This lithograph was dispatched to Britain where colonial authorities might have marvelled at the fledgling metropolis. Davison writes that Whittock's bird's-eye view of Melbourne 'highlights the crowded waterfront of the goldrush port as well as [various] new symbols of urban progress'.⁴³ A symbol of Melbourne's modernity was its pleasure garden, an archetypal form of modern leisure, and having one was appropriate to this city where colonial aspirations were seemingly being realised.⁴⁴ A related purpose of this lithograph was to demonstrate Melbourne's apparent vastness, reflected in the fact that Cremorne could not even be captured in the frame of this lithograph's imaginary vantage point.



Figure 2: Nathaniel Whittock, colour lithograph, *The City of Melbourne 1854*, London, Lloyd Brothers & Co., 1855 (Courtesy State Library Victoria, H34147)

Melburnians embraced their pleasure garden, but sustaining its operations and safeguarding its longevity depended on the entrepreneurial nous of its proprietor. A pleasure garden was a risky and capital-intensive private venture. A veteran of the London pleasure garden industry, James Ellis founded London's famed Cremorne Gardens in 1845. In 1849, he was characterised in a London newspaper as a moderniser for his democratic, imaginative and state-of-the-art pleasure garden:

He has done much to advance the taste for healthful and harmless recreations; he has spared neither pains nor expense to procure novel and attractive entertainments; indeed, throughout the season, novelty had succeeded: novelty with almost bewildering rapidity—the result has been, the most prosperous season on record.⁴⁵

Ellis had succeeded in pleasing his London patrons, gratifying the 'aristocratic loungeur' as much as 'the humbler tradesman'.⁴⁶ Despite this lavish praise, he seemingly lacked business acumen, for his London venture bankrupted him in 1850. London's Cremorne Gardens would continue under new management, peaking in popularity during the 1860s before shutting in 1877.⁴⁷

After his bankruptcy, Ellis left for Australia, sensing an opportunity to supply entertainments and amusements in gold-rush Victoria. He sailed from Plymouth to Port Phillip in July 1852 and arrived in Melbourne three months later in October 1852. He was one of tens of thousands of migrants arriving on hundreds of ships that crowded Queens Wharf on the lower Yarra River. Ellis's journey and intentions were recorded by the *Argus*, and there was some excitement surrounding his arrival in the colony. He brought with him, 'scenery, properties, and the necessary adjuncts for a portable theatre, to be erected at the diggings, a complete band of musicians and a Thespian company' and proposed 'to introduce [theatres and casinos and] thus combine pleasure with gold-seeking' for the Victorian colonists.⁴⁸ He opened the entertainment venue, the Salle de Valentino, on the northern corner of Bourke and Spring streets in June 1853, a rendezvous point for the 'fast men' of gold-rush Melbourne (up until its closure in 1857).⁴⁹ By January 1853 Ellis had also procured a house and garden in Richmond from the colonial architect Henry Ginn; this property he designated 'Cremorne'. Ellis called his Melbourne pleasure garden 'Cremorne Gardens' because

of his personal affinity with the name. Vauxhall was still the better known of London's pleasure gardens and the most common designation for overseas franchises, including at Randwick in Sydney.⁵⁰

Ellis's designs for his second Cremorne Gardens drew on his London experience. His selection of Richmond on the then outskirts of Melbourne provided the necessary physical space. Placing pleasure gardens on the edge of growing cities was common but could also lead to their demise. In London many pleasure gardens were 'absorbed by the insatiable metropolis', in Nead's words, swallowed up by their host city's outward physical, social and cultural expansion.⁵¹ Ellis's Melbourne site was 3 kilometres southeast of the city centre, and 12 acres in size (later expanded to 18 acres by George Coppin). A gentle hill sloped down to the winding Yarra, creating a delightful enclave. The *Illustrated Journal of Australasia* noted: 'The site seems specially adapted.'⁵² This riverbank was not entirely suitable for a pleasure garden, however, given that this part of Richmond was particularly flood prone. By 1857, Cremorne was less secluded than it had been in 1853 (Figure 1), yet still boasted an idyllic location. The proprietors—Ellis until another bankruptcy in 1855; then, in 1855–56, Percival Scott, a figure lost to history; and last, George Coppin, 1856–1863—took advantage of this river-side location.⁵³ Panoramas were placed for effect against the river backdrop, one of the many public bars was elevated to provide a vista of the river, and there was a wharf for river-borne transport to the site. Coppin was Cremorne's most notable proprietor, a nineteenth-century impresario, politician, actor and businessman, 'the King of Australian amusements' according to the *Age*.⁵⁴ In partnership with actor Gustavus Vaughan Brooke between 1855 and 1858, and then alone from 1859 to 1863, Coppin spent vast sums of money on improving the pleasure garden, often in advance of Melbourne's own development.

On the city's literal and metaphorical edge, Cremorne was endowed with an otherworldliness that contributed to its seductiveness. Before the river-borne gondola transport and the availability of rail and road links (explored below), visitors journeyed from the city to the pleasure garden by foot. The *Argus* suggested 'a stroll' across Richmond Paddock to reach Cremorne.⁵⁵ In the Paddock, there was, up until as late as 1863, an Indigenous camp where settlers took part in amusements, drinking, violence and interracial sex.⁵⁶ In the view of historian Penelope Edmonds, these camps on the urban frontier constituted a racial and

sexualised spectacle, and this, together with their associated vice and violence, had a powerful allure for colonists.⁵⁷ While colonial and oriental attractions (through entertainers and other spectacles) were imported to and presented at many pleasure gardens, at Melbourne's Cremorne colonialism was more tangible: realised via spatial proximity and encountered on the journey to and from the space. Melbourne was a product of settler colonialism, and, by the 1850s, an Australian colonial version of the British pleasure garden had been created in Melbourne.

The Entrepreneur and his Pleasure Garden

From its foundation by Ellis in 1853, Cremorne Gardens was improved each year to maintain the venue's attraction and enhance its facilities. Improvements included external access routes, ticket gates, internal walking paths, lighting, sewerage and irrigation. As with the gardens' descendants, the twentieth-century theme parks, the combination of these facilities and large crowds turned Cremorne into a miniature city. This pleasure garden had its own street life, its own architecture, its own essential services, its own workforce, its own transport and its own daily rhythms. It was a modern space at once dependent on, yet distanced from, Melbourne.

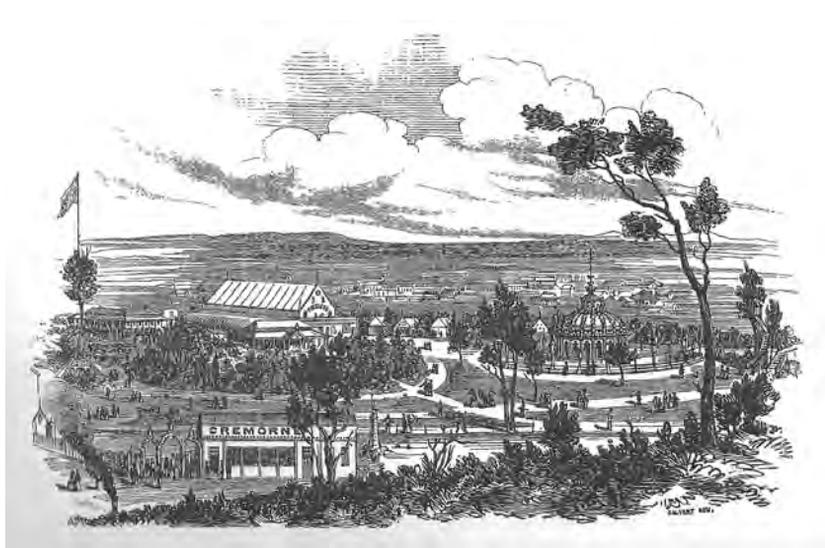


Figure 3: 'Cremorne Gardens', Etching, *Australian Home Companion*, 6 November 1857, republished in *Illustrated Journal of Australasia*, March 1858, and *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 20 December 1862

An engraving first published by *Australian Home Companion* previewed Cremorne Gardens (Figure 3). The engraver faces the gardens with the town in the distance behind them, the painted panoramas and Yarra River positioned to the right; the future railway station is situated across the other side of the gardens. At the entrance, signed ‘Cremorne’, a well-dressed crowd assembles. Arches embellished with illuminated lamps hover over the gateway, highlighting Cremorne’s separateness from its immediate surroundings. The piece was etched for the 1857 season after Coppin substantially upgraded the site: ‘no expense of labor has been spared to accumulate every varied amusement within the boundary of this popular place of recreation.’⁵⁸ To initially build and annually upgrade Cremorne involved imposing a colonial rationality on the land, an ordering and taming of the landscape. The engraving veils the conscious and deliberate efforts expended by Cremorne’s proprietors—the labour, wealth and effort invested—to construct immersive attractions for visitors in a colonial urban context so they might experience the pleasures evoked by similar attractions at centres of modernity such as London or New York. The rapid transformation of the south Richmond landscape was suggested by J. Alex Allan in his 1933 recollections in the *Argus*. Allan began his article as a walking tour: ‘To find the boundaries of Cremorne Gardens—once Wright’s Swamp—as they were in the ‘fifties and ‘sixties begin from the river end of Cremorne street, Richmond.’⁵⁹ He also prepared two useful maps of the site (Figure 4), based on Lexie Griffiths’ recollections in the *Australasian Boy’s Annual* from two decades earlier.⁶⁰ Allan’s first map overlaid Cremorne’s boundaries onto the 1885 street pattern and the second map incorporated a plan of Cremorne itself.

Passing under the arches depicted in the *Australian Home Companion* etching, Cremorne’s visitors approached tended paths and gardens, which the *Argus* described as containing, ‘the most beautiful flowers, English as well as tropical.’⁶¹ Seeds had been both sourced locally and imported from Britain, making these early gardens colonial hybrids. The green spaces served not only a popular and relaxing function but also performed a legitimising role with regard to the more controversial entertainments.⁶² The ‘pathways’ were soon elevated to the loftier term ‘boulevards’ in contemporary accounts, and Melburnians were invited to stroll along them for the purpose of both seeing and being seen.⁶³ As with the Parisian boulevards inhabited by Baudelaire’s flâneur, or the

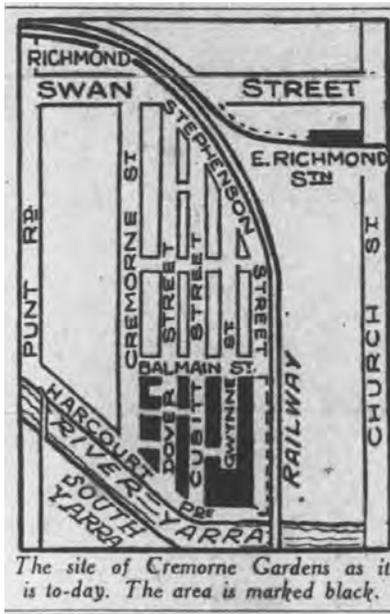
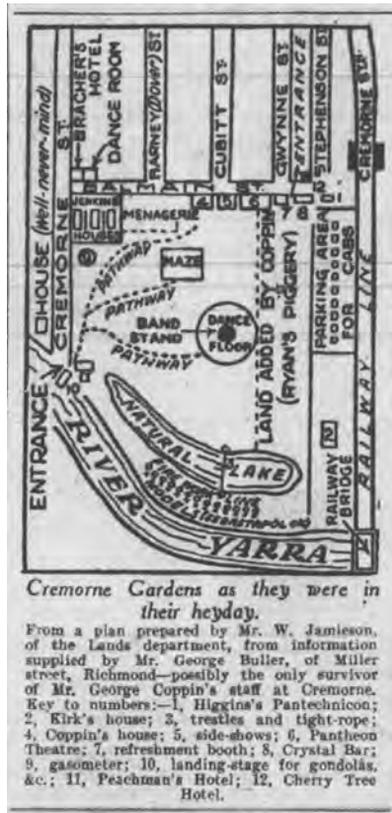


Figure 4: J. Alex Allan, Coppin's Cremorne: Richmond in the 'Fifties', Sketch, *Argus*, 8 April 1933



shopping arcades whose decline Walter Benjamin lamented, the pleasure garden was a place to experience modernity, and this was facilitated by its physical environment. Cremorne was planned in a way that physically demarcated activities and groups of people. The respectable gardens—incorporating a maze (popular with children and families) and plaster-cast statues—were set at a distance from the rotunda where, to the ire of moralists, unmarried men and women socialised and danced late into the night. Three paths were laid to the riverside panorama, allowing visitors, perhaps families or the easily offended, to bypass the dancing platforms and public bars.

Crafted and controlled by its proprietors, Cremorne was more modern than central Melbourne and its new inner suburbs.⁶⁴ The praise lavished on Cremorne suggested that it operated in sharp relief from the dusty, smelly, stagnant and dark city. With Cremorne, 'Melbourne

itself is making very considerable progress', London's *Observer* noted in 1854, even though '[it] is very far from being an agreeable city to live in ... without sewers, without gas and without water'.⁶⁵ Cremorne soon boasted each of these fundamental elements of municipal modernity, introduced by Coppin on the micro scale of the pleasure garden, making the site all the more remarkable to visit. While Melbourne lacked adequate street lighting, gas lamps were lit at Cremorne on the evening of 6 February 1856, the colony's first artificial illumination. This was a significant technological moment for visitors and for the city as a whole, especially for 'the old colonists who have never had an opportunity of beholding the extraordinary brilliance of the first artificial lights'.⁶⁶ In Melbourne the streets smelt of uncollected rubbish and horse manure, but at Cremorne labourers tended the garden beds and maintained the paths—just some of the many workers required to keep Cremorne looking its best. Rainy days in Richmond led to numerous drownings; a by-law restricting swimming in water holes was eventually enacted in 1869.⁶⁷ Cremorne's drain to the Yarra River was constructed a decade earlier in 1858, and Coppin also piped water from the Yarra into the Cremorne lagoon for 'sanitary' purposes, unfortunately contributing to the deterioration of the river's quality.⁶⁸ Both sewerage and transit were features of Cremorne's modernity.⁶⁹

Mass transit was of particular importance, a necessity to bring visitors from the city to the site and thus swell patronage. Lexie Griffiths recollected, 'even getting there was an adventure', and the nature of the adventure changed over Cremorne's lifetime.⁷⁰ Initially, Ellis arranged the illustrious Cremorne gondola, Melbourne's first river-borne transport. It took visitors from Princes Bridge up the Yarra River to Cremorne. In 1855, the wharf's flimsy wooden bridge over the Yarra River made way for a solid timber pier where larger steamboat vessels moored, allowing passengers to enter the gardens in increasing numbers.⁷¹ After Coppin took over the site, he first set about improving road access, for which the City of Richmond provided partial reimbursement after he pointed out the public good of his venture: 'as three or four thousand persons will probably visit the gardens nightly'.⁷² (Despite his elected position as a Richmond councillor, there was no overt evidence of impropriety.) With thousands departing the city for Cremorne each evening, there was 'great ... contention and clamour among the omnibus-drivers ... as there would be in Gracechurch-street,

London when the citizens are leaving for Kensington, Brixton, Clapham [∫c].⁷³ By referencing London, this article in the *Argus* conjured the hustle and bustle of the modern city, while also identifying the practical need for mass transit to Cremorne, which Coppin delivered in the form of rail transport, another symbol of nineteenth-century urban and industrial modernity. After much delay and expense, Cremorne Station—an event-day extension from Richmond Station—opened for the 1859–60 season.⁷⁴ Coppin bundled admission and rail tickets, available for purchase at any Melbourne railway station.⁷⁵ The novelty of rail and the imminent pleasure garden visit made this trip exciting; the carriage filled with ‘a host of joyous people.’⁷⁶ Under the arches, visitors showed their ticket at one of two turnstiles—‘ingeniously contrived to give as much trouble as possible’—marking their arrival at the pleasure garden.⁷⁷ From essential services to transport to crowd management, each aspect of Cremorne’s operational needs was managed by its proprietors to enhance visitor experiences.



Figure 5: Cox and Luckin, ‘Boulevard with Statues at Cremorne Gardens’, 1861, Photograph commissioned by the Richmond Council for the Victorian Exhibition, 1861
(Courtesy State Library Victoria, H26075, reproduced from H2013.290/23)

Cremorne’s proprietors also depended on expanding global shipping networks, as many of the attractions were imported from overseas. In addition to the scenery and property he brought with him to Melbourne in 1852, Ellis arranged a pre-fabricated iron pagoda from

New York in 1853.⁷⁸ After a visit to London in 1858 Coppin shipped a fountain and 150 plaster-cast statues—replicas of works from antiquity onwards, including the Apollo Belvedere, Venus di Medici, and busts of business partners Brooke and Coppin themselves—from the Covent Garden studio of master copier Domenico Brucciani. A pamphlet detailing the 150 statues was printed in Birmingham and distributed in Melbourne to educate Cremorne’s visitors.⁷⁹ Positioned along the boulevards, these statues rose above the foliage; in the distance, the trapeze and pagoda could be seen (Figure 5). Visitors marvelled at this imported, mass-produced public art. The *Argus* commended the statues, which had ‘been selected with considerable taste, and are of superior character ... For some time to come, in all probability, Cremorne will be the only School of Art which Melbourne will possess.’⁸⁰ Redmond Barry ordered a collection of Brucciani works for the new public museum in 1859 after a visit to Cremorne, but many of them were broken in transport, unlike Coppin’s collection, which had seemingly arrived unharmed.⁸¹ The same, however, could not be said for Coppin’s 500 goldfish for the lagoon, only nine of which reportedly survived the journey.⁸²

Shipping large, unusual and fragile prefabricated goods and living creatures was a perilous enterprise. Coppin’s 1858 shipment also included two hot air balloons, liquors and, for the menagerie, songbirds and white swans.⁸³ There were impressive crystal glass chandeliers located in their namesake Grand Crystal Bar (Figure 6), a splendourous chamber that was secure, light and airy, welcoming, and indistinguishable from modern public bars built elsewhere at this time.⁸⁴ Coppin sourced the chandeliers from J. Defries and Sons, London. This firm proudly advertised their clients in British newspapers, which included Evan’s in Covent Garden, Weston’s Grand Music Hall in the East End and, somewhat mistakenly, ‘Proprietor, James Ellis, the originator of Cremorne Gardens in London [and] Melbourne.’⁸⁵ At the symbolic heart of Empire, this London advertisement tied together these two Cremornes in a network of British pleasure gardens and entertainment sites. The sheer scale of goods imported to Melbourne in order to supply Cremorne and its entertainments was not only remarkable but also suggests the scale and seriousness of the leisure industry in gold-rush Melbourne.



Figure 6: Talma & Co., 'The Bar of the Theatre Royal, Melbourne' (Cremorne Crystal Bar) c.1865
 (Courtesy State Library of NSW, Graphic Materials, Photographs, 918869)

Pictured: W.J. Wilson, W. Pitt, George Coppin, L.L. Smith, and barmen Tupper and Peachman

The sophisticated representation of Cremorne in media and marketing was also noteworthy. Broadsheets advertising the diverse range of entertainments at Cremorne were plastered on hoardings at building sites and train stations across the city. Given the extent of construction in Melbourne, there would have been many vertical surfaces across the city to which these posters could be attached—and with the number of people arriving at and passing through Melbourne there were fresh eyeballs to entice on a daily basis. One such broadsheet dates from the opening night of the 1860–61 season. A highlight of this season was a panorama featuring an 'Illuminated View of Palermo!' (Figure 7). As Colligan has written, the Cremorne panoramas were particularly enticing.⁸⁶ These large-scale canvases have been likened to modern movie sets.⁸⁷ Visitors found themselves immersed in these entertainments whose theatricality, variety and innovativeness were unparalleled elsewhere in the city. As with its overseas counterparts,

Cremorne was also known for ballooning. The first ascent in Australia was arranged at Cremorne in January 1858 and was followed by more launches: balloons illuminated by coloured lights; evening launches; two balloons at one time—each ascent more remarkable than the previous.⁸⁸ On a visit to Britain, Coppin had consulted with English aeronaut Henry Coxwell. As with many of Cremorne’s other attractions, ballooning necessitated infrastructure such as a gasworks as well as a basic colonial road network to return the aeronauts from the outskirts of the city where they landed if they happened to float off course.⁸⁹ Again, the labour and cost involved were not immediately obvious to visitors, though the spectacle and entertainment provided by the displays of new technologies were duly reported in the press. Patrons were particularly



Figure 7: Cremorne Gardens Broadsheet for Season 1860–61
(Courtesy Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne, 1989.013.036)

frustrated when the balloon ascents (and other entertainments) were delayed or cancelled. *Punch* newspaper recorded a satirical conversation between two well-dressed men who stood outside Cremorne's gates (rather than paying admission): 'but I considers it to be a 'orrid shame o' Coppin to hadvertise ten o'clock for the hair balloon, and then to keep a man waiting like this.'⁹⁰

With the growth in newspapers and syndicated media content, details about pleasure gardens travelled along the railway lines and shipping routes of the British Empire and beyond, gratuitous promotion masquerading as news.⁹¹ In turn, the *Argus* always found London a tempting benchmark for Melbourne: '[W]e are sure that all who have visited the original Cremorne at Battersea must allow our gardens do not suffer in the comparison [though] the sandwiches in particular did not possess that remarkable "Vauxhallic" idiosyncrasy.'⁹² The knowingness of this Dickensian trope of the Vauxhall sandwich revealed an apparent cultural sophistication on the part of this journalist.⁹³

Amidst the global media coverage of pleasure gardens, it becomes pertinent to consider the extent to which a visit to Melbourne's Cremorne Gardens was distinctive. Irrespective of whether a visitor was at London's or Melbourne's Cremorne, for instance, he or she was presented with tended gardens, novel entertainments, and public bars serving fashionable refreshments. That the pleasure garden had effectively become a global commercial franchise did not necessarily matter to some colonists. Having a pleasure garden '[that did] not suffer in the comparison' represented a local colonial achievement.⁹⁴ In contrast, traveller H.B. Stoney found Melbourne's pleasure garden to be imitative: 'entertainments are given in similar character to those of Vauxhall and Cremorne Gardens in London.'⁹⁵ Contemporary historian Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye was even more critical: 'Cremorne boasts that her display of fireworks equals that of her London prototype, Vauxhall; but where can be the difficulty of out-rivalling anything, if desired, in a country where money is so abundant that its value seems scarcely felt?'⁹⁶ For Ramsay-Laye, Cremorne was indecorous, tacky and crass, like the gold-rush colony itself. The erudite 'Monkey at Cremorne', a regular correspondent for satirical *Punch*, wrote 'O, ye strutting, swaggering, speechifying, swearing and mutable morals—"the glass of fashion and the mould of form"—consider what a spectacle you present to the reflective and compassionate minds of monkeys.'⁹⁷ Ramsay-Laye's

sincere and *Punch*'s biting critique leads to the insight that what made Cremorne unique was its particular colonial context. The capacity to manufacture the mass spectacle and experience of this pleasure garden in a city transitioning from colonial outpost to modern metropolis was an extraordinary achievement, intricately linked to the wealth being produced by the city, its hinterlands and the broader settler-colonial project. In *Coppin the Great* (1965), biographer Alec Bagot writes that Cremorne was a drain on Coppin's personal finances.⁹⁸ He exported his wealth and, almost literally, imported 'bread and circuses.' Inspired to create a remarkably modern space, Cremorne's proprietors realised a series of notable achievements—from gas lights to balloon ascents—which served as attractions within the grounds of Cremorne but equally and uniquely marked the apparent progress of Melbourne as city.

To Visit a Modern Pleasure Garden

Impoverished Melburnian Anne Lynch wrote to her future husband George Morton, then digging for gold: 'We can see Rockets & fire balloons which ascend from Cremorne from the back of our house. We must go there together.'⁹⁹ Cremorne provoked thousands of responses among contemporary residents, visitors and social commentators. Many accounts identified it as otherworldly because of its form, its location and its attractions. The *Argus* called Cremorne an 'Elysian Retreat', which presented, 'a fairy-like scene, or a place of enchantment'.¹⁰⁰ The terms used to render Cremorne—ethereal, classical, spiritual, dreamy, idyllic—were similar to those employed to describe pleasure gardens elsewhere. An early nineteenth-century pleasure garden in Hoboken, New Jersey, was called the Elysian Fields, demonstrating the ubiquity of these descriptors.¹⁰¹ When Cawthorne wrote of an 'Arabian Night's Entertainment', a racialised though conventional phrasing, he conjured the apparent magic of this space in a way that emphasised its difference from ordinary urban, leisure and colonial experiences. Performances by 'Ethiopian serenaders' and 'Maori Warrior Chiefs' and, on one occasion, an allusion to an Indigenous horse trainer, reflected the fact that the pleasure garden, as an urban microcosm, reproduced the dominant colonial, oriental and racial paradigms of the era.¹⁰²

Cremorne Gardens, nevertheless, offered opportunities for social experimentation. As a result, the site attracted familiar Victorian-era contests around decorum and vice, similar to other entertainment venues across Melbourne and to pleasure gardens elsewhere. From the

outset, Ellis maintained an intimate yet imaginary dialogue between his second and first Cremorne Gardens. 'Cremorne Gardens', boasted his 1855 newspaper advertisement, 'The Rural! The Beautiful! The Serene! ... unequalled in extent and beauty in the colony ... Novelty in Australia! ... Concert and Dancing!!! As in the old Cremorne Gardens, London.'¹⁰³ Ellis conceived his Melbourne pleasure garden as refined and rational, picturesque and idyllic. He adopted this communication strategy to deflect potential criticism of his business. This approach would be, however, no assurance of commercial viability nor a safeguard against moralist critique.

The contests over vice became explicit at Cremorne Gardens after Ellis sought a licence for Sunday trading in order to be 'under the same footing' as pleasure gardens in England.¹⁰⁴ His argument was disingenuous given that it had been the refusal of London authorities to allow Sunday trading that had effectively bankrupted him there in the first place. After his request for Sunday trading again failed in Melbourne, he petitioned Governor Sir Charles Hotham. Exaggerating his accomplishments at London's Cremorne—boasting 'hundreds of thousands' of attendees—and predicting that refusal would lead to 'immediate ruin', Ellis, most likely invoking the failed Eureka rebellion, argued that Sunday trading '[would divert] the popular mind from brooding over imaginary public wrongs'.¹⁰⁵ As in London, he attributed his Melbourne bankruptcy to the failure of this petition to liberalise liquor licensing.¹⁰⁶

Ellis had incited criticism of Cremorne from the city's moralists, who saw the venue as inherently degenerate because of the diverse clientele, the social interaction between unmarried men and women, and the provision of alcohol, which they believed led to debauchery and prostitution. Similar criticisms had been levelled at London's Cremorne where maps of sexual geographies by doctor and regulationist William Acton identified the gardens as a den of vice. Acton counted a remarkable 47 brothels and 209 prostitutes in the vicinity—numbers based on what historians now identify as classed and gendered visual signifiers removed from social reality.¹⁰⁷ In the budding city of Melbourne, moralists also sought to civilise public life by promoting their views and lobbying for restrictions on alcohol and prostitution.¹⁰⁸ As a pleasure garden, Cremorne raised their ire, and its popularity added a sense of urgency to their activities. Despite the sustained criticism,

the moral crusade against Cremorne had no identifiable impact on attendance.

These conflicts were inherently modern, arising from the impacts of urbanisation, most notably a diversity of people living in close quarters in a context of changing social behaviours and norms. The moral criticism directed at Cremorne was relentless. In addition to the strictures of Richard Heales, there were particularly evocative comments from the evangelist John L. Milton: ‘Let the honourable Mr. Coppin forbid their [prostitutes’] appearance at Cremorne, and no longer tolerate the most disgusting perpetrations in some of the deeply-shaded towers, with classic taste and fiend like skill erected within the precincts of that bewitching establishment.’¹⁰⁹

In this *Argus* article, curiously headlined ‘The Sin of Great Cities,’ bombastic accusations were levelled at Cremorne due to the apparent presence of vice there. The immorality of Cremorne seemingly elevated Melbourne in the hierarchy of eminent modern metropolises. By way of contrast, visiting English writer and Melbourne booster Richard Horne wrote, ‘[prostitutes] seldom appear in public places of amusement, never in the glittering bars, and seldom in the casinos.’¹¹⁰ There is insufficient historical evidence to draw solid conclusions about whether, or the extent to which, prostitutes worked at Cremorne.¹¹¹ Ellis knew from experience that his venues were likely to attract prostitution. Coppin explicitly forbade the presence of prostitutes and also had a ‘reputation ... for preserving order and decorum under all circumstances.’¹¹² Cremorne was, however, still seen as a haunt for consumers of the supposed vices whether imagined or real. Portrayed by its proprietors as rational and wholesome, and operated under the guise of liberal and progressive values, Cremorne nevertheless projected a calculated ambiguity, and its civic virtue cannot be taken at face value.

The associations between Cremorne and vice contributed to its allure and engendered transgressive patterns of behaviour among visitors. Coppin advertised, ‘Persons guilty of indecorous expressions of conduct will be immediately given in charge of the police,’ thereby enhancing Cremorne’s attractiveness by alluding to its apparent underbelly.¹¹³ Similarly, a parliamentarian urged Melburnians to ‘refus[e] to visit the “gimcrack places of Cremorne”, and amuse themselves instead by going to the Public Library.’¹¹⁴ In reality, there were only four arrests publicly reported in the *Argus* during Cremorne’s ten seasons, all for improper



Figure 8: Walter Woodbury, 'Iron Pagoda, Dancing Platform and Painted Panorama at Cremorne Gardens', c.1855

(Courtesy Royal Photographic Society Collection at the V&A, RPS.3093:9-2018)

conduct, most likely intoxication.¹¹⁵ Intoxication could be an issue; on one occasion a recently arrived migrant from London died after falling from the hilltop bar through a fence into the Yarra River.¹¹⁶ But the various public bars were also attractive social spaces for the men and women who drank there, providing both alcohol and companionship, and going some way towards allaying the homesickness many patrons felt in their new city.

The robustness of policing also warrants suspicion. Man-about-town and Chief of Police Frederick Charles Standish was a frequent visitor to Cremorne. Standish brought various women with him, often left early in the morning, and had a reputation for monopolising women's attention there. Standish recorded in his diary his offence at being called a 'conversation cove' by a 'frail sister' when he attempted to

strike up a *tête-à-tête* with a woman named Marion.¹¹⁷ Standish joined other young men and women at the iron pagoda and its surrounding dance platform where musicians played original melodies such as the cadenced Cremorne Gallop.¹¹⁸ The illuminated panorama with the Yarra River behind it hovered over the pagoda and platform creating a striking space (Figure 8). Aside from the public bars, the rotunda was the most enticing and also most morally troubling of the entertainment spaces. The *Argus* depicted ‘couples whirling themselves round within its arcs’ and, by 1862, had identified a ‘Cremorne vigour’ that was maintained ‘until an advanced hour.’¹¹⁹ Of the rotunda Standish wrote in his diary: ‘The lamps, Chinese lanterns, shouts, dancing, music, swearing, all jumbled up together was calculated to strike a stranger.’¹²⁰ Standish distinguished knowing, voguish individuals such as himself, who were able to negotiate this intense, breathtaking environment with aplomb, from those who were not sufficiently sophisticated to partake in these types of pleasure.

Social experiences that tested contemporary standards of respectability were not limited to men such as Standish. A performer, a woman who adopted the pseudonym ‘Lorine,’ later reminisced about the Grand Crystal Bar (Figure 6). In 1888, she recalled especially the thrill of anticipation she and her fellow actors felt at the prospect of visiting the rotunda—‘an invitation not to be resisted.’¹²¹ Being at Cremorne provided a sense of community and shared fun for these women and men in the new colonial city. A visitor recalled in 1889 how waltzes and gallops used to ‘incite the suddenly enriched diggers and their much over-and-under-dressed partners of the gentler sex to out-herod herod in grotesque antics.’¹²² In this account, the young men and women were grouped together, both enjoying the sexualised courtship and jumbled meanings attached to their bodies and dress. Amid the dance platforms in the rotunda conventional social norms could be overcome, enabling mutable modern social identities to surface and affective experiences to occur.

Conclusion

When Cremorne shut in 1863 the *Argus* bemoaned ‘the closing of these gardens ... the only out-door place of amusement available near the city is lost to the citizens of Melbourne.’¹²³ The *Herald* obituary mourned, ‘Our own colonial Vauxhall ... faded beyond the power of revival.’¹²⁴ With the slowing of the gold rush, George Coppin’s finances

were stretched, and so he shut the gardens and sold the property. He even did away with his creditors, inviting them to Cremorne for refreshments, and to dictate his repayment terms: 'twenty shillings in the pound'.¹²⁵ Coppin was always a talented entrepreneur, and reaching such favourable terms would have been the envy of business people the world over (including the twice-bankrupted Ellis). The Grand Crystal Bar soon made its way to central Melbourne, reassembled in Coppin's Theatre Royale on Bourke Street. An asylum was next housed on the Cremorne site before the area was subdivided for workers' housing during the 1880s boom era, reflecting the continued growth of the metropolis and the desirability and accessibility of the south Richmond area.¹²⁶ It is probably no coincidence that this was the decade in which Lorine and others recorded the experiences of their youth.

Cremorne Gardens closed in the 1860s as the peak of the Victorian gold rush passed, thus constraining Coppin's ability to invest in the site. Melbourne itself was less volatile in the 1860s than in the 1850s. The distinctive clientele that had been attracted to Cremorne no longer dominated the city, and the gender imbalance had all but disappeared by 1861.¹²⁷ The *Herald* included in its obituary of Cremorne that the city now sought 'quieter enjoyment at a less fevered stage', and that it 'constitute[d] one among many instances of the rapidity with which the phases of our colonial existence succeed each other.'¹²⁸ For this commentator, Cremorne represented a certain stage in Melbourne's apparent progress, and, for the city to progress further, new forms of leisure and entertainment were required. The *Herald* also identified the role played by 'a certain section of society ... desperately virtuous and desirous [who] shut up the public houses, and as a matter of course they shut up Cremorne.'¹²⁹ Although this was not the primary reason for its demise, the targeting of Cremorne by moralists burdened the precinct's reputation until its closure. The decision to cease operating in February 1863 was fortuitous, however, for it would not have been able to continue to function into the 1863–64 season. In March and again in December, this flood-prone site was drowned. Coppin wrote to his wife Lucy in December 1863:

I expect to hear that all the lower fence, if not the bar and a portion of the wall is carried away—there will be such a large body of water in the gardens that when it goes down in the river, it will make a great rush somewhere. Mr Goldfish will be cashed out of the fountain. Do not repeat any of the damage.¹³⁰

In November 1863, Coppin was nevertheless able to hold a final event at Cremorne. Oddities ranging from statues to animals were put to auction. *Punch* satirised how the ‘Paris effigies of naughty gods and goddesses, which heretofore speckled the Paphean [*sic*] bowers of Cremorne, were dispersed by hammer.’¹³¹ According to the *Argus*: ‘The two lions went for £100, but the other animals are still unsold.’¹³²

This article has located Cremorne in Melbourne during the 1850s and 1860s and tied its various evolutions and social life to broader histories of pleasure gardens and urban development. Cremorne as a venture was capital, labour and infrastructure intensive, and its longevity depended on the skilfulness of its proprietors and their ability to harness the resources and knowledge of local and global networks of commerce and leisure. Annual improvements, substantial advertising and the enjoyment had by visitors sustained this urban space for its ten seasons. Its magnetism was amplified by its picturesque and secluded location on the settler-colonial urban frontier, Melburnians’ demand for modern forms of leisure and its novel attractions, along with the nuanced interplay between pleasure and vice fostered by its proprietors, enjoyed by visitors and condemned by moralists. Within its boundaries, Cremorne provided sophisticated experiences; after passing under the entry arches, walking among the garden beds and spending their nights drinking and dancing, visitors enjoyed the enticing and sensual experiences on offer. In comparison with pleasure gardens elsewhere, Melbourne’s Cremorne might be distinguished by the veneration in which it was held by its host city and by the attractions that the proprietors believed would be most enticing to the colonial audience. Clearly, Cremorne was influenced by pleasure gardens elsewhere.

The external impacts of Melbourne’s Cremorne on pleasure gardens across Australia and internationally is more difficult to ascertain. However, the interconnected print media across the British and English-speaking world, the entrepreneurial imperative to maintain the novelty of pleasure gardens, the social similarities between pleasure gardens across the world, the carbon-copy entertainments, and the

shared travelling entertainers provide a basis for assuming some degree of reciprocal influence. Cremorne evoked a more perfect version of urban modernity than that which could ever exist outside its gates. The distinctive and fluid social life of 1850s Melbourne allowed Cremorne to prosper, and once the city itself settled in the 1860s this pleasure garden faded away. Despite its short-lived existence, its memory has continued to captivate Melburnians to the present day.¹³³

Notes

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- 14 David E. Coke and Alan Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens: A History*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011; Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 25; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, p. 139.
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The Swordsman's Tale: The True Story of Robert Meikle and *The Fencer's Manual*

Andrew Lemon

Abstract

*The Royal Historical Society of Victoria library, accumulated over the span of 110 years, is among the most important collections of printed material on the history of this state but is eclectic rather than comprehensive. This article explores the provenance of one of the rarest books in the library—a slim volume published in 1859, the first work printed by the significant Melbourne publishers Clarson, Shallard and Co. The article seeks to discover the true identity of the author, Robert Meikle, to explain the origins of his illustrated treatise *The Fencer's Manual*, to discuss its insights into Australian colonial society in the 1850s and to explore the perils of relying on family legend as historical source material.*

The Historical Society of Victoria dates from 1909, a time when Melbourne was entering the motor-car age, when the pioneers of the pre-1851 Port Phillip District had just about died out, and the gold-rush era survivors were reaching their anecdotal age. Periodically from its early years the Society attempted systematically to collect written memories of pioneers or their immediate descendants, and these—for all their unreliability—are an important part of its collection. The Society also began building up a library, mostly by donation rather than acquisition, which means that the library has always been more eclectic than comprehensive. The same could be said for the collection of pictures and photographs. For 110 years, RHSV volunteers, through indexing, cataloguing and more recently scanning and digitising, have laboured to bring order and system to a miscellaneous collection and to produce a regular scholarly, readable historical journal.

As the Society developed it also served as an incubator for local historical societies and in time, with its 'Royal' honorific, it became the peak body for dozens of such societies around the state. As such it became a central repository for newsletters and ephemera that have emerged from these societies. Through these labours the RHSV is recognised as holding one of the three great specialist collections of Victorian local history books, periodicals, images and manuscripts.

Between the RHSV and the Prahran Mechanics' Institute and State Library Victoria, the history of this state is illustrated and documented.

Two important lessons emerge as we contemplate the treasures of the RHSV. The digital age has been transforming historical research universally, yet there is still much in collections everywhere that remains undigitised or imperfectly described in catalogues. Second, the actual physical objects in the collections each remain unique items in their own right and must be carefully curated. Original books, manuscripts and images are valuable for the stories they tell about themselves and their times, not just for the information they contain.

The library at the RHSV has been well used. Books that are in demand or have spent long parts of their lives being simply on the general reference shelves are unlikely to be in pristine condition. Many of the older titles have now been set aside into a rare book collection. The rarer a book becomes, the less its physical condition counts in assessing its relative significance. One foxed, dog-eared, torn first edition of an important work takes on a special glory if it happens to be a unique survivor.

Often over time the history of the object itself adds lustre to its value as a rare book. In a lecture in Rare Books Week 2017, I discussed one such instance. The small book, *How to Settle in Victoria*, was written in 1855 under the pseudonym of 'Rusticus'. It is listed in Sir John Ferguson's *Bibliography of Australia*, number 8079.¹

The catalogue notes our copy's faded cloth binding and poor condition. A signature and an address are scrawled repeatedly across the title pages and on various pages throughout. A child practising a name? Not in this case. In that lecture we explained the discovery—by cross-referencing our RHSV collection of Melbourne directories from the colonial period—that the name belonged to the proprietor of a boarding house in Bourke Street, Melbourne, the first temporary residence of many newcomers to Victoria. Those repeated scrawls turned out to be a primitive form of library stamp, a discouragement to theft. Knowing the provenance adds to the importance of this particular copy. Other copies in better nick may survive, but the history of this copy makes it unique, an artefact of gold-rush Victoria that had been read and digested by many an anxious new immigrant, for better or worse.

A Rare Book and its Publisher

Every rare book tells a story if you look hard enough, and that turns out to be the case with another unusual item in the collection now deemed to be rare. It too dates from the gold-rush era in Victoria, published in 1859. Again, its condition is fragile, in need of tender care and conservation attention. It too appears in Ferguson, number 12396. The author is Robert Meikle, and the full title is: *The Fencer's Manual: A Practical Treatise on Small-sword Exercises, also, Single-stick Play, Defence of Sabre against Bayonet, Cavalry, &c., Club Exercises, Preparatory Extension Motions, Hints to Professors and Amateurs, &c., &c., with Illustrations* (Figure 1).

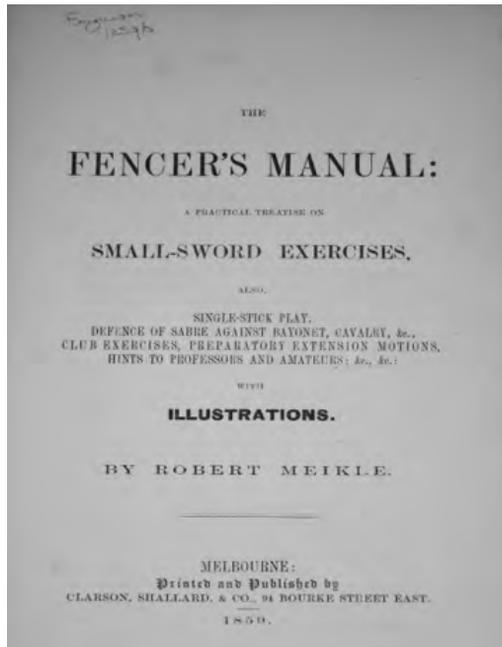


Figure 1: Title page, *The Fencer's Manual*

What else do we learn from the object itself? It is printed and published in Melbourne by Clarson, Shallard and Co. It is 22 cm high, runs to 82 pages plus 6 leaves of plates. The RHSV copy has some discoloured pages and may at some stage have been rebound—the cover was slightly loose at the time of inspection. The short title (*Fencer's*

Manual) and author's name ('R. Meikle') have been embossed in block capitals on the cover. A mis-reading of this name explains why it was mistakenly catalogued in the RHSV under R.M. Eikle, not R. Meikle.

The most particular points of interest are its distinctive lithographic plates. The frontispiece depicts a fencer in full flight and is signed 'Calvert', denoting the prolific colonial artist Samuel Calvert (Figure 2).² One illustration demonstrates various sword-fighting foot positions while other plates show you how to exercise with your Indian Clubs (Figure 3). The model as drawn represents a form of elegant and romantically healthy masculinity as the ideal at the time, curly haired, narrow waisted—interestingly an ideal that modified itself towards short-back-and-sides manhood as the nineteenth century progressed.



Figure 2: On Guard (Lithograph by Samuel Calvert)

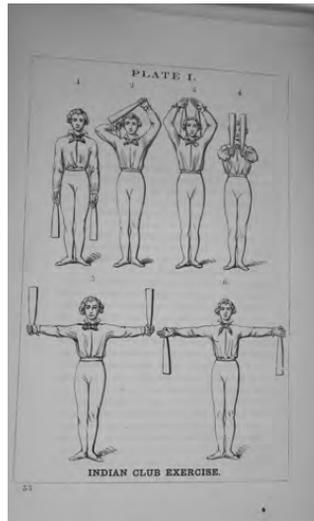


Figure 3: Indian Club exercise (Lithograph)

In thinking further about this unusual book, questions begin to form, and only some of them have immediate answers. Is it rare? Yes, though not quite unique. The National Library of Australia's Trove network identifies four copies in Australian libraries—its own, one each at the State Libraries of Victoria and New South Wales, and one at Newman College at the University of Melbourne. The RHSV copy was not included in Trove. State Library Victoria's catalogue notes it as 'The earliest book on the subject published in Australia.'

Who was the author, Robert Meikle? Bibliographic sources have nothing immediate to add; he was not further identified at the time of publication, nor did he precede or follow this book with any others. It is not an English, American or European work reprinted in Australia—it comes from Melbourne. The author's qualifications or experience are not stated in the book or advertisements for it, nor are they mentioned in the solitary detailed contemporary press review of the book, which needless to say appeared in the sporting weekly *Bell's Life in Victoria*. *Bell's* gave it a tick.

To the student it will prove invaluable: the style being terse, the directions divested of all intricacy and obscurity, renders it easily understood and the plates, diagrams etc. illustrative of the lessons, well drawn, neatly engraved, and altogether highly interesting. To the professors and amateurs, also it conveys some valuable hints.³

Did fencing and sword fighting have a big following in Melbourne at the time of publication? Well, hardly at all according to contemporary and later sources. So here was a puzzle. We have an 1859 book on the art of fencing and sword fighting published in Melbourne by a mystery author at a time when the sport barely had a local following or practitioners.

There was a second puzzle, of special interest to those with a particular interest in the history of Australian publishing. *The Fencer's Manual* was the very first publication advertised for sale under the imprint of Clarson, Shallard and Co.⁴ Don Hauser's 2006 monograph *Printers of the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne* fills in some of the detail.⁵ Hauser tells us that Clarson, Shallard and Co. was originally created as a partnership by four men (William Clarson, Joseph T. Shallard, Alfred Massina and Joseph T.B. Gibbs) to acquire the insolvent business of Slater, Williams and Hodgson, which had been printing books in Melbourne since 1854. By coincidence it was this earlier company that had published *How to Settle in Victoria* by Rusticus.

The Clarson Shallard partnership proved itself a progressive printing enterprise. It operated with success under this name through to 1877 and was in a business sense the progenitor of several enduring enterprises in both Sydney and Melbourne. In its year of formation, Clarson Shallard demonstrated lithography work at the Victorian Industrial Society exhibition at Cremorne Gardens, Richmond.⁶ It went

further and set up a working printing press at the 1861 Melbourne International Exhibition.⁷ It printed the scorecards with pictures of the players for the famous cricket match—the All England Eleven versus the Eighteen of Victoria—held on New Year’s Day 1862. It published a 706-page catalogue for the Melbourne Public Library, ‘embellished by 57 illustrated sub-titles and vignettes, designed by Edward Latrobe Bateman and engraved by Samuel Calvert.’⁸ It produced an invaluable annual *Almanac* beginning in 1864 (‘a sound useful epitome of information on many subjects of daily interest to colonists’).⁹ In the same year the company set up a Sydney branch office in Pitt Street from whence it began producing the monthly *Illustrated Sydney News*.¹⁰

In 1865 the Sydney office of Clarson Shallard began publishing the *Australian Journal*—‘a weekly record of amusing and instructive literature, science and the arts contributing to the necessities, the comforts and the luxuries of life.’¹¹ In 1867 the company divided its business interests, with the Sydney operations continuing as ‘Gibbs, Shallard and Co.’ and the Melbourne side as ‘Clarson, Massina and Co.’¹²

In its new guise as Clarson Massina, the Melbourne business printed and published a wide range of titles and authors, beginning with the Marcus Clarke novel, *Long Odds*, while Clarke’s greatest work, originally titled *His Natural Life*, was first serialised in the *Australian Journal*, which he edited.¹³ Clarson, Massina and Co. published Adam Lindsay Gordon’s *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* in 1870, the book appearing just days before the melancholic poet and steeplechase rider took his life in the scrub near Brighton Beach. The Melbourne partnership sold hymns and sheet music, and it even branched out to the import and sale of sewing machines. In 1877 it demonstrated to its customers and then to the press its latest imported piece of machinery, a Dawson patented ‘two-feeder Wharfedale’ with adjustable gripper, capable of printing 3,000 sheets an hour.¹⁴

From the end of 1877 the Clarson name disappeared from the partnership. The continuing printing and publishing business of A.H. Massina and Co. flourished in Melbourne for the next century.¹⁵

This does not tell us why the very first commercial publication under the initial imprint of Clarson Shallard in 1859—this very significant company in Australian publishing history—was *The Fencer’s Manual*, a book by someone without reputation on a topic of very narrow interest.

To try to answer these questions, several avenues of research were followed, each yielding some evidence. Family history research unlocks many but not all mysteries. Sport history is a bit of a help. Military history offers a couple of clues. Printing and technology histories shed some light on the question. Who was Robert Meikle and what explains his *Fencer's Manual*?

Swordsman and Lithographer

The year 1859 may sound early for a specialised Australian sporting book, but Melbourne was nearly a quarter of a century old as a settlement when *The Fencer's Manual* appeared. Sport had instantly made its presence felt in the frontier town; racing, cricket, athletics, rowing and sailing made almost immediate appearances, football taking just a few years longer to emerge in an Australian form. These were generally leisure activities that appealed to a young, energetic pioneer society.¹⁶ Discipline was not what settlers and adventurers were looking for. Fencing on the other hand was an ancient but specialist sport or art, always closely associated with military prowess. In Europe in the early nineteenth century it had allied itself to gymnastics, a sport that similarly had an ancient pedigree but was being reinvented. The two activities were systematised with local variations in Denmark, Sweden and Germany, and eventually in England. Pehr Henrik Ling is acknowledged as the founder of Swedish gymnastics, which to him had a distinctly military and nationalist purpose, and he systematically included fencing as part of the training.¹⁷ His ideas spread, but not so rapidly in early Australia, or at least not until city life began to be the norm. In gold-rush Melbourne, moralists lamented that young men preferred the tavern or dancing room to the gymnasium.¹⁸

Gymnastics as a sports discipline rather than as acrobatic entertainment made a first timorous appearance in Melbourne, as advertised in the *Melbourne Daily News* on 19 December 1850.¹⁹ And along with it is perhaps the first mention in Melbourne sources for the teaching of fencing.

MR. EDWARD Professor of Gymnastic of Leipzic, begs to inform the public of Melbourne and its vicinity that his VICTORIA GYMNASTIC YARDS for the instruction of young gentlemen from the age of 8 to 13 years and more will be opened next week.

GERMAN GYMNASTICS comprising the whole manners of exterior deportment and the development of the youthful frame, always

watched with the greatest care, will be the principal objects of the said establishment.

The fencing lessons are entrusted to an experienced master.

‘Mr Edward’ was in fact Edward Schlobach from Saxony.²⁰ His ‘gymnastic yards’ were on Victoria Parade, Collingwood. The identity of the experienced fencing master is not given, but it was not the author of our book, as he was not yet in Australia. Herr Schlobach’s project proved to be a little ahead of its time. Ironically, if we have the right Edward Schlobach, he turned to growing tobacco for a living. Not until 1856 did Messrs Jonsson and Reis—Scandinavian names—set up a comparable gymnastics institute in Melbourne.²¹

In the meantime, gymnastics and fencing featured in Melbourne only rarely in that decade, chiefly as entertainment, notably with the 1853 performances in the Protestant Hall in Stephen Street under the title, ‘The Grand Assault of Arms.’²²

Professor Parker,

Sergeant Jones, late of the 15th Hussars,

Signor Pizzaro,

Monsieur Tillier

And distinguished Amateurs, will display at Broadsword, Fencing, Single Stick, and the exciting attack of BROADSWORD V. BAYONET.

Interspersed with Professor Parker’s Cœur de Lion feat of cutting a Solid Bar of Lead,

a Leg of Mutton,

AND A WHOLE SHEEP,

At one stroke each with the broadsword.

Also, his Saladin feat of cutting a Silk Handkerchief asunder with the sword.

The practical use of the sword, and gymnastic feats to improve the strength of the body, present advantages to everyone who possesses the manly desire of defending himself and those dear to him, whether the attack be made by a few unprincipled ruffians, or by the organized invasion of an armed multitude.

The ‘professor’, George Parker, briefly saw an opportunity in Melbourne and afterwards advertised ‘a class for instruction in the

manly and athletic arts of self-defence, broadsword, stick-play and fencing’ at the same Protestant Hall. His slogan, ‘No More Sticking-up’, appealed to those with a fear of bushrangers. But, after a few more local performances of the Grand Assault, Parker departed Victoria and made his base in Sydney, establishing a School of Arms in York Street.²³

With the removal of Professor Parker to Sydney, a new immigrant to Melbourne, Robert Meikle, may have sensed an opportunity. The first clue comes in an anonymous advertisement lodged in the *Argus* on 22 December 1854.

FEATS with the Sword, Gymnastics, Fencing and Single Stick Play according to the system of Mr Arnold, Bond-street, London. A private gymnasium is being organised by a first-class pupil of the above celebrated Maitre d’Armes. Gentlemen desirous of instruction or practice will oblige him by sending the names, &c, addressed Mr. M., care of Messrs Slater and Co., 94 Bourke-street.

Did the initiative bear fruit? A longer advertisement in September 1855 again spoke of a scheme of ‘arranging to establish a Private Subscription Gymnasium’ where ‘a late pupil of Mr Arnold’ would teach small-sword fencing, gymnastics and sabre exercises. Again, enquirers were directed to Mr M.²⁴

At last on 26 March 1856 Mr M. proves definitively to be ‘Mr Meikle’. In almost identical wording to his 1854 advertisement, he runs a notice for a

School of Arms: Fencing, Sabre Exercises and Gymnastics, according to the system of Mr Arnold, of Bond-street, London, whose method of teaching is the most favourable for real progress, and is entirely free from those cumbrous complications which disfigure the old method, perplex the pupils, and are incompatible with a fine graceful execution.

‘Mr Arnold’, it was asserted, was the most eminent English professor of these arts who had ‘attracted to his School of Arms all the distinguished amateurs, including many Noble Lords, Officers of the Guards, Royal Navy &c’—and here was the most important piece of information: ‘the advertiser has on numerous occasions during several years fenced with nearly all of them’. Arnold’s academy in London indeed offered instruction in physical education and classes in fencing and gymnastics for two guineas a year.²⁵

The advertiser now explained that he had established a class that met in Melbourne two evenings a week, at a moderate subscription. ‘Gentlemen desirous of participating in the advantages hereby offered to them for invigorating their health and acquiring useful accomplishments’ were now invited to contact ‘Mr Meikle’ at 94 Bourke Street East.

He repeated the advertisement in full the next Saturday, and followed up later in the month with a succession of smaller notices. In the *Argus* on 14 April 1856: ‘School of Arms—the Melbourne Fencing and Gymnastic Club’. In May 1856 it read simply ‘THE SWORD — GYMNASTICS. The Members of a Class for Instruction and Practice meet twice a week at 6 Russell Street south’. Gentlemen desirous of joining were again invited to address Mr Meikle at Bourke Street west. Number 6 Russell Street south was the location of the Russell Street National School. Presumably its classroom was large enough to be cleared for the purpose in the evenings.

Was Mr Meikle hoping to be in on the start of a craze? Political attitudes in Victoria were slowly shifting, so the idea is not outlandish. The Crimean War (1853–56) was not long over and was somehow being construed as a British triumph despite the heavy death toll on all sides: hence the naming of places in Melbourne’s expanding suburbs after the battles of Alma, Balaclava, Inkerman and Sebastopol. Now a new war scare was sweeping Britain (this time the French again). Over the next two or three years in the colonies a distinctly new enthusiasm became evident for creating an armed militia to defend Britain’s Australian interests in the event of invasion from an unspecified foe. Increasingly raucous voices clamoured for compulsory military training for young men. Skills in self-defence in the colonies were evidently no longer just a matter of protection against bushrangers. By the time Robert Meikle’s book appeared in 1859, the *Bell’s Life* reviewer echoed the unattributed opinion of ‘a writer on national defences’ that ‘universal skill in the arts of defence, and the protection of a community entrusted to its males from the age of eighteen, are the surest means of freedom and perpetual peace.’

Let us now look at specific circumstances around the publication of this book. The 1855 and 1856 advertisements for enquiries about fencing lessons at Russell Street directed gentlemen to enquire to Mr Meikle at 94 Bourke Street east. The business address of Clarson Shallard printers in the year when they opened for business happened to be 94 Bourke

Street east. The last address of the predecessor company of printers, Slater, Williams and Hodgson, was 94 Bourke Street east. Cross-checking with biographical details, it emerges that Robert Meikle was a colonial Clark Kent, mild-mannered lithographer at the printing office by day, transforming into sword-fighting Super Meikle by night.

We know he was a lithographer by trade, as ‘Mr Meikle’ is mentioned in newspapers as working at the Survey Department in Melbourne at least as early as May 1855.²⁶ More specifically, in a parliamentary debate of the Legislative Assembly, he was referred to as a lithographer. In 1857 David Blair, member for the electorate of Talbot, was demanding an enquiry into the administration of the Public Lands Department. As an example of its mismanagement he spoke of the recent unfair sacking of Mr Meikle, ‘lately lithographic draughtsman in the department, a man of twenty-eight years’ experience in his branch, and who had been dismissed for that for which he ought to have been rewarded and advanced’.

Mr Blair MLA explained that a fight had broken out between Mr Meikle and the head of his department, a Mr Jones, ‘a man of brutal manners, unskilful character, and one who was in the habit of venting his ill-humor [*sic*] on the employees under him’. Jones, in this account, provoked the incident. ‘This Mr Jones had on one occasion the temerity to insult, in the most shameless manner, Mr Meikle, and he was justly punished by a knock-down blow.’ Mr Meikle had then sought ‘over and over’ an interview with the head of the department to explain the facts of the case, ‘but he could never obtain one’. An internal inquiry had acquitted Meikle of wrongdoing but he was dismissed nevertheless.²⁷

We know that six years later under a different administration Meikle regained government employment. The weekly Melbourne *Leader* on 14 January 1863 reported a list of new appointments:

Photographer: Robert Meikle to be a photo-lithographer in the Department of Lands and Survey. And in pursuance of the 24th section of the Civil Service Act, it is hereby notified that this appointment has been made in consequence of Mr Meikle’s professional skill, as ascertained in his previous connection with that department.

It is a logical assumption that between stints at the Lands Department he was working as a lithographer with Clarson Shallard at the time his book came out, and that he personally prepared the plates from Samuel Calvert’s drawings.

Family Legends: Tall Tales and True

Family history sources now help us to assemble more information about the life and career of Robert Meikle, even though—as family sources usually do—they also tip a whole barrel of red herrings across our path.

The surname Meikle was not unknown in colonial Australia. Most Meikles originated from Lanarkshire in the south of Scotland. Our Robert was Robert Douglas Meikle, born in Lanarkshire around 1817. He would have been about 36 when he arrived with his wife Emily Williams and their only son Eugene—the boy would have been nine or ten—in Melbourne around 1853–54.²⁸ When Emily died ten years later they were living in Simpson Street, East Melbourne.²⁹

Despite his enthusiasm for physical fitness, Robert Meikle died in 1868 at the comparatively early age of 51, diagnosed with chronic asthma and disease of the heart—a condition under which his doctor stated he had suffered for eleven years.³⁰ Probate records tell us he died without making a will and owed £10 to a Fitzroy tailor, Isaac Fawcett, for the supply of smart clothing including jackets, trousers, vests and calico drawers. He and Emily are buried in St Kilda Cemetery. His next of kin, his son, is referred to in the probate records only as E.F.M. Meikle.³¹

Are there any further clues about the origin of Robert's prowess with the sword? Here is where family myth gives some insights but also veers mightily off the rails. Who was the originator of the myths? The most likely culprit is his son Eugene. We jump forward half a century. This press report is brief and dates from 31 July 1916.

DEATH OF SIR EUGENE MEIKLE

Melbourne. July 31.

The death occurred at Prahran on Saturday of Sir Eugene Francis Mackenzie Meikle who took part in the American Civil war having been a captain in the Confederate army. He came of a military family, his father being Major Robert Meikle, of the 71st Foot. He left a widow and son, Mr. Hector Mackenzie Meikle, Brighton.³²

Sir Eugene? And Major Robert Meikle? Where did that come from? Eugene's married son Hector Meikle immediately attracted more press attention, as would be expected, with headlines such as this:

Baronet as Gardener

TITLE WITHOUT ESTATE.

FATHER'S ADVENTURES.

FOUGHT UNDER MANY FLAGS.

Sir Hector Douglas Mackenzie-Meikle cycles from his small home in Lynch-street, Brighton Beach Victoria to his work every day. He is a gardener, and at present he is more concerned about the roses that he prunes than with the baronetcy which his father's death, a weeks ago, conferred upon him.

It was the Melbourne *Herald* that first ran this story, on 2 September 1916, and it was breathlessly copied by newspapers around Australia. Here were studio photos of the 'young baronet's father' and of the 'present holder of the title', suggesting a degree of co-operation with the reporter. Hector, the suburban gardener, was 32 at the time his father died and became the source of the story. Eugene had died a few weeks earlier at the Alfred Hospital; according to the son, he had 'succeeded to the title many years ago' through the death of unspecified cousins. Other assertions were that the title was 'an empty one ... possessed of no property'; that Eugene had been twelve when he came to the colony; that his father was 'Robert Mackenzie-Meikle of the 71st Foot'; and that the major's father was 'General John Meikle, a veteran of the Peninsular Wars and of Waterloo'. Proof of these claims was a surviving medal 'struck in 1849 which is commemorative of the Peninsular wars. It is inscribed with the name of J. Meikle who, it is believed, was the general'.

The *Herald* report was hardly convincing. Hector described his father Eugene as 'always of a secretive nature'. His story was that the young Eugene had originally left his parents' home 'at Prahran', went to America and 'fought as an officer with the Confederate army', before going to Mexico and then India, 'for Hindustani figured among his other linguistic attainments'. Despite this detail it was conceded that 'little is known of his movements in foreign parts' before his return to Australia.

Hector in this telling put Eugene's age up by at least two years. There is no reason why Eugene Meikle could not have spent time as a young man in America and India, but by the age of 24 he was living in Melbourne as the official informant for the registration of his father Robert's death in April, his address being Main Road, South Yarra.³³ At

the end of that year the *Gundagai Times* on the Murrumbidgee River, New South Wales, referred to a 'Eugene Meikle' in the much more mundane role as 'superintendent of the snagging operations on the river between Gundagai and Wagga Wagga'.³⁴ No other Eugene Meikle appears in New South Wales records of births, deaths and marriages, which makes it likely this one is our Eugene.

Fourteen years later, Victorian marriage records confirm that Eugene was again in Melbourne. In 1882 he married Louise Jeanne Coppin, niece of theatrical entrepreneur George Coppin, and they lived in Brighton in 'unpretentious quarters over a shop in New Street'. Hector, their only child, was born in 1884. The widow was quoted in the article as saying that Eugene had 'no friends', and apart from taking daily walks with his dog 'he seldom saw anyone at all'.³⁵ It seemed that 'adversity had embittered him', and that when he died 'he left no records of any kind except a small notebook' deemed to be 'valueless as far as the throwing of any light on his family connections in England is concerned'. The war medal and 'a pair of [fencing] foils were prized by the old man and they were practically the only links with the past which he did not destroy'.

The article trailed off into abstractions about Scottish history and a possible antecedent in a 17th-century Scottish engineer and mechanic named James Meikle but was uselessly vague in its explanations of how a baronetcy might have made its way to Eugene. Present-day records of the Scottish peerage—arcane, disputed and impenetrable though they can be—similarly yield no evidence of any such title.

The story was rehashed several times over the next few years, Melbourne's *Herald* again meretriciously placing it on its front page on 13 April 1922 as 'Baronet and Charlady: romance disclosed in divorce petition'. Hector's marriage collapsed on the grounds of desertion; he left two young children, and his wronged wife was the 'charlady' of the story. But even twenty years afterwards he was prepared to float the story that he was the 'Scots Baronet, Sir Hector Douglas Mackenzie-Meikle'. In 1941 several papers reported in brief that the 'baronet' (by then 57) had enlisted in the Australian Army as a humble private 'because my stepson, Lindsay Adams (18) has joined, and I think a young man needs advice at times'.³⁶ Once again the official record lets us down and casts doubt on this claim, as the National Archives have no reference to the enlistment of Hector Meikle or Mackenzie-Meikle in the Second World War.

Similarly all assertions about the military career of ‘Sir Eugene’, his father Robert and his grandfather John elude confirmation from the public record, and even his descendants are disinclined to believe them.³⁷ Robert Meikle was never referred to in his time in Victoria as a major or as ex-army. His life dates make it almost impossible that he ever served with the Scottish 71st Regiment, which was chiefly stationed in Canada and the West Indies in the period in question. His death registration states he was married in London at the age of 25; official marriage records confirm that date as June 1841. Two children were born in East London, in 1842 and 1844 respectively. The first, Lucy, died in infancy.³⁸

Nor has anyone yet come up with independent evidence that Eugene (who did not turn 20 until 1864) ever fought for the Confederates, let alone as an officer in the American Civil War (1861–65); and no evidence has emerged to support Hector’s further story that Robert’s father John had been a general in the Peninsular Wars. On Robert’s death certificate, his father John Douglas Meikle is recorded as a ‘gentleman’.

Family myths of former greatness notoriously contain some tiny grain of truth. The best explanation that suggests itself is that Robert Meikle’s father John served in some capacity with the 71st Foot Regiment in the Peninsular Wars and the Battle of Waterloo.³⁹

What about the service medal given to ‘the General’? A ‘Military General Service Medal’ (MGSM) was struck in England in 1848 as a retrospective award and offered to all surviving officers and men of the British Army who had fought in British military actions between 1793 and 1814. Particular campaigns were signified by the clasps on each medal. How many of these medals were issued? Authorities put the figure at 26,091.⁴⁰

Robert Meikle was born three years after Waterloo—a likely timing for the birth of a son of a returned soldier after the Napoleonic wars. Robert’s training and expertise in fencing and sword fighting must have come from somewhere; an ex-soldier father is a possible explanation. Or perhaps it was just that, while Robert was training and working as a lithographer in London, he took up fencing lessons with Mr Arnold in Bond Street.

If, as was asserted in 1857, he had 28 years’ experience as a lithographer, he would have been in that trade since the age of twelve, not in the army. And, if he had been a major in the British Army, we

can be sure he would have made a virtue of it when he first attempted to establish his School of Arms in Melbourne. There is no hint that Robert Meikle was a fabulist, but the same could not be said of his son and grandson.

In the Next Exciting Episode ...

Extraordinary though the story of Robert Meikle and his descendants turns out to be, an even more bizarre set of circumstances brought scandal and disaster into the life of William Clarson, the man who published the *Fencer's Manual*. There are human stories in the early history of the city of Melbourne that would rival anything that Trollope or Dickens or Galsworthy could have devised. Marcus Clarke, Henry Handel Richardson and Martin Boyd had the right idea—Australian history is redolent with tragic stories and extraordinary coincidences enacted over a sequence of generations. What might the novelist have done with the Robert Meikle saga? Just as Marcus Clarke mastered the art of the serialised cliffhanger in the *Australian Journal*, so the next instalment of this story—the Clarson saga—will surely have to await another episode.

The classic teaser for that next chapter might read something like this. What was behind the sensational court case *Clarson et uxor v. Dr Blair*, the news story of 1871? *Plus ça change ...* Libel cases involving sex, compromising letters and photos, misuse of power, famous judges, breathlessly arrogant barristers, and contested versions of what really happened, sold newspapers then, and they still do.

This tale began with a random browse through the treasures of the RHSV. Such stories explode just from this one old rare book, condition poor.

Notes

- 1 'Rusticus' (W. Snell Chauncey, *pseud.*), *How to Settle in Victoria; or, Instructions on the Purchase and Occupation of the Land, with Observations on Gardening and Farming; the Growth of the Vine and Other Fruit Trees; the Nature and Quality of the Australian Soils and on the Use of Manures; to Which Is Added a Rural Calendar, Descriptions of the Climate, and Other Useful Information*, Melbourne, Slater, Williams and Hodgson, 1855.
- 2 See Thomas Darragh, 'Samuel Calvert (1828–1913)' in 'Design and Art Australia Online', at www.daaao.org.au/bio/samuel-calvert/biography/, accessed 17 July 2019.
- 3 *Bell's Life in Victoria*, 20 August 1859.
- 4 Advertised, for example, in *Age* and *Argus*, 12 August 1859.
- 5 Don Hauser, *Printers of the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne (1837–1975)*, Melbourne, Nondescript Press, 2006.
- 6 Reported in *South Australian Register*, 21 April 1859; *Ballarat Star*, 8 October 1861.
- 7 *Age*, 1 and 2 January 1862.
- 8 Described in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January 1869.
- 9 Advertisement, *Argus*, 5 December 1864.
- 10 Advertisement, *Sydney Mail*, 19 November 1864.
- 11 Advertisement, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August 1865.
- 12 Publishers' imprint in *Illustrated Sydney News*, 16 January 1867; partnership advertisement in *Empire* (Sydney), 10 February 1866.
- 13 Brian Elliott, 'Clarke, Andrew Marcus (1846–1881)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 3, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1969. The title of the book was changed after the author's death to *For the Term of His Natural Life*.
- 14 *Advocate*, 29 September 1877.
- 15 Frank Strahan, 'Massina, Alfred Henry (1834–1917)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 5, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1974.
- 16 See Dave Nadel and Graeme Ryan (eds), *Sport in Victoria: A History*, Melbourne, Ryan Publishing, 2015.
- 17 Gertrud Pfister, 'Cultural Confrontations: German *Turnen*, Swedish Gymnastics and English Sport—European Diversity in Physical Activities from a Historical Perspective', *Culture, Sport, Society*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2003, pp. 61–91.
- 18 Letter, 'Gymnasticus', *Argus*, 25 June 1856.
- 19 'Victoria Gymnastic Games' were advertised at the Melbourne Racecourse in November 1850 in honour of Separation, but this was a general sports and athletics contest, not gymnastics in the modern sense.
- 20 Correctly given as 'Edward Schlobach' in advertisement, *Argus*, 20 December 1850; still noted as a 'professor of gymnastics' in Melbourne 1851; growing tobacco, *Leader*, 25 February 1865.
- 21 Noted as L.J. (Lars Johann) Jonsson and Captain A. Jvon Reis at the official opening, *Age*, 11 June 1856. Jonsson remained teaching gymnastics in Melbourne until 1864. Gustav Techow opened his St Kilda Gymnasium 'on Ling's principles' in 1860, leading to his opening a 'National Gymnasium' in Exhibition Street in 1864 intended primarily for training militia volunteers: see Andrew Lemon, 'Gymnastics', in Wray Vamplew *et al* (eds), *Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 1994.

- 22 Advertisement, *Argus*, 3 June 1853.
- 23 Advertisement, *Argus*, 14 July 1853; for advertisements for Parker's Sydney school, see *Bell's Life in Sydney*, 28 October 1854, 12 May 1855.
- 24 Advertisement, *Argus*, 7 September 1855.
- 25 The most renowned fencing academy in London was Angelo's. L.A. Hilden, 'Fencing in Regency England', 10 September 2012 post, in regencyfencing.blogspot.com (accessed 12 July 2019) notes 'Angelo's Fencing Academy' was established 1758, later moving to Opera House buildings, Haymarket, next to Old Bond Street. 'Angelo' was Dominico Angelo Malevolti Tremanmondo; the academy moved to St James Street in 1830. Arnold's at 16 Bond Street advertised physical education and evening classes for fencing and gymnastics (for example *Times*, 2 February 1853). George Parker in his Sydney advertisements claimed to have trained there. Arnold's establishment is also noted by 'Athlotheta' (*pseud.*), 'A Word on Gymnastics', *The Sporting Review*, London, 1852, p. 126.
- 26 Referred to by name in a personal advertisement, *Argus*, 24 May 1855.
- 27 David Blair calling for commission of enquiry into the Public Lands Department: Legislative Assembly, 11 December 1857, reported in *Argus*, 12 December 1857, and mentioned in the *Age*, 14 December 1857.
- 28 Eugene Mackenzie Meikle, born June 1844, East London: UK Births, Deaths and Marriage index at www.freebmd.org.uk. His older sister Lucy died in infancy in the year of her birth, 1842. Robert's birthplace, Lanarkshire, is noted on his death certificate, Victoria BDM no. 343, 1868.
- 29 Death notice, *Argus*, 13 October 1864: 'Emily, the beloved wife of Robert Meikle, aged forty-five years'.
- 30 Death certificate, Victoria BDM no. 342, 1868.
- 31 Probate and Administration Files, series VPRS 28 no. 7/364, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).
- 32 *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 1 August 1916.
- 33 Death certificate, Victoria BDM no. 342, 1868.
- 34 *Gundagai Times*, 5 December 1868.
- 35 Marriage certificate, Victoria BDM no. 4007, 1882.
- 36 *Cairns Post*, 5 August 1941, also reported in other newspapers.
- 37 Ancestry.com.au/boards/surnames.meikle/226.1/mb.ash for family comments (accessed 17 July 2019): 'I can find no evidence in the UK or US that Robert ever served in the military' (Nicola, 14 March 2013). Justin Meikle (great-great-great grandson), Melbourne, personal communication, July 2019.
- 38 Death certificate, Victoria BDM no. 342, 1868.
- 39 Officially the 71st (Highland) Regiment of Foot.
- 40 Website, www.forces-war-records.co.uk/medals/military-general-service-medal, accessed 17 July 2019.

Happy Valley Road and the Victoria Hill District: A Microhistory of a Victorian Gold-mining Community, 1854–1913

Charles Fahey

Abstract

The Victoria Hill Reserve in Bendigo is a major site for interpreting the history of quartz mining in Bendigo from the 1850s through to the early twentieth century. Although little of the domestic architecture along Happy Valley Road adjoining Victoria Hill survives to help us interpret the social history of mining, the area has a very rich archive of both personal and public records. These records can be used to write a microhistory of a gold-mining community. Labour-intensive quartz reefing sponsored the formation of mining communities. The fabric of daily life in these communities was dictated by mining. Mining was inherently unpredictable for both speculators and wage workers. The industry also created a harsh environment that made domestic life dirty, unhealthy and unsafe. Like all gold mines, the Victoria Hill mines were a diminishing resource, and boom was followed by depression and the inevitable loss of population. This pattern of boom and bust was repeated across the Victorian gold-mining districts.

The Victoria Hill Historic Reserve, five minutes drive from the centre of Bendigo, is one of the more accessible sites of mining heritage in Victoria. The area was critical in opening up the Bendigo quartz reefs in the mid-1850s, and mine owners and companies used the hill to pioneer deep sinking. Well-laid-out paths and excellent signage, interspersed with seating, direct walkers through the early open cuts, which dramatically reveal the synclines and anticlines of the Bendigo saddle reefs. An old iron poppet head, returned from service as a fire watchtower in the Dandenongs, sits on top of the capped shaft of the Victoria Reef Quartz Mine. In the 1890s this shaft, then one of the deepest in the world, hauled men and materials (but by this stage little gold) over 1,000 metres to and from the surface. From the poppet head itself, visitors can look out along the former New Chum line of reef, which was once a scene of intense industrial mining activity (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Victoria Hill from New Chum Hill. Nicholas Caire Photographer
(Courtesy State Library Victoria)

The headframe in the centre is the North Old Chum. To the right of this is the headframe of Lansell's 180, and to the left of the North Old Chum was Ballersedt's open cut. Nicholas Caire took this photograph as part of a series of images of Sandhurst (Bendigo) in 1875.

Along the Bendigo lines of reef in the 1870s was perhaps the largest concentration of steam engines in the Australian colonies. The visitor trail meanders through two major open cuts and past an array of mining artefacts—shafts drilled by hand into unforgiving rock, engine footings for winding, and compressed air engines, and there is also an old stamp battery that crushed quartz to win gold. Time has erased much of the harshness of mining; red ironbarks have regrown and are testimony to the resilience of eucalypts. In spring the reserve is clothed with flowering wattle. It is a delightful place to walk and the author of this article is frequently led through the reserve by his border collie, Artemis.

From the reserve the curious visitor gets glimpses of two nineteenth-century houses, a stone-and-stucco cottage and a more elaborate colonnaded entrance to a once imposing gentleman's residence. Apart from these buildings there are few clues on Happy Valley Road, the road running along the western side of the reserve,

about the community that mined Victoria Hill. In 1993 heritage architects Graham Butler and Andrew Ward surveyed Happy Valley Road and recorded five houses that they considered were part of the nineteenth-century landscape. The most striking of these was Bon Accord, the brick home of the mining investor William Rae. In the 1870s Rae added a classical Palladian front of two grand rooms and an entrance hall to his modest timber home. Rae commissioned Bendigo's premier architect of the 1870s, William Vahland, for this extension. A generation later, Rae's son Willie turned to the Australian-born William Beebe to design a brick villa close by his father's house. This was noted in the 1993 heritage survey. Also included in the survey was Coath's Cottage (sometimes known as Guernsey Cottage), an 1860s house built of mud, stone and stucco. These three houses were listed in the study as being individually significant (Butler and Ward gave such houses ranks of A–C). Two other houses were listed in the study; one was ranked D (contributory/representative) and the other E, presumably considered of little heritage significance. The house ranked D was a weatherboard cottage, constructed from the dominant building material of domestic architecture on the Victoria goldfields.¹

On 7 February 2009 a fire was deliberately lit in Eaglehawk and tragically killed two men, part of the overall toll of 173 lives lost across Victoria on 'Black Saturday'. In its path, from St Just Point along Happy Valley Road, the fire destroyed a number of historic buildings. In the wake of the fires all that remained of Bon Accord was the 1872 extension of Vahland, and Beebe's villa was severely burnt. The owners of Bon Accord bravely decided not to demolish but added a new addition to its rear. An old stable was unfortunately beyond repair. The owners of the Beebe villa decided not to rebuild, and the house was demolished. Several timber cottages from the nineteenth century were destroyed by fire on Black Saturday. Near Happy Valley Road in St Just Point, a timber cottage built by a miner diarist, Richard Pope, was burnt to the ground. Coath's Cottage sustained severe damage, but, despite the odds against success, Andrew Ward undertook the monumental task of restoring it.

Even before the fires of 2009 much of the nineteenth-century housing fabric of Happy Valley and surrounding mining areas had disappeared. Although Butler and Ward recorded only five historic houses in Happy Valley Road in 1993, the rate assessment books of 1873 rated 55 residences. With this considerable loss of housing it is difficult for the contemporary visitor at Victoria Hill to understand that

open cuts, engine beds and other mining remains were the product of a once vibrant community. Victoria Hill, however, has an extremely rich archival heritage that permits the historian to reconstruct the lives of this mining community in a level of detail that is rarely possible in other communities. Through these records we can write a microhistory of this mining settlement.

From the Big Picture to Microhistory

In the 1960s and 1970s a number of leading historians who turned to the goldfields explored the big picture rather than the minutiae of ordinary lives. Geoffrey Serle's *The Golden Age* painted a masterly portrait of Victoria during the golden decade of the 1850s, with vivid accounts of life on the early diggings, the development of the Victorian economy and a detailed narrative of the birth of democratic politics in the colony. In his *Rush that Never Ended*, Geoffrey Blainey, in the process of covering the vast scope of Australian mineral development, told the story of Victoria's gold industry beyond the 1850s and into the much longer company phase of mining.

The best portrait of an individual mining community remains Weston Bate's *Lucky City*, which narrates the development of Ballarat from the alluvial rushes of the 1850s to the turn of the twentieth century. In less detail Bate covered the story of Ballarat through the twentieth century in *Life after Gold*.² Yet, as a portrait of a gold community, *Lucky City* tells us more about the city fathers (James Oddie is an obvious example) than the miners who laboured in the deep lead or quartz mines and are seldom seen. The unemployment and forced migration that came in the wake of the collapse of deep lead mining in the 1870s is barely touched on. Nor do we hear from the tradesmen, whose skills were essential to the development of Ballarat's successful engineering works. And, as working men are missing, so also are their families. Bate argues that the city had an exceptionally high rate of home ownership, but he never explores the system of the miners' residence area on crown land that made this apparent home ownership possible.

Recent historians, influenced by the methods of microhistory, have attempted to reconstitute the lives of gold-mining families. Pat Grimshaw and Charles Fahey pioneered his approach in their 1980s study of Castlemaine. More recently this methodology has been adopted in a number of unpublished doctoral dissertations. Louise Blake has explored 'Women and Community on the Upper Goulburn Goldfields'

(2019) and Joan Hunt, in ‘Mining a Rich Lode’ (2015), has researched the families who settled on the Springdallah Dead Lead near Ballarat. While these studies owe much to overseas models—the work of Barry Reay stands out—Australian microhistorians labour under a number of acute disadvantages.³

Unlike their English counterparts, scholars of the Victorian goldfields have no manuscript census returns to enable exploration of small-scale locations. The 1861 printed Victorian census provided detailed tabulations of small regions on the goldfields; thereafter returns at the local level were very poor. The last colonial census to record occupations for towns and cities was in 1871. Under the direction of Henry Archer, himself a product of the gold migration, a detailed system of recording births, deaths and marriages was introduced in Victoria. Although records of birth, deaths and marriages are stored in the Public Record Office Victoria, they are generally closed to local researchers. Local historians have to rely, like Joan Hunt, on the chance survival of local duplicates of vital records or employ, as Louise Blake did, the limited information available in digital indexes of vital events. Although individual certificates can be purchased, their cost at over \$20 a certificate is prohibitive for detailed local studies.

Weston Bate argued that Ballarat was a ‘Lucky City’ not just because it was endowed with rich gold resources—shallow alluvial, deep lead alluvial and quartz—but also because its location as a railway centre permitted the city to later exploit the rich agricultural lands of its hinterland. Most importantly, the first migrant generation proved to be a rich human resource, and they brought skills and ambition from their old lands to Australia. Yet this is a view from the centre of the city, from the mercantile houses, the offices of the local manufacturing works, the municipal council offices and the local stock exchange. By focusing on Victoria Hill and Happy Valley Road and its environs, a small district of Bendigo, this article investigates another side of mining: the insecure world of mining suburbs where life chances were tied to the peculiarities of geology and the exploitation of an asset that faced ineluctable decline.

A microhistory of the region, compiled through public records and a rich selection of personal papers, can uncover much about daily life on the Victorian goldfields during the years after the great alluvial rushes of the 1850s. A close-grained reconstruction of life in this mining district illustrates the riches that investors could make, but it also reminds us that mining was inherently risky. Mining investments could suddenly

disappear owing to the happenstance of unpredictable geology. Even greater risks confronted those who physically worked in the mines. Like the dividends of investors, regular wages were subject to the vagaries of geology. In turn, the unpredictability of wages cruelly touched the families of the mining workforce. Gold also created a hostile physical environment—a world of dust, mullock heaps, dangerous open cuts and unsanitary backyard privies. In reconstructing the history of this region, this article will show how the exploitation of a diminishing asset shaped the daily fabric of life. Stories of building homes, looking for work, raising children in difficult environments, or risking all in speculative mining ventures were repeated across the goldfields. Such stories are critical to understanding and interpreting the mining heritage of Victoria.

Written Heritage

Victoria Hill, Happy Valley Road and St Just Point have left us with a rich written record. Particularly rare and valuable are the personal voices of residents. From Happy Valley Road we have the journal of John Bartlett Davies, who settled as early as 1858. Two other diarists lived close by. From 1871 to 1886 Richard Pope, a quartz miner and a keen diarist, lived at St Just Point, at the northern end of Happy Valley Road (Figure 2). At the southern and top end of the road, is Bendigo's most prominent residence, Fortuna Villa. Although Fortuna was the home of George Lansell, it was also the home for many years of the indefatigable diarist Isaac Edward Dyason. In March 1871 Lansell, when he was in the process of purchasing Fortuna Villa, offered Dyason employment, a proposal accepted somewhat reluctantly. In March 1875 Lansell embarked on a world trip, and left Isaac Dyason in charge of Fortuna until mid-1876. Lansell left once more to live in London from 1881 to 1887. Again Isaac Dyason was the master of Fortuna, sharing the villa with his wife Harriet. Three of their children were born in Fortuna. In 1888 he continued to live close by Happy Valley in Marong Road (the view of his house has recently been obscured by a number of units). This residence, also once owned by Lansell, was close to Fortuna, but it was also near to the family of Harriet Eastwood. Harriet and Isaac meet in 1876 at a dance ('nice little widow for partner') and they married in 1881. Harriet was a daughter of Willian Mason, a wine merchant, who lived in Happy Valley Road, and her sister Jane married William Rae, the quartz reef owner on Victoria Hill. The Dyason family were frequent visitors to the Rae home, Bon Accord, in Happy Valley Road.⁴



Figure 2: Map of Victoria Hill and region, based on 'Bendigo Gold Field', issued by W. Dickson, Secretary for Mines, 1913 (Courtesy State Library Victoria)

These rich personal sources can be supplemented with public records. To explore the residents of Happy Valley, I have extracted all names listed as living in the street from the rate assessment books for 1873, 1877, 1885, 1891, 1897, 1908 and 1913.⁵ This source gives a description of the rateable property, lists whether the property was owned by the crown (as a miner's residence area), gives the net annual value of the property and also states the number of persons living in each residence. As part of an earlier project I conducted with Professor Alan Mayne on the central Victorian goldfields, I was given access to the records of the Office of Births, Deaths and Marriages, and I have attempted to recover the genealogical history of as many families listed

in the Valley as was possible.⁶ The index of probates has also been consulted. Together the journals and the public records permit us to explore in some detail the lives of those who settled in Happy Valley and environs.

John Bartlett Davies Arrives in Happy Valley

Some time in the early twentieth century John Bartlett Davies decided to transcribe entries from a diary (or diaries) into an account of his life on the Bendigo goldfield. Davies commenced his memo by recalling his decision to leave Cornwall in 1857. He wrote: ⁷

In common with many others in my station, I got dissatisfied with my prospects at home and determined to try my fortune in Australia. After some difficulty in getting the needful outfit for the voyage, owing to my father being unwilling to part with me (he having suddenly discovered that I was useful on the farm) I found myself on the eve of starting for the gold land with something over £50 in my pocket.

Although Davies' background was not typical of Cornish migrants to Victoria, it was not unusual. On the Victorian goldfields the most common background of Cornish migrants was the copper and tin mines of the west of Cornwall, with around two-thirds recruited from mining or its associated industries such as engineering. Just over one in ten migrants came from farming families.⁸ Most migrants were probably not as well off as Davies. In the 1851 census his father was listed as a farmer of 100 acres employing three men. In addition, the household contained two female domestic servants.⁹

Like thousands of other Cornish migrants, Davies journeyed from Penzance to Liverpool by steamer, and took passage to Melbourne on the *Sultana*. Accompanied to Liverpool by a brother and an uncle, Davies, aged just 21, also had the good fortune to be taken under wing by a fellow passenger booked on the *Sultana*, Mr Thomas Luxton. Davies wrote that Mr Luxton proved to be a 'judicious counsellor' to a novice like himself and an 'agreeable ship mate'. Mr Luxton advised him to purchase provisions 'in the form of hams, potatoes, cheese, jams etc' to supplement the fare provided on the ship. On 21 December 1857 Davies bade farewell to his uncle, brother and Liverpool and began the long journey to Australia.¹⁰

By early March 1858 Davies was tired by the tedium of the voyage, and his discomfort was increased by the depletion of his luxuries. He

would 'gladly have replaced the sea with any place worthy of *Terra Firma*'. When he saw Cape Otway from the deck of the ship, he felt truly thankful, and his spirits rose even more as they entered the heads. Once in Port Phillip Bay, Mr Luxton pointed out Mt Macedon, some 40 miles distant, and the 'Black Forest of Bushranging celebrity'. At Sandridge Mr Luxton continued to be an excellent companion and provided the young Davies with a bed in Collingwood. Here, on his first night in Australia, Davies 'listened with avidity to anything connected with Bendigo' as it was there he 'intended to settle and pick up nuggets if he had the chance'.¹¹

As his companion had business in Melbourne, Davies caught the coach the following day and set out alone for Bendigo. His journal recorded passing through the towns of Keilor, Sunbury and Gisborne, none of which seemed to him to be places of much importance, appearing to be chiefly kept up by carriers on the roads. The Black Forest, however, was worthy of its name: 'The trees being very large and growing very thick together, a fine rendezvous for lawless bands could well be imagined'.¹² After sleeping the night in Kyneton, Davies continued his journey via Castlemaine. When about ten miles distant from Bendigo:

We came in sight of the "Big Hill" being a high dividing range and which our horses had to climb over in order to reach "Bendigo" it must be a fearful place to pull heavy loads over and has been the scene of many untoward accidents. Beyond this our path lay over a level rise of ground all the way known as Kangaroo Flat whose surfaces bore ample testimony to its auriferous character, as well as the diggers themselves who were scattered about in patches plying their tub and cradles and as we got nearer Sandhurst [there were] other gold getting appliances in the shape of puddling machines which were then in general use.¹³

Arriving in Bendigo, Davies quickly sought out contacts given to him by his shipboard companion. Dropping in at a number of hotels, he also found boyhood companions, including a Thomas Percy. His friends in turn helped him search for work, and within a couple of days he 'fell in with a party of Irishmen' who wanted a man immediately to work their puddling machine. After months at sea, however, he was not used to manual labour; his hands soon blistered, and he gave up his puddling work. To his surprise the Irishmen paid him in pound notes, the first he had ever seen. He was astounded to see 'paper currency on a gold-diggings—the cradle of sovereigns'.¹⁴

Throwing up his puddling job Davies called on friends, who offered him accommodation, and they also informed him that a Henry Thomas was living in a place called Happy Valley. After making a number of inquiries, he found Happy Valley where he fell into conversation with 'some Breage men'. As they reminisced about Cornwall, John Bartlett Davies saw Henry coming down the valley with an axe over his shoulder. Henry kindly asked John to stop with him and, after 'many yarns about old times and old friends', Henry explained that he had just purchased a horse and dray to carry wood and quartz. He offered to go into partnership with John. After a couple of days searching, they purchased another horse and dray for 'for something over £70'. John had only £26 left from his savings so Henry Thomas agreed to make up the difference, and they entered into a partnership as carters. Davies took up residence in Happy Valley, where he remained for most of the next three decades.¹⁵

A Society in Transition

John Bartlett Davies arrived at a critical juncture in the history of the Bendigo goldfield. Travelling across Kangaroo Flat, he noticed 'ample testimony' of the alluvial diggings and watched tub and cradle men ply their trade. Closer to the city he observed puddling machines that were in general use in 1858. Although his dream had been to pick up nuggets if he had the chance, such dreams were fast fading by the time he arrived on the diggings. In the first flush of the gold rushes rich finds could be made. Isaac Dyason, who would later be associated with Happy Valley, gave up digging in 1853 with £1,500 clear profit. By the late 1850s alluvial mining was in decline. The mining registrars spoke of abandoned machines, and sludge from the machines had created major environmental problems.¹⁶ A way forward was to turn to quartz reefing.

Winning gold from quartz was an expensive and risky enterprise. The first quartz reefers generally worked in small parties. Leaseholders were working proprietors, and they relied on good fortune to provide capital for mine development. In the late 1850s miners began experimenting with schemes to raise capital. Ralph Birrell has written on the early forms of companies and the legislation devised to promote quartz reefing.¹⁷ The late 1850s also saw men who had made money from other endeavours enter quartz reefing. The most spectacular example was George Lansell, who in later years was given the sobriquet, the Quartz King. In the early 1860s he invested in the Advance Mine on

Victoria Hill near Happy Valley. In 1865 and 1866 this mine produced excellent dividends and was the foundation of Lansell's mining success.¹⁸

The goldfields were changing in other ways. Early alluvial mining had been the domain of the young, single man. However, from the earliest days on the goldfields, women and children were also present. Perhaps a quarter of the early diggers came as married men. Single and married diggers also came with unmarried sisters. In the second half of the 1850s the colonial government made a concerted effort to redress the imbalance of the sexes and sponsored the migration of single women. Single diggers also called for their girlfriends and fiancées to join them. The late 1850s and early 1860s constituted a period of rapid family formation. By the census of 1861 the marriage rate of women on the goldfields was, by British standards, exceptionally high. In the age cohort 40–44, most women in Bendigo were married; at home maybe one in five remained unmarried at this age.¹⁹ It was into this society in transition that John Bartlett Davies settled, and his diary records the process of establishing himself, finding work, and creating a family and home.

After John Davies and Henry Thomas had purchased the horse, dray and harness they set about seeking work. Business was erratic. When they found jobs they made 35s to 40s per day but 'work was not constant by any means'. When not carting they worked on their houses. Davies boasted that he soon showed himself competent in the 'carpentering line' and was able to cook a steak or a chop and make a pie and pudding. The latter dainties, he added, were only indulged in on Sunday. As winter set in a chimney was erected on their slab and calico tent, which enabled them to get warm and dry their clothes.²⁰ The 1861 census shows that such simple houses were the norm around Victoria Hill. At this census there were 222 residents living in Happy Valley, most of whom were young men in their prime. They were almost all engaged in quartz reefing, and they lived in tents or in houses of one room.²¹

Collecting timber in the bush, Davies had to learn the skills of a bushman. Initially he experienced difficulty finding his way, 'but by degrees [I] got accustomed to it and soon felt nothing about it'.²² He also had to come to terms with a new climate. After two winters he realised that:

The rainy season set in about the middle of June and continued to rain pretty frequently until the middle of September, when everything

around seemed to put forth tokens of spring time. The bush looks beautiful during the two months that follow the short winter. All the undergrowth seems to be covered with flowers something like the heather, only much higher shrubs, and the ground everywhere with an endless variety of flowers, and in the level flats the ground was soon covered with fine grass, and in some places presented quite a Parklike scene. As November and December advanced, however, these beauties began to fade and the water in many places becomes scarce and the tracks in many places covered some inches deep with dust, but it is not until January that the full force of the summer is felt.²³

Initially Davies and Thomas did not receive sufficient work from carting quartz to public quartz batteries, and they decided to set up a puddling machine at Sidney Flat with two other diggers. They purchased timber for the machine, obtained a lease and put up a stable. When their partners abandoned the project, Davies and Thomas sold their timber and returned to carting quartz. By early 1859 they had more work than they could handle so they purchased more horses and employed labour.²⁴

Henry Thomas also heard that his brother Richard and (unnamed) sisters were working at Creswick. Henry visited them and convinced one sister to come back and keep house for himself and John. When she agreed they decided to build a more substantial weatherboard dwelling 24 by 14 foot (about 7.3 by 4.3 metres) costing £90. John Bartlett Davies borrowed his share of the capital, £40, from his Cornish mate Thomas Percy. Richard Thomas also joined the circle when he moved from Creswick and became a partner. Davies combined quartz carting with timber getting, and by June 1859 he boasted that working with a Redruth colleague he made good money.²⁵ In the early 1860s he began to re-invest the carting and timber profits into mining investments, and he became a regular dealer in shares. Initially he lost £70–80, but he was not deterred as they received a few dividends from time to time. The carting business, which changed partners on a number of occasions, was a source of information about gold yields. Davies and his partners—now Tom Percy and Richard Thomas—also took out shares, which gave them some influence in winning carting contracts.²⁶



Figure 3: The claim of Richard and Thomas Coath and their partners on Victoria Hill 1857
(Courtesy Bendigo Historical Society)

Like many early quartz reefers, Richard Coath lost his claim in the 1860s when the returns of gold failed to repay costs of deep sinking. Many of the original prospectors on Bendigo lost their claims in these years.

The 1865 drought drove up the price of feed and made carting difficult and expensive.²⁷ Not daunted by this, Davies and his partners continued to speculate, and from 1866 these investments proved to be very profitable. Davies invested in two ways. First, he and his partners purchased a share in a number of private mines. In October 1866, when the Advance Mine offered a number of shares to raise capital, they bought two for £410. They also purchased an eighth share in the Unity claim for £40. Second, they also invested in public companies. When the Unity claim was floated as a public company in 1869, they received 2,500 of the 20,000 shares and Davies immediately sold 300 for £56 5s.²⁸ In 1871 he wrote: 'I have done no carting myself this year, not because I am above working, but because I can make more money by share speculating'.²⁹

Between 1858 and 1871 John Bartlett Davies made the transition from workingman to independent gentleman. While he had not picked up nuggets, gold was his avenue to success. This was a dream that very few realised, but it was not unheard of. When William Rae of Aberdeen married Jane Mason in April 1861 he was working as a quartz crusher. Profits from this enterprise were invested in his mining claim. By the early 1870s, Rae had retired from active mining. In 1872 he commissioned an addition of two grand rooms and entrance hall to his 1860s weatherboard house and thereafter lived the life of a gentleman bibliophile (Figure 4).³⁰ Similarly, David Chaplin Sterry was working as a quartz miner in March 1860 at the birth his daughter Elizabeth Jane. Profits from this endeavour were invested in the construction of the Gold Mines Hotel, designed by William Vahland and opened in 1872.³¹



Figure 4: William Rae (Courtesy Madeleine Chow)

This picture was probably taken in the 1880s when William Rae had retired from active mining and lived the life of an independent gentleman spending most of his time reading.

Among the prominent quartz reefers on Victoria Hill were the German father and son team of Johann and Christopher Theodore Ballerstedt. Together, and sometimes with other partners, they opened up quartz reefs from the 1850s. Their early open cut can still be seen on Victoria Hill. They were fortunate, and early profits, which they refused to disclose, financed later reefing. In the 1860s they built the handsome villa, Fortuna, south of Victoria Hill.³² Johann died in 1869 leaving an estate valued for probate at £19,000, and in February 1871 Christopher (normally known as Theodore) sold his house and mine to George Lansell for £30,000 and returned home.³³ George Lansell renamed the Ballerstedt claim the '180' and used it to experiment with deep sinking in the 1880s and 1890s. The footings of his winding machinery for the '180' are also still extant on Victoria Hill.

To understand the history of Bendigo we need to appreciate a number of critical factors about quartz mining; each reef was a diminishing asset, and the cost of getting gold was an enormous consumer of capital. Unless claim holders found easily won gold, their costs quickly mounted, and they faced enormous problems working and holding onto their claims. Richard Coath, the son of a sawyer and a native of Guernsey, migrated to the Victorian goldfields in 1854 and in the same year took up a claim on Victoria Hill with his brother Thomas and three other partners. By the late 1850s these claim holders faced difficulties financing their mine, and they were forced to amalgamate with eight other claims to form one company, the Victoria Reef Quartz Mining Company. Although the original claim holders received shares in the new company, these were not fully paid up, and within a few years many of the original claimholders forfeited their shares for non-payment of calls. Richard Coath was one of these unfortunate miners, and by 1863 he had left Happy Valley and tried his luck at Rushworth. This was also unsuccessful; he was back in Bendigo in 1865 when he filed for bankruptcy, claiming failed mining speculations as the cause of his distress. Coath remained in Happy Valley for the remainder of his life, and he was listed in subsequent rate books as a miner, presumably working for wages.³⁴

In the 1866 rate book, the first to give occupations, the majority of householders were miners (86 per cent) living in humble houses built on crown land or miners' residence areas. Several of these initial claim holders were pushed, like Richard Coath, into working in one

of the major mines on Victoria Hill or in mines in the wider district. Over the next five years the turnover along the road was high, and 43 per cent of the 1866 householders had moved out by 1873. Overall the Bendigo goldfield was prosperous in the late 1860s and early 1870s, and population flowed into both Bendigo and Happy Valley. In 1873, 25 of the 55 householders in Happy Valley had arrived since 1866. These new migrants joined the old residents in forming the distinctive mining suburbs of Bendigo.³⁵

Our best account of this later stream of migration comes from the diaries of Richard Pope, who settled at St Just Point on the northern edge of Victoria Hill in 1871. Born at Breage in Cornwall in 1835, Pope migrated for the first time when he turned 21 and mined in the Virginia coal mines, the Illinois silver mines and at the great copper mines of Michigan. The day after his marriage in 1858 he journeyed once again to the US; then, on returning to the British Isles, he joined his father, a mine manager, in Ireland. In 1868, after his father died, he once again migrated, this time to Australia and not as a bachelor sojourner but as a married settler with his wife Mary Anne and family of five young children. His brother Joseph had preceded him, and a sister also settled in the copper triangle in South Australia. After working in the deep lead mines of Ballarat and district, Pope grew tired of erratic employment resulting from the failure of the Ballarat leads. He was never fond of deep lead mining with its dank atmosphere and creaking timbers, so he returned to hard rock mining at Bendigo in 1870. His story was a common one during the boom of the early 1870s.³⁶

Mining Communities

David Goodman has argued that the colonial authorities in the 1850s feared a society made up of single, immature males.³⁷ Their concerns were largely misplaced, and most diggers the 1850s did not succumb to the irresponsible life feared by evangelical Christians. As mining moved to a more stable regime of puddling and then quartz reefing, miners began building permanent houses and establishing families. When we probe behind the raw statistics of the census, we can begin to uncover complex family links. Even single diggers brought complex family relationships to the goldfields, and many single diggers sent for, or encouraged, kin to join them.

Although John Bartlett Davies travelled to Australia alone, his decision to stay in Happy Valley was buttressed by the offer of a boyhood

friend to take him into a partnership. Very rapidly these two young men extended their friendship and family links. Henry Thomas was joined by a brother, Richard Thomas, and a sister Julia.³⁸ In March 1861 Julia married a Thomas Wills, who operated a crushing machine at Golden Square. The young John Davies was invited to the wedding and here he met the bridegroom's sister Grace. Grace and John married in March 1863.³⁹ John Bartlett Davies was also eventually joined by three brothers. James William arrived in 1860, only to succumb to a bowel complaint soon after arriving. John wrote he felt 'more lonely than ever for we were always on the best of terms and I used to look forward with great pleasure to the time when he would be my daily companion'.⁴⁰ In 1869 Sidney Davies arrived and probably lived with his brother until he married in 1873. Gamaliel Robert Davies (known as Robert) arrived the following year and married in 1874. His first wife, Mary Anne, died in 1879, and Robert remarried in the same year, this time taking a young widow, Caroline Johnson, as his wife. Both brothers established households around Victoria Hill and worked in mining.

At the height of the boom in 1873, Happy Valley Road contained a total of 55 houses and a total of 216 inhabitants (Figure 5). The rate books do not give a description of the material of which the houses were made, but the average net annual value of £14 10s suggests that most were timber houses. William Rae was rated on a house and stables valued annually at £65, indicating that his was the only brick house. The majority of residents in 1873 (73 per cent) were miners, but there were also two storekeepers, a restaurant keeper, a butcher and a bootmaker. In 1873 only one residence was built on freehold land; all the rest were built on what was known as a miner's residence area. Under the Mining Act, miners and others were able to take up crown land, often in large areas of half an acre, and build a house for a nominal rent of 5s per year. In 1881 the law was amended to allow residence area holders to sell the improvements on these blocks and bequeath them to their heirs.⁴¹ Well into the twentieth century the residence area remained a common form of household tenure in Happy Valley Road; 40 per cent of houses were built on crown land in 1913. Occupying crown land, often not identified as such on rate books, explains the apparent high levels of home ownership on the goldfields.

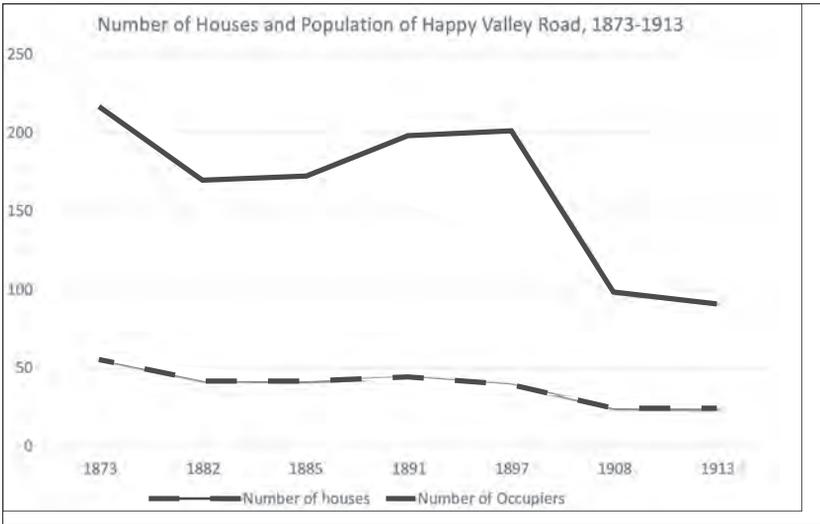


Figure 5: Numbers of houses and occupiers in Happy Valley Road, 1873–1913
(Rate Assessment Books 1873–1913)

In a booming mining community of the late 1860s and early 1870s, the simple weatherboard cottage was an ingenious way to quickly and cheaply house the growing population. When he first arrived in Bendigo in August 1870 Richard Pope boarded at a hotel in Long Gully at 18s per week, which was around 40 per cent of his weekly wages. When his family arrived at the end of the month, he rented two rooms for 5s 6d. This was a crush for his family of seven, and by the new year he had planned for his own house at St Just Point, north of Happy Valley:⁴²

Wednesday 18th January 1871

Carpenter started putting up our new house for us at St. Just Point today, 4 Rooms, 22 feet long and 20 feet in depth, 9 feet walls to house. £7 10s to put up shell.

Friday 3rd February 1871

Received £40 draft from Ballarat for sale of house and went into Sandhurst today to get it cashed which I succeeded in doing after some trouble and afterwards paid Magee £25 on a/c, he having supplied building material for our house.

Saturday 4th February 1871

Paid Mr. Colenso 30s for building chimney and carpenter £5 on account, and went into the house to live this afternoon (though it is not finished), to save the rent.

In the early 1870s, Happy Valley bore many of the distinctive demographic features of the mining districts of Bendigo. After the alluvial period, few Irishmen or Scotsmen settled in the area. When we include the surrounding districts of New Chum, St Just Point and Ironbark, a distinct Cornish community is evident. The area also shared with Ironbark a strong German community. A feature of Happy Valley was the strong representation of Channel Islanders—Richard and Thomas Coath, William Mason and James Pitcher were born in Guernsey. In 1873 the sexual imbalance of the gold-rush days of the 1850s was still evident. Of the 55 occupied residences, nine were inhabited by only one person. These were generally bachelors. When Adolphus Witt died in the hospital in 1888 little was known about his background other than his age. He was buried in the Lutheran section of the White Hills cemetery. Those who did marry largely followed the patterns of high fertility evident in the general Bendigo community. Married at eighteen in 1863, Grace Davies bore her first child within a year of marriage, and by 1878 she had given birth to seven children. Selina Coath, married at 22, bore the last of her fifteen children in 1884. Her fertility was clearly exceptional; Grace Davies was closer to the average marital fertility of Bendigo women.⁴³

Until Bendigo was supplied with secure and clean water in 1877, infant death rates were high. In 1861 one in four children died before their first birthday. By the boom of the 1870s the rate had declined but was still high at around 150 infant deaths per 1,000 births.⁴⁴ While death rates declined when children were older than one, childhood diseases nevertheless took a toll on toddlers. Few families in Happy Valley escaped infant or childhood deaths. Early in 1867, Grace Davies was laid up with a sore throat, and just as she was getting better her son Edward James contracted scarlet fever on 14 January. In the middle of the night poor little May Louise was taken sick as well. After fitting for several days, she died on 17 January. John wrote:⁴⁵

On Friday afternoon we carried her to her last earthly resting place, she was buried by the side of James William in the White Hills cemetery being nearly 3 ¼ years of age. We feel her loss very much indeed she was such an affectionate little thing, she used to come to me and getting on my knee say, “I your own Papa Ed John is Mama’s boy”.

The mining landscape contained perils that created a hostile environment, and residents had to be aware of abandoned shafts and mining dams. Thomas Percy, the mate and business partner of John Bartlett Davies, cut across the Victoria Hill mining area on 25 October 1875 after a visit to the Ironbark Hotel. According to the publican he was not intoxicated and had drunk only one small glass of ale. The night was a dark one, and he did not carry a lamp or light. Crossing Victoria Hill, he turned off the track and fell into an unfenced section of Rae’s open cut. He was found the following morning by a couple of miners about 20 feet (6.1 metres) below the surface. His injuries were so severe that all the attending doctor could do was make him comfortable. He died on 10 December. At the subsequent inquest William Rae testified that he had fenced off the open cut with timber and mullock, but some thief, unknown to him, had stolen the timber fence. Adult illnesses were also an ever-present threat in an area with few sanitation facilities. In 1884 Robert Davies died of typhoid, leaving his widow, Caroline, with four young children.

Decline

Happy Valley and its residents enjoyed their most prosperous days in the first half of the 1870s. By the 1880s gold getting was becoming more difficult, and capital for exploration was scarce.

In the mid-1870s John Davies noticed a falling away of dividends and contemplated getting out of mining.⁴⁶ In 1874, feeling the stress of mining speculation and after a bout of ill health, he visited Cornwall. On his return he discovered that ‘dividends were scarce and shares had gone down in price’. Looking for other opportunities, he tried his hand at farming and purchased a small property at Myers Creek. He quickly realised that this was too small to become a going concern for his growing family. Grace also missed the community of her Wesleyan chapel. Returning to Bendigo he contemplated selling out of mining and figured that he could realise sufficient to make £3–4 per week.⁴⁷ In the end he stayed in mining. In 1878 he risked a large part of his capital

when speculators purchased shares from the successful mine owner Barnet Lazarus and offered these to the public. In September 1878 he hoped his purchase would ‘turn out well’, but in the following November he reluctantly conceded that the speculation in the ‘Lazarus [Company] did not turn out a good thing’ and mining was ‘not lively on the whole.’⁴⁸

John Davies’ journal ends in 1879. In January he wrote that Grace and he had often talked of making ‘a start to go to the old country’. Grace, he explained, was as anxious as he ‘and more so to get away from the heat and dust and the worrying life of mining’. In February 1879 they booked their passage and he ended his journal. From the Bendigo rate books it would appear that Davies let out his Happy Valley Road property from 1880 to 1882. He returned to Happy Valley in 1882 and continued his occupation as a carter until 1889 when he decided to try his hand as a mining share broker. In 1895 he purchased a house in Don Street and worked as a stockbroker until his death in 1908. Davies made the all-too-common mistake of remaining in mining too long, and when he died in 1908 he left no assets that were probated.⁴⁹

William Rae similarly found that by the mid-1870s his investments were not as profitable as they previously had been. In 1876 he accepted a proposal to amalgamate his claim with the Victoria Reef Quartz Company. For his claim he received 9,000 shares paid up to 2s on a par of 20s. His problems commenced when yields declined, and the company needed to make calls on capital. Across Bendigo the prosperous years of the early 1870s turned sour in the late 1870s when further exploration was required. Prodigal payment of dividends left companies exposed. The calling up of capital was required, and many investors once again lost their shares. There was a turn-around in the early 1880s, and exploration was helped by the introduction of rock drills. Yet the old problem of failure to set aside reserves continued, and in the second half of the 1880s profits dived once again. In these years William Rae found himself pressed to pay calls. Isaac Dyason, his brother-in-law, worried that Rae in January 1882 may have ‘connived’ with his mine workers to encroach on a neighbouring mine and share the gold. In November 1883 Dyason lamented their failure to sell their shares in the Victoria Quartz Reef mine when it had been possible at 30s per share.⁵⁰

Unemployment emerged as a major problem in 1879, and thereafter mining was a highly insecure occupation. In August 1879 local mine owners reacted to the decline in yields by attempting to cut

weekly wages from 45s to 42s. Miners in turn struck. Tensions were high, and Isaac Dyason, as George Lansell's manager, feared walking along Happy Valley Road to visit his fiancée Harriet Eastwood. The strike was resolved by the government threatening mine owners with a loss of leases. Led ineptly during the strike by Lansell, the mine owners caved in and restored the old wage rate. They turned, however, to an exploitative form of work known as tributing where the miner worked without wages in return for a percentage of the gold won. In 1880 tensions were further heightened when Lansell refused to pump water from claims near his '180' mine, throwing some 200 men out of work.⁵¹

Richard Pope took a major part in the 1879 strike and was a part of a deputation that waited on Lansell at the Menzies Hotel in Melbourne. For his part in this dispute he appears to have lost his job and for a while was forced to work at Woods Point. By the mid-1880s he had won a position as manager of the South Johnson Mine and for a few years was relatively prosperous. He led his neighbourhood Primitive Methodist Church and was a member of a local self-improvement society. But, when the fortunes of the Johnsons Reef Mine turned down, Pope, as manager, was blamed, and he was dismissed. Isaac Dyason had the unenviable task of giving Pope this news and felt sorry for him, but he did add in his diary that he had found the manager reading novels in the stope. Like many other miners in such circumstances, Pope realised that flight was his only option, and in 1886 he left for Broken Hill.⁵²

The decline in mining had a major impact on the mining suburbs of Bendigo. Happy Valley was particularly sorely hit. In 1889 a return of Bendigo mines demonstrated that the once prosperous Victoria Quartz Reef Mine employed a mere four wage workers. The remaining 25 miners eked out a living as tributers.⁵³ George Lansell's '180' mine won 34,607 ounces of gold between 1884 and 1887; for the next eight years the return was a mere 632 ounces.⁵⁴ Between 1873 and 1891 the number of occupied houses in Happy Valley dropped from 55 to 44. In 1891 less than half of the householders were miners, and, as a sign of the changing fortunes of the area, one quarter were widows (Figures 5 and 6).

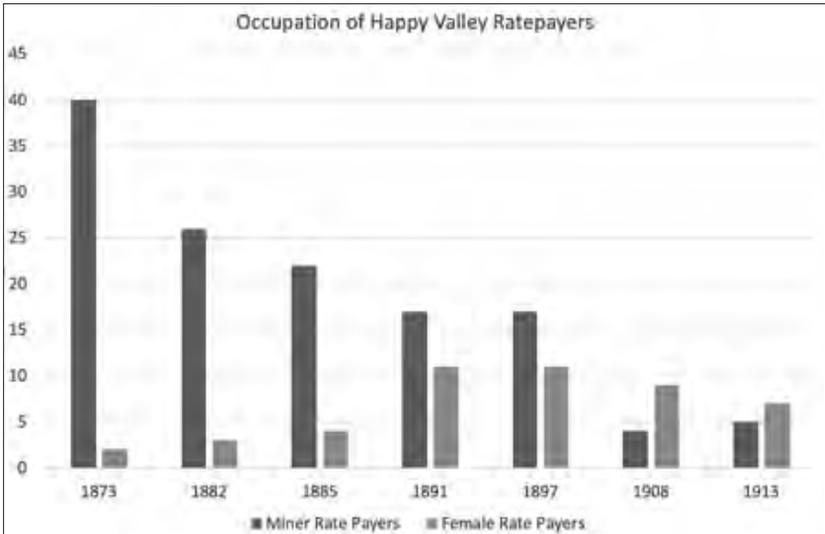


Figure 6: Occupation of Happy Valley Ratepayers (Rate Assessment Books 1873–1913)

Although this represented a natural ageing of the area, it was also a sign of a more intractable feature of the industry—mining was prematurely killing its workforce. Isaac Dyason compared mining to war; both made men callous. Mine accidents were a constant feature of mining life, and few miners would have escaped without at least a minor accident. Richard Pope, for example, suffered a painful blow to his thumb from a mining hammer in September 1874.⁵⁵ Regulation of workplaces reduced fatalities after 1878, but deep mining and the use of mechanical drills alarmingly increased the rate of deaths from miners’ silicosis or phthisis. Doctors were often imprecise in recording causes of death and had little understanding of miners’ phthisis. By the 1880s the scourge of what was often called miners’ complaint was evident among Happy Valley Road households. Richard Coath died in 1886 at the relatively young age of 50 from bronchitis, probably contracted from his years of mining. As early as 1883 the disease touched the family of Isaac Dyason when Harriet reported that her brother, Alfred, in Happy Valley was suffering from miner’s complaint. His illness was protracted and he did not die until 1899.⁵⁶

Although mining revived in the 1890s, the great days of the mines of the Happy Valley–Ironbark region were over. In this decade the centre

of mining moved north to the Moon group of mines in Eaglehawk, and the Bendigo goldfield enjoyed a brief Indian summer before the wartime crash. The population of Happy Valley Road remained stable over the 1890s, only to drop precipitously in the new century. By the 1890s the number of miner ratepayers in the region had declined substantially since the early 1870s (Figures 5 and 6).

Changing mining fortunes meant changing domestic fortunes. Jane Rae had been used to a comfortable life when her husband William died in November 1887 (Figure 7). On paper he was a wealthy man, leaving an estate of over £6,000. However, most of this was tied up in shares in the Victoria Quartz Reef Mine. He had survived by selling off shares, and at death he owned less than half of his initial allocation. The year after William died, Jane Rae faced the demand for calls on the remaining shares. Her brother-in-law, Isaac Dyason, wrote that she lived beyond her means, as if she had an income of £1,000 per year. To provide some support, Dyason organised the sale of further shares, and her children were old enough to help out. But the children caused problems. Tina married a Presbyterian minister whose congregation did not realise he had a fondness for drink. Her son Willie eloped in 1900 with her servant. She managed to hang on, however, and remained a resident in Bon Accord in Happy Valley Road until her death in 1913.⁵⁷

With a depressed mining industry, whether to stay or to move became a common dilemma among goldfields residents. In Richard Pope's case, as we have seen, the decision was forced upon him. John Bartlett Davies left Victoria Hill but moved only a few blocks away to Don Street. Isaac Dyason resisted moving. In the early twentieth century his son Clarence worked as a mining engineer (and was a man about town) in Melbourne, and his daughter Emily pursued a musical career in Melbourne and briefly in Germany. His second daughter Amy was her mother's companion before marriage. Harriet's family struggled to make a living in Happy Valley, and when a sister decided to shift to Melbourne Harriet tried to convince Isaac to move too. Isaac initially considered this a silly course of action, but he gave into pressure and purchased a home in St Kilda when his daughter Amy married a Melbourne businessman.⁵⁸

Not all residents could afford to make such moves. Selina Coath remained in her cottage long after the death of her husband. It is difficult to say how widows survived in these years. Selina Coath died in 1925,



Figure 7: Jane Rae and her daughter Christina c.1864 (Courtesy Madeleine Chow)

Jane Rae was born in Guernsey and arrived in Victoria in 1860 at the age of seventeen. She married William Rae in 1861. Five of their six children lived to adulthood.

having outlived her husband Richard by over thirty years. Her humble miner's cottage was an obvious bulwark against extreme poverty. Her many children helped her survive, and one son, Thomas, became a labour activist in the early twentieth century, while another, William, was the mayor of Boulder in Western Australia. The Western Australian goldfields were a common place of flight for young Bendigo miners in the early twentieth century. More desperate was the situation of Caroline Davies, who had four young children to support in 1884. For over twenty years she remained the ratepayer on a humble miner's residence area. While her occupation on the rate returns was given as widow, the 1912 federal electoral roll makes it clear that she actually eked out a living as a laundress. The same roll demonstrates that in a mining community there were very few jobs for women.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Victoria Hill is an important part of the gold-mining heritage of Victoria. Located close to the centre of Bendigo, the historic reserve illustrates the open cuts first used by reefers to exploit gold locked in quartz. On the site are engine beds of the great steam machinery that crushed the quartz and conveyed men and materials to underground workplaces. The same machines hauled the ore from below. The iron head frame of the Victoria Quartz Reef Mine was once instrumental in deep sinking. Over a hundred years since the peak of mining, the native bush that John Bartlett Davies enjoyed but also cut down has regenerated. The City of Greater Bendigo has constructed easy walking paths through the open cuts, and clear signage helps the visitor interpret the mining geology and machinery (Figure 8). Missing, however, is any interpretation of the lives of those who worked in the mines and raised families under the shadow of mullock heaps and sand dumps, and amidst the dust, fumes and noise of mining.

Fortunately, the area also has a rich written record to complement the material culture of mining. This record reminds us that mining was an inherently unstable industry where fortunes—both of the entrepreneur and the working miner—could quickly change. Unlike modern mining, nineteenth-century quartz reefing was labour intensive, the work was dangerous and unhealthy, and unemployment was an ever-present threat. To fully appreciate the heritage of Victoria Hill we must understand the lives of the women, men and children who lived alongside the mines. This is the challenge heritage managers must now face in their ongoing work of interpreting Victoria Hill.



Figure 8: Rae's Open Cut and the Victoria Quartz headframe August 2019
(Courtesy Charles Fahey)

Since 1875 the native vegetation has returned and visitor paths guide the walker safely through Rae's Open Cut where Thomas Percy was fatally injured in 1875.

Notes

- 1 The 1993 Heritage Study by Graeme Butler & Associates can be downloaded from the City of Greater Bendigo Home Page, at <https://www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/About/Document-Library/eaglehawk-and-bendigo-heritage-study-1993>.
- 2 Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851–1861*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1963; Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended: A History of Australian Mining*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1963; and Weston Bate, *Lucky City: The First Generation at Ballarat 1851–1901*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1978, and *Life After Gold: Twentieth-century Ballarat*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1993.
- 3 Pat Grimshaw and Charles Fahey, 'Family and Community in Nineteenth-century Castlemaine', in Patricia Grimshaw, Chris McConville and Ellen McEwen (eds), *Families in Colonial Australia*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1985, pp. 83–104; Louise Blake 'Women and Community on the Upper Goulburn Goldfields', PhD thesis, Monash University, 2019; and Joan E. Hunt, 'Mining a Rich Lode: The Making of the Springdallah Deep Lead Goldfield Communities', PhD thesis, Federation University, 2016. For microhistory, see Barry Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800–1930*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- 4 See Charles Fahey, 'From Kent to New Chum: The Families of Isaac Edward Dyason and George Lansell, 1871–1915', in Charles Fahey & Alan Mayne (eds), *Gold Tailings: Forgotten Histories of Family and Community on the Central Victorian Goldfields*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2010, pp. 62–90.
- 5 These assessment books were found in the Bendigo Town Hall tower in 1993 and have recently been deposited in the Bendigo Regional Archives Centre (BRAC). Unlike rate books, the assessment books listed whether the property was built on crown land as a miner's residence area, and how many persons lived in each house.
- 6 I have made a less detailed study of the neighbouring districts of Ironbark Hill and Gully. Where individuals have been named, certificates have been purchased or supplied to the author by descendants.
- 7 John Bartlett Davies, Journal, 1965.0005, University of Melbourne Archives, p. 1.
- 8 Charles Fahey, 'From St Just to St Just Point: Cornish Migration to Nineteenth-century Victoria', in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies 15*, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2007, pp. 117–40, at p. 125.
- 9 Census of England, 1851, HO 107/1912.
- 10 Davies, Journal, pp. 3–4.
- 11 Davies, Journal, p. 15.
- 12 Davies, Journal, pp. 16–18.
- 13 Davies, Journal, p. 19.
- 14 Davies, Journal, p. 21.
- 15 Davies, Journal, pp. 22–3.
- 16 'Report of the Royal Commission, Appointed to Enquire into the Best Method of Removing the Sludge from the Gold Fields', *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1859–60, Vol. 3; *Report of the Mining Registrar*, Kangaroo Flat Division, December 1859. See Susan Lawrence and Peter Davies, *Sludge: Disaster on Victoria's Goldfields*, Melbourne, La Trobe University Press, 2019.

- 17 Ralph W. Birrell, *Striking a Claim: Gold and the Development of Victorian Mining Law*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998, pp. 106–20.
- 18 See, for example, a report on the Melbourne Exhibition describing a display illustrating the dividends of the Advance Mine, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 26 October 1866.
- 19 Peter McDonald, *Marriage in Australia: Age at First Marriage and Proportion Marrying, 1860–1970*, Australian Family Formation Project, Monograph No. 2, Department of Demography, ANU, 1974, see pp. 68, 75 and 79.
- 20 Davies, Journal, pp. 23–4.
- 21 Census 1861. The 1861 census is a particularly rich source and gives detailed descriptions of the various gullies and diggings on the Bendigo and other goldfields.
- 22 Davies, Journal, p. 24.
- 23 Davies, Journal, p. 29.
- 24 Davies, Journal, p. 26.
- 25 Davies, Journal, pp. 27–8.
- 26 Davies, Journal, pp. 34–6.
- 27 Davies, Journal, p. 37.
- 28 Davies, Journal, p. 45.
- 29 Davies, Journal, p. 65.
- 30 Mike Butcher and Gill Flanders, *Bendigo Historic Buildings*, Bendigo, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Central Victorian Branch, 1987, pp. 107–08.
- 31 The changing occupations of Rae and Sterry can be traced through their marriage certificates and the birth certificates of their children. For the mines on Victoria Hill, see *Dicker's Mining Record*, 23 November 1861.
- 32 For the Ballerstedts, see Charles Fahey, 'The Ballerstedts and the Bendigo Quartz Reefs', *La Trobe Library Journal*, no. 30, December 1982, pp. 29–32.
- 33 For a vivid account of the sale of Fortuna, see Isaac Dyason, Diary, 25 February 1871, MS 10813, State Library Victoria (SLV).
- 34 *Dicker's Mining Record*, 23 November 1861. For Richard Coath's insolvency, see *Herald*, 13 November 1865.
- 35 This analysis is based on the 1866 rate books and the 1873 assessment book.
- 36 For Richard Pope's biography, see Charles Fahey, 'Richard Pope: A Miner's Life in the Inland Corridor', in Alan Mayne and Stephen Atkinson (eds), *Outside Country: Histories of Inland Australia*, Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 2011, pp. 135–58.
- 37 David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1994, pp. 166–7.
- 38 Davies, Journal, p. 23.
- 39 Davies, Journal, p. 35.
- 40 Davies, Journal, pp. 31–2.
- 41 Bendigo Assessment Book 1873. For the miner's cottage, see Tony Dingle, 'Miners' Cottages', *Australian Economic History Review*, vol. 5, no. 2, July 2010, pp. 148–61.
- 42 Diary of Richard Pope, 8 August 1870, and 18 January, 3 and 4 February 1871, MS 11918, SLV.
- 43 Bendigo Assessment Book 1873. The family histories were compiled from Birth, Death and Marriage Records. Marital fertility in Bendigo was high. In 1871, the 'Total Marital Fertility Rate' was 8.8 children and in 1881 the rate was 9.5. The figures were calculated from manuscript Birth Registers and the published census returns.

- 44 Calculated from Manuscript Birth and Death Registers.
- 45 Davies, Journal, p. 46.
- 46 Davies, Journal, p. 67.
- 47 Davies, Journal, pp. 74–7.
- 48 Davies, Journal, p. 83.
- 49 Davies' career after 1879 can be followed in the Bendigo City Rate Books.
- 50 Dyason, Diary, 27 January 1882 and 29 November 1883.
- 51 For the 1879 strike and flooding of mines, see Michael Roper, 'Inventing Traditions in Goldfields Society: Public Rituals and Townbuilding in Sandhurst 1867–1885', MA thesis, Monash University, 1986, pp. 297–37.
- 52 Pope, Diary, 19 May 1886; and Dyason, Diary, 19 May 1886.
- 53 Mining Leases, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1889, Number c10.
- 54 Mining Returns, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), held in the Epsom office.
- 55 Pope, Diary, 22 September 1874.
- 56 Richard Coath, Death Certificate 1886; Dyason, Diary, 30 August 1883; and *Bendigo Independent*, 24 January 1899. The problem of Miners Phthisis was investigated by Walter Summons. See his *Miners Phthisis: Report on the Ventilation of the Bendigo Mines*, Melbourne, Government Printer, 1906, and *Miners' Phthisis: Report of an Investigation at Bendigo into the Prevalence, Nature, Causes and Prevention of Miners Phthisis*, Melbourne, Stillwell & Co., 1907.
- 57 Dyason, Diary, 26 May, 8 June, 20 September, 13 and 20 November 1888, and 21 January 1900.
- 58 Fahey, 'Richard Pope', pp. 151–4; and Fahey, 'From Kent to New Chum', pp. 87–90.
- 59 Federal Electoral Roll, 1912. Of the 51 female electors in Happy Valley and Victoria Hill, 46 were simply listed as 'Home Duties'. The other occupations were: one laundress, two dressmakers, one tailoress and one saleswoman.

'Where are the others?'

Victoria's Forgotten 1926 Bushfires

John Schauble

Abstract

Victoria's fire services will soon undergo their most fundamental restructure in more than a century. This article points to the largely forgotten tragedy of the 1926 bushfires that swept through Gippsland as the key driver of the state's volunteer bush fire brigade movement rather than the 1939 fires, which would eventually prompt the formation of a state-wide rural fire organisation.

The 1926 bushfires killed more people as a proportion of Victoria's population than any before or since, except for those of 1939. Yet they have largely been forgotten, eclipsed in living memory by many other calamitous and deadly bushfires—in the 1930s, 1960s, 1980s and 2000s—and so jettisoned to a more distant past. These fires featured in no great artworks like those of 1851 and 1898, nor were they memorialised in literature or history.¹

Just as the fires have been forgotten, so too has the actual death toll. An accurate tally of those killed remains elusive. The official figure given by the state government at the time was 31. Later assessments have varied between 33 and 60, but a figure at the lower end of the scale is more likely.² Whole families were killed, entire towns and communities destroyed. Around one million acres (400,000 hectares) were blackened—almost the same area as the 2009 Black Saturday fires. In addition to those killed, up to 700 people were injured and 1,000 properties destroyed. When 'normalised' against other years in terms of lives lost and buildings damaged, the 1926 fires are still considered by some to be the worst on record.³ The fires certainly became a catalyst for action and reforms that would eventually come to define rural firefighting in the state for decades to come.⁴

The 'Great Fires of 1926', as they were sometimes referred to in their aftermath, did most damage in the dense and productive timber-milling country of the Upper Yarra and West Gippsland. Beginning in late January, the fires burned for weeks, the worst day being Sunday 14 February, which almost inevitably became known as 'Black Sunday'. Even

so, the 1926 fires have all but faded from view, at best noted briefly in local histories of affected communities or referred to in periodic listings of the 'worst fires' in the state's history.⁵

Far from being a footnote, however, the fires of 1926 signalled a turning point in the relationship between Victorians and their environment. The events were met with a realisation that the time had arrived to redefine how people and fire should mix in the landscape. Just how and by whom the bush could be used had also become an issue. There was also a growing belief that modern technology (especially motor vehicles) might offer at least some solutions to dealing with fires in the bush. Perhaps most importantly, it became clear that there was an urgent need to review the organised social and practical responses to bushfire in Victoria.

These themes remain as much matters of contemporary as of historical interest and dialogue, for Australians face increasingly serious and more frequent bushfires as human settlement pushes deeper into fire-prone environments. Among environmental historians to explore bushfire in Australia, it seems the American academic Stephen Pyne alone has acknowledged the significance of the 1926 fires as a catalyst for change and a shift in community views around fire and forest conservancy. While mistakenly conflating the fires in Victoria with those in New South Wales, he nevertheless correctly concludes that, although they failed to prompt sweeping systemic changes, they did initiate a pathway to reform.⁶ Tom Griffiths and others position the 1926 fires in a continuum of major fires since European settlement but have placed greater emphasis on the events and aftermath of 1939 (and since) as the real drivers of change.⁷

In public policy terms, lessons from the 1926 fires that still remain relevant are those around engagement, self-help and the resilience of communities that live in the bushfire flume. Processes that place increasing reliance on response measures and interventions from government, fire agencies and technology to provide solutions for individuals and small communities remain no less fraught almost a century later. As the smoke cleared in 1926, it became clear that local communities would need to be at the centre of any future response.

The Summer of 1925–26

The preconditions for fire that summer were set well in advance. In 1925–26 the impact of a strong El Niño was felt across eastern Australia,

with much of Victoria (and notably the forests of west Gippsland) recording their lowest rainfalls on record.⁸ In late October 1925, the *Age* reported a record temperature of 104°F (40°C) at Balranald and noted drily ‘the prospects for the summer are not promising.’⁹ In the same edition, the paper noted unseasonal outbreaks of fire at Olinda and Sassafras in the Dandenong Ranges and at Healesville in the Yarra Valley. As the summer holidays commenced, the government meteorologist Mr Hunt warned that temperatures over the ensuing weeks were expected to be higher than the previous year, and much of the country to the north was already parched.¹⁰

In timber country, bushfire was a constant threat in the summer months, but in late 1925 the omens were worse than in most years:

In one way there were plenty of warnings of the fires of 1926. For weeks prior to the major outbreak, small fires had started at various locations across the State as the combination of dry undergrowth and high temperatures provided a lethal cocktail waiting only for the addition of strong northerly winds to provide a truly explosive situation.¹¹

Bushfires were hardly a new phenomenon in the Victorian environment. Huge conflagrations, such as the 1851 Black Thursday fires and the 1898 fires that engulfed much of south Gippsland, had periodically swept across the landscape. There had been many other serious bushfires, especially on the outskirts of Melbourne and as recently as 1923.

Paradoxically, community attitudes to fire beyond the built environment of the towns and cities were characteristically relaxed. Farmers and graziers, especially in remote areas, routinely used fire as a tool to clear scrublands and encourage new grass for stock, even when this endangered the forest estate. Escaped fires were not seen as a particularly big problem, except perhaps in those areas closer to Melbourne where ‘weekenders’ were becoming more popular. The impact of fire was gauged largely in economic rather than environmental terms, although lip service was paid to the preservation of popular tourist ‘beauty spots’.

While lightning strikes were then (as now) a significant source of bushfire ignitions, the realisation that the ‘hand of man’ was also in large part to blame was simply accepted. In the 1920s, more than 40 per cent of all forest fires were attributed to the activities of farmers and graziers. Another 25 per cent were blamed on campers, sportsmen and

tourists.¹² An early Pathe newsreel prepared ‘free of charge for use in relation to the 1926 Bush Fire Relief Fund’ fingered the miscreants in its opening title slides:

Sunday Feb.14th will remain more than a memory for thousands of Australian bush folk.

A day of terrific heat, a changing wind that blew at aeroplane speed, smouldering fires that had been lit by selfish graziers, thoughtless timbermen and unthinking picnickers.

These were the factors that combined to bring death to 31 souls, the destruction of hundreds of homes and ruin to our glorious forests.¹³

In the aftermath, the *Australian Worker* even saw a class conspiracy afoot, pointing to ‘the complete silence’ of the conservative press on ‘the question of incendiarism’.

Had there been any prospect of fastening the blame on to Trade Unionists, the Communists, or members of the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World], there is no doubt that the “Nationalist” press would set up a loud howl. But as the “fire-bugs” happen to be squatter supporters of the “Nationalist” Party, not one word of condemnation has appeared in the columns of the “Nationalist” press.¹⁴

There was a clear tension between those who wished to exploit Victoria’s forests for their timber and those who saw alienation of the public estate for agriculture and grazing as of paramount importance. Significant interest in forest conservation for environmental reasons was still decades away.

Management of the public forests had been vested in the Forests Commission in 1918 after years of virtually unmanaged exploitation of the crown estate. A Victorian Forests Department had not been established until 1907, and, while some land had been excised for water catchment and smaller areas for recreation, the main focus of both the department and the commission was on managing forests for timber harvesting. Fire management was just one aspect of their overall responsibility and did not extend into private lands.

The Fires and their Reach

These were the first major fires that tested the limits of both private and public land tenure, broadly affecting the two types of usage and

settlement. Worst affected by the 1926 bushfires were the densely forested timber-milling areas, and hardest hit were the remote and largely transient mill communities. But these fires also took a toll in the then semi-rural Dandenong Ranges, east of Melbourne, which were already in transition from farming and agriculture to tourism and residential usage.

From late January onwards, serious outbreaks of fire in the Dandenongs saw hundreds of volunteers mobilised. Towns like Upwey and Belgrave had recently formed fire brigades in response to fires in 1918 and 1923, but the bulk of the effort came from forestry workers and local landowners. Fires flared across the hills for three weeks, destroying a number of weekend homes (nineteen at Selby alone), and threatening the scenic reserve at the Ferntree Gully National Park and the narrow gauge railway from Belgrave to Gembrook. In a florid account of one fire at Belgrave, the *Age* correspondent seemed carried away by the moment in describing the efforts of the firefighters: 'Hither and thither they ran, belting, beating, stumbling and struggling ... Bare armed and with bare breasts, the warriors went at it again.'¹⁵

By mid-February, the prospect of containing any significant outbreak of fire in Victoria was slight. As it was, simultaneous fires would soon strike a number of communities from the outskirts of Melbourne right across Gippsland as far as Bairnsdale. Places like Warburton, Powelltown, Gilderoy, Gembrook, Noojee and Erica bore the brunt of the flames. But there were other places affected too, in the Dandenongs, near Lilydale, Healesville, Christmas Hills and Yarra Glen, at Daylesford and Kinglake. The open cut coal mine at Yallourn was also affected when it was ignited by bushfire.¹⁶

The real crisis escalated on Saturday 13 February when fires broke out or intensified around Warburton (Figure 1). While some mill families sensed danger and left their remote homes for the relative safety of the township, others did not—with fatal consequences. At Grant's Mill, deep in the forest above Big Pats Creek east of Warburton, the Donald family remained in their home that weekend as a fire that had broken out to the north weeks earlier was revived by the weather conditions. The bodies of winch driver Thomas Donald, 40, his wife Mabel, 26, and their three children, John, 8, William, 6, and Leslie, 4, were found two days later. The family had stayed behind and then tried to flee at the last minute.¹⁷



Figure 1: 'Bushfire ravages', aftermath of bushfire photographed during an excursion organised by the Melbourne Walking Club to the Warburton–Marysville area, Easter 1926 (RHSV Collection: AL-MWC001-0026-02)

By early on the morning of the 14th, much of the Upper Yarra was already on fire. Along a smaller, narrow valley fed by the Little Yarra River, those in the mill settlements of Powelltown and Gilderoy watched anxiously as a number of fires converged under the influence of the strong northerlies. The greatest tragedy of all was at Worley's Mill, deep in the forest to the south of Gilderoy, where fourteen workers and family members died as the fires struck. Eleven of the victims were originally from Tasmania. Ten local mills were destroyed, along with numerous homes and kilometres of timber tramway.¹⁸ Ernest Bull, president of the Victorian branch of the Telegraphists Union, was holidaying near Powelltown and died when the flames trapped him.¹⁹

A dozen horses perished at Powelltown as the women and children of the settlement sheltered on the bowling green with the sprinklers going. All the houses were destroyed but the mill itself was saved. At least a dozen mills feeding the Powelltown tramway were destroyed.²⁰

Fires in the Upper Yarra swept down from the north along the Mississippi Creek valley and McMahons Creek. Across the ridge, the flames headed for Noojee, with disastrous effects. Noojee was by this time a bustling railway township, established in 1902, with stores, a post

office, hairdresser, hotel, motor garage, railway station, a local hydro-electric station, community hall and numerous houses. A school had finally been opened in 1922 after much local agitation. Every building in the town except the Methodist church, the hotel and motor garage was destroyed in the 1926 fires, along with significant local rail infrastructure (Figures 2 and 3). Gone also were 45 homes. For Noojee, the events of 1926 were appropriately designated ‘The Great Fire’.²¹



Figure 2: A man is standing on a bridge near Neerim South on the Warragul to Noojee rail line after the 1926 bushfires have been through. The piers have been burnt through although the sleepers appear to have escaped the fire. (Courtesy Museums Victoria)

Between Noojee and Neerim East, farmer Peter Olsen, 60, his wife Clara, 48, and two of their children, Frederick, 14, and Thomas, 9, died. The eldest son, Leslie, aged 17, survived by sheltering for hours in a nearby creek.²² At Nayook West, near Noojee, dozens of people sheltered in The Bump railway tunnel as the settlement itself was razed. At Fumina South, the local postmistress Mrs Mitchell died after she ran back into her house to retrieve mementoes of her son killed in World War I.²³



Figure 3: Trestle bridge on the Neerim South to Toorongo River line, which has been damaged by bushfires, February 1926 (Courtesy Museums Victoria)

About 20 kilometres north of Longwarry,

a major front came down from the Beenak area, north of Gembrook, and swept down the Bunyip River and Black Snake Creek at an amazing rate destroying everything in its way. Freeman's mill lay directly in its path. Although the fires were clearly visible from a distance of 30 km, the speed with which the flames travelled provided little opportunity to evacuate the settlement.

Because it was a Sunday, many workers were away from the mill, but the ten who remained took refuge in the mill boss's house. A bucket line was formed from a nearby creek and the house, though scorched, was saved with wet hessian beaters. While those at the mill all survived, two

others—Tom Franklin, a timber splitter, and John Armour, a 70-year-old tin miner—perished in the flames near Bunyip.²⁴

The flames destroyed a number of small mills and also a tramway to Longwarry, which had been in operation since 1881. The survivors from Freeman's Mill trudged out along the burnt-out tramway to safety. A new steel-railed tramway linking mills at Black Snake Creek and Beenak with the narrow gauge railway at Gembrook was badly damaged but later repaired.²⁵

Further east, the Baw Baws were swept by fire on 14 and 15 February. Bennett's Phoenix Mill (which had been rebuilt after a fire only three years earlier) and O'Shea's Mill north of Erica were badly affected. Three other mills and several wooden tramways and bridges were burnt out. North of Erica, many residences were destroyed leaving a hundred people homeless.²⁶ William Fisk, 75, from Yea was killed when visiting his son at Erica, while farmer James Lang died near Toongabbie.

The fires continued through until March. The Granton Company's Dindi Mill north of Healesville was threatened in mid-March as fires again swept through the ranges, destroying several bridges and many miles of timber tramway. A falling branch from a burning tree killed blacksmith Herbert Fletcher near Knott's Mill at Toolangi.²⁷

These bushfires, like others, also had many tales of selflessness and bravery, but the one that captured the imagination of the nation was that of fifteen-year-old Florrie Hodges, who lived at a mill settlement near Powelltown. Trapped by flames and unable to reach safety, Florrie used her own body to shield her three younger siblings—Rita, Vera and Dorothy. All four survived. Florrie endured severe burns and was hospitalised for many months at St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne. In recognition of her bravery, the Royal Humane Society awarded Florrie Hodges a medal. A testimonial fund administered by the Timber Workers' Union raised some £1,500, with support strongest from Victoria and Western Australia. The certificate below was issued in 1926 to people who gave money to the fund (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Souvenir certificate of the 'Disastrous Bush Fires', 14 February 1926, showing presentation by medical staff to Florrie Hodges of Powelltown for her self-sacrificing heroism (RHSV Collection: VF 033112)

Florrie Hodges became something of a celebrity. A souvenir booklet of her exploits was published, 100,000 photographs were distributed to school children across the nation, her story was retold in schools on Empire Day and a gramophone record was released by the Columbia Company of Florrie telling of the deed. Photographs of the 'Australian heroine' were also presented to Queen Mary and the Duchess of York. A version of Florrie's story as told by celebrated author Mary Grant Bruce was published in the *School Magazine*.²⁸ A union-led Florrie Hodges Appreciation Committee helped promote the cause. While Florrie was feted for many months, there was a hiccup when a testimonial concert at the Sydney Town Hall flopped badly. Some 2,000 tickets had been issued to schools, but only 200 people turned up. The event ran at a considerable loss, prompting outraged headlines of 'Apathy' in the daily press.²⁹

The Aftermath

Perhaps surprisingly, at least from a modern perspective, there was no formal inquiry into the 1926 fires.³⁰ While this was also the case when grassfires killed 22 people near Lara in 1969, official inquiries

in some form have followed almost every major fire—and several smaller but significant bushfires—in Victoria. Some have prompted royal commissions (in 1939, 1944 and 2009). In 1926, Country Party Premier John Allan passively resisted calls by the Labor opposition for a joint parliamentary committee to be established, let alone any form of independent inquiry.³¹

Coronial inquests were quickly held into a number of the deaths. In some instances, this allowed for the remains of the victims to be buried (or repatriated to Tasmania for burial). Most notable of these inquests were two held at Yarra Junction on 9 March 1926 before the Melbourne city coroner, Mr Daniel Berriman PM. Prominent lawyer and politician Maurice Blackburn represented the relatives of the deceased.

The first was into the deaths of the fourteen people killed at Worrley's Mill near Gilderoy, and two others at Powelltown and the nearby No. 13 Mill. Accounts of the gruesome discovery and retrieval of the bodies by their fellow workers and the police were given in distressing detail at the inquest and reported in the press. Eleven bodies, including that of a child, were found within a radius of just six metres at Worrley's Mill.

The survivors' stories were harrowing. Arthur Rowe was the winch driver at the mill, and his wife managed the boarding house there. Of the twenty people who sat down to Sunday lunch there at 1 p.m., twelve were dead within the next two hours. Rowe had led those who survived away from danger:

We all got snuggled down in the creek. The fire swept over us at a terrible force. The heat was awful. I kept knocking the sparks off the others and kept pouring water over them with my hat. We remained in the position for about 10 minutes. Later I got out of the creek and met Joe Walker and Henry King ... I carried King to the creek and bathed both of them with water. They were both badly burnt. I said to Walker: "Where are the others?"

Rowe went on to describe to the inquest how he went in search of the rest of the workers and their families and the gruesome discovery of thirteen of the bodies.³²

Equally poignant was the inquest held that afternoon into the deaths of the entire Donald family of five at Big Pats Creek, plus another mill worker. The inquest itself was rushed owing to the need

for witnesses to be released to fight yet another fire that had broken out on the outskirts of the town. The bodies of the Donald family had been discovered heaped upon one another about two miles from the mill. They had perished in a vain attempt to reach a nearby creek.³³

The coroner, Mr Berriman, was evidently a man of his time. He entered verdicts of accidental death, commenting on the 'lamentable tragedy' that had moved the hearts and feelings of all Victorians:

I want to say how much we all admire the marvellous courage shown by the womenfolk and the men who met with this awful holocaust on that dreadful Sunday afternoon. It moves one to speak of it. They showed courage which is expected from the sons and daughters of our race ...³⁴

The Victorian community responded to the tragedy of 1926 in ways different from reactions to previous bushfire events. As in the past, there were generous donations to a public fund for the relief of the survivors. But it was clearly no longer deemed sufficient for bush communities to meet such cataclysms in an *ad hoc* manner. In these fires was the genesis of the network of rural fire brigades that would in time become an organised state-wide country fire service.

There were actually very few rural fire brigades in Victoria before the 1920s. Although there was a strong tradition of country fire brigades based in towns and regional cities and dating from the 1850s, these were *urban* brigades, dependent upon a supply of mains water and focused on fighting fires in the built environment. They might head out into the neighbouring bush as the need arose, but their equipment was of limited use. The operation of these brigades was overseen by the Country Fire Brigades Board (CFBB), which was formed at the same time as the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board in 1891. The latter replaced volunteer and insurance industry fire brigades in metropolitan Melbourne with a paid fire service. The CFBB, however, showed little inclination to embrace the idea of, or take responsibility for, bush fire brigades beyond town limits.

Bush brigades outside larger settlements had begun to appear from the 1890s. The first known brigade was formed following a public meeting at Kangaroo Ground in 1892, although little is recorded of its earliest activities. Historians Robert Murray and Kate White characterise these bush brigades as 'informal and individualistic'. Often they would

be formed spontaneously in response to a fire and then dissolve again soon after.³⁵ When brigades were constituted in a more formal sense, they might meet once a year ahead of bushfire season. Usually they had minimal equipment at their disposal. Their members were drawn from local communities, often in response to a significant fire event. At Upwey in the Dandenong Ranges, the Upwey Firefighters' Association was formed as a volunteer brigade in 1918 in just such circumstances. By 1923, it had accumulated 'three axes, four hand pumps and three buckets, slashers and rakes'.³⁶

Bush brigades had no legal status, no funding, no central organisation, and little equipment or training. In July 1926, the minister for forests, Horace Richardson, chaired a conference of representatives from across state government, the sawmilling industry, the Meteorological Bureau and the CFBB. Despite opposition from grazing interests, who saw the formation of bush brigades as likely to interfere with their use of fire to promote forage growth, the brigades were encouraged and the Forests Commission charged with providing basic equipment and funds.³⁷

The 1926 fires also prompted a group of Melbourne businessmen and politicians to form the Melbourne Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade (MVBFB), envisioned as a highly mobile cluster of firefighting units ready for dispatch to fight blazes within a 60-mile (100-kilometre) radius of the city. A cynic might suggest that the radius neatly covered those parts of the state—the Dandenong Ranges, Macedon Ranges and Mornington Peninsula—where Melbourne's elite maintained large and often-expensive holiday homes, but these were equally areas where the bushfire risk was extremely high.

Now largely forgotten, the MVBFB lasted little more than a decade. Originally chaired by journalist turned federal politician H.S. (Harry) Gullett, it drew its volunteers from city business houses. One sub-brigade was formed at the Stock Exchange. Others included units at the Shell Oil Company, Myer Emporium and the Vacuum Oil Company.³⁸ Training exercises were periodically held in the field under the guidance of Forests Commission officers in the Dandenongs or on the Peninsula. Other leading MVBFB members included Sir Stephen Morell, businessman and lord mayor of Melbourne from 1927 to 1928, Lieutenant-Colonel Daniel Aston Luxton, a career soldier who commanded the AIF 5th Battalion from 1917, and textile manufacturer

Alured Kelly, a Boer War veteran who was also president of the RACV and in 1928 first president of the National Safety Council of Australia. Even with motorised transport, the tyranny of distance meant that, by the time the Melbourne volunteers were contacted and mobilised, fires were often under control or out. In other circumstances, mischievous callouts led to wasted journeys.

Far more significant was the rise in the number of community-based volunteer brigades in smaller towns and communities across the state. By 1928, more than 50 were in existence. By 1931, some 220 bush brigades had been organised, the number climbing to 320 by 1937 and including around 13,000 volunteers.³⁹ Their administration was hampered, however, by continued reluctance on the part of the CFBB to take control, political instability at state level and the arrival of the Great Depression in 1929. Neither the formation of the Bush Fire Brigades Association in 1928 nor the passage of the *Bush Fire Brigades Act 1933* brought about the administration and funding needed to put the brigades on a secure footing. There were no stations, few trucks and little organisation. Even so, A.V. Galbraith, the highly regarded chairman of the Forests Commission from 1927 until 1949, was a keen supporter of the bush fire brigades model based upon 'the spirit of mutual self-help', while acknowledging the complete absence of financial support from the state. His characterisation of it in mid-1937 as a 'strong organization' would be sorely tested just eighteen months later.

While there were no funds forthcoming for the bush brigades, there was at least some legal protection. The 1933 Act provided that brigades had the right of entry onto private property, the right to take whatever water was necessary for firefighting and a statutory indemnity for brigade members in the event of damage due to the exercising of such powers in good faith. The Act also provided for the registration of brigades and the election of captains and lieutenants by brigade members. All of these arrangements have continued through to the current day. In the late 1930s, however, there was no compensation scheme in place for members injured or killed in the course of their duties.⁴⁰

These bush brigades began to coalesce in an environment where there were too many bushfires and too few resources. The principle of self-help was one that would come to characterise volunteer fire fighting across Victoria, even as it became more formalised. It was also

seen by Galbraith as ‘a definite indication that the people of the State are becoming more and more alive to the actual and potential menace of the bush or forest fire and the necessity for concerted action if a recurrence of the calamitous losses of past years is to be warded off’. However, it would take three more major deadly conflagrations—in 1932, 1939 and 1944—before the state would act to create the Country Fire Authority in an effort to place rural firefighting on private land on a more secure footing.

Notes

- 1 One Australian novel draws on the 1926 fires near Noojee for its denouement: Frederick Howard, *The Emigrant*, London, Longmans, 1928.
- 2 The higher figure, now often quoted in the media as definitive, appears to be the result of some curious double counting since the late 1970s. Even considering the fluid bush population of the early 20th century, it seems improbable that up to 30 unnamed citizens would remain unaccounted for. Contemporary accounts and reports of coronial inquests support a lower figure. A credible figure is 39, derived by Haynes *et al.* in a study of more than a century of Australian bushfire deaths, which also takes into account deaths that were more broadly fire related (e.g. heart attack while firefighting). See: Katharine Haynes, John Handmer, John McAneney, Amalie Tibbits and Lucinda Coates, ‘Australian Bushfire Fatalities 1900–2008: Exploring Trends in Relation to the “Prepare, stay and defend or leave early” Policy’, *Environmental Science and Policy*, vol. 13, no. 3, May 2010, pp. 185–94.
- 3 P. Ryan, K. Crompton, John McAneney, Keping Chen, Roger A. Pielke, and Katharine Haynes, ‘Influence of Location, Population, and Climate on Building Damage and Fatalities due to Australian Bushfire: 1925–2009’, *Weather, Climate and Society*, vol. 2, no. 4, October 2010, pp.300–10.
- 4 Robert Murray and Kate White, *State of Fire: A History of Volunteer Firefighting and the Country Fire Authority in Victoria*, Melbourne, Hargreen Publishing, 1995, p. 83.
- 5 The detailed histories of timber milling and light railways in the Upper Yarra and West Gippsland are especially noteworthy.
- 6 Stephen Pyne, *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia*, New York, Henry Holt, 1991, p. 272.
- 7 Tom Griffiths, *Forests of Ash: An Environmental History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, chap. 10; Christine Hansen and Tom Griffiths, *Living with Fire: People, Nature and History in Steels Creek*, Melbourne, CSIRO, 2012, p. 76. In his chronological history, Paul Collins devotes some pages to the events of 1926, but focuses on the 1939 fires and the subsequent Stretton royal commission as the key catalyst for change: Paul Collins, *Burn: The Epic Story of Bushfire in Australia*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, chap. 3.
- 8 ‘El Niño—Detailed Australian Analysis’, at <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/enlist/>.
- 9 *Age*, 29 October 1925, p. 11.
- 10 *Age*, 22 December 1925, p. 9.

- 11 Mike McCarthy, *Settlers and Sawmillers: A History of West Gippsland Tramways and the Industries They Served*, Melbourne, Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., 1993, p. 56.
- 12 Parliament of Victoria, *Forests Commission of Victoria, Ninth Annual Report, Financial Year 1927–28*, Melbourne, H.J. Green, Government Printer, p. 7.
- 13 A small number of documentary film clips made by Herschells are available at the National Film and Sound Archive: <https://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/black-sunday/clip1/>.
- 14 *Australian Worker*, 7 April 1926, p. 11.
- 15 *Age*, 8 February 1926; *Age*, 16 February 1926. For general accounts of the fires in the Dandenongs, see: John Schauble, *Hills of Fire: A Community's Fight Against Fire in the Dandenong Ranges, Victoria*, Sassafras, Sassafras–Ferry Creek Fire Brigade, 1992, pp. 19–21; Belgrave Volunteer Fire Brigade, *Our History: March 1923 to June 2002*, Hastings, Galaxy Print and Design, 2002, pp. 12–14.
- 16 Bob Pockett, *Answering the Call. The History of the Healesville Fire Brigade 1894–2002*, Healesville, 2003, pp. 26–7; *Age*, 17 February 1926, p. 9.
- 17 Mike McCarthy, *Mountains of Ash: A History of the Sawmills and Tramways of Warburton and District*, Melbourne, Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., 2001, p. 150.
- 18 F.E.R. Stamford, E.G. Stuckey and G.L. Maynard, *Powelltown: A History of its Timber Mills and Tramways*, Melbourne, Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., 1984, p. 52.
- 19 *Age*, 16 February 1926, p. 11.
- 20 Frank Stamford, *Arsenic and Molasses: A Pictorial History of the Powelltown Tramway and Timber Milling Operations*, Melbourne, Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., 1987, p. 54; Brian Carroll, *The Upper Yarra: An Illustrated History*, Yarra Junction, Shire of Upper Yarra, 1988, p. 167.
- 21 Graeme Butler, *Buln Buln: A History of the Buln Buln Shire*, Drouin, Shire of Buln Buln, 1979, pp. 659–89. Ironically, even though the town was quickly rebuilt, it was all burnt down again (this time only the hotel was saved) just thirteen years later in the 1939 bushfires.
- 22 *Herald*, Melbourne, 16 February 1926, p. 5; 22 February 1926, p. 1.
- 23 *Evening News*, Rockhampton, 18 February 1926, p. 5; *Age*, 19 February 1926, p. 9.
- 24 McCarthy, *Settlers and Sawmillers*, pp. 56–7.
- 25 M.J. McCarthy, *Bellbrakes, Bullocks and Bushmen: A Sawmilling and Tramway History of Gembrook 1885–1985*, Melbourne, Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., 1987, p. 34; McCarthy, *Settlers and Sawmillers*, p. 57.
- 26 John Adams, *Mountain Gold: A History of the Baw Baw and Walhalla Country of the Narracan Shire*, Trafalgar, Narracan Shire Council, 1980, p. 123.
- 27 Norm Houghton, *Timber Mountain: A Sawmilling History of the Murrindindi Forest 1885–1950*, Melbourne, Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., 1986, p. 29; *Argus*, 12 March 1926, p. 11; *Healesville Guardian*, 20 March 1926, p. 3.
- 28 *The School Magazine*, Department of Education NSW, vol. 11, no. 6, part 3 (Classes 5 & 6), 3 July 1926, pp. 90–2.
- 29 Items such as the purse in which the proceeds of the testimonial fund were presented and the medal are now held by Museum Victoria after being donated by her family: <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/1991401>; *Labor Daily*, 11 May 1927, p. 7; *Sun*, Sydney, 19 November 1926, p. 8, 23 January 1926, p. 11; *Labor Call*, 1 April 1926, p. 7.

- 30 A royal commission was held into contemporaneous bushfires in New South Wales: J.B. Cramsie, F. Jackson and N.W. Jolly, *Royal Commission of Inquiry on Bush Fires in the State of New South Wales* (1927).
- 31 *Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 171, 7 July 1926, p. 149.
- 32 *Herald*, Melbourne, 9 March 1926, p. 1.
- 33 *Age*, 10 March 1926, p. 11.
- 34 *Herald*, Melbourne, 9 March 1926, p. 1.
- 35 Bruce Bence, *Fire: The Story of a Community's Fight Against Fire*, Warrandyte, N.B. Bence, 1989, pp. 15–18; Bruce Bence, *Kangaroo Ground Bush Fire Brigade Centenary 1892–1992*, Kangaroo Ground, N.B. Bence, 1991, pp. 1–2; Murray and White, p. 87.
- 36 Arthur Winzenried, *A Century of Volunteering*, Upwey, Upwey CFA, 2018, pp. 24–5.
- 37 Murray and White, pp. 83–6; Pyne, p. 283.
- 38 *Argus*, 20 January 1932, p. 7.
- 39 A. V. Galbraith, 'The Bush Fire Brigades Movement in Victoria, Australia', *Empire Forestry Journal*, vol. 16, no.1, July 1937, pp. 40–8, at p. 49.
- 40 Galbraith, pp. 44–5.

HISTORICAL NOTES

John Norcock's Voyage to Australia on HMS *Rattlesnake* between 1835 and 1837, and his Reflections on Early Port Phillip

Anne Marsden

Abstract

First Mate John Norcock's Journal records vividly the voyage of HMS Rattlesnake to New South Wales in the 1830s and his candid opinions of the Captain, William Hobson. In 1836 the ship delivered Captain William Lonsdale to Port Phillip as the first district administrator, and returned in 1837 carrying Governor Bourke on a tour of inspection, during which he named the settlement 'Melbourne'. Norcock developed a close relationship with William and Martha Lonsdale, accompanying Martha around the fledgling settlement on the Yarra River. His opinion of the first settlers changed from initial scornful dismissal to acknowledgement of their fortitude and achievements.¹



Figure 1: Emblem of HMS *Rattlesnake*, watercolour, unsigned. Pasted inside front endpaper of *Album of Sketches of the Voyage of the HMS Rattlesnake 1846–1849* (Courtesy State Library NSW, SAFE/PXC 281)

The name John Norcock does not loom large in the annals of early Port Phillip, so why should we find his impressions of the early settlement on the banks of the Yarra River significant in the light of more familiar contemporary accounts of the time?

The answer lies in Norcock's role as first mate of HMS *Rattlesnake*, which made two visits to the Port Phillip District of New South Wales in 1836–1837. In 1836, the first of these brought Captain William Lonsdale, accompanied by his wife Martha and baby daughter Alice, to take up an appointment as the first administrator of Port Phillip. The *Rattlesnake* continued to provide accommodation for the Lonsdale family for ten weeks while a simple subaltern's hut was prepared to house them, pending the arrival of promised prefabricated house materials from Sydney. The crew also carried out surveying work in Port Phillip before the *Rattlesnake* returned to Sydney in December 1836. Three months later, in March 1837, the *Rattlesnake* returned to Port Phillip carrying the governor of New South Wales, Sir Richard Bourke, accompanied by Captain Phillip Parker King and surveying personnel. Bourke and King kept records of their visits to the district.

Unlike many early diarists of Port Phillip, including the Reverend William Waterfield, Thomas Strode and Edmund Finn, whose focus was primarily on the men who were influential in establishing the settlement, Norcock's Journal is of significance in other ways.²

We are given intimate glimpses into the domestic life of the Lonsdale family, especially of Martha Lonsdale and her infant daughter. Norcock also records his candid opinion of the captain of the *Rattlesnake*, William Hobson, after whom Hobsons Bay would be named in 1837, and who, in 1841, was appointed the first governor of New Zealand. We view through Norcock's eyes the little community of Europeans in the settlement on the banks of the Yarra River, and notice as his attitudes towards the settlers change from an initially rather scornful dismissal of them as socially unacceptable to the Lonsdales to a sincere acknowledgement of their fortitude and achievements.

This article first provides some background on John Henry Norcock and the voyage of HMS *Rattlesnake*, which left England for Australia on 27 March 1835 (Figure 2). Norcock, the eldest son of John Norcock Esq., R.N., was born on 1 February 1809 and joined the Navy aged twelve in 1821. He enlisted as a 'first-class volunteer', a class of young gentlemen who entered the Navy under Admiralty patronage,

serving on board the *Liffey*, a 50-gun ‘fourth rate’ vessel appointed to the East Indies Station. His career covered service in many naval vessels, and he was slightly injured in action early in his career in 1824. In 1829 he passed his mate’s examination, a ranking that on most ships was just below that of the captain of the ship, qualifying its holder to take over in the event that the captain could no longer perform his duties.³



Figure 2: HMS *Rattlesnake* leaving Port Essington, 1846–1849. Artist Stanley Owen, water colour, drawn whilst captain of the *Rattlesnake*, from *Album of Sketches of the Voyage of the HMS Rattlesnake 1848* (Courtesy State Library NSW, SAFE/PXC 281)

Almost every entry in Norcock’s Journal expressed his longing for Jane, his sweetheart. Jane Mary Lowcay, born on 8 July 1819, was a cousin, being the daughter of Norcock’s maternal uncle, Captain Robert Lowcay. The couple became engaged four months before Jane’s sixteenth birthday, prior to the *Rattlesnake*’s departure for Australia.⁴

Letters between the two were eagerly awaited. In March 1836, a year into the voyage, we read: ‘Received another letter (& 5 newspapers) from sweet Jenny dated August 26th ... I have now received my Jane’s nos. 1, 2, 6, 7, & 10, therefore nos. 3, 4, 5, 8, & 9 are yet to come.’ Newspapers allowed the crew to catch up with news from England, including listings of naval promotions, both of colleagues and, occasionally, of their own.

Norcock felt contempt for Captain Hobson, who offended his deeply held religious views. He regarded Hobson’s behaviour as ‘erratic, undisciplined and hypocritical’. He frequently referred to Hobson as

‘Sweet William’ and, on Sunday 19 February 1837, wrote of his horror of ‘Capt. Hobson’s “wickedness” in repeatedly breaking the Sabbath by causing ... much work to be done ... the most glaring violation of the 4th Commandment occurred’.

Similarly this pious young man despised most of his fellow shipmates, who failed to meet his standards of behaviour, often relieving their tensions by heavy drinking, though Norcock himself was not averse to a drink or two on occasion. Bearing in mind that the crew had been cooped up at close quarters on a small sailing ship for a great many months, friction amongst shipmates was not surprising, but Norcock’s attitude goes further, displaying his constant feeling of ‘apartness’ from shipmates, which he referred to as ‘the solitude of a crowd’. On 18 November 1835, he complained that ‘everything continues disgusting and miserable on board this d-d old Tub’.

We follow the *Rattlesnake*’s travels over much of the coastline of India, visiting ports to collect ‘old rupees’ and deliver them to Bombay to be melted down.

In late April 1836 the ship was sluggish: ‘it was very vexing to be standing still on the great bosom of the Ocean’. The delightful image below, of the *Rattlesnake* on a voyage in the 1840s shows the crew enjoying a dip in an outstretched sail when the ship was becalmed near the Equator (Figure 3).



Figure 3: HMS *Rattlesnake*, 1848, ‘Becalmed near the Line—“Hands to Bathe”’. Artist Stanley Owen (Courtesy State Library NSW, SAFE/PXC 281)

The ship continued on to Mauritius and then, on 24 June, set course for Australia. Approaching the Australian coast in late July, the captain considered conditions were too rough to traverse the east coast of Australia to Port Jackson, instead making for Hobart, entering the River Derwent on 5 August, where the ship:

safely anchored at 4 o'clock abreast of Hobart Town. HM's 21st Regiment ... immediately invited all of us to dine at their Mess ... I declare I never partook of a better dinner, nor have I ever met more friendly Soldiers; indeed, after our six weeks boisterous, salt meat passage [from the Isle of France] ... passed altogether an exceedingly pleasant evening. Returned to the Ship at midnight with a skin-full of wine, & in very good humor—& slept soundly all the remainder of the night.

After attending church two days later:

Myself and several other shipmates were kindly conducted by the Soldiers to the Governor's Gardens a lovely spot about two miles out of town. Here all the fruits, flowers, and vegetables of Europe are in a high state of cultivation and are much more productive than in England ... ate some of the apples of the garden (which on this occasion were not forbidden fruit) and drank some excellent Cider which the Gardener gave us ...

Other Hobarton diversions included a visit to the Penitentiary where they saw 'a number of disorderly Convicts and other troublesome characters working in the Tread Mill, a very dreadful species of hard labour'.

Ten days after arrival in Hobart the *Rattlesnake*, having embarked a detachment of HM's 28th Regiment, sailed for Sydney, and on 22 August, after a week's voyage:

Saw the land at daylight ... At 3 o'clock in the morning we anchored safely in Sydney Cove, the place where I passed 3 months very pleasantly in 1826—10 years ago! At Daylight I could see that the place was, as formerly, exceedingly beautiful, much improved in size and cultivation ...

It is here in Sydney that we meet Captain William Lonsdale. He was advised on 12 September 1836 that the governor, Sir Richard Bourke, had appointed him to the command of a detachment of

troops to proceed to Port Phillip, where he was to be responsible for administration of the district. The New South Wales government called for tenders for a vessel for Port Phillip, ‘having accommodation for about sixty passengers, four of whom will be cabin passengers, and stowage for about seventy tons of stores and provisions.’⁵

The *Rattlesnake*, already at anchor in Port Jackson, was engaged. It was arranged for 33 soldiers of the 4th King’s Own Regiment, three surveyors, three constables and other personnel, including a ‘scourger’, to be dispatched on this and following ships to Port Phillip. Two male servants, a groom and a footman, were assigned to Lonsdale, and he would be supplied with ‘a small wooden house in frame’, also ‘a whaleboat, with oars complete ... the harbour attendant has been instructed to provide one and to ship it on board.’⁶

Captain William Hobson submitted his account, totalling £52, for transporting the Lonsdale family on the *Rattlesnake*, from 18 September to 7 October 1836, being 14 days at 30s each, 5 days at 20s each: ‘The child being an infant I waive all claim for her’. On 21 September 1836 Norcock notes, ‘having embarked Captain Lonsdale and family—set sail for Port Phillip’, and, on the following day, ‘all our passengers sick.’⁷

On 27 September the *Rattlesnake* arrived at Port Phillip ‘and anchored about 2 miles inside the entrance of this beautiful and capacious Basin [Hobsons Bay] ... the scenery was that of an extensive Park—in short the whole Country only requires to be inhabited, and cultivated slightly to render it a most delightful region.’ The next day, ‘the Ship made Sail and proceeded higher up this lovely Lake nearly grounded once, the place not being yet known, indeed one of the objects of the Rattler’s visit is to survey it and make known to the world its advantages and disadvantages for colonizing.’

On 6 October, Norcock noted:

Early this morning a Party ... went away to survey Geelong Harbour, taking with them provisions &c. for 14 days. Although the wind was strong and adverse, our noble Captain got the ship under weigh and commenced beating out, in doing which he managed to get her on shore on an unknown shoal—“a clever thing”—however the strength of the wind enabled us, by a certain arrangement of the sails, to float her off again without damage ...

When they reached their anchorage they found ‘the brig “*Stirlingshire*” from Sydney with Troops, stores, and all sorts of material for building Houses and otherwise settling in due form this place as another Town of New South Wales.’ Everyone was kept busy landing the stores ‘and forming the settlement’—a tiny encampment, which three months before had been described as consisting of just thirteen weatherboard, slab, and turf huts.⁸

Norcock quickly established a rapport with the Lonsdales (Figure 4), and on 2 October we have the first of many entries about his affection for the their baby Alice: ‘One of my amusements lately has been nursing Mrs Lonsdale’s infant daughter.’



Figure 4: Miniature of Martha Lonsdale. Artist not known (Courtesy Sotheby’s Australia)

On the following Sunday, ‘four of the Gents. who came in the “*Stirlingshire*”, to fill Government situations and settle at this place, came on board with their Wives to breakfast.’ Norcock displays his condescension towards them:

The Wives ... were by no means good looking or lady-like, and I thought Mrs Lonsdale did not seem to anticipate much pleasure from the society of her future female neighbours.—However I dare say they are what the World calls “good sort of people” and will therefore do very well to found a Colony in the Wilds of Australia.

On 12 October: ‘The Captain, first Lieutenant and one Mate went away early this morning on an excursion to shoot Kangaroos’. On 20 October Norcock notes: ‘Several Parties have been away shooting lately, others fishing & so that we have had several good reports of Australian Game’. The crew also sampled ‘soup made from the tails of 2 Kangaroos and it was exceedingly good, being very like ox tail soup ... Kangaroo steaks also “smoked upon the board” occasionally’. They found ‘black swans which are very numerous ... excellent food and their down (which is white) very valuable’.

On 2 November a crew member died at Port Phillip from wounds caused by the accidental firing of a ‘musquet’ two days earlier. His death occurred on the anniversary of the death of a young crew member who was killed ‘by falling from aloft’. Three months later Norcock records the death of the ship’s cooper, the ninth shipboard death since leaving England.

In mid-November, following surveying exercises in the bay, the ship anchored at midnight at Arthur’s Seat: ‘The prettiest and most convenient Anchorage in Port Phillip and in my opinion the spot where a commercial Town might be built more advantageously than at Gellibrand’. The next day brought some excitement when the crew tried to catch a shark ‘that was swimming around the Ship all day. This monster was apparently about sixteen feet long and as stout as a common sized Ox, he swallowed two hooks & broke two stout ropes, and then made his escape!!’⁹

On 30 November, ‘Captn. & Mrs Lonsdale, & family took their final leave of us ... and felt I believe some regret on the occasion; they were with us ten weeks and received every attention that was in the power of “Ship gentlemen” to bestow’. Early the following morning Norcock received

a very lady-like and kind note from Mrs Lonsdale stating that her feelings yesterday would not allow her to take a formal leave of us and much more that was friendly ... I missed our late passengers very

much, particularly the Baby, who is such a dear little creature that I loved her as if she had been my own.

Early in December the ship's work continued: 'Great doings in the Surveying department—Ship and Boats sounding—taking angles and bearings of shoals & points of land, &c.' Then finally on 11 December: 'Having been 11 weeks at Port Phillip and done all in the power of the clever Rattlesnake to assist in forming the new settlement and surveying the Harbour &c., we, this morning, set sail with a fair wind for Sydney.' A couple of days later: 'Ship sailing at a furious rate as if the old tub herself was anxious to arrive at Sydney.' And the following day: 'At 9 in the evening we were successful & moored the Ship in her old berth in Farm Cove, having made a very good passage of 4 days from Port Phillip, a distance of about 700 miles.'

The officers were invited to a Quadrille Party at the house of a Sydneysider Norcock had met whilst he was serving in the *Warspite* ten years previously; this was Gregory Blaxland, an English farmer and explorer in Australia, noted especially for co-leading the first successful crossing of the Blue Mountains by European settlers: 'I well remember ... ten years since ... passing many pleasant days at this Gent's house.'

On New Year's Day 1837:

I was ordered by our "most religious & gracious" Captain to go on shore & search all the Pot-Houses and Brothels for two seamen who had deserted, which I did, but without finding the men. It would be as impossible to describe the "Tents of iniquity" I entered in the performance of this job (duty I cannot call it) as it would be to express my disgust at the Captain's infamous conduct in sending a Gentleman on such work on a Sunday!

By late January rumours were circulating that they would be going to sea, which prompted Norcock to go on shore shopping: 'I found: ... excitement at the announcement in the Government Papers that the Governor Sir R. Bourke is about to resign and proceed to England. He has long been very unpopular in the Colony and so I suppose his departure will be considered "Good riddance of bad rubbish"!!'

On 26 January 1837, 'this being the 49th anniversary of the foundation of the Colony, it was celebrated by a very spirited Regatta ... this old Rattletrap displayed the Royal Standard, and a large party of fair ladies (accompanied of course by their male friends) graced our

Quarter Deck with their presence'. Norcock 'purchased a Wax Doll for my baby friend, Little Miss Lonsdale', and, a few days later, 'purchased some more toys for my little friend'.

Preparations were underway for the governor to sail for Port Phillip on a 'Tour of inspection'. On 20 February:

His Excellency Sir Richard Bourke K.C.B. Governor of N.S. Wales &c. &c. &c. embarked officially ... The yards were manned, a salute of 15 Guns fired ... & the Officers of the Ship in full dress, saluted him on the Quarter deck ... at a late hour (about 9) the whole of these "distinguished individuals" returned to the shore ...

The following day, 'The Governor and Suite embarked privately, and we immediately weighed anchor and took our leave of Sydney after a long stay of 10 weeks'. On 1 March the *Rattlesnake* reached Port Phillip: 'the Governor and Suite landed on Port Nepean ... to ascertain the best position for a lighthouse which must be built to render the approach safe, as the place is likely to become of great commercial importance'.

William and Martha Lonsdale must have been pleased to see their shipboard friends. Norcock had sent his toy purchases on shore to 'my little friend Baby Lonsdale', and on the afternoon of 3 March the Lonsdales 'came on board to dine with the Governor and Sweet William, and brought the baby with them so that I had the pleasure of nursing the little creature as I used to do'.

With the Lonsdales now settled in their simple hut Norcock visited them whenever possible, obviously to their mutual pleasure. On the Sunday after the ship arrived, Norcock went on shore (Figure 5) and:

called on all the settlers—took luncheon with the Governor at his Tent—and dined at 5 with Mrs Lonsdale. After dinner I walked with Mrs L to the Burial Ground to see the Grave of our Seaman, John Drake, who was shot by accident on Nov.^r 2nd ... His Grave is in a beautiful sequestered spot on a rising ground, commanding an extensive & picturesque prospect, in which this Ship & Anchorage was seen in the distance—there are four other graves around it; and the whole are beautifully shaded by Trees ...¹⁰

Later they were joined by Captain Lonsdale, who had dined with the governor: 'Mrs L very kindly prepared a bed for me and I slept comfortably & soundly till 6 o'clock'.

On 8 March, ‘Our friend and Captain, Sweet William landed today and joined the Governor’s Party on an exploring Expedition into a part of the interior named Australia Felix from its beautiful appearance. They will probably be absent a fortnight, during which time we anticipate comparative quiet.’

Norcock enjoyed his reprieve from the captain’s presence: ‘I went on shore today and ... went to the abode of my friends the Lonsdales, took tiffin [lunch] with them—walked out with Mrs L and made some “calls”—returned to dinner, tea &c. ... and slept at their House on the same bed that was so hospitably provided on the 5th inst.’



Figure 5: ‘Melbourne Founded by Sir Richard Bourke 1837: Melbourne From the Falls, 30 June 1837’. Artist Robert Russell
(Courtesy State Library Victoria H4321)

The following Sunday, 12 March, Hobson returned early from his journey: ‘having been tired and “knocked up” before he had proceeded above 30 miles ... indeed he looks bilious & “as yellow as a Kite’s foot”’. Norcock indulged in a little *schadenfreude* when dispatches arrived on 13 March from the governor for Hobson: ‘I observed that he was very much out of sorts & hinted that the Governor had not treated him well ... I could not help being a leetle rejoiced at our Chief’s chagrin.’

Bourke laid out the allotments for the new town:

The Governor directs it to be notified that the Bay at the northern extremity of the waters called, in the chart of Flinders, Port Phillip, has been ... named "Hobson's Bay"; and ... the sites of two towns to be laid out, the one on the western shore of Hobson's Bay being called "Williamstown" and the other, on the right bank of the Yarra River, which discharges into that Bay, being named "Melbourne".¹¹

On 16 March: 'Captn. & Mrs Lonsdale & the Baby came on board and spent the day, and as usual made themselves very agreeable.' They stayed overnight, leaving the next morning before the ship sailed to the entrance of the port to pick up the surveyors.

By mid-March 1837 the ship had been in commission for two and a half years: 'everyone expressing his gladness at the prospect of the Rattler's horrid 3 years drawing to a close.' A week later marked two years since leaving England. After returning to the anchorage at Melbourne the crew spent the day at gun practice. Norcock's satisfaction with this sham warfare seems at odds with the man's deeply held religious convictions:

The men fired very well, so much so as to convince me that all future Naval Battles will be of short duration, for no vessel of equal force could have held out long against our destructive broadsides of today ... All this was satisfactory enough to me as it proves that my gunnery instructions have not been thrown away.

In late March Norcock went on shore with Second Lieutenant Henry:

Immediately on landing we went to the Lonsdale's, & of course were instantly invited to dine; in the meantime we procured Horses, and, accompanied by Mrs L, we had a delightful gallop about 15 miles across a most enchanting country on the banks of the salt branch of the "Yarra Yarra" [the Maribyrnong River]—returned to dine at 6 and spent a very happy evening.

Norcock stayed overnight with Mr King, the officer commanding a detachment of William Lonsdale's old regiment, the 4th, which was quartered in the settlement.

In the morning, after breakfasting with Mrs Lonsdale 'and Baby', Norcock, with several of his shipmates, went around the settlement to say farewell 'to all the good folks of Melbourne who have all along been very kind to the Rattlers, and were in reality sorry to lose us, and I must

confess I felt much regret leaving them. Sadly he then had to farewell the Lonsdale family before returning to the ship 'highly gratified with a 24 hours' excursion that I must class amongst a few agreeable ones I have had since I left England'. He had on occasion accompanied Martha Lonsdale on visits around the settlement, and the endeavours of the settlers had obviously changed his views since his initial visit to the settlement the previous year.

Due ceremony had to be observed when the governor officially took his leave of the settlement the following day. He embarked, 'accompanied by Captn. & Mrs Lonsdale and, of course, his Tail [retinue] ... and at 10:00 PM Captain & Mrs Lonsdale took their leave of the old Rattlesnake'.

At noon, after waiting for the tide, the ship left Port Phillip, 'a place which has improved very much on acquaintance, at least in my estimation—and I sincerely wish the good folks, who have made it their adopted country, every happiness and success'. Norcock felt low in spirits, 'such is the effect of leaving friendly kind hearted people like Captain and Mrs L and their dear little baby'. During the week-long voyage back to Sydney. Norcock 'Kept the afternoon watch and had a long chat with the Governor, who is an affable & gentlemanly man—but he is an Irishman—and I don't like Irishmen generally'.

The ship reached Farm Cove, Sydney on 7 April at 10 o'clock in the evening. The following morning, 'After the Governor left, Sweet William ... began to abuse and find fault with everybody, looking all the time as pleasant as a sick monkey'. Two days later Norcock went shopping and went to the Reading Room checking up on the English papers and periodicals 'up to the 18th Dec^r'.

On 17 April, Norcock prepared, reluctantly, to pay a visit to the governor who had invited him to be a guest at Government House at Parramatta. Norcock found Parramatta 'a very pretty Country Town, at the head of Port Jackson about 16 miles from Sydney'. He was received by the aide-de-camp, Captain Westmacott, and then greeted by the governor:

At 2 o'clock we partook of Luncheon & then all proceeded on Horseback to see a new Lunatic Asylum, at a place called Bedlam Point, about 10 miles from Parramatta ... we galloped back to dinner which was waiting for us at 6 and of which I was quite ready to partake after a 20 miles' ride. Dinner good but plain—wines excellent—conversation

slack and dull. After dinner we of course went to the Drawing Room where were tea, cards, books &c. &c. &c. Yawned away two hours & then retired to bed ...

The next day after family prayers and breakfast, Norcock whiled away the morning reading and talking to members of the household, including the governor's son, who was blind. After lunch they rode out again returning at six for dinner. The following day: 'The same dull routine as yesterday'.

On 20 April Norcock left Government House and: 'went to the Red Cow, a very comfortable Inn', and the next morning returned to Sydney and boarded the *Rattlesnake*, where soon there were rumours of sailing.

But, on 10 May, Norcock's life was turned upside down: 'A new era in my life! ... By mere accident I got sight of a London Paper ... in which was an account of an extensive Naval promotion that took place ... and in which I'm happy to say I find myself included'. Norcock approached Captain Hobson, who 'behaved uncommonly well. He offered me my discharge immediately, although a Newspaper account is not authority & therefore he could have detained me if he had thought proper until he had an order from the Admiralty to discharge me'. Norcock immediately sought a passage in a Merchant Ship, and 'fell in with a Mr Mallard, a Lieutenant in the Navy commanding the Ship Kinnear, who ... instantly offered to take me home for £50 ... I, of course, gladly struck the bargain'.

Norcock was busy over the next few days: 'making preparations for sailing—paying debts—making purchases—packing up my things—&c. &c. ... Captain Hobson remarkably civil now—gave me a most handsome certificate'. On 14 May, 'I arose at 4 o'clock—dressed, finished my preparations & sent my luggage on board the Barque Kinnear. I bid farewell to all the Rattlers & went on board'.

We must now speed Norcock on his journey, though the voyage was not without its dangers: 'I am not in the least astonished at the losses I hear and read of ... for nothing could exceed the wilful neglect of proper precautions, & the utter carelessness displayed in the Navigation of the Barque Kinnear through Cook's Straits on a thick, drizzly, foggy uncomfortable day'.

In his unaccustomed role as paying passenger, Norcock reflected on the monotony of life on board: 'Eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, talking, reading, & playing with the Children'. He finds his fellow passengers congenial: 'I am happy to say that all of us passengers agree very well ... a very fortunate circumstance, as our Captain is an ill

tempered coarse man and would be formidably disagreeable to us if we were not united ... we manage to keep him in tolerable order'.

On 27 July they reached the Island of Ascension, where they contacted the small garrison of Royal Marines and borrowed English newspapers dated from January to April, finding that an influenza epidemic had been raging at home. Norcock was relieved to find no family members in the obituary columns.

At the end of July the ship sailed from Ascension. On 3 August they fell in with the Brig *George & Mary* from England and learned of the death of King William IV, aged 72, 'after a politically turbulent reign of 7 years'.

The ship became becalmed in latitude 28° N for a few days in mid-August, having lost the trade winds that had been driving them onwards. A very light wind picked up, and, on 20 August, 'we were only 1700 miles from England'. By the 27th they were only 700 miles off and, by the 29th, just 450 miles away. On 1 September, after a fifteen-week voyage, Norcock recorded: '100 miles from England this morning—expecting soon to see the land'.

And here the Journal ends.

With Norcock finally back on home soil we cannot take our leave of him without finding out how he and his beloved Jane fared.

Reader, he married her. Just four weeks after Norcock's landfall, the couple took their vows on 5 October 1837.¹²

On 28 November 1837 Norcock was appointed to HMS *Vistal* for the West Indies:

He served many years in the West Indies as Lieut. and there suffered much in health. As Commander he became Inspecting Commander of the Coastguard at Castletownsend (Co. Cork Ireland) in April 1849 and on the completion of his 5 years in that appointment was about to be relieved when he died on 6th April 1854.¹³

He was just 45.

Jane Mary Norcock remarried in 1860 Rear Admiral W. Blight, who died on 22 July 1862. She subsequently married General Sir Fortescue Graham K.C.B., who survived her. She died, aged 47, on 24 October 1866.¹⁴

Norcock has given us an intimate glimpse of the fledgling settlement on the banks of the Yarra River in the Port Phillip District, of the Lonsdale family and their fellow settlers, and of the official pomp and circumstance surrounding Governor Bourke, as well as Government

House, Sydney. We are also privy to Norcock's views of the harsh, often monotonous, life on a sailing ship and his privately expressed criticism of Captain Hobson. Should we take with a grain of salt his extreme and pious views on his captain and fellow crew members, dealing as best they could with the most difficult of circumstances? It is tempting to view their lives in the 1830s from the relative comfort of our 21st-century existence, but life was brief and unpredictable in the 1800s, and to be exiled from family and friends for months, even years, exposed to constant danger, would drive most to the edge of depression and sanity at times.

Notes

- 1 On 11 February 1978, the *Canberra Times* reported: 'A private journal by the mate, John Henry Norcock, on board HMS *Rattlesnake* off Australia in 1835–37 when Melbourne was being officially established was sold by his descendants for the equivalent of \$A8,500 in Crewkerne, Somerset, on Wednesday. It is believed to be destined for an Australian archive'. This rare document had in fact been acquired by the National Library of Australia. See John H. Norcock, 'Journal of Life on Board HMS *Rattlesnake*, 1835–1837', MS5896, Bib ID 2090081, National Library of Australia (NLA). Transcript by G.T. Powell (1980), NLA, also available. Quotations in this article from Norcock's Journal retain his spelling and writing style, e.g. underling words he wished to emphasise.
- 2 'Rev. William Waterfield Journal 1837–1864', 3 Volumes, A1375, A1376, A1377, State Library NSW; Thomas Strobe, 'Annals and Reminiscences of Bygone Days, Historical, Statistical and Social: Being Some Contributions to the Early History of Port Phillip together with Incidents Not Generally Known / by a Melbournite of '38', MS 8780 (MSM40), State Library Victoria; Edmund Finn ('Garryowen'), *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835–1852*, Melbourne, Ferguson & Mitchell, 1898.
- 3 N.A.M. Rodger, *Naval Records for Genealogists*, London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1988, p. 175. After 1824 Volunteer 1st Class was the rating for a would-be lieutenant.
- 4 The relationship is mentioned in a diary note for 17 & 18 February 1837, also in Norcock, John Henry', in *A Naval Biographical Dictionary*, at https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=A_Naval_Biographical_Dictionary/Norcock,_John_Henry&oldid=7365030, accessed 15 May 2018.
- 5 Michael Cannon & Pauline Jones (eds), *Beginnings of Permanent Government*, in *Historical Records of Victoria*, Vol. 1, Melbourne, Victorian Government Printing Office, 1981, p. 45.
- 6 Cannon & Jones, pp. 54–9.
- 7 Cannon & Jones, p. 77.
- 8 Report to the Colonial Secretary by Port Phillip Police Magistrate George Stewart, 10 June 1836, Cannon & Jones, pp. 39–43.
- 9 Arthurs Seat had been given a European name by Acting Lieutenant John Murray when he entered Port Phillip in HMS *Lady Nelson* in 1802, for its apparent resemblance to the hill of Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh.
- 10 The first Melbourne cemetery was 'Burial Hill', today's Flagstaff Gardens. This site was used for about six burials.
- 11 Cannon & Jones, p. 118; *NSW Government Gazette*, 29 March 1837.
- 12 'Norcock, John Henry', in *A Naval Biographical Dictionary*.
- 13 Norcock's Journal, Preliminary notes by family member.
- 14 Norcock's Journal, Preliminary notes by family member.

Expedition Deceit: The Fabulists Who Claimed an Association with the Burke and Wills Expedition

Ian D. Clark

Abstract

This article examines the accounts of nine men who claimed or were claimed by others to be members of the Burke and Wills expedition. Using methods of counterdetection, the article reveals and unmasks imposters by reference to publicly available documents and reports and other primary sources associated with the expedition. Analysis of the nine alleged fabulists interrogates their claims and exposes their fraud. All nine claimants are found to have been deceptive and possibly fraudulent—there are anomalies and inconsistencies in their stories and their claims are not corroborated by the extensive historical record of the expedition. In one case the claimant sought direct financial gain, whereas the other claimants' use of puffery and self-aggrandisement was probably designed to enhance reputation and self-esteem.

Recently, when undertaking research into the life histories of the 29 men who survived the Burke and Wills expedition of 1860, I uncovered a further 25 men and women who alleged, or others claimed they had, an association with the expedition. In this article I will examine the accounts of nine men who claimed to have been members: Mr Brookers, Mr Francis, James Griffiths, Edward Jamieson, Edward Mitchell, John Sharp, Charles Skinner, Jeremiah Toohey, and Richard Wilson.¹

Of the remaining claimants, two were associated with relief expeditions (Lieutenant Handfield and William Williams) and it is likely that over time their involvement has morphed into having been part of the original expedition. Their stories are a farrago of fact and myth. Four people claimed to have travelled with the expedition for a short distance from its departure from Melbourne (Mark Daly; Augusta Gurner—rode out of Melbourne; Brabazon Purcell—accompanied the expedition for the first day or so; Anne Robb—rode a camel for the first eight miles). None of these claims can be authenticated. In the case of Mark Daly, the belief that he started out with the expedition was a

misreporting of his claim that one of his earliest recollections was ‘the starting out of the Burke and Wills expedition’.

A further four people claimed to have been associated with the expedition in some way, though not as members (Ada Bartlett—cooking and mending clothes at the Pamamaroo Creek camp and caring for an injured cameleer at Menindie; Dick Davis—selecting the expedition’s horses; John Farrar—piloting the explorers over the Diamantina country to Cooper Creek; and Anne Robb—carrying cans of milk and soup to the Afghan camel drivers). However, I am unable to corroborate any of these claims. The final group claimed to have been selected to be part of the original expedition but at the last minute were unable to proceed or refused the offer of employment (Lieutenant Handfield, Francis Bullen, William Cope, Peter Fullerton, Gustav Klein, Patrick Samon). Of these, only one, Francis Bullen, was an applicant, but his application was unsuccessful. Another claimant, James Mulligan, stated he decided at interview not to proceed with his application, and, while his unsuccessful application can be verified, his account that he withdrew from the process cannot. I suspect that he lied to preserve his reputation and thus avoid humiliation. Bullen and Samon are likely to have worked in the police force with Robert O’Hara Burke, and this article postulates that they have embellished their association.

Unmasking Imposters

Counterdetection is the exposure of deception in order to reveal and unmask imposters by exposing the anomalies and inconsistencies in their stories, especially where they make factually incorrect statements.² In this process it is important to determine, where possible, the source of each claim. A claim coming directly from the source (the claimant) is given more import than a claim made by others in an obituary, for example, where we do not know the source; it may be based on an exaggeration that has been embellished by others and turned into a lie in the obituary. Claims can be corroborated or dismissed using publicly available documents, applications, lists, and other primary sources associated with the expedition.³ Expedition membership is easily reconstructed and lists are readily available through reference to official records. Expedition membership underwent numerous restructures, but all the personnel changes are quantified and specified. The analysis of the nine alleged fabulists presented here will attempt to interrogate their claims and expose their fraud.

A key question for this study is whether the nine claimants being considered were fraudulent. A fraud is generally understood to be a person who pretends to be something or someone that s/he is not, and fraudulent behaviour is understood to be the intentional misrepresentation of important facts. From a legal perspective, fraud is wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain.⁴ Counterdetection is relevant to many disciplines and fields such as history, auditing, and criminology. It comes to the fore in situations where people embellish or exaggerate their academic qualifications, something called ‘degree deceit’ or ‘degree fraud.’⁵ In medicine, a factitious disorder refers to people who deliberately invent, produce, or exaggerate a physical or psychological illness.⁶ Military imposters make false claims in civilian life about their military service and include people who have never served in the military as well as genuine veterans who lie about or embellish their service record. Such behaviour has been dubbed ‘stolen valor’, and the imposters termed ‘military posers’, ‘fake warriors’, ‘military phonies’ and ‘medal cheats.’⁷ Doug Sterner and Michael Mink explain that military ‘imposters trade on the honor and goodwill society gives to real veterans and heroes, usurping these things for self-serving purposes and personal gain.’ In British military slang these imposters are called ‘Walts’—an allusion to James Thurber’s fictional character ‘Walter Mitty’, an ineffectual man who indulged in fantastic daydreams of personal triumphs and pretensions.⁸

American criminologist Donald Cressey’s ‘fraud triangle’ would suggest that people commit fraud when three overlapping conditions and motivations are at play: the opportunity (expected gains are greater than potential risks—they are confident of not being caught out); the motivation or need (financial incentives, self-esteem); and rationalisation (to avoid loss of social status or prevent destruction of self-image, believing ‘no one’s going to catch me’).⁹ Without knowing these individuals, we can only speculate as to why they may have been fraudulent—perhaps some had a pathological desire to behave dishonestly, or they were gross exaggerators who always embellished their achievements and experiences to bolster their self-esteem.

Mr Brookers

In 1911 the *Gosford Times* reported that an old gentleman named Brookers was ‘the only man now alive who was associated with the Burke and Wills exploring expedition’.

The promoter of the Company [Brookers Colours, Ltd—a paint works at Fernleigh], an old gentleman named Brookers, is the only man now alive who was associated with the Burke and Wills exploring expedition in the early days, and whose tragic end makes sad reading in the pages of Australian history.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the nature of Brookers’ association is not explained, and, although expedition records do not support his claim, if he was a member, he was certainly not the sole survivor in 1911—William Brahe died in 1912, Hermann Beckler in 1914, John Prolongeau in 1915, and expedition foreman Charles Ferguson lived until 1925.

Mr Francis

In April 1898, a Mr Francis approached a meeting of the trustees of the Benevolent Home in Wellington, New Zealand, seeking charity as ‘the only living member of the Burke and Wills exploring expedition’. The *New Zealand Times* was sceptical of his claim:

It therefore sounds strange to hear of a man who claims to be “the only living member of the Burke and Wills exploring expedition” seeking charity. Yet this was the claim put forward by a tall, elderly man who appeared before the Benevolent Trustees yesterday in search of relief ... The Trustees decided to admit the applicant to the Benevolent Home for a fortnight.¹¹

The editor of the *Bulletin*, as reported in the *Mount Magnet Miner and Lennonville Leader*, made a salient observation about Francis’s claim to be the ‘sole survivor’, noting with some incredulity: ‘There are as many “sole survivors” of the Burke and Wills party as there are of the Balaclava charge’. The paper then proceeded to list the original party (and made several errors) and correctly noted that some joined the party after the expedition set out. The editor rightly noted that Francis ‘may also have done so, but there is no record of the fact’. ‘One who declared himself to be “the only living member of the Burke and Wills exploring expedition”, asked Wellington (M.L.) Benevolent Trustees for help the other day ... The trustees gave the old man a rest in the Ohiro Home pending further enquiries.’¹²

News of Francis's claim to having been part of the expedition elicited responses from two readers. Charles Bruford focused narrowly on the four men who left for the Gulf and noted that of that party only John King survived.¹³ The second letter writer, James Liddle, formerly of Bendigo, Victoria, was also sceptical of the man's claim, and asserted that, once it was broadcast in Australia, 'heaps of men who went with Burke' would 'spring up and testify to its inaccuracy'.

It seems so short a time since I drove Mrs Liddle from Bendigo out to the Campaspe river to see the great exploring expedition under Richard O'Hara Burke pass on its way out to the unknown land; that I was considerably astonished to read in your paper that an applicant for charity stated to the Board of Relief "He was the sole survivor of that party". I shall be surprised if, when said paragraph is copied into the Australian papers, heaps of men who went with Burke don't spring up and testify to its inaccuracy ... J.L., Constable street, Wellington.¹⁴

The identity of the claimant is unclear. Expedition records do not authenticate this man's association with the expedition. A John Francis and a William Francis submitted applications to join the expedition, but both were unsuccessful. It is possible that this Mr Francis was one of these unsuccessful applicants.

James Griffiths (1839–1921)

James Griffiths died on 8 December 1921 at Emmaville, New South Wales, aged 82. In his obituary in the *Armidale Chronicle* it was claimed that he 'set out with Burke and Wills and left them at Menindie': 'James Griffiths, one of the last of the original miners who went to Vegetable Creek, is dead. In 1860 he set out with Burke and Wills on their long and disastrous expedition, but left them at Menindie.'¹⁵ Expedition records do not corroborate this alleged association.

Edward Jamieson (1839–1927)

Edward Jamieson (Figure 1) was born in Irwins Town, County Tyrone, Ireland, in 1839 (parents: Edward Jamieson and Rebecca Hurst) and died at Tenthill homestead, Tent Hill, Queensland, on 19 June 1927.¹⁶ He arrived in Australia with his family on 22 May 1850 on the vessel *Thetis*, having sailed from Laginstown, County Tipperary, Ireland.¹⁷

In his obituary in the *Queenslander* it was claimed that he was 'with the Burke and Wills expedition for several months', but expedition

records do not confirm his association with the expedition or any of the relief expeditions:

MR. EDWARD JAMIESON, of Tenthill, died on Sunday, at the age of 80 years and 8 months. The deceased gentleman was born in Ireland, and came to Australia with his parents in the year 1849. He was with the Burke and Wills expedition for several months, and later on settled at Wollongong, New South Wales.¹⁸



Figure 1: Edward Jamieson (<https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/47101983/person/6905555069/gallery>)

Edward Hichens Mitchell (1834–1918)⁶

Edward Hichens Mitchell was a caretaker/janitor of the Gordon Technical College buildings, Geelong, who claimed to have been a member of the Victorian Exploring Expedition (VEE) and to have proceeded as far as Cooper Creek. He claimed he joined as a representative of noted Victorian financier and politician Henry Miller. Expedition records do not validate this association.

Mitchell's death notice and obituary and other newspaper stories state he was born in 1820; however, this is not supported by the entry of his baptism in the UK, Foreign and Overseas Registers of British Subjects. It reads: 'Baptisms solemnised in the City of Paris & its environs in the year 1834: When baptised: 16 June 1834; born 15 February 1834; Edward Hichens Mitchell: parents—Robert Deeble Mitchell and Mary James; Abode—Paris.'²⁰

This registration also exposes his claim that he was born in London as a likely mistruth. However, his claim that his father was a doctor and

treated royalty may have some credibility as the family at one time did live in Peascod Street, Windsor, which leads to the entrance of Windsor Castle.²¹

Mitchell's purported association with the Burke and Wills expedition first appeared in newspapers in 1904:

Mr. Edward Mitchell, the caretaker of the Gordon Technical College, was a member of the party of explorers led by Burke and Wills, which set out on a trip across Australia from Melbourne 30 [*sic*] years ago last Saturday. When the intrepid leaders went on alone after a portion of the journey had been got over, Mr. Mitchell was one of those who returned. He is now 80 years of age, and has a lively recollection of the enthusiastic send-off given the expedition by the public.²²

Mr. Edmund [*sic*] Mitchell, who for the past 20 years has been caretaker of the Gordon Technical College Buildings, Geelong, left Melbourne with the expedition as the representative of the late Mr. Henry Miller, and proceeded as far as Cooper's Creek, where he remained in camp with Mr. Wright, and left with him to search for water near the border of New South Wales and South Australia. Mr. Mitchell afterwards travelled on horseback alone to Swan Hill, where he caught the coach to Bendigo and returned to Melbourne. He set out again, with horses, men and provisions, for the place where he left Mr. Wright, and when he reached the camp heard that Burke and Wills were missing. Mr. Mitchell who is now 84 years old, says he was for seventeen months with the expedition.²³

Mr. Mitchell, who still enjoys robust health, was born in London in 1820, his father being private physician to King George IV. He was educated in France, and arrived in Victoria in 1850. The most notable event of his life in Australia was the part he played in the Burke and Wills expedition. He left Melbourne with the explorers in 1860, and camped at Menindie while the leaders went on to Cooper's Creek.²⁴

At a presentation made to him in July 1909, Mr Mitchell spoke of his supposed involvement in the expedition.²⁵ And, in 1915, on the anniversary of the discovery of the remains of Burke and Wills, Mitchell made the local news again:

Today is the anniversary of finding the bodies of the explorers, Burke and Wills. Local interest attaches to it from the fact that the old janitor at the Gordon College, Edward Mitchell, was a member of the

expedition up to Cooper's Creek, and has therefore some first-hand views concerning it. Mr. Mitchell ... pictured the start of the ill-fated journey from Flemington, and said that up to Cooper's Creek it was comparatively easy to a bushman. A great many useless things were taken up to Menindie, tending to sap the strength of the party. He considers it was the removal of the provisions from the depot at Cooper's Creek that took the heart out of the explorers on the return journey.²⁶

Mitchell's death notice in 1918 referred to him as an 'unattached member' of the expedition:

There has just died at Geelong Mr. Edward Mitchell, who as an unattached member of the party took part in the Burke and Wills expedition ... When the Burke and Wills expedition was arranged, young Mitchell was appointed by Mr. Miller (father of Sir Edward Miller) to look after his interests. He travelled as far as Menindie, beyond which place the unofficial members of the party were not allowed to go. On his return he furnished a report to Mr. Miller.²⁷

John Ward Sharp (1837–1926)

John Ward Sharp (Figure 2) was born in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, on 28 March 1837 (parents: John Sharp and Jane Ward). He married Mary Ann Jane Winzer (1841–1918) in Albury on 2 July 1861. He died in Albury on 8 May 1926. In his obituary it was claimed that he was a member of the expedition, but expedition records do not substantiate this claim. His obituary in the *Singleton Argus* read: 'The death has occurred at Albury of Mr John Sharp, aged 88 years. He was a member of the Burke and Wills expedition into Central Australia, and a member of the party which surveyed the route of the overland telegraph line from Melbourne to Albury'.²⁸



Figure 2: John Sharp (<https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/38428843/person/20465523908/gallery>)

Charles H. Skinner (? –1911)

In the obituary for Charles H. Skinner in the Queensland paper, the *Balonne Beacon*, it was noted that he claimed to be a member of the expedition, though the editor of the newspaper was unsure if Skinner meant Burke's expedition or one of the relief expeditions. Available records do not verify this association.

An elderly man named Chas. H. Skinner, a resident of the town for the past three or four years, and known as "Old Gundy", passed away in the hospital on Saturday night. He earned his living by wood cutting, and claimed to be a member of the Burke and Wills exploring party, but whether the old man meant the exploring party or the party that went to the relief of the explorers, or whether there was any truth in his statement we know not.²⁹

Jeremiah Toohey (1832–1904)

Jeremiah Toohey was born in 1832 in Nenagh, County Tipperary, Ireland, to parents Timothy Toohey and Alice Egan. He died at St Kilda on 14 November 1904. In 1848 he joined the Irish Police Force. In 1856 he married Mary Anne Teresa O'Donnell (1833–1926) at Mullingar, County Westmeath, Ireland, and later that year emigrated, along with other relatives, to Australia, arriving in Melbourne on 31 December 1856. Toohey was appointed to Victoria Police on 2 January 1857. His Police Register Number is 1247. His Victoria Police records confirm that he was promoted to senior constable on 5 April 1857, to 2nd class

sergeant on 1 October 1859, and to 1st class sergeant on 1 September 1868.³⁰ He was sergeant at Geelong in 1860.³¹

In one of his obituaries, it was claimed he was part of the expedition, but this is not supported by the available evidence. I suspect his police association with Burke has been exaggerated. The following appeared in *Table Talk* in 1896, some years before his death.

Mr. [Jeremiah] Toohey was born at Castletown in the North Riding of the County of Tipperary, Ireland, and joined the Irish constabulary when quite a youth in 1848. The title “Royal” was conferred on the force not many years ago by Queen Victoria, for services rendered at times of exceptional trouble and difficulty in the rural districts of Ireland. Mr. Toohey was drilled at the Constabulary Depot in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, close to the Vice-regal Lodge, the official residence of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland and to the Hibernian Military School, where the sons of British soldiers were trained for the profession of their fathers. When Mr. Toohey joined the constabulary, the commandant was Colonel Roberts, the chief of the force being invariably an army officer. Having gone through his period of drill and training at the depot, Mr. Toohey was sent to Roscommon in the West of Ireland, where the county inspector was Mr. Burke, father of Dr. Burke, the well-known physician of North Melbourne. There he underwent drill for the cavalry, which was under the command of Robert O’Hara Burke, who afterwards became officer of the Victorian Police Force, explored the continent of Australia from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria (dying at Cooper’s Creek), and whose statue, with that of his ill-fated companion, Wills (an officer of the Melbourne Observatory), now stands in Spring-street, opposite the Houses of Parliament. Mr. Toohey has been heard to describe Burke as “one of the best-hearted men who ever existed”.³²

His obituary in the Launceston *Examiner* in 1904 read:

The announcement of the death of Mr. Toohey, an ex-superintendent of the Victorian police force, revives an almost forgotten incident in my mind. The late Mr. Toohey was a member of the Burke and Wills exploring expedition, and I can remember seeing that ill-fated host start off on the journey from which but one of its members—of those who remained with their leaders—returned. Nov. 19.³³

Richard Stone Wilson (1843/4–1929)

Richard Stone Wilson (Figure 3) was born in Falmouth, Jamaica, and was baptised on 24 March 1844 in the Parish of Trelawney, Cornwall, Jamaica.³⁴ He claimed to have been attached to ‘the transportation branch’ of the VEE under the charge of Landells, and to have left the expedition at Menindie when Landells resigned. He also claimed that he joined Howitt’s relief expedition. Expedition records do not authenticate either claim.

Wilson attended a commemoration service at St George’s Church, Royal Park, on 20 August 1905, to mark the 45th anniversary of the setting out of the expedition. In the afternoon a special gathering was held at Royal Park, at which Master Robert O’Hara Burke Legg, the son of a cousin of Robert O’Hara Burke, the expedition leader, placed a wreath in the memorial cairn. The *Leader* noted that: ‘The only survivors of the expedition are Mr. James Lane and Mr. Wilson. Neither of these men accompanied Burke and Wills further than Swan Hill, but the last named was a member of Mr. Howitt’s relief party, which found its way to Cooper’s Creek.’³⁵

Wilson featured in several articles in August 1920 concerning the 60th anniversary of the departure of the expedition. The *Geelong Advertiser*, under the heading ‘Burke and Wills—Last Survivor’, published the following:

Yesterday marked the 60th anniversary of the departure of the Burke and Wills expedition of exploration, and it interesting to note that Geelong has a citizen who can well claim to be the last surviving member of the original party. Mr. R.S. Wilson, of Sydney-parade, East Geelong, was one of Mr. Lansell’s [*sic*] boys in charge of the camels, and he gives interesting reminiscences of the historical event. He was not 15 years of age when he signed on, but, unfortunately, he did so with Mr. Lansell [*sic*], who had charge of the transportation branch, and therefore was not entitled to any Government pension. Once leaving Melbourne, the expedition camped the first night somewhere near Broadmeadows, which in later years has been the scene of encampments of men who were to embark on a different kind of mission. The stages then were Woodend, Castlemaine and thence to Swan Hill. At the latter place Lansell [*sic*] had a few words with Burke, and severed his connection with the enterprise. Young Wilson had necessarily to leave, also, but he gained touch again subsequently in South Australia, where he was engaged by Mr. Howitt to supervise

the camels which went into the interior to bring back the explorers' remains. This was in 1862. The remains were subsequently brought to Melbourne by steamer, and Mr. Wilson convoyed the camels to a station in the Wimmera. Mr. Wilson is still hale and hearty, though 75 years of age, and promises to record his experiences while still able to recall the hardships and trials of those early days. He has travelled all over the world since then.³⁶

The *Argus* also noted Wilson's claims under the heading 'Burke and Wills Expedition':

Mr. R.S. Wilson of Sydney Parade, Geelong claims to be the only surviving member of the Burke and Wills expedition which set out from Melbourne 60 years ago. He is 75 years of age, and was not 15 years of age when he signed on for work with the camels. His employer had a disagreement with Burke at Swan Hill, and did not proceed. Mr. Wilson rejoined the expedition in South Australia, and went with the party that brought back the remains of Burke and Wills.³⁷

In 1929, three months before his demise, the *Newcastle Morning Herald* published a lengthy article on Wilson's recollections under the heading 'Burke and Wills Survivor of Expedition Victorian Man's Story'. In the reminiscence Wilson claims that Landells resigned at Swan Hill; however, this is a significant error as expedition documents record that he resigned at Menindie.

Claimed to be the only man living who left Melbourne with the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition in 1860, Mr. Richard Wilson, of Baker-street, Richmond (Vic.), is in his 87th year (says the Melbourne 'Herald'). He is a thin diminutive little man, with a slightly wrinkled olive face and long grey beard. His small brown eyes gleam with enthusiasm when he talks of his early experiences in Australia. With amazingly keen memory, he recalls his adventures on the goldfields in the 'sixties, of a nightmare passage round the Horn, and an air-raid in London, in which his first wife was killed. Born in Jamaica, Mr. Wilson spent his early years in Lancashire, and came to Australia in the late 'fifties.

"It was in 1860 that I joined the Burke and Wills expedition", he said. "A man named Landells engaged me to assist him with the camels, 24 having been specially brought out from India. Landells was Burke's second-in-command, and was taken mainly, I think, because of his knowledge of camels."

“A FAIR-SIZED TOWN”

“Melbourne was at that time, only a fair-sized town.” There were already some good shops, and the doctors were beginning to have rooms in Collins-street.

“On the Saturday before we set out for the unknown inland, we had a procession through the streets, so that the people could see the equipment. Burke, who had a fine soldierly figure, rode a magnificent white horse. Our first camp was at Broadmeadows, which at that time was well out in the country. From there we pushed on to Woodend, Bendigo, and eventually reached Swan Hill. Here, Landells had a quarrel with Burke and left the party. We crossed the Murray near Echuca, and, as Landells had returned, I also left the party and travelled into South Australia. Burke and Wills continued towards the Darling Downs.”

When no word was heard of Burke and Wills, Mr. Wilson joined the relief party organised in South Australia by Mr. A.W. Howitt. With it, he travelled as far north as Cooper’s Creek, where the remains of Burke and Wills had been buried after their tragic death from exhaustion near the Barcoo.

AT COOPER’S CREEK

“Cooper’s Creek was as desolate a spot as you could wish to see.” Mr. Wilson said. “It was a creek in name only. There was a little stunted growth, a few small gum trees, and a number of rapidly drying waterholes. We exhumed the bodies and set off south again. The heat was terrific.

“In the camps at night I heard the leaders of our party discuss the tragic expedition from every angle. Burke has been blamed for his rashness, but I believe that he was shamefully deserted by members of his own expedition, who did not give him enough information about the location of food supplies.

“As we neared Adelaide, we heard that the South Australian people were annoyed because we had not brought back the body of Gray, who had also been a member of Burke’s party. Burke’s body was sent to Adelaide, and on to Melbourne by boat.

“Our party continued the journey overland without calling at Adelaide, and we reached Melbourne on the day of Burke’s funeral. During the years since then I have kept in touch with other members of the party, but one by one they have died, until now I seem to be the only survivor.”

Mr Wilson is very interested in the reported proposal to make a film of the expedition. He considers that everyone who knows anything of the true facts should be consulted.³⁸



Figure 3: Richard Wilson (*Barrier Miner* [Broken Hill, NSW], 14 September 1929, p. 3)

When Wilson died in December 1929, one obituary—in the *Argus*—referred to his association with the expedition.

Mr. Richard Stone Wilson, the last survivor of the relief party which searched for the missing members of the Burke and Wills expedition in 1861, died at his home at 44 Baker street, Richmond yesterday. Mr. Wilson was aged 86 years and he leaves a widow and two sons, Mr. Frederick Wilson and Mr. Arthur Wilson. The funeral will take place at the Melbourne General Cemetery at half past 3 o'clock this afternoon. The relief party of which Mr Wilson was a member reached Cooper's Creek, and found the explorer King, the survivor of the Burke and Wills expedition, living among the aborigines. The bodies of the other members of the expedition were found later and buried.³⁹

Conclusion

This study has focused on nine men who alleged, or others claimed, that they were part of the Burke and Wills expedition: Mr Brookers, Mr Francis, James Griffiths (from Melbourne to Menindie), Edward Jamieson (with the expedition for 'several months'), Edward Mitchell (from Melbourne to Menindie or Cooper Creek for seventeen months), John Sharp, Charles Skinner, Jeremiah Toohey, and Richard Wilson

(from Melbourne to Swan Hill). None of these claims are corroborated by expedition records. Analysis of each of these cases has revealed that the claims are, in all likelihood, fabrications.

Three genuine survivors of the expedition received pensions in their later years—John King, Thomas McDonogh, and Robert Lane. Research into the alleged imposters suggests that only one attempted to seek financial gain through his deceit. In New Zealand in 1898, a Mr Francis sought charity from Benevolent Trustees in Wellington on the basis of his claim that he was ‘the only living member of the Burke and Wills exploring expedition.’ In this case, I suspect the claimant adopted a false history to seek direct financial benefit from the government. Some Australian newspapers were sceptical of Francis’s claim. One correspondent, James Liddle, asserted that once the claim was broadcast in Australia ‘heaps of men who went with Burke’, would ‘spring up and testify to its inaccuracy’. Yet the number of expeditioners then in a position to expose expedition deceit was limited. In 1900, for example, only six were living in Australia, and three were overseas.

We know for certain that in 1900 nine men who were part of the expedition were still living. Although all of these men would have been in a position to verify claims of association (depending of course on the length of their own involvement with the expedition), there is no record that any one of them ever exposed any charlatans. The nine were: William Hodgkinson in Queensland (d. 1900), Thomas McDonogh in Victoria (d. 1904), Alfred Price in New Zealand (d. 1904), William Wright in New South Wales (d. after 1905), James Lane in Melbourne (d. 1907), William Brahe in Melbourne (d. 1912), Herman Beckler in Germany (d. 1914), John Prolongeau in Victoria (d. 1915), and Charles Ferguson in the United States (d. 1925).

The fabulists may have been motivated by a need for respect and social recognition, wanting to benefit from the reverence the community held for the survivors of the Burke and Wills expedition. Perhaps they were absorbed into a fantasy world in some kind of Walter Mitty delusion, even inserting themselves into public events as Richard Stone Wilson did in 1905 and 1920 by attending and being feted during the 45th and 60th Burke and Wills anniversary commemorations in Melbourne. No doubt some of the expedition imposters were braggarts, who were prone to self-aggrandising, and fabulists or inveterate liars who created fictive personalities. The two that seem to be prime candidates for this

characterisation are Richard Wilson and Edward Mitchell, who both asserted that their membership was unofficial as an explanation for why there is no record of their involvement.

Mitchell, a caretaker/janitor at Gordon Technical College in Geelong, claimed to have travelled with the expedition as far as Cooper Creek or Menindie (depending on which article is cited). He claimed to have been with the expedition for seventeen months as a representative of Henry Miller, and that his involvement was unofficial, which was probably a subterfuge to explain why his name does not appear in any official records of the expedition. His claim that he was associated with the expedition for seventeen months is anomalous and does not tally with known expedition time lines. He was feted in newspaper accounts (1904, 1905, 1906, 1909, 1915, and in numerous obituaries in 1918). Research into his life history has revealed that he overstated his age by some 14 years, and may have lied about his birthplace, so his penchant for telling mistruths about his involvement in the expedition is not inconsistent with other aspects of his life.

Richard Wilson, a Jamaican-born carpenter, was a fabulist who claimed to have been attached to the 'transportation branch' under the charge of George Landells, and that he left the expedition at Swan Hill. Wilson attended the 45th anniversary celebrations at Royal Park, Carlton, in August 1905, along with Robert O'Hara Burke Legg, the son of a cousin of Robert O'Hara Burke. He also attended the 60th anniversary celebrations in August 1920. Wilson claimed that he was fifteen years of age when he signed on with Landells to take charge of the camels, and that because of this he was not entitled to any government pension. He also claimed he was engaged by William Howitt's relief party. Although historian Tim Bonyhady accepted that he was a member of Howitt's relief party, expedition records do not authenticate either of his claims.⁴⁰

This article has gone some way to unmasking deceit and fabrication—I believe that all of these nine expedition claimants were deceptive at least and, in some instances, fraudulent—there are anomalies and inconsistencies in their stories and their claims are not corroborated by the extensive historical records of the Burke and Wills expedition. In one case the claimant sought direct financial gain. For most of the others the puffery and self-aggrandisement were probably designed to enhance reputation and self-esteem.

Notes

- 1 Ian D. Clark, 'The Members of the Victorian Exploring Expedition and their Prior Experience of Aboriginal Peoples', in Ian D. Clark & Fred Cahir (eds), *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*, Melbourne, CSIRO Publishing, 2013, pp. 15-46; Ian D. Clark, *What Became of Them? Biographies of the Survivors of the Burke and Wills Expedition*, Charleston, Createspace, 2018. A tenth claimant, Edward Bartlett, is not considered here as I regard the newspaper claim that he was a member as a misreporting of his wife's claim.
- 2 Barton Whaley, *Detecting Deception: A Bibliography of Counterdeception across Time, Cultures, and Disciplines*, Washington, Foreign Denial & Deception Committee, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2006. p. viii.
- 3 A resource that has proven invaluable in unmasking imposters has been the Burke and Wills Web digital archive of expedition records at <http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/index.php>. It contains lists of members of the expedition and relief expeditions, as well as an archive of the applications to join the expedition.
- 4 Fraud is defined as: 'All multifarious means which human ingenuity can devise, and which are resorted to by one individual to get an advantage over another by false suggestions or suppression of the truth. It includes all surprises, tricks, cunning or dissembling, and any unfair way by which another is cheated'. See H.C. Black (ed.), *Black's Law Dictionary*, St Paul, Minnesota, West Publishing, 1979.
- 5 Ron Aumann, 'Dubious Degrees: Organizations Can Avoid Negative Press by Ensuring New Employees Have Valid Academic Credentials', *Internal Auditor*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2006, pp. 83 ff.
- 6 Marc D. Feldman & Gregory P. Yates, *Dying to be Ill: True Stories of Medical Deception*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2018.
- 7 Doug Sterner & Michael Mink, *Restoring Valor: One Couple's Mission to Expose Fraudulent War Heroes and to Protect America's Military Awards System*, New York, Skyhorse, 2014.
- 8 James Thurber, 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty', *New Yorker*, 18 March 1939.
- 9 D.R. Cressey, *Other People's Money: A Study in the Social Psychology of Embezzlement*. Glencoe, IL, The Free Press, 1953.
- 10 *Gosford Times and Wyong District Advocate* (NSW), 17 November 1911, p. 7.
- 11 *New Zealand Times*, 30 March 1898, p. 2; *Grey River Argus* (NZ), 11 April 1898, p. 2.
- 12 From the *Bulletin* as reported in the *Mount Magnet Miner and Lennonville Leader*, 7 May 1898, p. 3.
- 13 *Evening Post* (NZ), 15 April 1898.
- 14 *New Zealand Times*, 18 April 1898, p. 4; also see *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 March 1901, p. 3.
- 15 *Armidale Chronicle* (NSW), 24 December 1921, p. 6.
- 16 Death Registration 002998.
- 17 *Persons on bounty ships (Agent's Immigrant Lists)*, Series 5316; Reel 2136; Item [4/4786], State Records Authority of New South Wales.
- 18 *Queenslander*, 30 June 1927, p. 7.
- 19 Hitchens/Hitchens/Hichens/Henry are all found in various records.
- 20 *General Register Office: Foreign Registers and Returns*; Class RG 33; Piece 62, The National Archives (UK), Kew, Surrey, England.
- 21 <http://geneagraphie.com/getperson.php?personID=19805>.
- 22 *Geelong Advertiser*, 22 August 1904, p. 2.

- 23 *Bendigo Independent*, 25 May 1905, p. 2.
- 24 *Age*, 17 December 1906.
- 25 *Geelong Advertiser*, 30 July 1909, p. 4.
- 26 *Geelong Advertiser*, 22 September 1915, p. 3.
- 27 *Argus*, 10 December 1918, p. 6.
- 28 *Singleton Argus* (NSW), 15 May 1926, p. 1.
- 29 *Balonne Beacon* (St George, Qld), 22 February 1911, p. 3.
- 30 Jeremiah Toohey, Records of Conduct and Service, Victoria Police Museum.
- 31 See *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 31 March 1860, p. 3.
- 32 *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 24 January 1896, pp. 2–3.
- 33 *Examiner* (Launceston, Tas.), 21 November 1904.
- 34 Ancestry.com. *Jamaica, Select Births and Baptisms, 1752–1920*, Ancestry.com Operations, Inc. [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA, 2014.
- 35 *Leader* (Melbourne), 29 July 1905, p. 38.
- 36 *Geelong Advertiser*, 21 August 1920, p. 3.
- 37 *Argus*, 21 August 1920, p. 22.
- 38 *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* (NSW), 11 September 1929, p. 9.
- 39 *Argus*, 7 December 1929, p. 18.
- 40 Tim Bonyhady, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth*, Sydney, David Ell Press, 1991, p. 282.

Ferdinand von Mueller in the Victorian Grampians

Benjamin Wilkie

Abstract

The Gariwerd mountain ranges in western Victoria are renowned for their flora and fauna. The Grampians National Park is the state's most important botanical reserve with one third of all native plants in Victoria found growing there. This brief historical note outlines the efforts of nineteenth-century botanists and their networks of plant collectors to identify and gather specimens from Gariwerd, which were then sent to the major collecting institutions of Australia, Britain, and Europe. In particular, the correspondence and writings of German botanist Ferdinand von Mueller reveal—in addition to his already well-recognised fascination with flora of the Australian Alps—a lifelong interest in the Gariwerd ranges.

The Victorian Grampians, also called Gariwerd, and their wildflower displays in spring have held an allure for Europeans since the time of colonisation. At the end of the twentieth century, one third of all native plants in Victoria could be found growing in the Grampians National Park, including over 975 native plant species and several orchid species. Many of them are endemic to the region—that is, not found growing anywhere else in the world. Nearly 170 species of threatened flora and fauna are found in the park, of which many are endemic. The Grampians pincushion-lily (*Borya mirabilis*) is both endangered and endemic, and now known only to grow on a single rocky outcrop in Gariwerd.¹ Perhaps the most well-known and popular flora of Gariwerd are the rich and colourful wildflowers—indeed, some of the busiest periods for visitors to the Grampians National Park are during the wildflower season in September, October, and November. More than 75 terrestrial orchid species have been recorded in the ranges. Along with these striking displays, there are also some less charismatic species, including 137 species of mosses and 54 species of liverworts, and around 500 different species of fungi.

While the plant communities of the mountains are nationally renowned and have been the reason for many casual visits to the area,

they have also sparked the imaginations of botanists and their plant collectors since the middle of the nineteenth century, beginning with Thomas Mitchell's initial expeditions into the ranges in 1836. Less well recognised is Ferdinand von Mueller's fascination with Gariwerd's flora, piqued initially during his 1852 tour to western Victoria. One author claims that 'When Ferdinand von Mueller ... and John Dallachy, his collector, visited the Grampians ... they found less to interest them there than they did in the Victorian Alps'.² As is clear from Mueller's extensive correspondence, however, the German botanist maintained an interest in the ranges throughout his career, cultivated relationships with a number of local plant collectors and botanists, and ensured local specimens made their way into some of the world's premiere collecting institutions. Mueller also, however, collected human remains—most likely those of Djab wurrung or Jardwadjali people—reminding us of his embeddedness within the darker currents of nineteenth-century science.

Mitchell's Expedition

The first European scientists to encounter Gariwerd were part of Thomas Mitchell's expedition to the southern reaches of New South Wales. Mitchell's plant collector, John Richardson, had been thorough during the party's expedition through the area in the winter of 1836. When they returned from the icy peaks of Mount William in July, Richardson and Mitchell brought with them 'various interesting plants, which we had seen nowhere else'. These included the 'most beautiful downy-leaved' Grampians common heath (*Epacris impressa* var. *grandiflora*), 'the 'most remarkable' notched phebalium (*Phebalium bilobum*), 'a new *Cryptandra* remarkable for its downy leaves' (prickly cryptandra, *Cryptandra tomentosa*), 'a beautiful species of *Baeckea*' (rosy baeckea, *Baeckea ramosissima*), 'a new species of *Bossiaea* which had the appearance of a Rosemary bush, and differed from all the published kinds' (Grampians bossiaea, *Bossiaea rosmarinifolia*), snow myrtle (*Calytrix alpetris*), 'several species of *Grevillea*, particular a remarkable kind', including variable prickly grevillea (*Grevillea aquifolium*) and cat's claws (*G. alpina*), and ruddy beard-heath (*Leucopogon rufus*).³

Overall through the expedition, Richardson collected around 150 species, which Mitchell sent to John Lindley at the University of London. About 40 of these specimens were new to Western science, including the Grampians thryptomene (*Thryptomene calcyina*) and the Grampians

gum (*Eucalyptus alpine*), ‘a new species of eucalyptus with short broad viscid leaves, and rough-warted branches.’⁴

Ferdinand von Mueller

After Mitchell, the next significant plant-collecting expedition to Gariwerd was undertaken by the German-born Victorian government botanist, Ferdinand von Mueller, in November 1853, as part of his broader project to comprehensively document the flora of the colony. Mitchell and Richardson had been in the ranges in winter, while Mueller planned to be there in late spring or summer. Mueller wrote to the governor of the colony, Charles La Trobe, in August 1853, laying out his ‘plan for a new botanical investigation of this colony during the next season’:

I would propose to start at the end of September or in the beginning of October in a westerly direction, examine all the low country between here and the Glenelg, where already some interesting botanical discoveries have been made by Sir Th. Mitchell, proceed thence to the Grampians for the purpose of ascending the most elevated points of that range ... This exploring line ... would enable me to accumulate to a certain degree the materials for the Flora of this province.⁵

La Trobe himself had visited the ‘Grampians & Victoria ranges’, and stayed at the homestead near Mount Sturgeon in early 1850. Upon La Trobe’s assent to his request, Mueller’s expedition commenced in November 1853.

Once he had reached Victoria Range, Mueller wrote to William Hooker, the director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, on 21 November. He informed Hooker:

I have met, to my great delight, with all of Sir Thomas Mitchell’s rarities of the Grampians, beside some which, during Sir Thomas’s visit to this locality (June), were not in flower; so that I hope to be enabled to add amply to your great herbarium. *Myosurus australis* I found here again—the second locality which I know of this most interesting plant; *Marianthes* [*sic*] *bignoniaceus* and *Eriostemon Hillebrandi* occur also in the Grampians, as well as a beautiful subalpine *Bauera*, several *Melaleuca*, *Mitrasacme*, *Stylidium*, *Stenantha*, *Styphelia*, etc.. Most of them are new to me, and many, I presume, also new to science.⁶

Writing from Mount Sturgeon two days later, Mueller told La Trobe that he had been

engaged in examining the Grampians and the Victoria ranges. I ascended many of the highest mountains, and found the subalpine vegetation of Mount William particularly interesting. The Victoria-Flora has been enriched during this part of the journey with about 70 species of plants, of which the fourth part appears to be yet undescribed. The Government-herbarium received besides numerous additions in those species, which Sir Thomas Mitchell previously discovered and which seem to be confined to these ranges.⁷

Later, in January 1854, Mueller sent Hooker an update, his first since November:

I have since that time examined the neighbourhood of Mount Zero (already favourable known by Sir Thomas Mitchell's researches), and I had here the gratification of adding a considerable number of undescribed or rare plants to my last botanical stores, amongst them a most handsome new genus of *Myrtaceae* (*Scarymyrtus hexamera*).⁸

In his report of October 1854, Mueller summarised his impression of the ranges:

The low land between Melbourne and Mount Sturgeon offered but very few novelties to the collections formed during the previous season, but in the Grampians, the Serra, and the Victoria Ranges, I had an opportunity, by ascending the most prominent heights, to increase considerably the series of plants already discovered in these localities by Sir Thomas Mitchell during his exploration of this country. Many of these plants belong not only exclusively to this Colony, although interspersed with such as inhabit the mountains of New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land, and South Australia, but are even in some instances restricted to solitary heights, an observation confirmed by similar instances of isolation of certain species occurring at the Table Mount of the Cape of Good Hope, in the mountains of North America, and other parts of the globe. The subalpine summit of Mount William proved in this respect to be exceedingly interesting.⁹

By 1857, one of Mueller's assistants, Carl Wilhelmi, had returned to Gariwerd, where, wrote Mueller,

he procured an extensive collection of seeds, particularly valuable as containing many species hitherto nowhere under cultivation. Chiefly of this supply collections have been transmitted for interchange to the Royal Gardens of Kew, to the Melbourne University Garden, to the Botanic Gardens of Hobart Town, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Paris, Mauritius, Cape Town, Calcutta, Boston, and Hamburg.¹⁰

Wilhelmi would be the first to publish a detailed botanical account of Gariwerd.¹¹ From the late 1850s, another of Mueller's collectors, John Dallachy, was active in the mountains.¹² In his 1858 report on the botanic gardens in Melbourne, Mueller said that Dallachy had 'carried out very successfully this part of the service' in collecting 'for interchange, and for enriching our own establishment, seedlings of the remarkable and rare plants of the Grampians' for the gardens.¹³ Dallachy's collections were also destined for Kew, and Mueller told Hooker in 1858, 'I despatched Mr Dallachi from this establishment two months ago to the Grampians, and now he is just returned with a lot of living plants in an excellent state ... plants restricted mostly to that range, and of which I hope to establish a great many for Kew'.¹⁴



Figure 1: Ferdinand von Mueller, 1825–1896 (State Library of Victoria)

During his journey through the mountains, Mueller had met with local residents, including the D'Alton family at Glenbower.¹⁵ He maintained these relationships, and Mueller would eventually name the narrow-leaf trymalium (*Trymalium d'altonii*) for St Eloy D'Alton, who

had sent him a specimen of this ‘Halls Gap shrub’, and would become an important contributor of specimens to Mueller’s collection.¹⁶ As late as 1894 Mueller was sending seeds of ‘economic plants’ to D’Alton for distribution to people in and around the mountains, who had sent in return

two specimens, one of an acacia rather rare in this part and the other a *Cryptandra* I presume, which is only to be met with in one locality in this district. It grows 4 and 5 feet high, and the leaves are not the same shape as the others I have collected here and at the Grampians.¹⁷

Daniel Sullivan, a schoolteacher from Moyston, was another of Mueller’s plant collectors, and a lifelong enthusiast for the ranges. After a trip to the Australian Alps in 1884, Sullivan told Mueller that his ‘remarks that I would see much that was new to me were correct, but not to the extent I expected. We travelled over a great extent of country the vegetation of which was certainly luxuriant’, but, nevertheless, ‘I find no mountains in my travels equal to the Grampians for the number and variety of its plants.’¹⁸ Sullivan published his *Complete Census of the Flora of the Grampians and Pyrenees* in 1890, which included 35 plants he said were new to Western science; Mueller had a hand in helping Sullivan to identify the plants he had collected in the ranges.¹⁹ Another schoolteacher, Marmaduke Fisher from Dunkeld, collected for Mueller from the late 1850s.²⁰

Despite an active career, Mueller maintained a fascination with the ranges decades after his first visit. He would write to the *Gardener’s Chronicle* in 1886 of the rosy bush-pea (*Pultenaea rosea*), describing it as ‘one of the most local of all plants in existence, being absolutely restricted to the summit of Mount William, in the Australian Grampians, at about 5000 feet’, and suggested it might be grown elsewhere:

If plants strong enough for experiment are available, they might be tried in mild places of England as outdoor plants, inasmuch as this *Pultenaea* has to endure in its native haunts a sub-alpine clime, and is subjected to frosts of more or less severity through several months in the year. In places like Arran in Scotland, the Devonshire coast, and the Channel Islands, it ought to prove perfectly hardy.²¹

While Mueller was primarily interested in botanical specimens, he and his associates collected much else. In 1863, Mueller sent to Joseph

Decaisne at Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, Paris, a case of 'weapons of the Gipps Land Aborigines' and 'fossils from the Grampians'.²² If there is ambiguity about what is meant by fossils in this context, another piece of correspondence is quite clear. In 1868, Mueller had sent his friend Wilhelm Sonder a crate of Australian scientific specimens, which Sonder was to pass on to collections in Berlin, Vienna, Munich, and other locations. Sonder informed the director of the Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde in Stuttgart, Ferdinand Krauss, that he would receive some 'bird skins', a 'young crocodile from North Australia as well as a droll animal like a rat', which would give Krauss 'some enjoyment, and perhaps also the insects and other vermin in spirit'. At the end of his letter, Sonder told Krauss that Mueller had also sent the body parts of Indigenous Australians for display in the Stuttgart museum: 'The skulls of the Aborigines are from the Grampians,' said Sonder. 'Perhaps a wild man can be made artificially with the remaining bones.'²³ Where these remains were ultimately stored is unclear.

Throughout the later nineteenth century, the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria also became active and enthusiastic collectors of specimens, both plant and animal. By 1925, in addition to Wilhem's early account and Sullivan's 1890 *Complete Census of the Flora of the Grampians and Pyrenees*, work had been completed for *One of Nature's Wonderlands, the Victorian Grampians* by the senior botanist for the National Herbarium in Melbourne, James Audas. One of the chief contributions of this work was its investigation of the Mount Difficult region, where Audas identified a new species, the broad-leaf trymalium (*Trymalium ramosissimum*).²⁴ This early interest from botanists and plant collectors, including Mueller and his many assistants, led to nation-wide recognition of Gariwerd as a unique botanical reserve, a feature that would contribute to its eventual declaration as a national park in the 1980s.

Notes

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- 4 Mitchell, p. 175.
- 5 Ferdinand von Mueller, Letter to John Foster—22 August 1853, Melbourne, D53/8374, unit 203, VPRS 1189 inward registered correspondence, VA 856 Colonial Secretary's Office, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).
- 6 Ferdinand von Mueller, Letter to William Hooker—21 November 1853, Victoria Range, in William J. Hooker (ed.), *Hooker's Journal of Botany and Kew Garden Miscellany*, Volume 6, London, Reeve, Benham, and Reeve, 1849–1857, p. 156.
- 7 Ferdinand von Mueller, Letter to John Foster—23 November 1853, Mount Sturgeon, D53/12043, unit 203, VPRS 1189 inward registered correspondence, VA 856 Colonial Secretary's Office, PROV.
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- 10 Ferdinand von Mueller, Report on the Botanic Garden—25 August 1857, Department of Public Works, No. 4301, unit 3, p. 196, VPRS 963, PROV.
- 11 Christine Moje, 'Wilhelmi, Johann Friederich Carl (1829–1884)', *Encyclopedia of Australian Science*, 2014, at <http://www.eoas.info/biogs/P005437b.htm>.
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- 13 Ferdinand von Mueller, *Report of the Government Botanist—24 October 1858*, Melbourne, John Ferres, 1858, p. 6.
- 14 Ferdinand von Mueller, Letter to William Hooker—15 June 1858, Directors' Letters, Vol. LXXIV, Australia Letters 1851–8, letter no. 181, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.
- 15 Joan Gillison, 'Henrietta D'Alton and her Family', MS 000725, Box 207–15, 1981, Royal Historical Society of Victoria Manuscripts Collection.
- 16 St E. D'Alton, Letter [with specimen of *Trymalium daltonii*] to Ferdinand von Mueller—undated, MEL 56066, National Herbarium of Victoria, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne; Ferdinand von Mueller, *Fragmenta Phytographiae Australiae*, vol. 9, no. 78, 1875, p. 135.
- 17 St E. D'Alton, Letter to Ferdinand von Mueller—25 August 1894, RB MSS M56, Library, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.
- 18 Daniel Sullivan, Letter to Ferdinand von Mueller—16 January 1884, RB MSS M19, Library, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.
- 19 Daniel Sullivan, Letter to Ferdinand von Mueller—6 June 1883, MSS M19, Library, Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.
- 20 Calder, pp. 146–7.
- 21 Ferdinand von Mueller, Letter to the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 17 July 1886. Mueller noted too in this letter that: 'This is also the exclusive native locality of *Eucalyptus alpine*'.
- 22 Ferdinand von Mueller, Letter to Joseph Decaisne—25 April 1863, *Von Mueller Correspondence Project [VMCP]*, at <http://vmcp.conaltnuohy.com/xtf/view?docId=tei/1860-9/1863/63-04-25a.xml>.
- 23 Wilhelm Sonder, Letter to Ferdinand Krauss—28 July 1868, Hamburg, *VMCP*, at <http://vmcp.conaltnuohy.com/xtf/view?docId=tei/Mentions/Selected%20Mentions%20letters/M68-07-28-final.xml>.
- 24 J.W. Audas, *One of Nature's Wonderlands, the Victorian Grampians*, Melbourne, Ramsay Publishing, 1925.

The Impact of Religion on Eva West, Female Trailblazer in Local Government and Accounting

Jennifer Hammett

Abstract

This article examines the practical and positive role participation in mainstream Anglican religious programs played in the early development of one of the first women to qualify as an accountant and to find a career in local government administration in Victoria. It emphasises the part played by religion in the building of confidence and competence in girls and young women, especially in a rural and regional context, expanding their world view and reach beyond the small communities in which they were raised.

In the year that young Eva West was completing her elementary schooling and was confirmed at St James Anglican Church in the small Gippsland town of Traralgon, far across the ocean in London, Member of the House of Lords and Archbishop of Manchester, the Reverend Dr James Moorhouse, announced his retirement. It was 1903.

Eva went on with her education to do what no woman had done before her when in 1916 she sat and passed the final examination of the Incorporated Institute of Accountants, Victoria. Two and a half years earlier she had become only the third woman in Victoria to pass the Municipal Clerks Examination, qualifying her for an executive or senior position in local government in Victoria.

This article aims to place Eva West and her career in the context of her family and religious background and to expand upon the importance participation in church organisation played in the education and moral engagement of girls and their emergence as women into public life in early twentieth-century Victoria. This is a field a number of feminist historians have broached in examining the importance of philanthropic and temperance work in women's activism and the ways some small religions such as Christian Science and Theosophy moulded women's political views.¹ My aim here is to place Eva in the more mainstream

Anglican church and its activities to show how its evolving programs for girls and women provided practical and positive opportunities to build their confidence and competence and, in a rural and regional context, to expand their world and their reach beyond the small communities in which they lived. This article contributes to a larger work in which I am engaged exploring the emergence of women in local government administration and their general professional advancement.

The article begins by tracing the work of the Reverend Dr James Moorhouse during his time in Australia, and links him to the young man who became Eva's father, Walter West. It then goes on to explore how that connection influenced Eva's life and career.

The Reverend Dr James Moorhouse may well have set in place the foundations upon which Eva's success was achieved, at least in part. Moorhouse arrived in Melbourne on 7 January 1877 as the second Anglican bishop of Melbourne.² His diocese incorporated virtually the entire colony, and he embraced it broadly as he journeyed and lectured throughout Victoria. H.W. Nunn in his work, *Project Canterbury: A Short History of the Church of England in Victoria 1847–1947*, refers to the reverend doctor as 'the Sheffield Blade', a reference to Moorhouse's ties with the steel-producing community from which he hailed, and claims he 'had learnt the value of intellectual brotherhood with the working man, and convinced that they were by nature religious, it was to them that he devoted himself'.³

Bishop Moorhouse spoke all over the colony. He was regarded as a thought leader of his time, and his lectures were widely reported. On 11 July 1877, the *Age* reported on the Church of England Assembly, including a comprehensive coverage of the bishop's address and his passion for education, though in this case the focus was on young men:

Was it too much to appeal to the laity to give up some of their time and strength for the instruction of young men, and the formation of night schools? It was God's work, and if it were not done by their self-sacrifice, he was quite sure that the people and their church would suffer. The young men wanted to learn; they were curious about everything in heaven and earth, and what they had to do was to teach them in such a way as would be attractive to them. Let them first of all learn what they sought to know; not teach them in the dry method of the schools, but with perpetual reference to current events and current principles, and by-and-by they [the teachers] would first

win a deep affection towards themselves, and then by the blessing of God be enabled to transfer that affection to one more worthy than themselves to receive it.⁴

Victoria, upon separation from New South Wales in 1851, inherited the dual education system that had developed in the first colony. Education of children was initially the province of the churches. The state contributed with grants. In 1848 the National Board of Education was established to oversee a dual system of common and religious education with contributions from the state to each.

Victoria's *Act for the Better Maintenance and Establishment of Common Schools in Victoria 1862* (the Common Schools Act) established a Board of Education with five laymen appointed to oversee the system to which fee charging applied. Taking the lead on universal education, Victoria's *Education Act 1872* a decade later instituted the principle of free, secular and compulsory instruction overseen by a Department of Education.⁵ In doing so it lessened the influence of the churches.

Bishop Moorhouse continued to speak on education and religion, however, and to advocate bible instruction in the new state schools. On 4 December 1878 the *Argus* reported his public musings on religion and education at St Mary's Church in Hotham: 'Is there any connexion between national welfare and religious education? May we teach Christian morality without Christian religion? Is it better to have education without religion, or to strive to make religion the basis and inspiration of education, even at the cost of some trouble and conflict?'⁶

Amongst the people listening to and reading the thoughts of this eminent religious leader was a young man living in Mortlake with his three brothers and widowed mother. Walter West was the second of David and Mary West's sons. David, who had arrived in the colony with the Hentys, died when Walter was six. Mary, Mortlake's first teacher, raised her sons on the land her husband had purchased in 1856.⁷

Walter was a vestryman with St James Church in Mortlake at the time the bishop was making his pronouncements in 1878. Did he attend any of the Moorhouse lectures in the Western District in 1882? The answer is unknown, though it is most likely. What we do know and can be sure of is that Walter did know of the bishop's visits to regional areas and did see and hear Moorhouse in Hawthorn in 1883. The reason we know is because the Traralgon Historical Society holds in trust a

remarkable archive of personal and professional papers of Walter West and his daughter Eva.⁸

As a young blacksmith, Walter moved to Melbourne in 1883, from where he regularly corresponded with his mother on life in the city, the trials and tribulations of his brother Henry, and the concerns and aspirations of a young man on the threshold of life. Living in Malvern in July 1883, Walter wrote to his mother of his walk to Hawthorn to hear the bishop: 'A most tremendous crowd of people in the church. It is just the same here as when he preaches in the country—the churches are never big enough to hold the crowd that comes.'⁹ Walter had walked several miles to attend. His comments indicate the power of the bishop's oratory.

The following year Walter moved to Traralgon where he lived for the next fifty years in service to the church. Throughout Gippsland and beyond, his counsel as a layman in the church was sought and respected, as was his role in the community where he rose to become shire president, shire secretary and a member of the state's Legislative Assembly (1922–27).

Bishop Moorhouse left Australia in 1887 to take up the See of Manchester. He is remembered as having enlivened the Anglican Church in Victoria and for initiating and/or supporting a number of progressive developments. While there is some difference of opinion about his attitudes to advances for women in public life, for example encouraging the enrolment of women at the University of Melbourne, it is nevertheless the case that the establishment of what would become Janet Clarke Hall within Trinity College took place under his watch. He also strongly supported the establishment of an Anglican girls secondary school for his middle-class constituency and championed active participation in the church by young working-class women through his support of the Girls' Friendly Society, established in Victoria in 1881.¹⁰ The *Argus* on 29 November 1883 reports his comments as chair of the GFS annual meeting:

The Chairman, in opening the proceedings, congratulated the members of the society and those who took part in its foundation in 1881, upon the success which had attended their good work in Victoria. That success, although it might be termed moderate, was perhaps as great as could have been expected, he thought he would be well within the truth if he said there were 200 parochial districts

in the colony, and that as yet there were only 23 in which the work of the society was carried on.

He considered there ought to be a branch organisation of the society in every one of them, and hoped the time was not far distant when such would be the case. The members of the society should not rest satisfied with the progress that had been made up to the present time ¹¹

Moorhouse, as leader of the church, was laying the foundations for the future development of young women as well as young men through religious organisation. He further encouraged the engagement of both boys and girls through the foundation of the Sunday School Association and the expansion of Anglican Saturday and Sunday Schools not only in Melbourne but throughout the state. Indeed, as Nunn writes, Moorhouse was ‘well known for his pastoral ... tours over the whole of his vast diocese. These took two and three months of each year ... Gippsland clergy felt his annual visitations to be “the light of the year”’. Out of these visits emerged ‘a system of rural deaneries’ and ‘the creation of a body of rural deans through whom the Bishop could administer to the outlying districts and keep his finger on their pulse’.¹²

The tributaries of influence that flow into the rivers of our lives often go unrecognised; nevertheless they are real. Their effects may lie unexpressed until many years later, and thus a life history may be necessary to uncover connecting links that reveal their impact. So, it is with the lives of Walter West and his daughter Eva.

The treasure of the Wests’ archives reveals many things, amongst them evidence of Bishop Moorhouse’s legacies to the colony, and later state, of Victoria. Walter West became a member of the Board of Trinity College, and his daughter Eva, although she did not attend Melbourne University as a student, sat her exams at the university. Both were amongst the invited guests attending functions of support for Janet Clarke Hall. Eva became a champion of young women through her work in the church, the Girl Guides and the board of St Anne’s Girls’ Grammar School (as Sale Church of England Girls’ Grammar School was renamed in 1934).



This professional portrait of Eva West was taken in the 1940s during her term as secretary of Traralgon Shire (Courtesy Traralgon & District Historical Society)

How exactly did religion contribute to the professional and personal development of Eva West, accountant, auditor, businesswoman, Guide captain, shire secretary, Member of the Order of the British Empire, and highly respected community leader? The archive tells part of the story; the local papers fill in the gaps. .

By the end of 1884 Walter West had a well-established business as a blacksmith, wheelwright and coach builder and was embedded in the community of St James Church of England in Traralgon. There his family would experience fellowship, religious education, spiritual and personal growth, and love and comfort for the next 85 years. Walter started out as the auditor of St James in 1884, and his brother Henry was secretary. The following year Walter took over the role of secretary and held the position for the next 50 years.

If that had been his only contribution to the church it would have been a significant one, but it can be argued that this was actually the least of his contributions. Walter West was a member of the Archdeaconry Committee to establish the Diocese of Gippsland, and was also a lay representative on the committee to appoint the first bishop of Gippsland. This occurred in 1901. Much more was to follow.

Not long after his arrival in Traralgon Walter married Susan Barrett. Their first child Lillian died at just seven weeks; Eva was their second daughter born in September 1888. Her birth was followed by that of their only son, William, who passed away at just a few days old. Several years later her sisters, Florence, known as Ethel, and Vera were born. Though Eva's birth occurred just after Moorhouse had left Victoria, his legacy was important to helping shape the trajectory of her life.

The West family was socially well connected, through business, Walter's position as a councillor and, most particularly, through their church. Susie West engaged in many of the social activities typical of church ladies, winning prizes at the flower shows as well as contributing to and manning stalls at the church bazaars. The family ethos was one of service to God through service to the church and community. Family culture is a powerful influence on the lives of children and teenagers; indeed it is arguable that in the days long before radio, television, computers and social media, and also long before thousands of young men were killed in a war fought for the 'mother country', it was in many families a binding influence.

From a young age Eva participated and competed in church activities. At four she was winning prizes at the church picnic races, at ten she was winning encores at the church's children's night for her cartwheels performed in time with the music played by the Reverend Poynder, and she was winning Sunday School prizes. Eva's early life is gleaned from the pages of the local newspaper the *Traralgon Record*, which faithfully reported on church activities and other local events in the period 1888 to 1903. Eva's success through the church's activities identified her as a valued member of the community at an early age. Her name regularly appeared in the local papers, and by the time she was fourteen she had an identity, one that continued and expanded in the local community for the next 66 years.

In 1903, the year she turned fifteen, Eva's confirmation was reported in the *Traralgon Record* of 27 November, along with that of eight other young locals. Conducted by the first bishop of Gippsland, the Right Reverend Arthur Pain, the ceremony included a sermon on the young people's relationship with God, concluding:

In their everyday life they would find many opportunities of doing something for God, and if they did so He would bless and strengthen their souls and give them power to go on. In referring to church work they should not say they do so-and-so, but that we do it. In conclusion he trusted they would set the Lord always before them and He would help and defend them, while giving them strength and power to fulfil their sacred promise to remain God's forever.¹³

Service to God was to be aspired to. It was a message Eva knew well. What it actually meant though was a subject of study for her over many years, and her knowledge and understanding of that relationship was tested through examinations many times over.

In 1904, 1905 and 1907, Eva sat the Diocese of Gippsland's Scholars Examination.¹⁴ Her religious studies complemented the skills and confidence developed through her formal schooling. In each division she passed with first class honours, competing against males and females in her age group. It is notable that she did not compete in exams in 1906; both her parents were very ill in that year and Eva was preoccupied with managing on the home front.

By 1907 Eva was approaching early adulthood and her father had taken on the role of shire secretary for Traralgon Shire. The

following year her mother died. This tragic event led to a change in circumstances for the family, and it also contributed to the broadening of Eva's experience within the church. Walter West's influence within the governance of the church in Gippsland continued to grow, and his reputation as a highly respected laymen contributing to the broader governance of the church expanded beyond Gippsland, ensuring his invitation to significant church events. Eva sometimes accompanied her father on these occasions, thus becoming exposed to the world of male dominance in church affairs but also to intellectual and spiritual discussion of a higher order.¹⁵

In 1877 the *Argus* reported that Bishop Moorhouse had called for the clergy 'to get more and better teachers, and that they of the clergy ought to endeavour to teach those who were to be teachers of others.'¹⁶ Forty-four years later the Gippsland Diocese was doing just that, and one of its student teachers was Eva West. Once again Eva studied for and sat a series of exams over three years commencing in 1911 and continuing throughout 1912 and 1913. She achieved second class honours in the Diocese of Gippsland Sunday School Board Sunday School Teacher's Voluntary Examination Part 1, and first class honours in the Part 2 & 3 Examinations.¹⁷

The results indicate that Eva had developed and mastered the habit of study. There is no doubt that the education she received in both the state and private spheres contributed to this. And so too did the church. Whether consciously or not, Eva strove to compete strongly in a domain dominated by men, and, over the course of six years and six examinations, she achieved one second class honour and five first class honours. Clearly, she had developed the confidence necessary to strive for and master a systematic understanding of knowledge.

Early in 1914, Eva West achieved her first professional qualification when she sat for and passed the Municipal Clerks Examination; she was the only woman to do so that year and was only the third woman in the state to achieve the qualification. While the knowledge Eva was tested on differed from that which she had successfully mastered over the previous three years, it is plausible to argue that the habit of study and the experience of sitting exams in a room dominated by men benefited her preparation and performance.

By 1915 she had studied consecutively for four years. In that year, along with Irene Bourne, she passed the intermediate examinations of

the Incorporated Institute of Accountants, Victoria. The examinations were sat in two lots in May and October. They were the only women amongst 271 participants. Irene Bourne achieved the fourth-highest marks, while Eva, with an average score of 85.4 per cent, obtained the sixth-highest result.¹⁸ The following year both women passed the final exams of the Incorporated Institute of Accountants, Victoria. Like the church, the field of accounting was the domain of men; women were a recent addition, one that was not necessarily welcomed by all. It took two years and ministerial approval for Eva and Irene to obtain a licence to audit in 1918 under the *Company's Act 1915*. Eva had meanwhile been appointed assistant shire secretary of the Shire of Jeetho-Poowong in Korumburra in 1915 and subsequently worked as an accountant for the Country Roads Board and the YMCA in Melbourne, as well as for Holmes & McCrindle, public accountants. She returned to Traralgon in 1921 where she opened her own accountancy business before commencing work at Traralgon Shire Council in 1922.¹⁹

Back in her home town in the 1920s, Eva took on a number of community leadership roles in accordance with the sense of community responsibility inculcated by her education and church work. In 1922, she achieved the Church of England Australia's Commission to Teach, and in the following year she became the first woman in Victoria to be licensed as a municipal auditor. In 1924 the Reverend Blundell approached her to establish and captain the 1st Traralgon Girl Guides, a role she took on with great enthusiasm. Like many women of her time Eva never married and had no children of her own. Her work through teaching at Sunday School, Guiding, and as a member of the Board of St Anne's Girls' Grammar School provided her with genuine opportunities to influence the lives of many young women.

In 1934 Eva sat one final set of church examinations, through which she obtained an associate diploma of theology from the Australian College of Theology in Sydney. At this stage the college is unable to advise how many women had achieved this qualification before Eva; this will be a subject of further investigation.²⁰

Eva West was a significant trailblazer in the history of professional women in Australia, notably in accountancy and local government, and it may well be that she was also a trailblazer for women in the history of the Anglican Church in Australia. Only time and further research will tell. Nevertheless, it is clear from the information presented here that

her religious education and commitment were key factors in developing the self-discipline and confidence underpinning her successful career as well as the sense of responsibility and duty sustaining her community activism.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Shurlee Swain, 'Religion, Philanthropy and Social Reform: Meanings, Motivations and Interactions in the Lives of Nineteenth-century Australian Women,' *Women-Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, no. 23, October 1998, pp. 29–35; Patricia Grimshaw, 'Gender, Citizenship and Race in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Australia 1890s to the 1930s,' *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 13, no. 28, October 1988, pp. 199–214, and 'In Pursuit of True Anglican Womanhood in Victoria, 1880–1914,' *Women's History Review*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1993, pp. 331–347; Judith Smart, 'A Mission to the Home: The Housewives' Association, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Protestant Christianity, 1920–40,' *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 13, no. 28, October 1998, pp. 215–34; Anne P. O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 2005; Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1979–1939*, Sydney, NSW University Press, 1986, and "'Testimonies from the Field': The Coming of Christian Science to Australia, c.1890–1910,' *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 22, no. 3, October 1998, pp. 304–19.
- 2 H.W. Nunn, *A Short History of the Church of England in Victoria 1847–1947*, Melbourne, Editorial Committee of the Centenary Celebrations, Melbourne Diocese, 1947, at <http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/hwnunn-victoria1947>.
- 3 Nunn, chap. 5.
- 4 'Church of England Assembly,' *Age*, 11 July 1877, p. 4.
- 5 'Victoria's Education System,' *Age*, 6 September 1934, p. 28.
- 6 'The Bishop of Melbourne on Religious Education,' *Argus*, 4 December 1878, p. 6.
- 7 Descendants of David Venson West (1811 – 26/1/1867) & Mary West (née Blewett) (24/8/1823 – 1/11/1897), Trish Symonds, in the West Papers, Author's Collection.
- 8 The Traralgon & District Historical Society (T&DHS) was entrusted with significant archival material from the estate of Eva West in 1969. The material dates back to Walter's school certificate in 1876 and contains personal and professional papers and letters, photographs and certificates that reveal the history and connections of the family.
- 9 Letter to Mary West, from Walter West, Malvern, 14 July 1883, Walter West Collection, T&DHS.
- 10 See Nunn, chap. 5, and C.R. Badger, 'Moorhouse, James (1826–1915),' *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/moorhouse-james-4238/text6841>, published first in hardcopy 1974.
- 11 'Girls' Friendly Society,' *Argus*, 29 November 1883, p. 11.
- 12 Nunn, chap. 5.
- 13 'Confirmation,' *Traralgon Record*, 27 November 1903, p. 2.
- 14 The certificates for all three examinations are held in the Eva West Collection, T&DHS.
- 15 Postcards and invitations in the Eva West Collection reveal Eva attended events on a number of occasions with her father, Walter, following her mother's death, until Walter's death in 1934.

- 16 Church of England Assembly, *Age*, 11 July 1877, p. 4.
- 17 The certificates for all three examinations are also held in the Eva West Collection, T&DHS.
- 18 The official examination results with handwritten notes regarding Eva's & Irene Bourne's placing and the number who sat the examination are contained in the Eva West Collection, T&DHS.
- 19 Jenny Hammett, 'West, Evelyn Maude (1888–1969)', *ADB*, at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/west-evelyn-maude-11999/text21517>, published first in hardcopy 2002.
- 20 Author's discussions with Australian College of Theology's Geoff Treloar, director of teaching and learning.

Conscientious Objectors: The Vietnam War Years

Geoffrey A. Sandy

Abstract

The Vietnam War and conscription for it were as divisive for Australian society as were the World War I conscription plebiscites. Much has been written about the Vietnam War and the military but little about conscientious objectors and conscientious non-compliers, and the many persons and organisations that worked for peace. This article aims to make a modest contribution to correcting the resulting imbalance. It summarises the major characteristics of a group of known conscientious objectors and relates the personal stories of a small but representative set of this group, including the author, in order to enrich the analysis.

Background

On 24 November 1964 the Menzies Liberal government successfully passed amendments to the *National Service Act* (NSA) providing for selective conscription of young men turning twenty from 1965 onwards.¹ The author was one of those in the first cohort as he was born on 13 April 1945.² The government claimed that the army required more personnel as insufficient numbers of young men were volunteering.³ Critics of the amended NSA, which included the opposition Labor Party, believed that the government was being disingenuous because the failure to attract numbers was not a problem. They argued that the real reason was to curry favour with the United States. Specifically, the intention was to send conscripts to fight in overseas conflicts and in particular the Vietnam War. This the government denied.⁴ It amended the NSA to allow conscripts to be integrated into the regular army.⁵ On 8 March 1966 the Australian government announced it would send conscripts to fight in Vietnam, euphemistically referred to as 'special service overseas'.⁶ The justification given was the need to combat the alleged menace of communism to Australia stemming from Vietnam, a rationale linked to what was known as the 'Domino Theory'. In simple terms it argued that if Vietnam fell to the communists other Southeast Asian countries would also fall, all the way to Indonesia, Australia's closest neighbour.⁷

However, although South Vietnam was overrun by the communist north in 1975, only Laos and Cambodia have since adopted communism.

The National Service Act 1964

Since 1903 the Australian government has provided for a number of exemptions to compulsory military service. The *Defence Act 1903* permitted a man⁸ eligible for military service to apply for exemption on the grounds of conscientious belief where he could demonstrate that the doctrine of his religion did not permit the bearing of arms or undertaking military service.⁹ In 1939 the *Defence Act* provided for conscientious beliefs that were religious or non-religious, and where religious beliefs were claimed they did not have to be doctrinally connected to a religious institution.¹⁰ The *NSA 1964* incorporated this broader definition of conscientious beliefs as had the previous *NSA 1951*. Over time the legal determinations of the courts helped clarify what constituted 'genuine' conscientious belief. The belief must be deep-seated and compelling. If it had been long held this strengthened an applicant's chance of exemption as a conscientious objector. The government only permitted pacifist opposition to all wars as justifying exemption from military duties.¹¹ An eligible man who had a conscientious objection to a particular war, for example the Vietnam War, was not regarded as a conscientious objector under the *NSA*.¹² Australia's participation in this war was, in any case, only officially acknowledged in 1973.¹³ Similarly, an eligible man who believed conscription itself was immoral was not regarded as a conscientious objector. Because the legal definition of conscientious objection was narrow, many men who held such views chose a response of non-compliance with the *NSA*. Many others, including pacifists, also chose to be conscientious non-compliers. A man who applied under the *NSA* to be registered as a conscientious objector complied with the Act. Non-compliers by definition did not comply and worked for the repeal of the *NSA*. Today both groups would probably qualify as conscientious objectors.¹⁴

As previously mentioned, all males turning twenty in 1965 between 1 January and 30 June were required to register for National Service (military). All birthdates for that period were represented by a marble and placed in a barrel similar to those commonly used in lotteries. Pomp and ceremony frequently accompanied the drawing of a specified number of marbles. The number selected was dependent on how many conscripts were required by the army to fulfil its military commitments

in Australia and overseas and on calculations by the Department of Labour and National Service as to how many registrants were expected to apply for exemption or were already exempt from service, or were entitled to indefinite or temporary deferment. Conscription was thus selective, not universal. The author's birthdate was drawn in the first lottery on 10 March 1965.¹⁵ He was as shocked and confused as would be any nineteen year old. The selective conscription process was repeated every six months until 9 December 1972 when the newly elected Whitlam Labor government suspended operation of the NSA.¹⁶ At the end of May 1973 the Commonwealth parliament formally repealed the scheme in passing the *National Service Termination Act*.¹⁷

Following selection of his birthdate, the young man concerned was required to attend a medical examination and an X-ray to determine his fitness for military service. Approximately 50 per cent of individuals balloted in failed the medical.¹⁸ Those who passed the medical were next informed by the Commonwealth when they would be called up for military duties and what rank they would hold. The author was to be called up on 26 January 1969 and was to have the rank of private.¹⁹ There was provision for those called up to apply for deferment. Completion of university and other types of educational qualifications were common grounds for deferment. The author successfully applied for deferment to complete tertiary studies at the University of Melbourne.²⁰ Continued permission to defer each year was conditional on academic success. If a balloted-in man who was not yet called up wished to travel overseas, he was required to obtain permission from the government. The author applied for and was given permission to travel to India on 20 July 1966 and New Zealand on 22 November 1967.²¹ Figure 1 shows the author aged 22 in 1967.

Once called up, a man could apply to be registered as a conscientious objector to military duties.²² The application could be for exemption from combatant duties only or for a full exemption from combatant and non-combatant duties.²³ On receipt of the application the Department of Labour and National Service arranged and advised a date for a court hearing. The author waited until he had completed his university studies to make an application for full exemption on 30 November 1968.²⁴

An applicant had to demonstrate in court that he was a conscientious objector as defined by the NSA. The onus of proof resided



Figure 1: Geoffrey A. Sandy, Christian Pacifist (Courtesy Geoffrey A. Sandy)

with the applicant. The court had to decide whether to grant a full or partial exemption, or whether to dismiss the application altogether. Unsuccessful applicants had a right of appeal to a higher court(s). The exact legal arrangements differed amongst the states and territories. It was alleged that applicants in some states and territories had a better chance of success than in others.²⁵ Applicants to Victorian courts, for example, were seen as having an advantage. An applicant was entitled to be represented by legal counsel and persons who could support the application. The state was also represented by legal counsel. The lower court was presided over by a magistrate. Under the current Defence Act special purpose tribunals have been established Australia-wide.²⁶

The Conscientious Objectors

It has proved difficult to obtain the records of those men balloted in from 1964 until 1972 who were registered as conscientious objectors. They are held at the National Archives of Australia (NAA). Whilst they are accessible this comes at a price and is a very costly exercise for any researcher; as a result detailed investigation of the holdings has not yet been undertaken. The author's file has been opened by him and is available to anyone accessing the NAA.²⁷ The court proceedings for

hearing conscientious objection applications were destroyed about ten to fifteen years after the cases were completed so these cannot be referred to. Fortunately many of the court proceedings were reported in the newspaper of the Federal Pacifist Council of Australia, *The Peacemaker*.²⁸ Identification of the conscientious objectors who made application for exemption and, most importantly, the grounds on which they based their conscientious beliefs is available in summary form from the relevant issue or issues. This important data can be supplemented by information from other sources including parliamentary documents, media reports and interviews.

There are a number of estimates as to how many men were registered as conscientious objectors from 1964 to 1972. It is likely that they numbered between 850 and 950.²⁹ The author continues to build a database of known conscientious objectors who now number 250. This sample is large enough to enable description of the characteristics of this group. In the following sections of this article, the personal stories of a representative set of conscientious objectors are told.

The demographic comprises young men in their early twenties. This is to be expected, as selective conscription was directed at nineteen-year-old males. A few were older, as some men had been regular army volunteers for a number of years. Not surprisingly the highest numbers were from the most populous states—New South Wales and Victoria. As might be expected, more extensive information about rights was available in the two largest cities—Sydney and Melbourne—and they also offered better communication and organisation for the practice of dissent.

Conscientious beliefs were predominantly grounded in religion. The Christian religion was the most commonly cited. Adherents of the Church of England and other Protestant churches constituted the most numerous group seeking exemption. Adherents of the historic peace churches, which included the Quakers, Brethren and Jehovah's Witnesses, were also well represented. While Jehovah's Witnesses are not strictly a peace church they maintain steadfast opposition to military service and neutrality during conflicts and wars.

Most Christian conscientious objectors argued that their application was based on the immorality of killing another human being. A major reference was the injunction of the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' and the claim that the life and teaching of Jesus

was non-violent. There are, however, instances of applicants who based their conscientious beliefs on other religions, including Buddhism and Judaism.

Humanism was the next important ground for conscientious beliefs. It shared a similar rationale to that based on religious conviction. Killing of human beings was immoral and following the path of non-violence was commended, especially in a war situation.

There were other grounds on which conscientious beliefs were based. These include the immorality of a particular conflict, for example the Vietnam War, and of conscription itself. As previously mentioned the NSA did not permit such grounds to be used in court as a reason for obtaining exemption from national service. Most conscientious objectors and non-compliers shared similar beliefs about war, the Vietnam War and conscription. A few conscientious non-compliers held an anarchic commitment of opposition to government per se and all its laws. Some based their conscientious non-compliance on the virtue of internationalism or opposition to capitalism. A few were communist.

During the five years from 1965 to 1970, of those who applied for exemption from military service on the grounds of conscientious objection 66 per cent were granted a full exemption, 17 per cent were granted exemption from combatant military duties and 17 per cent were refused any exemption.³⁰ As mentioned previously, sometimes success was influenced by the state or territory in which the court hearing took place.

The historical record reveals a generally unsympathetic reception accorded to conscientious objectors and conscientious non-compliers. The 1960s were no exception. Epithets with a long history were revived, although mainly directed at conscientious non-compliers. Harry Turner, the Liberal MHR for the NSW seat of Bradfield, used terms that included 'cowards', 'shirkers' and 'spivs'.³¹ Others from the conservative side of politics invoked stereotypes of long-haired bodgies who needed a wash, together with the cliché that military discipline would make men of them.³² Such epithets charged these young men of conscience with contributing little to society, rather than seeing them as men of principle with the courage to stand up against majority opinion. Some were jailed and some were badly treated whilst incarcerated.³³ Analysis of the data reveals that most of them were gainfully employed or were undertaking education and training. As a result of their adherence to

their convictions, some lost their jobs and had their chosen careers ruined. There are many examples demonstrating that these men gave great service to society and that they continue to do so today.³⁴

Another charge, often made by those on the conservative side of politics, was that these objectors and non-compliers were under the influence of communists. During the Vietnam War the fear of communism was strong in the community. Yet communists were, and always had been, a tiny minority in Australia. While some objectors and non-compliers held communist beliefs, the vast majority were guided by strong religious and/or humanist principles underpinned by a firm belief in democracy, personal rights and liberty, and community service.

Personal Stories: Historic Peace Churches

Some Christian churches have adopted as part of their doctrinal teaching a strong pacifist stance or steadfast neutrality to war. Sometimes they are referred to as 'Historic Peace Churches.' These include The Society of Friends (Quakers), Exclusive Brethren, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists. During the Vietnam War years members of these churches who were called up made application for full or partial exemption as conscientious objectors

Noel Edgar Collett was a member of the Exclusive Brethren and was an early conscientious objector. He was a farm labourer from Nambour in Queensland. Noel would have expected to have his application for exemption from combatant duties granted as he was from a recognised sect that disavowed the taking of human life in war. But his application was dismissed by Magistrate Loane in the lower court during August 1965 and also on appeal at the District Court in Brisbane during November 1965. In response Collett made a second application to be registered as a conscientious objector, which was set down for hearing on 4 April 1966 at the Court of Petty Sessions at Nambour. Unfortunately for Collett it was heard by the same Magistrate Loane, who ruled he had no jurisdiction to hear the second application.³⁵ Noel then appealed to the High Court of Queensland during August 1966. In a split decision (three to two) it was ruled that the lower court could hear the second application for exemption from combatant duties. During the subsequent hearing Noel stressed that although his religious beliefs prevented him from killing others his conscience would allow him to undertake a non-combatant role in the military. The magistrate agreed and granted his application.³⁶

Personal Stories: Religious Pacifism

Bruce Reginald French was a member of the Baptist Church and from Lower Barrington, Tasmania. He was a schoolteacher by profession. He originally applied for full exemption from military duties, but on the day of the court hearing he changed his plea to exemption from combatant duties only. The hearing was held at the Devonport Court on 7 February 1970. Magistrate Crisp advised Bruce to consult with a solicitor on the matter of change of plea. French indicated that he wished to continue with the partial exemption. He stated that his objection to combatant duties was based on his religious beliefs. Part of the court exchange between Crisp and French was reported.

French: My Christian beliefs convince me that life is sacred and therefore the only acceptable form of defence is in terms of constructive aid and mutual understanding. Crisp: How do you meet aggression?

French: I am prepared to prevent aggression starting. Crisp: If our shores were attacked what would you do? French: Diplomacy would be a more effective means of defence. I would not kill. I can say that categorically. Crisp: Would it outrage your conscience if asked to kill?

French: Yes I have felt this way for at least 6 years.³⁷

Magistrate Crisp then asked Bruce French on what authority he based his antipathy to war. He replied that his beliefs had been 'crystallised' in study groups at Hobart Baptist Church and at university in Hobart and that his beliefs were based on the Old and New Testaments. Crisp responded by granting exemption from combatant duties stating: 'I am satisfied it would be outrageous in his present state of mind for him to be asked to kill.'³⁸

In my own case I, Geoffrey Alan Sandy (hereafter referred to in the third person as 'he', 'Geoffrey Sandy' or 'Geoff'), applied for full exemption on the ground of Christian pacifism. Like many other conscientious objectors and conscientious non-compliers Geoff was opposed to the Vietnam War and viewed Australia's participation in it as immoral. He was also opposed to conscription as a gross violation of individual liberty.

Geoff Sandy was declared medically fit for military service after a physical examination and X-ray undertaken on 16 October 1968. On 21 November 1968 the government notified him he would be called up for military service on 29 January 1969. As he had successfully completed

his university studies by then, he made formal application for full exemption from military service as a conscientious objector. His case was heard at the Court of Petty Sessions, now the Magistrates Court, in Melbourne on 23 January 1969.³⁹ In his application Sandy explained (in part) why he sought full exemption:

War under any conceivable circumstances is always the greatest of two evils for the Christian. This denies the possibility of a “just war”. Thus taking part in war (combatant) or support of war (non combatant) is immoral for the Christian. It is wrong because Christ expressly taught the principle of non violence, although the Christian must resist by non violent means that which is evil. However war or support of war is an illegitimate activity of the Christian.⁴⁰

Geoff Sandy’s father and his former parish priest were supporters at his court hearing. Alexander Sandy served in the RAAF during World War II. He gave testimony that his son’s pacifism was long standing even though he disagreed with his views. The Reverend Stephen Cherry gave testimony that Geoff was an active member of the Anglican church but that he, Cherry, disagreed with the view that Christianity was strongly pacifist. Geoff cannot remember the specific questions he was asked, but they were many as it proved to be a long hearing. During the hearing it became apparent that the magistrate was not only hostile to conscientious objection but also to Christianity. He was wearing a RSL badge which was not reassuring to the applicant. It should have come as no surprise that he dismissed the application. In Sandy’s memory,

the room became a blur and whirled around inside my head and I felt physically sick. I was thinking only of what was to follow. There was great fear but a strong desire to summon the courage to do what my conscience demanded. I was prepared to go to jail. I would not comply.

Such was Sandy’s emotional state that he was unaware that immediately after the magistrate ruled against him both his legal counsel and the state’s legal counsel remonstrated with the magistrate that he was a genuine conscientious objector under the NSA. The state’s legal counsel stressed the importance of the testimony of Geoff’s father that his son’s pacifist views were long standing. Geoff was awakened from his stupor with the news that the magistrate had changed his mind and that he was now registered as a conscientious objector. The applicant, his

legal counsel Alf O'Connor, and his father Alexander went to a nearby pub to celebrate. It was an anti-climax but Geoff could now resume his life and career as an educator. Fifty years on his views on these matters have not substantially changed. He remains a pacifist with respect to war.

Personal Stories: Humanist Pacifism

The NSA also allowed for non-religious pacifism, which is here referred to as humanist. Robert Bender is an example of a man whose conscientious belief was mainly grounded in humanism but was also influenced by Judaism.⁴¹ Bender was from the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton, Victoria. On 14 March 1968 his application for full exemption was dismissed by Magistrate Foley.⁴² Robert lodged an appeal and it was heard by Judge Hewitt of the County Court Melbourne. At the hearing Bender stated that:

He had a moral objection to all war on the grounds that it involved the deliberate and negligent taking of human life or inflicting of suffering. But killing was justified in some circumstances ... for example in self-defence. He contrasted this situation as spontaneous compared with premeditation of war. The judge commented at the court hearing that it was unusual for an applicant to argue on non-religious grounds.⁴³

Robert Bender further stated that he regarded non-combatant duties in the same light as the law regards an accomplice in a crime. All parts of the army are geared to the aim of the whole. He also said that he would resign his job at Kodak if it started work with the army. He also mentioned he had belonged to cadets at school and had not thought about conscientious objection before the NSA was introduced. Since then, however, he had read 100 books for and against war.⁴⁴ The judge commented that:

I'm usually suspicious of people who affirm. But I accept the sincerity of Bender's application and of his evidence ... The judge's views in these cases are not relevant. However, stupid the judge thinks the appellant's views, he is bound to uphold them if believes them to be sincerely held. I think this appellant does come within the Act⁴⁵

Figure 2 is an image of humanist pacifist Robert Bender, aged nineteen in 1967.



Figure 2: Robert Bender, humanist pacifist (Courtesy Robert Bender)

Personal Stories: Serving Soldiers

There were examples of serving conscript and regular soldiers in the Royal Australian Regiment who developed or confirmed their conscientious beliefs whilst in the army and then applied to be registered as conscientious objectors.

The story of Desmond Phillipson is one of perseverance, and probably one of many examples of how the government of the day attempted to mitigate bad publicity surrounding conscription and the Vietnam War. Phillipson was from Bedford Park in Western Australia. He was eventually declared unfit by the army after it ordered he take a medical examination. He had been called up for military service in February 1968. About six weeks later he made application to be registered as a conscientious objector. The army's response was swift. Desmond Phillipson was placed in detention at Holsworthy for several weeks under court martial. The reason given was his refusal to obey army orders. Phillipson stated that whilst in detention he was subjected at times to brutal and inhumane treatment.⁴⁶

The army then granted him leave without pay to prepare for his court hearing. His application for full exemption from military duties was dismissed by Magistrate Bateman on 4 November 1968.⁴⁷ Phillipson appealed to the Supreme Court of Western Australia. His case was heard by Acting Judge Staples, who dismissed the appeal.⁴⁸ At his appeal Desmond explained that his objection to killing was in fact developed during army training. Phillipson was employed as a clerk in the army but was still required to undertake military training. In his explanation he described in graphic detail one training incident that had a strong impact on his aversion to killing:

I think the most forceful of these incidents was the demonstration of the power of the rifle commonly used by the army. On this occasion a dummy was fired upon and when struck, a barrel of red ink and gelatine fell from the dummy's middle and slit its contents. A roar of laughter accompanied this demonstration and we were told that this would happen to the "yellow men" when their "guts" where hit ... A corporal jokingly remarked that the bullet "would blast the yellow man's spine right out".⁴⁹

Phillipson claimed that Judge Staples failed to take into account the process by which his conscientious beliefs had developed over the

six months between his application and appeal. He did acknowledge that his pacifism was a recent development. He then decided to make a second application for exemption to the lower court on 17 December 1968. He cited the high costs of an appeal to the High Court. However, prior to the hearing the army discharged him as medically unfit.⁵⁰

Personal Stories: Unsuccessful Applicants

Not all applicants for registration as conscientious objectors under the NSA were successful, despite the right of appeal. It is difficult to quantify the failure rate. What statistical information exists suggests a figure of about 17 per cent.⁵¹

John Francis Zarb was a postman from the Melbourne suburb of Pascoe Vale South in Victoria. He complied with the NSA and registered. He then applied for exemption from all military duties as a conscientious objector. Magistrate Elvish heard his application on 2 November 1967. The magistrate stated that he was satisfied that Zarb held sincere conscientious beliefs and was in fact a conscientious objector. But much to John's disappointment the magistrate dismissed his application. The magistrate explained that section 29A of the NSA did not permit exemption on the ground of conscientious objection to a particular conflict. Zarb had based his argument on his conscientious objection to the Vietnam War. In times past or today his application would probably have been successful but not in 1967. John Zarb's conscience now demanded that he follow a policy of non-compliance. He failed to obey a call-up notice, was convicted on 14 October 1968 and sentenced to the then-mandatory two years' imprisonment.⁵²

During the prosecution for failing to obey a call-up notice, Zarb repeated what he had stated at his original court hearing. He had a conscientious objection to aiding and abetting what he regarded as an unjust and immoral war—the Vietnam War. He indicated he was not a pacifist and that he was prepared to undertake military training. He further indicated that he was prepared to defend Australia against an unprovoked attack, including the use of lethal force. He would not attack another country.⁵³

His case attracted a great deal of interest from the media and parliament and was one of the first cases to come to the attention of the Australian public. It caused some disquiet and embarrassment to the government. John Zarb was adopted by Amnesty International as a Prisoner of Conscience.⁵⁴ Irene Zarb, John's mother, expressed her

thanks through *The Peacemaker* to all throughout Australia and internationally who were supporting him. She noted that his name had been added to the War Resisters International Prisoners of Honour Christmas List—the first Australian included since conscription in the 1950s. Irene also mentioned that John had elected to serve his imprisonment in Pentridge rather than country Victoria.⁵⁵ Presumably this was to be close to his parents, who were not well. He was released early from his sentence on 21 August 1969. The government portrayed this as an act of compassion, given his parents' poor health. A closer reading of the cabinet minutes suggest otherwise.⁵⁶ As knowledge of war atrocities grew the public came to understand the basis of Zarb's stand. Figure 3 shows the iconic image of Vietnamese children burnt by napalm in 1972, including the little girl Kim Phuc, who survived and is shown as an adult in 2010.



Figure 3: Kim Phuc—Vietnam War Girl (Courtesy Tommy Truong, PhotosForClass, Creative Commons)

Personal Stories: Objector to Non-complier to Objector

Some applicants for registration as a conscientious objector were unsuccessful and responded by non-compliance. With persistence they were ultimately successful.

The story of Bill White of Sydney is another that raised awareness amongst the general populace of the impact of the Vietnam War and conscription, and helped turn public opinion against both. William Phillip Orrick White (Bill) was a Sydney schoolteacher who lived at Gladesville. He registered for military service and then applied for full exemption as a conscientious objector. He was granted exemption from combatant duties only.⁵⁷ He appealed, and this was heard on 22 March 1966 by Judge Cameron-Smith. At the appeal hearing Bill White summarised his views as:

Man's chief purpose is to live—therefore the taking of human life is wrong and unjustifiable. I cannot with a clear conscience kill a person, or be part of any organisation that is able or willing to kill or make war. No matter how disconnected from actual killing that part may seem to be, for any individual part of such an organisation must be such as to increase the efficiency of the whole towards its end—that is to kill.⁵⁸

Despite White's clear statement the judge dismissed his appeal. Bill refused to accept the decision and continued his teaching. He was then banned from the classroom by the school principal. The government encouraged employers and others to 'dob in' any man liable for registration or non-compliance with a call-up notice. At one stage the government sought power to prosecute parents who knew their sons were non-complying.⁵⁹ Thankfully the worst powers of the bill were withdrawn. White was ordered to report to the army at Watsons Bay. He refused to comply and waited at home for any response by the authorities.

This case was already attracting attention within the wider Australian community. The NSW Teachers Federation worked to arrange re-employment in an inferior position, pending Bill's appeal against his dismissal from the classroom. The NSW Department of Education then 'sacked' him whilst his appeal was still pending. Events then took a dramatic turn. White was dragged by three burly policemen from his family home, the event being witnessed by the press, family, neighbours and supporters. A photograph of the arrest by a reporter of the Fairfax press has become iconic, and represents, in the opinion of some, the trapping of the government in a position of its own making through trying to defend the indefensible. Like the Zarb case in Melbourne, Bill White's experience helped turn the tide of opinion

against the government, the Vietnam War and conscription. His arrest and jailing received wide coverage by the media and in the parliament. It was bad publicity for the government.⁶⁰

White was jailed for three weeks during 1966 in Holsworthy Military Correctional Facility. Amnesty International was seriously considering declaring him a Prisoner of Conscience when he was given full exemption from military duties as a conscientious objector. Before his arrest he had made another application for full exemption. On 23 December 1966 Magistrate Ward ruled in his favour. White stated that his non-compliance had cost him \$2000 in lost pay and legal fees, not to mention the emotional cost. In the legal process he had gone the full circle. He was a NSA complier, then a non-complier and then a complier again. Figure 4 shows Bill White with his parents during July 1966.

Observations

During the Vietnam War years success for a conscript in being granted exemption from military duties was dependent on meeting the narrow definition of conscientious objection adopted by the NSA. The applicant had to be a pacifist and thus opposed to killing in war. Some applicants had developed their pacifism by their late teens and early twenties. Others had developed pacifist convictions more recently but were as genuine as those whose views were of longer standing. The chances of success in the courts were greater if a long-standing pacifism could be demonstrated. This could prove difficult in a cohort of such young men. Their commitment generally included opposition to conscription itself, especially to the unjust method of selection, often described as a death lottery. And their view that the Vietnam War was immoral confirmed their pacifist conscience. The conscientious objectors came from diverse backgrounds and were usually employed or undertaking educational studies. As such they were then and in later years able to meet their social contract. Long-haired 'bodge types' they were not. They were young men of peace who were principled and courageous. The epithets of 'shirkers' and 'cowards' directed at them were misplaced then, as they have always been. It is fitting that they and their personal stories be remembered and recorded as a legitimate part of Victorian and Australian history.



Figure 4: Bill White with his parents 1966 (Courtesy Tribune/SEARCH FOUNDATION and State Library of New South Wales)

Notes

- 1 *National Service Act 1964*, No. 126 of 1964, *An Act to Amend the National Service Act 1951–1957*. Assented to 24 November 1964.
- 2 The author has taken the liberty of embedding his personal story as a conscientious objector in the narrative.
- 3 'Prime Ministerial Statement on the Defence Review 1964', *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, House of Representatives, 10 November 1964.
- 4 Readers are directed to second reading of the National Service Bill, *CPD*, House of Representatives, 17 November 1964, and Senate, 17 November 1964. Similar arguments and counter-arguments are evident for the second reading of the National Service Bill 1968 (amendments to the 1964 National Service Act), *CPD*, House of Representatives, 16 May 1968, and Senate, 12 June 1968.
- 5 *National Service Act 1964*, No. 126 of 1964.
- 6 Sue Langford, 'Appendix: The National Service Scheme 1964–1972', at https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/viet_app, accessed 28 August 2019. The appendix is from Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965–1975: The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–1975*, Volume VI, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1997.
- 7 The Domino Theory is prevalent in the debates concerning the 1964 National Service Bill and the 1968 amendments. It is also present in 'Prime Ministerial Statement on Defence Review 1964'. See also speeches by Senators Denham Henty, Liberal (Tas.) and Elliot Lilloco, Liberal (Tas.), *CPD*, Senate, 5 June 1968.
- 8 Until recently recruitment and conscription applied to males only. This was the case during the Vietnam War years.
- 9 *Defence Act 1903*, s. 61.
- 10 *Defence Act (No 2) 1939*, s. 61.
- 11 The government on a number of occasions was urged to introduce an alternative civilian service scheme under the NSA. This was rejected. Refer to the debate *CPD*, House of Representatives, 16 and 17 May 1968. On 21 December 1969, cabinet again rejected a civilian alternative—see *The Peacemaker*, January/February 1969, p. 1.
- 12 The government on a number of occasions was urged to permit conscientious objection to a particular war as grounds for successful registration as a conscientious objector under the NSA. The proposals were rejected. See for instance Tom Hughes, Liberal (NSW), *CPD*, House of Representatives, 28 May 1968; and discussion of civilian alternatives in Langford.
- 13 Australian War Memorial, 'Vietnam War 1962–1975', <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/event/vietnam>, accessed 28 August 2019.
- 14 *Defence Act 1903*, Compilation No. 75, 20 December 2018, s.61 (h) and (i).8.
- 15 Langford lists the dates of all the lotteries and the birthdate marbles that were selected over the period 1965 to 1972.
- 16 See 'Whitlam and Conscription—an End to the Lottery of Death', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 2014.
- 17 Debates on National Service Termination Bill 1973, *CPD*, House of Representatives, 31 May 1973. Sent to the Senate on 30 May 1973 to be passed without delay.
- 18 Langford states that the number of men classified as unfit after the medical examination increased throughout the Vietnam War years 1965 to 1972. In 1965 37.7 per cent were so

- classified, but for 1967 and 1970 the failure rate was 51.2 per cent. Confirmed by William McMahon, Liberal, and Leslie Bury, Liberal, both as minister of labour and national service, *CPD*, House of Representatives, 10 December 1965 and 28 May 1968 respectively.
- 19 Letter from P.H. Cook, Secretary National Service Registration Centre, to G.A. Sandy, 21 November 1968, MP1227/1, 2005409-4, National Archives of Australia (NAA).
 - 20 Application for Deferment, Geoffrey Allan Sandy to the Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Labour and National Service, 27 May 1965, MP1227/1, 2005409-4, NAA.
 - 21 Letters from W.K. Allen, Registrar National Service Registration Office, to G.A. Sandy, 20 July 1966 and 22 November 1967, MP1227/1, 2005409-4, NAA.
 - 22 Most waited until later in the process. There are examples of serving soldiers who applied, for example, Desmond Phillipson, *The Peacemaker*, July/August 1968, p. 3; Peter John Hill, *The Peacemaker*, November/December 1968, p. 3; Peter Kenneth Hall, *The Peacemaker*, April 1968, p. 3.
 - 23 *National Service Act 1964*, s.29A(2).
 - 24 Application for Registration as a Conscientious Objector to the Register, National Registration Office, from Geoffrey Allan Sandy, 30 November 1968, MP1227/1, 2005409-4, NAA.
 - 25 See discussion of variable court treatments in Langford; also Senator Jim Cavanagh, Labor, *CPD*, Senate, 6 June 1968.
 - 26 *Defence Act 1903*, Compilation No. 75, s. 61CF and its sub-sections.
 - 27 SANDY, Geoffrey Allan [born 1945]—National Service registration and National Service Vocational Training Scheme, MP1227/1, 2005409-4 box 597, NAA.
 - 28 Issues of *The Peacemaker* span vol.1, no. 1 (September 1930) – vol. 33, nos. 9–12 (September – December 1971). A full set is available at the National Library of Australia and State Library Victoria.
 - 29 The analysis was of a sample of 150 successful applicants compiled by Dr Geoffrey Allan Sandy largely based on the court reports in *The Peacemaker* between 1965 and 1971. The most likely number of successful applicants registered as conscientious objectors between 1965 and 1972 ranges between 850 and 950. Refer to *The Peacemaker*, May/June and July/August 1971, p. 9; *CPD*, House of Representatives, 24 February 1971. Answer to Questions Upon Notice, National Service (Question No. 1906); Langford.
 - 30 *CPD*, House of Representatives, 24 February 1971. Note the available statistics are unclear as to the number who applied for full exemption but were only partially exempted.
 - 31 *CPD*, House of Representatives, 29 May 1968.
 - 32 Michael McKellar, Liberal, National Service Bill 1964, *CPD*, House of Representatives, 17 November 1964.
 - 33 These include Desmond Phillipson, *The Peacemaker*, July/August 1968, p. 3; Michael Cutrapi, *The Peacemaker*, March 1967, p. 3; Simon Townsend, *The Peacemaker*, May/June 1968, p. 6; Bill Perry, *The Peacemaker*, March 1967, p. 3.
 - 34 These include Robert Bender, <http://www.agendaforlife.com/inspirational-volunteering/>, accessed 24 August 2019; Mowbray Triplets, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2122165>, accessed 24 August 2019; Simon Townsend, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_Townsend, accessed 24 August 2019; Michael Leunig, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Leunig, accessed 24 August 2019.
 - 35 *The Peacemaker*, May/June 1966, p. 3.
 - 36 *The Peacemaker*, March 1967, p. 3.
 - 37 *The Peacemaker*, March/April 1970, p. 3.

- 38 *The Peacemaker*, March/April 1970, p. 3.
- 39 All dates can be confirmed from SANDY, Geoffrey Allan [born 1945]—National Service registration and National Service Vocational Training Scheme, MP1227/1, 2005409-4, box 597, NAA.
- 40 Application for Registration as a Conscientious Objector, Geoffrey Allan Sandy, 30 November 1968, MP1227/1, 2005409-4, NAA.
- 41 Robert Bender was personally interviewed by the author on 29 May 2019 and confirmed these details, which are a summary of a fuller story.
- 42 *The Peacemaker*, April 1968, p. 3.
- 43 *The Peacemaker*, September/October 1968, p. 3.
- 44 *The Peacemaker*, September/October 1968, p. 3.
- 45 *The Peacemaker*, September/October 1968, p. 3.
- 46 *The Peacemaker*, January/February 1969, p. 3.
- 47 *The Peacemaker*, September/October 1968, p. 3.
- 48 *The Peacemaker*, November/December 1968, p. 3.
- 49 *The Peacemaker*, January/February 1969, p. 3.
- 50 *The Peacemaker*, January/February 1969, p. 3. See also Unknown, circa 1968, 'National Mobilization: Mass Non Violent Sit-In at the Prime Ministers' Lodge, Canberra, ACT', at <http://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/objects/pdf/d0727.pdf>, accessed 25 June 2019.
- 51 CPD, House of Representatives, 24 February 1971.
- 52 *The Peacemaker*, November/December 1968, p. 1.
- 53 *The Peacemaker*, November/December 1968, p. 1.
- 54 *The Peacemaker*, July/August 1969, p. 3.
- 55 *The Peacemaker*, January/February 1969, p. 2.
- 56 Cabinet Minute—Application of John Zarb for Release—Submission 750 [1 page], 1969, A5872, 1206, NAA, at <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=3326660>, accessed 12 July 2019.
- 57 *The Peacemaker*, May/June 1966, p. 3.
- 58 *The Peacemaker*, May/June 1966, p. 3.
- 59 Langford; See also the debates on the Second Reading of the National Service Bill (1968 Amendments), CPD, House of Representatives, 16 May and 28 May 1968.
- 60 See William White (conscientious objector), at [https://wikivisually.com/wiki/William_White_\(conscientious_objector\)](https://wikivisually.com/wiki/William_White_(conscientious_objector)), accessed 25 June 2019. See also Associations Individual—Committee for the defence of Bill White, Bill White Conscientious Defence Committee—Volume 1, Copy of Statement by Mr White Sydney Teacher and Conscientious Objector, authorised and roneoed on behalf of the Save Our Sons Movement, by Mrs A Pert, p. 119, A6122, 1824, NAA, at <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=3008765>, accessed 12 July 2019.

REVIEWS

Cold War Games: Spies, Subterfuge and Secret Operations at the 1956 Olympic Games

By Harry Blutstein. Echo, Melbourne 2017.
Pp. xx + 348. \$32.99, paperback.

When Hungarian athletes left for the long plane journey to compete in the Melbourne Olympic Games in early November 1956, they were leaving a newly democratic country. A popular revolution begun by students in mid-October had led to the fall of the Soviet puppet government and the promise of free elections. By the time they arrived in Darwin a week later, a Soviet-backed regime was back in charge, and athletes were left to fret over the fate of their loved ones.

The thwarted revolution in Hungary provides one of the geopolitical backdrops to Harry Blutstein's fascinating and highly readable history of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, *Cold War Games*. There are plenty of others. The games were affected by the boycott of several countries before they began. China refused to participate because of Taiwan's involvement. Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon withdrew over the invasion of the Sinai and Suez Canal by Israeli, British and French forces, though Blutstein shows there were likely other reasons at play—Egypt was concerned that its athletes would perform poorly, while Lebanon may not have been able to find a plane to transport its competitors. Cambodia, the Netherlands and Spain boycotted in protest at the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Blutstein claims that the Soviet invasion provided a convenient excuse for the Spaniards, who could not afford to send a team. The Swiss did not participate because, by the time they debated the Hungarian situation and resolved to compete, it was too late to arrange transport.

Despite these challenges, the International Olympic Committee president Avery Brundage was convinced of the power of sport to overcome political conflict: 'Where amateur sport with its high ideals flourishes, there civilisation advances', he claimed (p. 197). The moniker of the 'friendly games', which Melbourne assiduously cultivated, was boosted by the participation of East and West Germany in one united

German team (though that union was much less harmonious than it appeared). It was also enhanced by the attendance of the Soviet Union, for only the second time. Joseph Stalin was not particularly interested in sport, but he came to understand its usefulness for domestic morale and Cold War politics. Nikita Khrushchev inherited the plans put in place by Stalin to strike a blow in the Cold War by winning more gold medals than the United States.

The games were scripted better than most movies. The love story across the iron curtain between American hammer thrower Hal Connolly and Czechoslovakian discus thrower Olga Fikotová captured the imagination of the west and caused much consternation in the Soviet bloc. The Czech secret police were paranoid that Fikotová would defect and tried everything to keep the couple apart, including forcing her to travel on a 'holiday' to Sydney and commandeering the Czech team onto a Soviet ship for the journey home. The Czech government eventually consented to Fikotová's marriage to the 'fascist American' (p. 188), but the relationship was far from smooth sailing. Connolly was ostracised by the Catholic community in Boston for marrying in a Protestant church (as well as a Catholic one). The Czech government refused to allow Fikotová to compete for Czechoslovakia in Rome in 1960 and spread rumours that she had refused to represent her country. The couple settled in America and had four children but divorced after sixteen years.

Stalin was no longer around to see it, but the Soviet Union extracted huge propaganda value from 'winning' the Melbourne Olympics, with 37 gold medals compared to America's 32. The Americans protested, with some justification, that the amateur status of communist bloc athletes was a farce. The Soviet runner Vladimir Kuts charmed Melbourne spectators with his dramatic wins in the 5,000 and 10,000 metres and was recognised as 'the hero of the games'. As Blutstein points out, the Australian sprinter Betty Cuthbert had a better claim to the title with her three gold medals, two world records and one Olympic record, but her gender made her ineligible.

The Americans had their propaganda victories too. Despite the best efforts of the KGB, the Soviets were unable to staunch the flow of defectors: 61 athletes, officials and journalists sought asylum after the games ended. Among them was the Hungarian water polo player, Ervin Zádor, whose bloodied eye, inflicted at the hand of a Soviet rival,

became the iconic symbol of the games. In truth, the Hungarians had been man-handling the Russians for the entire semi-final match, but it was the latter's retaliation that was captured by a photographer and relayed around the western world as a symbol of Soviet oppression. Zádor struggled after his defection to the United States, not least with the loss of the status and privileges he had enjoyed in Hungary as an elite athlete.

Blutstein's journalistic background is evident in his clear, direct prose and his ability to tell a story. His descriptions of races, such as Kuts's victories are riveting, as are details of the backstories and post-1956 lives of athletes and officials. Blutstein's intricate knowledge of the games and the politicking behind them is buttressed by extensive research in Australian newspapers and archives, as well as eastern European sources. While *Cold War Games* is less interested in historiographical questions, such as the implications of 1956 for how we understand the Cold War and the 1950s, and the role of sport in world politics, the book provides an excellent basis for historians who are.

Carolyn Holbrook

Black Snake: The Real Story of Ned Kelly

By Leo Kennedy with Mic Looby. Affirm Press, Melbourne 2018. Pp. 336. \$35.00, paperback.

I used to present my first-year history students with the Ned Kelly story as a case study of contested history. Was he the champion of the oppressed or a desperate hooligan turned cop-killer? A surprising number of the cohort sided with the latter view, largely, I suspect, in defiance of those old tropes of Australian folklore with which (they think) their parents and grandparents expected them to identify. Still, the topic was deliciously polarising, capable of generating introspection and debate. But I ceased teaching it a few years ago when it became more difficult to have students care about 'old school' Australian history at all. Somehow, all that 'squatters versus selectors' stuff just doesn't cut through anymore.

One person who still cares is Leo Kennedy, and that is because he has a very personal connection to the Ned Kelly story. He is (as the cover of his book proclaims) the great-grandson of Sergeant Michael Kennedy,

one of three constables ambushed and fatally shot at Stringybark Creek on 26 October 1878—the event that precipitated a two-year manhunt that ended in the fatal capture of Dan Kelly, Joe Byrne and Steve Hart at Glenrowan and the hanging of Ned Kelly at Old Melbourne Gaol on 11 November 1880. The last of the three constables to fall—a bullet through the armpit, another through the heart at close range—Sergeant Kennedy was likely murdered in the act of surrendering, his body robbed and possibly mutilated. He was buried at Mansfield Public Cemetery, age 36, survived by a widow and five children including one-year-old James Gibney Kennedy, the author's grandfather.

There is no doubting author Leo Kennedy's take on this history. Kelly is the 'Black Snake'—an appellation the outlaw himself feared (in the sense of denoting a 'snitch' or police informer) and the name dutifully bestowed upon him by the descendants of Sergeant Kennedy, who remember Kelly as a repulsive, poisonous and treacherous creature. Indeed, the Ned Kelly featured here holds no redeeming features whatsoever. He is a psychopathic criminal with narcissistic tendencies whose short and brutish life played out as a succession of 'undeniable thefts, murders and acts of terrorism'. All the members of the Greta Mob were 'brutal and cruel'. The police were honourable men, underpaid and under-resourced, toiling valiantly to keep the peace in a remote and restless region.

Leo Kennedy is far from the first historian to offer a revisionist account of the Ned Kelly story in defiance of the romanticised impulses of Australia's radical-nationalist tradition. But there is a special poignancy in Kennedy's book, arising from the manner in which he approaches and understands the historiographical transmutation of Kelly from criminal outlaw to national hero. Understandably, Kennedy is particularly sensitive to the processes by which 'a murderer went from villain to victim, killer to hero', because that process has offended him and his family for generations. The most rewarding aspect of this book is the manner in which it communicates a very elemental and easily forgotten fact—that is, that the Kelly gang 'left behind a lot of pain'. This book is about 'the echoes of anguish resounding through generations', from grandfather's 'sad eyes' to the author being teased and taunted at school. *Black Snake* is the product of a very personalised mission to set the record straight, of a lifelong quest to challenge myths and the myth-making through exhaustive research on the one hand, and agitation and protest on the other (such as in restoring the policemen's headstones,

which were vandalised in 1960, and countering the proliferation of 'kitsch outlaw symbols and phoney rhetoric' that perpetuate 'Kelly adulation').

In the early phases of the book, this approach felt a little like a quest to claim a greater stake in a famous story, or even a call for martyrdom, establishing Sergeant Kennedy as 'the real victim' (rather than Ned, who is popularly believed to have been persecuted and driven to crime by the Victorian police). But the argument becomes far more convincing in the closing chapters where we read of many moments of 'insanity' ensuing from the rise of Kelly-mania generated in recent decades by 'profiteers and promoters' (primarily, and naturally, the tourism industry). Attending the centenary commemoration of the Stringybark Creek incident to witness a re-enactment of the shooting of the policemen is but one of many depressing anecdotes related by the author. And yet, it is obviously easy for one so invested in such an (apparently) high-stakes matter of history to appear, at times, a little precious. Occasionally, the author seems a little too dismissive of other historians whose views differ from his own. There are moments when he sounds unkind and possessive in his condemnation of 'Kelly experts' with 'their often foolish take on things, particularly those who have cooked up or swallowed the mythical nonsense'. On the other hand, it is fairly noted that some historians have butchered the Kelly story rather badly.

This of course just reflects the author's peculiar and passionate investment in the story, which is a key strength of the book. I will leave it to others more expert than I to quarrel over the accuracy of Kennedy's accounts of all those crucial and well-trodden moments in the Ned Kelly story. There is obviously a prodigious amount of research behind this work, including archival and field work, although scholars will find it frustratingly under-referenced. It draws heavily from family oral traditions, which provide a new and unique contribution to the story, although academics would treat such evidence far more critically. The almost polemical nature of the argument here does perhaps oversimplify the Kelly story into one of good versus evil, and it deals in personalities rather than broader social and political phenomena. But certainly we do need more insight into the ways historical moments are remembered and how they impact on the present. We need to hear more about history from the point of view of those who have experienced its legacies most keenly.

David Roberts

Aboriginal People and Australian Football in the Nineteenth Century: They Did Not Come from Nowhere

By Roy Hay. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle Upon Tyne 2019. Pp. 316. £64.99, hardback, £24.99, paperback.

In the contemporary Australian Football League (AFL) Indigenous players are conspicuous. Although comprising a small proportion of modern Australia's population, the number of Indigenous players in the AFL, as is regularly pointed out, exceeds their representation in the wider Australian community. This high representation of Indigenous players is one of the remarkable phenomena to have emerged from modern footy. Of course, Indigenous men and women have played football since the colonial period when what we now know as Australian football first emerged in Melbourne. Roy Hay's book is an attempt to document and record Aboriginal involvement in the game in the nineteenth century. Despite the ever-growing literature about Australian football this is the first methodical attempt to trace the involvement of Aboriginal people with the game.

Inevitably, any historical work on Indigenous people and football will confront the so called 'origins debate'. In this debate the extent to which games played by Indigenous people in Victoria may have influenced Australian football is argued and disputed. Periodically over the past 30 years the debate has reared up and split into two camps that may be designated romantics and empiricists. In June 2019 it emerged again when the Australian Football League seemed to reverse a previous position and assert that games played by the nation's first peoples in areas such as Victoria's Western District were a foundation for Australian football (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/22/whats-behind-the-afls-sudden-insistence-that-the-game-has-indigenous-beginnings>). Hay—firmly in the empiricists' camp—has contributed to this debate and has elsewhere memorably described this as 'a strange and emotional attempt to link Aboriginal activities to early Melbourne and Victorian football'. A chapter in this new work deals with the question of the Aboriginal influence on the origins of Australian football. However, Hay's main purpose here is not to engage in this debate but rather to relate, as he says in the Preface to this book, p. ix, 'the stories of those who saw the white men play their strange game and thought "We could do that" and did in the most difficult

of circumstances, initially in the missions and stations around the periphery of Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. They are the real heroes and their stories should be told. This book is just a taste of the richness that awaits’.

To tell these stories of post-invasion engagement with Australian football, Hay has scoured official sources such as the annual reports of the Board of the Protection of Aborigines in Victoria, colonial-era newspapers and other documentary sources. As Hay notes there is no ‘direct testimony’ from an Indigenous person about football, or any other sport for that matter, from prior to 1914. There are precedents for this type of study. Bernard Whimpress’s doctoral study and book *Passport to Nowhere* explored Indigenous involvement in cricket in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and used a similar focus upon mission settlements, where the sport was played by Indigenous people, and biographies of leading exponents. Hay focuses upon Victoria, unsurprisingly, as the epicentre of football’s emergence. The first section explores the evidence in Victoria. Missions such as Coranderrk, Framlingham and Lake Tyers are each examined. Coranderrk receives the most detailed study, but other missions such as Ramahyuck where little sport was played are also discussed. The second section explores some of the more prominent Aboriginal individuals and families who were conspicuous on football grounds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These biographies are the most illuminating and fascinating parts of this book. They are not just football stories but detailed excavations of the lives of these figures on and beyond the football field. Albert ‘Pompey’ Austin, famous for his single game with Geelong in the Victorian Football Association, is revealed as a gifted sportsman, traveller and entertainer. Many of the figures examined excelled in other sports and in politics and laid a path for their descendants. A third section covers South Australia and Western Australia though in far less detail than the preceding Victorian section.

To bring this book to a close Hay, in the fourth and final section, revisits the origin of modern sport and reviews the evidence for Indigenous influence on early Australian football. One of his most insightful observations is that a virtual cessation of inward migration in the 1870s and 1880s allowed the Victorian game time to develop a separate and distinct identity from other football codes then emerging in Britain. Hay does not find any reliable evidence of Indigenous

involvement with Australian football at this time. But he does not discount it or the ‘possibility that the rational methods of the academic historian may not be the only appropriate ones for the investigation of cultural ideas and the transmission of ideas among social groups.’

This is highly recommended for academic and general readers with an interest in Indigenous and sports history—that is, Australian history.

Peter Burke

The Church on Bakery Hill: St Paul’s Ballarat and its Place in the Community

By Anne Doggett, Photography by Ed Dunens. Anne Doggett, Ballarat 2018. Pp. 296. To purchase a copy contact Dr Doggett at adoggett@optusnet.com.au.

In the conclusion to her history of St Paul’s on Bakery Hill, Anne Doggett reminds us that a ‘general history that ignores the ongoing role of the church would be distorted and incomplete.’ She also observes that: ‘Local histories shape our sense of identity, telling us who we are, where we come from, and what makes us different. This makes the telling of such stories so important for an understanding of ourselves and our communities.’ In tracing the history of St Paul’s from its foundation in 1855 to the present, Anne Doggett has written an engaging history of one goldfield’s church and kept a fine balance between local detail and engagement with general changes in the Anglican Church and the church’s place in both Ballarat and the wider Australian community.

Doggett’s narrative is organised around the various priests who ministered at St Paul’s. The first chapter examines the tenure of James Robert Thackery, a Yorkshireman, who was appointed in July 1854 and was responsible for establishing a first temporary church and laying the foundation stone of a more permanent structure. He fell out with his parishioners, some of whom felt he lacked ‘any religious and devotional feeling.’ The next two ministers had little more success. John Potter served from 1855 to 1858 and Thomas Cooper Serle from 1858 to 1860. They left the church with a considerable debt of £2,500. The longest-serving minister at St Paul’s, Robert T. Cummins, was the incumbent from 1860 to 1887. Among the major problems he had to deal with was

structural damage to the church caused by poor foundations, which in turn were the result of building in an area compromised by mining. Most subsequent priests served for lesser periods, and seven subsequent chapters, covering the years 1888 to 1917, deal with eighteen of these clergy. A final chapter breaks with this narrative structure and examines music at St Paul's. The later chapters give fascinating detail of a move to a more Anglo-Catholic style of liturgy from the mid-1970s to 2003, and a more socially aware church in recent years.

The strength of the narrative obviously depends on the quality of surviving records. Doggett has made excellent use of surviving vestry and council minutes. These provide fascinating glimpses in the early years of the church into the relationship, often fraught, between ministers and the leading laymen on the parish council. Where local records were not extant Doggett turned to general Anglican Church records, and she has made excellent use of the local press.

With this primary focus on the clergyman we get little insight into who were the parishioners at St Paul's, and what was the relationship of the local community to the Anglican Church. Baptismal, death and marriage records survive for this church. Doggett undertakes some analysis of the numbers recorded in these records, but there is little investigation of the class origins of St Paul's congregation. In a mining community, the Anglicans may have had stiff competition from the various Methodist communities—Wesleyans, Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists—who were such a strong presence on the goldfields.

The Church on Bakery Hill has excellent descriptions of the construction of the church and its associated buildings, and a highlight of the book are the wonderful colour pictures of the church photographed by Ed Dunens. All in all, this is a splendid model for writing a local church history.

Charles Fahey

Jean Berthe: The Quiet Frenchman

By Sandra A. Hargreaves. Sandra A. Hargreaves, Bairnsdale 2018.
Pp. 124. \$20.00, paperback.

Published in September 2018, *Jean Berthe: The Quiet Frenchman* by East Gippsland historian Sandra A Hargreaves is a relative latecomer in the outburst of books that marked the centenary of the First World War. Many commentators have noted that commemorative fatigue had overcome the centenary by then. During 2018, there was a lot of ‘top down’ public and institutional history focused on Sir John Monash, much of it lacking the rigour of his earlier biographers Geoffrey Serle and Peter Pedersen, whose works were published in 1982 and 1985 respectively. An article written by Jonathan King and published in the Fairfax press on Anzac Day 2018 has become infamous among historians who give a damn because it contained several mistruths and resembled myth-making populism or chest beating. *The Quiet Frenchman* by comparison is a refreshing read, painstakingly researched and told honestly with a local flavour.

At the end of the First World War, the Australian Imperial Force and the Australian government faced the massive administrative and logistical task of repatriating or returning 167,000 Australian service men and nearly 1,000 service women. More than 13,000 of the Australians returned with wives, husbands and children. *Jean Berthe: The Quiet Frenchman* is a return story with a difference. In 1918, a group of diggers found a young French boy wandering among the ruins of a village on the Somme River near Amiens. The boy’s name was Jean Berthe. The diggers ‘unofficially’ adopted him. They gave him a uniform and made him their mascot. Private Robert Simpson, a 43-year-old fisherman and father of six, brought the boy home to Paynesville, East Gippsland.

The meeting of Robert Simpson and Jean Berthe occurred at a crucial time in the war. In the spring of 1918 the Australian Corps, commanded by General William Birdwood, rushed into the line to check the German Michael and Georgette offensives. Australia’s official historian, C.E.W. Bean, quoted Allied commander-in-chief Douglas Haig exhorting his army (*Official History*, Vol. V, p. 437):

To all the ranks of the British Force in France ... There is no other course open for us but to fight it out! Every position must be held to

the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause each of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our Homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.

As the Australians marched toward the sound of the guns, many of them wrote of their distress at seeing the civilian population fleeing as refugees. Sergeant 'Eddie' Edwards, 1st Australian Battalion, described how: 'Our footsteps echoed hollowly as we tramped through the deserted streets ... Everything spoke of hurried departures as some new rumour of the enemy's approach spread panic into a wild stampede for personal safety' (Jordan, *Stealth Raiders*, p. 21).

Such storied scenes are an important part of the Anzac legend. Ross McMullin described the inspiration behind Australian war artist Will Dyson's lithograph 'Welcome back to the Somme': 'Terrified Frenchwomen who had abandoned their homes retraced their steps after Australians arrived with nonchalant reassurance: "Fini retreat madame, beaucoup Australiens ici" (surely one of the all-time great national statements)' (McMullin, *Will Dyson*, p. 199).

The Quiet Frenchman gives an insight into Private Robert Simpson's unit, the 3rd Pioneer Battalion, during these turbulent times. Sandra Hargreaves relies on quotes and background information gathered from the official war diary and from war diarists who served in Simpson's unit. When the pair showed up in Paynesville in 1919, a Gippsland newspaper published several verifiable details and is perhaps the best evidence of what happened and when:

The youngster [aged thirteen] was found in the ruins of a village on the Somme, with both feet wounded by pieces of shell. His father, a poilu [French soldier], lost his life in the line and his mother was killed by a bomb. Jean attached himself to the battalion, with whom he was a great favourite and particularly endeared himself to Pte. Simpson who took him dressed as a first class Australian Warrant Officer to England and secured for him a passage by the troopship to this country.

There are no known records of Jean Berthe such as the names of his parents or his place of birth, and, since it was highly irregular to keep a boy as a mascot, there are no official Australian records describing Jean's life with the 3rd Pioneer Battalion. A photographic portrait taken in an

English studio of Berthe aged about twelve in slouch hat and warrant officer's uniform is the most evocative historical document in the book.

The problem of how Jean Berthe came to be in England occupies much of the author's attention. Hargreaves' sometimes confusing narrative suggests that Berthe made two journeys to 'Blighty', most likely wrapped in a blanket and thrown over a digger's shoulder. However, by using Robert Simpson's service record she verifies the date and name of the ship on which they travelled to Australia, arriving in Port Melbourne on 12 June 1919.

Hargreaves points out that Jean Berthe's arrival in Paynesville must have affected the running of the Simpson family. How Robert's wife Eliza and their six children adapted and dealt with the new addition is one of the many tantalising mysteries dealt with in the book.

It did not take long for Jean to be immersed in family life or his new 'Aussie' sister Connie Simpson to become top of her class in French! Jean himself received very little formal education. He was not naturalised—possibly because the family was wary of interference by the authorities. The young boy grew up to be a Paynesville man; he played football, cricket, enjoyed a beer and a cigarette, became a fisherman (like his adoptive father), and married a 'Gippsland girl', Janet Christina Lay. Ultimately he owned his own fishing boat and a weatherboard cottage by Lake Victoria, which is still standing today. Janet was a keen photographer and her images of family and community life at Lake Victoria make an important contribution to the book.

The beginning of Jean Berthe's life remains a mystery, and many questions remain unanswered. Nevertheless, *Jean Berthe: The Quiet Frenchman* sometimes reaches above the limitations of the sources to say something about humanity and empathy in war. It highlights the relationship between diggers and children in France. Although Robert Simpson was in his 40s many of the other soldiers were only a few years older than Jean Berthe. Sandra Hargreaves has chosen an image showing this—a French boy in a cap and frock coat casually having a yarn with three youthful diggers. The photograph held by the Australian War Memorial captures a relaxed, casual and empathetic moment that speaks to the oft-mentioned pleasure the diggers gained in simple contact with the people of rural France.

Sandra Hargreaves has done an impressive amount of research in a variety of sources. Unfortunately, the book is sometimes repetitive.

A lack of primary sources constrains what light she might have hoped to throw on the great mystery of Jean Berthe's early years. Hargreaves hints that maybe this is how the quiet Frenchman and his adoptive father wished it to be. While it is unlikely that local Australian historians will unearth another story quite like this one, let us hope the focus on return from the First World War will continue to inspire insightful local histories.

Lucas Jordan

Aboriginal Biocultural Knowledge in South Eastern Australia: Perspectives of Early Colonists

By Fred Cahir, Ian D. Clark and Philip A. Clarke. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne 2018. Pp. 360. \$69.95, paperback.

Interest in Aboriginal or Indigenous knowledges has, in recent years, become a mainstay of academic and popular publishing. The near universal praise for Aboriginal author Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* (2017) has seen it sell tens of thousands of copies, and recently an annotated educational version has been marketed to teachers and educationalists. Perhaps more modest, and more academic, *The Biggest Estate on Earth* by Bill Gammage (2011) could be described as a forerunner to *Dark Emu*. Gammage presented extensive historical evidence for Aboriginal faunal and botanical knowledge and the application of these in Aboriginal land management. Over 60,000 years of living, indeed thriving, on the Australian continent was contingent on understanding the so-called 'natural' world. Observations honed over countless generations and millennia meant Aboriginal people understood their environment intimately. They knew seasons, weather patterns, animal movements and plant distributions. They knew what settler-Australian authors, Fred Cahir, Ian Clark and Philip Clarke call 'biocultural' knowledge. All three writers are known for their close reading of historical documents and their forensic attention to detail, and this book is testament to their ongoing commitment to Aboriginal histories.

I am deliberate in highlighting that the authors are not themselves Indigenous, and, while this is and of itself not a criticism, I do think it a pity that contemporary Aboriginal communities from the south east are

all but absent from the text. Many of the contemporary communities of this area are actively engaging with cultural environmental knowledge, with burning practices being revived and traditional land management being undertaken as part of joint management of parks, both state and national. Similarly the reclamation work being undertaken on languages is both inspiring and challenging. Rather than simply noting that there is no consistency with spellings as there was no written language, the authors could have considered the work of Dhaagung Wurrung (Taungurung) linguist and Elder Aunty Lee Healy, author of a definitive language text. Other communities engaged in similar projects include the Djadjawurrung, Gunditjmara, and Boonerwurrung. The work that these communities are undertaking is as the custodians of the knowledge that is the focus of this book.

Another matter that I think deserves both comment and critique is the use of the term 'biocultural'. This term, like the similar terms Indigenous knowledge (IK) or Traditional Ecological (or environmental) Knowledge (TEK), has the tendency to create a twofold separation. First, it separates Indigenous epistemologies from western science, which is perceived as both normative and authoritative, rendering Indigenous knowledges subservient. Second, the use of these terms separates contemporary Indigenous people from their own heritage, which is seen to exist only in the past. What is being described is, put simply, Aboriginal knowledge, sometimes even specific tribal knowledge, such as GunaiKurnai knowledge or more generally Kulin knowledge.

The subtitle of the book *Perspectives of Early Colonists* allows the authors to focus on the ethnographic writings of early observers (though the odd reference to Leckie seems inexplicable), and the synthesis of contemporary researchers is unremarked. The synthesis of the ethnography is located in the published and unpublished writings of explorer Edward Eyre, geologist and magistrate Alfred W. Howitt, surveyor R.H. Mathews, protector of Aborigines William Thomas, botanist explorer Ferdinand von Mueller, naturalist William Blandowski, and squatter E.M. Curr among others. All of these men are undoubtedly products of their time. They subscribed to the view of racial hierarchy and they shared a sense of belief that Indigenous extinction was inevitable. Sensibly the authors use the frameworks of these observers to structure the text. Twelve chapters cover totemic life, terrestrial spirit beings, water spirit beings, plant food, animal

food, water, fire, watercraft, shelter, clothing, wellbeing (as opposed to) healing, trade, space, and time. Manoeuvring through these categories enables the reader to build a detailed picture of Aboriginal knowledge and cultural experiences in the early contact period. This book will be of great value to students and those interested in our history; it is especially recommended for teachers. *Aboriginal Biocultural Knowledge in South Eastern Australia: Perspectives of Early Colonists* counteracts the often-held view of nomadic hunter-gatherers moving across the land in unpredictable ways and replaces it with a view of sophisticated environmental knowledge, deep understanding of their country, and millennia of survival.

Lynette Russell

Tragedy and Triumph: Early Testimonies of Jewish Survivors of World War II

Compiled and translated by Freda Hodge. Monash University Publishing, Melbourne 2018. Pp. 256. \$34.95, paperback.

‘History today is on the tip of every Jewish tongue; history emerges from every fold in our memory. One must only have an ear to catch words. Let us heap up, create. Collect—save!’ With these words Israel Kaplan, editor of the journal *Fun Letzten Khurben (From the Last Destruction)*, appealed to the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, who after the war lived in one of the countless displaced persons’ camps in occupied Germany. Around 3,500 survivors responded to the call and submitted testimonies describing their wartime fate to the Munich Historical Commission. Over 100 of them, written by women, men, and children, were published in Yiddish in ten issues of *Fun Letzen Khurben* between 1946 and 1948.

Published in the land of the perpetrators, the journal was the voice of the Jewish displaced persons who either remained in occupied Germany after the Liberation, or escaped there before the pogroms and violence that engulfed Eastern Europe, in particular Poland, in the first months and years after the war. The liberated prisoners lived in the Displaced Persons’ camps, often near the sites of the former concentration camps, where they were awaiting their uncertain future.

Some of them eventually moved to the new state of Israel, whilst a significant number were dispersed all over the rest of the world. The short period of the first post-war years offered a unique opportunity to collect these testimonies. It brought together survivors from the large swathes of Eastern Europe before they again left Bavaria for all corners of the world. For almost 70 years the testimonies were left forgotten and were largely inaccessible.

It is thanks to the commendable effort of Freda Hodge that a selection of these early testimonies is now available to a wider audience in English. Hodge selected 30 testimonies from the journal, 24 of them written by adult survivors and 6 by children. Commenting on their importance, Hodge suggests that ‘the early testimonies are characterised by their immediacy, the detailed nature of their narratives and their matter-of-fact, even detached tone (p. 1)’. Most of the testimonies bring us back to the epicentre of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. We travel to small, long-forgotten shtetls and villages, outside of the main Jewish urban settlements. We are taken back to the ghettos in occupied Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, and to labour camps in occupied Poland, as well as the death camps of Sobibór, Treblinka and Auschwitz. In this respect the publication of the testimonies can be compared to the prepared but not published—at least at that time—*Black Book of Soviet Jewry*. This was a publication effort by the Soviet Jewish authors, Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, which was at the very last moment stopped by the resurgent Stalinist antisemitism of the late 1940s.

The testimonies provide more proof that immediately after the war survivors were desperate to share their stories. The Munich Historical Commission was only one group of activists, writers and historians who set themselves the task of collecting the stories of the survivors. Such historical committees emerged all over Europe, with other groups interviewing survivors purely for the purposes of war crime trials. The collectors (the *zammlers*), often prominent historians, were aware of the need to create ‘written monuments’ and ‘memorials’ to those who perished in the catastrophe. These are very factual accounts that without any literary fantasy and embellishment record the fate of the Jewish communities, mostly in a chronological manner. Others included more detailed, personal stories from the camps and ghettos.

The presented stories are not only sombre, matter-of-fact accounts about the mass murder in Eastern Europe. Although we are led through

the horrific stories of gradual liquidations of the ghettos, and of the mass death in the extermination camps, we also follow the Jews' efforts to survive the horrors of the Holocaust. Stories of resistance and partisan activities in the deep forests of Eastern Europe are represented in several testimonies. They are full of brutality from the German perpetrators, as well as their Polish, Ukrainian, or Lithuanian collaborators. They paint a bleak image of the inter-ethnic co-existence under the Nazi rule, though there are also positive stories of survivors being helped by their non-Jewish neighbours.

There is only one minor critical comment I would like to make at the very end of this otherwise laudatory review. The editor and translator could pay more attention to the transliteration from Yiddish of personal names, especially if they are of well-known historical actors. For example, Wilhelm Kuba should be Kube (p. 74), Karl Frenzel should be Frenzel (p. 78), Suchamil should be Suchomel (p. 96), and so on.

This carefully translated selection of the testimonies will be of enormous importance to historians, but also to anybody who is interested in the early accounts of survivors. They show how the surviving remnant of the Jewish population struggled with the memories of the war and tried to build a testament to their destroyed communities, murdered families, and friends. They created a memory of a sad end to the once vibrant world that was completely obliterated by the Nazis and their eastern European collaborators.

Jan Lániček

The Welsh on Victoria's Central Goldfields: A Dictionary of Biography

By Peter Griffiths. Peter Griffiths, Ballarat 2018. Pp. 282. \$45.00, paperback.

Peter Griffiths has lovingly compiled a biographical dictionary of just over 400 Welsh men and 200 Welsh women who migrated to the Victorian goldfields in the wake of the discovery of gold in 1851. The Welsh were a significant minority of the population on the Victorian goldfields. By my calculation from birth certificates for Ballarat and Bendigo in 1861, the Welsh accounted for 2.2 per cent of mothers and 2.1 per cent of fathers. To put this in context the Cornish were 12.4 per

cent of fathers and 11.4 per cent of mothers. As a distinctive group the Welsh were also heavily outnumbered by Irishmen and women from the province of Munster and probably only a quarter as numerous as Londoners.

Peter Griffiths has drawn on numerous sources to trace his Welsh subjects. Well-known biographical dictionaries such as W.B. Kimberley's 1895 surveys of Ballarat and Bendigo have been checked, as well as numerous local histories. However, to obtain a more representative sample, Griffiths has consulted a wide range of archival sources such as cemetery records, hospital records, asylum records, inquests and rate books, to name just a few. For Ballarat he was fortunate to be able to draw on the doctoral research of Robert Tyler, who had access to the records of the office of Births, Deaths and Marriages for his 2000 Melbourne University doctorate. For other districts he has had to rely on the less than satisfactory information contained in indexes of Birth, Death and Marriage Records. Ancestry.com is an obvious source for these.

In a number of appendices Griffiths records the representation of the Welsh among municipal councillors on the goldfields and among colonial politicians; he also identifies Welsh people killed in mining accidents, the lifespan of the Welsh, their longevity on the goldfields, and their counties of origin, and he further attempts to determine the proportion of the total Welsh population contained in his dictionary. He estimates that his dictionary covers about 40 per cent of the Welsh population on the goldfields in 1861.

We cannot be sure that Griffiths' dictionary is representative of the Welsh migrants who came to the goldfields. Nonetheless it does provide a fascinating range of biographies, and the subjects' details range from sketchy evidence found in such sources as inquests to Joseph Jenkins, the 'Welsh Swagman', who has left us with detailed diaries (curiously Griffiths does not refer to the original diaries held by the State Library). John Jenkins (1828–1871) was an example of the former and is known to us only through the sad fact that he was burnt to death in a hut in Epsom under the influence of drink. A single man, he left few records other than the proceedings of his inquest. Similarly, the brief details of William Llewellyn Williams' (1810–1854) colonial life come from his death certificate. All we know from his death certificate in 1854 was that he was a married miner, and that he and his wife Elizabeth had one child, William. More successful was Oliver Lewis Randell (1833–1899),

who was an early prospector of the quartz reefs on the Mount Egerton goldfield. In 1871 he headed for Bendigo and took part in that city's boom in company formation in the early 1870s. He remained an active and successful member of the stock exchange until his death in 1899.

These biographies are only a brief hint of the riches contained in *The Welsh on Victoria's Central Goldfields*, and Peter Griffiths' book will become a valuable research tool for those interested in the nineteenth-century Welsh migration. I hope that researchers will provide us with similar resources for other major migrant groups.

Charles Fahey

A Second Chance: The Making of Yiddish Melbourne

By Margaret Taft and Andrew Markus. Monash University Publishing, Melbourne 2018. Pp. xii + 345. \$29.95, paperback.

This is a highly readable book that will introduce the general reader to the story of Jewish immigration from Poland and its impact in shaping contemporary Melbourne Jewry. The book analyses the movements experienced by the Melbourne Jewish community during the interwar, post-war and more contemporary periods. This unique account, written in a very accessible style, draws the readers in through the personal stories of the key players. If one wants to understand the Second Polish Commonwealth, 1919–1939, the contemporary Melbourne 'shtetl' (small Jewish village or town in Eastern Europe), as it is locally referred to, this book is a good starting point.

A Second Chance is divided into three parts, representing the different time periods traversed. The first part covers the interwar period, focusing on the arrival of Polish Jews in the 1920s and developments during this period, including Australian pre-Holocaust immigration policies. The second part deals with the war years, immediate post-war developments (including Calwell's pragmatic response to antisemitism through secret discriminatory policies while personally supporting members from his electorate), the impact of trauma, and survivor responses. This part ends with the impact of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the strong appeal of Zionism. The final part analyses the generational impact of Melbourne Jewry, where 60 per cent of

survivors, mainly Polish Jews, rebuilt their lives. This section charts the changes over the generations and argues that Yiddish is still alive in contemporary Melbourne.

This evocative story of the *Making of Yiddish Melbourne* is built around vignettes from the rich oral history of over 60 interviews from the Centre of Jewish Civilisation project at Monash University, led by Dr Miriam Munz, and preserved on the Monash website. Margaret Taft's own personal background adds to the power of the narration. Each chapter opens with a personal story or description of a specific event that draws the reader into the subject matter of that chapter. For example, the first chapter opens with the story of Sender Burstin's arrival, describing an 'inauspicious' beginning when he suffered from a biting cold Melbourne winter night in his unheated hotel room (p. 3). He was to play a key role in the development of Yiddish Melbourne. Another example is the story of Chaim Sztajer, a Treblinka survivor, opening Chapter 9: '*She'orit HaPletach*, the Surviving Remnant'. These very powerful oral history accounts add significantly to the strength of this book. The book also shines a light on some of the more neglected parts of the history of Melbourne Jewry, in particular the development of the *landsmanshaftn*, a key feature of the Melbourne Jewish community, where, by the 1960s, there were 21 groups, each representing a different geographical Jewish community in Poland, many of which had slightly different Yiddish dialects. In addition, the use of Yiddish terms scattered throughout the book adds to the veracity of the account.

One weakness of the book is that it starts the story of Yiddish Melbourne in the 1920s, but the story really begins earlier. In the period from 1880 to 1920 over two and a half million Jews escaped Tsarist Russian persecution, with the vast majority settling in the United States, known as the *goldene medina* (golden country). The numbers who came to Australia were tiny—only a couple of thousand—and more settled in New South Wales than in Victoria because of the severe impact of the 1890s depression in the southern state. The settlement patterns in these two major Jewish centres were different, with the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton emerging as the city's first area of settlement, whilst there was no equivalent in Sydney. Thus, already in the pre-World War I period, the institutions that were to form the essence of post-war Yiddish Melbourne were established, including the Kadimah, founded in 1911, Yiddish theatre, and the beginnings of a more orthodox life

style. These early beginnings were reinforced during the interwar period, and explain the significant Polish survivor chain migration after 1945, making Melbourne the largest and strongest Jewish community in Australia today. The book also does not deal with the different Sydney dynamics, as the second-largest Australian Jewish community, but such a comparison could have enriched the reader's understanding of the nature of Melbourne Jewry. As well, the book fails to discuss the emergence of the various Hassidic sects, with the centrality of Yiddish, or to highlight sufficiently Zionist Polish Jews who rejected Yiddish, representing the school that believed Yiddish was part of the Old Diaspora World and that Modern Hebrew should be the focus.

A Second Chance conveys the world of Yiddish Melbourne through a lucid, well-written overview of the community's history as seen through the lens of personal stories. It includes footnotes, an extensive bibliography, and detailed index, indicative of wide research. The story of the re-creation of the Polish Jewish world on the other side of the globe, at the edge of the Diaspora, has not only enriched the Melbourne Jewish community but also the general Australian community and is part of the history of Australian immigration. This book thus makes an important contribution to the literature and should have wide appeal.

Suzanne D. Rutland

Scotland to Australia Felix: Founding Scots of Victoria's Camperdown District

By Camperdown and District Historical Society Scots Book Committee. Camperdown and District Historical Society, Camperdown 2018. Pp. x + 190. \$35.00, paperback.

'The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.' Mark Antony might well have been right when talking about ancient Rome, but this book suggests his nostrum did not apply to nineteenth-century Camperdown. A collection of biographies of Scottish settlers in the Camperdown district, *Scotland to Australia Felix* is full of stories of 'staunch Presbyterians' who worked hard, contributed to their community and were remembered fondly by their usually large numbers of children and grandchildren. My Western District

connections are with Warrnambool and points further west, where villains abounded and local histories are spiced with stories of murder, fraud, infidelity and assorted crimes and misdemeanours. In contrast, Camperdown appears to have been almost devoid of scoundrels. One possibility, of course, is that the Presbyterian Scots were all upright citizens, while all the rogues were Anglicans, Methodists or Catholics. We must await further sectarian-based sequels to find out if this is the case.

Scotland to Australia Felix is not a narrative account of the role of the Scots in the European invasion and settlement of the Camperdown district. The foreword by Stewart McArthur, former local MHR and a fourth-generation descendant of Scottish settlers, and an introduction by Benjamin Wilkie give a general guide to the forces driving Scottish emigration in the 1830s and 1840s and a basic outline of settlement around Camperdown, but the book is essentially a biographical dictionary of Scottish settlers. It would have been easy to focus on the squattocracy, but the compilers have avoided this temptation and the stories of Niel Black, John Lang Currie and other pastoral princes are leavened with the lives of shepherds, storekeepers, builders, midwives, millers, housewives and more.

For most of the Scots in this collection, the dislocation of migration was rewarded with rapid socio-economic advancement. The children of tenant farmers, coal miners, shepherds and labourers became landowners, successful entrepreneurs and major employers. The greatest success story was that of John Lang Currie. The son of tenant farmers from Selkirkshire, Currie was 26 when he acquired the 32,000 acres of the Geelengla run near Mt Elephant. Renamed Larra, it became one of Australia's premier merino studs. On his death in 1898, his estate was valued for probate at £479,000, one of the great fortunes of nineteenth-century Australia. More typical of the success stories in the book is that of James McDonald. McDonald's family were small tenant farmers in Argyllshire when James, aged 32, was indentured to Niel Black & Co. to come to Australia to work as a shepherd. After his indentured period expired, McDonald worked for Peter McArthur on Meningoort for about a decade before buying a block of land at Basin Banks near Lake Bullen Merri. Camperdown was then a major wheat-growing district, and in 1855 McDonald bought a threshing machine, which worked on many farms during the harvest. By the time of his death, McDonald had

acquired two farms and several blocks in Camperdown, in addition to his home at Basin Banks.

The lack of sources means that little is known of the lives of most women of the era beyond the basics of births, deaths and marriages, but the compilers have attempted as far as possible to document the lives of the Scottish women of the district. Two of the most interesting biographies are those of Isabella Taylor and Agnes Yates. Isabella was the daughter of James Dawson, who squatted originally at Kangatong near Hawkesdale before moving to Camperdown in 1868. James and Isabella shared a deep interest in local Aboriginal culture, and Isabella ‘was brought up with the local Aboriginal children and became fluent in their languages’, an extremely rare accomplishment among white settlers. They jointly authored the remarkable book, *The Australian Aborigines: The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes in the Western District of Victoria, Australia*, although the publishers did not acknowledge Isabella’s authorship. Agnes Yates came to Australia in 1853 with her parents after her father signed on as indentured worker for the Chirnside family. She grew up on the Chirnside properties of Mount William and Caranballac before marrying John Yates in 1870. Presumably Yates was not of Scottish ancestry, because he turned out to be one of the few rogues in the book. In 1880 he sold 1,000 sheep he did not own, pocketed payment of £250, and disappeared. Left to fend for herself, Agnes trained as a nurse at the Melbourne Women’s Hospital and, after working for several years in Melbourne, came to Camperdown where she built and ran a successful private hospital.

For those with Western District ties, or researchers of Scottish ancestors in western Victoria, this book is an excellent resource. It is thoroughly researched, well written and illustrated with some highly evocative contemporary photos. My only minor quibble is that the strictly alphabetical arrangement of entries leads inevitably to frequent repetitions—as, for example, in the separate entries for Niel and Archibald Black, and for James and Isabella Dawson. But this detracts only slightly from what is a wonderful book, and a great credit to the Camperdown and District Historical Society.

Peter Yule

The Blackburns: Private Lives, Public Ambition

By Carolyn Rasmussen. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 2019. Pp. ix + 400. \$44.99, hardcover.

This fascinating dual biography won the History Publication Award in the 2019 Victorian Community History Awards announced in October—and deservedly so. It is not only a meticulously researched study of two important figures in Australian labour and feminist history, but also an absorbing and inspiring read. Carolyn Rasmussen is a distinguished professional historian with a long list of very fine commissioned works on many subjects to her name, but this book is special—the product of a life’s work and research and a labour of love.

Most people will have heard of Maurice Blackburn through Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, the firm he pioneered in 1919 to meet the needs of trade unions and working people caught up in the law. Many will also be aware of his defence of socialist values within the Labor Party, which he represented in both the Victorian and federal parliaments, his commitment to civil liberties and to equality for women, his opposition to conscription in both world wars, and his principled decision to leave the party and sit as an independent in 1941. I am probably unusual, however, in having met up with Doris Blackburn (née Hordern) before I came across Maurice, for Doris was present in almost all the women’s organisations I have researched for the period up to 1950. Doris’s interests ranged across an unusually broad spectrum of women’s political and social groups, from the Women’s Political Association, to the Housewives’ Association, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, the National Council of Women, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. And she was also a leading figure in the free kindergarten movement, the Citizens’ Education League and the Council for Civil Liberties. She has long been overlooked in the history of women leaders in Australia; even her political career as the second woman elected to the House of Representatives (Independent Labor) has been barely noticed, and her important role in the fight for Aboriginal rights has taken a back seat to other white women activists such as Jessie Street. *The Blackburns* goes a long way to redressing this oversight.

Maurice Blackburn and Doris Hordern’s meeting and falling in love grew out of their mutual political commitment to equality and

the advancement of women through membership of Vida Goldstein's Women's Political Association. Neither had envisaged marriage before they met early in 1913, but their shared idealism was magnetic, and they were engaged within months and married at the end of 1914. By then Maurice was the Labor MLA for Essendon, and both had become disillusioned with the WPA. Maurice had left the Socialist Party too, and he and Doris found a more congenial association in the Reverend Frederick Sinclair's Free Religious Fellowship. This was symptomatic; they did not cease to be socialists or advocates of women's rights but found themselves unable to accept the constraints of WPA and VSP party discipline on matters of principle, specifically war, compulsory military service overseas and what they termed 'sex antagonism'. It was a pattern that continued to characterise their political activism, both eventually leaving the Labor Party and Doris struggling with WILPF's dogmatic pacifism under the influence of long-term secretary Eleanor Moore. But they never gave up the fight and always found other channels for continuing their activism in the broad causes of justice, equity and civil liberties.

While their marriage recognised the importance of independent political engagement, it was conventional in terms of domestic roles, with Maurice the breadwinner and Doris assuming household and maternal responsibilities, but, as Doris later wrote about a new home she had built, 'do not expect me to sit in contentment'. Three children (a fourth died in infancy) and domestic duties simply gave Doris's political activism an additional focus centred on education and the importance of home and family to national wellbeing.

Rasmussen's decision to write a joint biography of Maurice and Doris Blackburn makes for a highly nuanced and complex analysis of two important figures in the history of progressive politics in Australia, particularly Victoria; the intertwining of their emotional and intellectual engagement enriches our understanding of the paths they took both together and independently. We are able in this way to trace the evolution of the interesting but not always stable mix of socialism, feminism, international idealism, civil liberties and individual conscience that drove them. The structure of the book reinforces the connections, for each chapter—up until Maurice's death in 1943—is designed to include the experiences of and parts played by both in matters relating to women's rights, labour politics, war and conscription,

child rearing and education, peace and internationalism, and civil liberties. There were differences in emphasis—Maurice was more bound up with the internal stresses and tensions in the Labor Party where he was viewed, somewhat suspiciously, as an intellectual more interested in theory than solidarity; Doris on the other hand, though no less principled, was guided more by what she could contribute in a practical way to her choice of causes. Of necessity, the last two chapters focus on Doris's work after Maurice's death—in parliament, and in the Aboriginal Advancement League and WILPF. Her contribution to progressive political movements was arguably most significant during this long period, when, for more than a quarter of a century, she was able to dedicate herself to the causes she loved without the preoccupations of home and family constraining her activism.

As well as being a finely crafted work of scholarship, this book is a riveting read. There are some minor mistakes—Sir Andrew Peacock referred to in chapter 11 should be Sir Alexander Peacock, and 'Women's' should be 'Woman's' in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union—but only pedants like this reviewer will notice these blemishes.

Rasmussen has certainly rescued the Blackburns from the footnotes of labour history, as she intended, but this book achieves a great deal more than that. It has greatly enriched the scholarship on Victorian labour history, but it has also made a major contribution to the history of the progressivist politics and thinking that have characterised this state. It adds a sophisticated study of two important figures to the earlier key biographical works on George Higinbotham, David Syme and Charles Pearson by Stuart Macintyre, Henry Bournes Higgins by John Rickard, and, more recently, the biographical studies of these and other key Victorians that underpin Marilyn Lake's *Progressive New World*.

Judith Smart

Notes on Contributors

Peter Burke completed a doctorate on the social history of workplace Australian football in 2009 and has published numerous articles and reviews on different aspects of Australian football history. He is currently researching the hybrid code of football called Austus that was played in Melbourne by locals and US servicemen during the Second World War. He is employed in the Research Office at RMIT University.

Ian D. Clark is professor of tourism at Federation University Australia. He has a doctorate in Aboriginal historical geography from Monash University. He has been researching and publishing in Victorian Aboriginal history since 1982, and has been the centre manager of the Brambuk Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Halls Gap, and research fellow in history at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. His areas of interest include Aboriginal history, the history of tourism, and toponyms (place names).

Charles Fahey taught at La Trobe University from 1990 to 2018. His research interests and publications are in the fields of labour history, the history of the Victorian goldfields and the history of rural Australia. He is presently working with Mandy Jean, a heritage architect, to develop historical and architectural criteria for the protection of domestic housing built in Bendigo in the nineteenth century. He is co-author with Richard Broome, Andrea Gaynor and Katie Holmes of *Mallee Country: Land, People, History* (2019).

Carolyn Holbrook is an Australian Research Council DECRA fellow in the Contemporary Histories Research Group at Deakin University. She is the author of *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography* (2014), and co-editor with Keir Reeves of *The Great War: Aftermath and Commemoration* (2019). Carolyn is the director of the network, Australian Policy and History, and co-editor of the *Journal of Australian Studies*. She is currently writing a history of Australians' attitudes towards their federation.

Jennifer Hammett is a sixth-generation Gippslander. Her interest in history and writing is inherited. Her working life spans experiences from the kindergarten sand pit to the state and federal houses of parliament, but she is most recently the former director of the Gippsland Community Leadership Program. A writer of poetry for 40 years, Jenny is currently fulfilling a long-held dream to complete her research and a book on Eva West before she moves on to other writing projects.

Lucas Jordan is the author of *Stealth Raiders: A Few Daring Men in 1918* (2017). He has taught history to undergraduate students at Deakin and Monash universities and has written a global report for Amnesty International. He currently teaches history at Western English Language School in Melbourne and is a visiting fellow with the College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University.

Jan Láníček is senior lecturer at the University of New South Wales. He specialises in modern European history and Jewish/non-Jewish relations during the Holocaust. He is the author of *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938–1948* (2013), *Arnost Frischer and the Jewish Politics of Early 20th-Century Europe* (2016) and, most recently, *The Jew in Czech and Slovak Imagination, 1938–89* (co-authored with Hana Kubátová). He also co-edited *Governments-in-Exile and the Jews during the Second World War* (2013).

Andrew Lemon AM, FRHSV was president of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria 2009–13 and edited the *Victorian Historical Journal* 1990–99. He is a Melbourne independent professional historian with many articles and books to his credit, notably the three-volume *History of Australian Thoroughbred Racing* and his most recent book, *The Master Gardener*, a biography of T.R. Garnett, long-listed for the 2019 Mark and Evette Moran Literary Prize. He holds the degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Melbourne. This article was developed from a lecture given at the RHSV for Melbourne Rare Books Week.

James Lesh researches urban history and heritage conservation. He completed his PhD at the University of Melbourne in 2018 and is currently based at the University of Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning. His research considers the ways history and conservation intersect with development and community in urban contexts. Published refereed articles have ranged from the changing relationship between skyscrapers and heritage to the history of urban conservation and the Australian Burra Charter (for managing cultural heritage places).

Anne Marsden, a graduate of Leeds University and former science teacher, held a 2012–13 Honorary Creative Fellowship at the State Library Victoria, leading to papers in the *La Trobe Journal*, the *Victorian Historical Journal*, and *La Trobeana*. In 2016, *The Making of the Melbourne Mechanics' Institution*, and in 2018 its companion volume, *And The Women Came Too*, were published with the support of the Melbourne Athenaeum Library where Anne is a volunteer archives researcher.

Simon R. Molesworth AO, QC, BA, LL.B, M.ICOMOS, MRSV in his initial year of legal practice founded the first environmental law association in Australia. His subsequent legal career focused on environmental, planning, heritage and natural resource law. A Queens Council for over two decades, he recently completed two years as an acting justice of the Land and Environment Court in NSW. Simon has held the most senior roles in the National Trust movement in Victoria, nationally and globally, including as inaugural executive chairman and president of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) during its first decade. He was also a commissioner of the Australian Heritage Commission for five years and a member of the Commonwealth's National Cultural Heritage Committee for over a decade.

David Andrew Roberts is an associate professor and lectures in Australian History at the University of New England. He is the editor of the *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, and co-editor of *Australian Historical Studies*. His current research projects include 'Landscapes of Production and Punishment', a study of the Port Arthur penal settlement, and 'Enquiring into Empire', which investigates the transformations of law and governance in the British Empire during the early nineteenth century.

Lynette Russell AM is director of the Monash Indigenous Studies Centre and deputy director of the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence in Australian Biodiversity and Heritage, and from 2020 she will be the Kathleen Fitzpatrick Laureate fellow. Professor Russell is an award-winning author or editor of over a dozen books. Her Aboriginal ancestors were born on the lands of the Wotjabaluk people, who through the colonial project married into the Pallawah people of Tasmania, and she is descended from convicts. She is also one of the only Australian scholars to be elected to both the Royal Historical Society (London) and the Royal Anthropological Institute (London).

Suzanne D. Rutland OAM is professor emerita in the Department of Hebrew, Biblical & Jewish Studies, University of Sydney. She is a renowned Australian Jewish historian, has published widely on Australia, the Holocaust, Soviet Jewry and anti-Semitism, and is past president of the Australian Association for Jewish Studies and the Australian Jewish Historical Society. Her co-authored book with journalist Sam Lipski on Australia and the Soviet Jewry campaign was co-winner of the 2016 Prime Minister's Literary Award (Australian history). As a member of the Australian Delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) she serves on the Education Working Group and Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial.

Geoffrey A. Sandy holds a doctorate in Computer Science from RMIT University, and M.Com., Dip.Ed. from the University of Melbourne, as well as a Certificate of Theology from Moore College, Sydney. He has published widely in Information Systems and has also taught history at both secondary school and university levels. In 2012 he published *Saint Margaret's Anglican Church Eltham: Celebrating 150 Years*, and in 2014 and 2016, Volumes 1 and 3 of *A History of Saint Margaret's Church Eltham (The Foundation Years—Beginnings to 1888 and The Post-War Years—1945 to 2015)*. He is currently researching conscientious objectors and conscientious non-compliers during the Vietnam War years and is about to place a new gallery online for the Australian Living Peace Museum.

John Schauble worked in fire and emergency management policy and research in the Victorian Public Service for over a decade. Before that he was a journalist with the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* for more than twenty years. His MA thesis at the University of Melbourne in 2008 explored the influence of art and literature on community perceptions of bushfire. He has been a CFA volunteer for 35 years.

Judith Smart FRHSV co-edits the *Victorian Historical Journal*. She has published on Australian women's organisations, women and political protest, and the Australian home front during World War I, co-authored (with Marian Quartly) *Respectable Radicals: A History of the National Council of Women of Australia, 1896–2006* (2015) and co-edited (with Joy Damousi) *Contesting Australia History: Essays in Honour of Marilyn Lake* (2019), and (with Shurlee Swain) *The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia*, at <http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/index.htm> (2014).

Kristin Stegley OAM has extensive leadership experience in the Victorian cultural, philanthropic and local government sectors. An arts educator for over twenty years, Kristin has also been a local government councillor, trustee of several philanthropic foundations, and a political activist. She has volunteered with the National Trust for many years to promote the importance and value of heritage to our cultural well being. She is currently the chairman of the Board of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

Benjamin Wilkie is a historian and has lectured at Deakin University. He is currently a visiting research fellow at the University of Glasgow Library. His broad research interests include historical relationships between Scotland, Australia, and the British Empire, and social and environmental histories of Australia and its region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His first book was *The Scots in Australia 1788–1938* (2017) and he is currently writing a history of the Grampians–Gariwerd National Park.

Peter Yule FRHSV has written widely on Australian military, economic and medical history. His books include histories of Carlton, the Collins Class submarine project, Australian National Airways and the Royal Children's Hospital, and biographies of W.L. Baillieu and Sir Ian Potter. He has recently completed a major study commissioned by the Australian War Memorial on the Medical Legacies of the Vietnam War and is now writing a history of the Victorian Bar.

About the Royal Historical Society of Victoria

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria is a community organisation comprising people from many fields committed to collecting, researching and sharing an understanding of the history of Victoria. Founded in 1909, the Society continues the founders' vision that knowing the individual stories of past inhabitants gives present and future generations links with local place and local community, bolstering a sense of identity and belonging, and enriching our cultural heritage.

The RHSV is located in History House, the heritage-listed Drill Hall at 239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, built in 1939 on a site devoted to defence installations since the construction of the West Melbourne Orderly Room in 1866 for the Victorian Volunteer Corps. The 1939 building was designed to be used by the Army Medical Corps as a training and research facility. It passed into the hands of the Victorian government, which has leased it to the Society since 1999.

The RHSV conducts lectures, exhibitions, excursions and workshops for the benefit of members and the general public. It publishes the bi-annual *Victorian Historical Journal*, a bi-monthly newsletter, *History News*, and monographs. It is committed to collecting and making accessible the history of Melbourne and Victoria. It holds a significant collection of the history of Victoria including books, manuscripts, photographs, prints and drawings, ephemera and maps. The Society's library is considered one of Australia's richest in its focus on Victorian history. Catalogues are accessible online.

The RHSV acts as the umbrella body for over 320 historical societies throughout Victoria and actively promotes their collections, details of which are accessible via the Victorian Local History Database identified on the RHSV website. The Society also sponsors the History Victoria Support Group, which runs quarterly meetings throughout the state to increase the skills and knowledge of historical societies. The RHSV has an active online presence and runs the History Victoria bookshop—online and on-site.

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Guidelines for Contributors to the *Victorian Historical Journal*

1. The *Victorian Historical Journal* is a refereed journal publishing original and previously unpublished scholarly articles on Victorian history, or on Australian history where it illuminates Victorian history. It is published twice yearly by the Publications Committee, Royal Historical Society of Victoria.
2. The submission of original scholarly articles is invited following the journal's *Guidelines* available at <http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/publications/victorian-historical-journal>.
3. Articles from 4,000 to 8,000 words (including notes) are preferred.
4. The *VHJ* also publishes historical notes, which are reviewed by the editors. A historical note may be up to 4,000 words in length. It contains factual information and is different from an article in not being an extended analysis or having an argument. Submitted articles may be reduced and published as historical notes at the discretion of the editor(s) and the Publications Committee, after consultation with the author.
5. The review editor(s) commission book reviews—suggestions welcome.
6. The RHSV does not pay for contributions to the journal.
7. The manuscript should be in digital form in a minimum 12-point serif typeface, double or one-and-a-half line spaced (including indented quotations and endnotes), with margins of at least 3 cm.
8. Referencing style is endnotes and must not exceed 10 per cent of the text. They should be devoted principally to the citation of sources.
9. The title page should include: author's name and title(s); postal address; telephone number; email address; article's word length (including notes); a 100-word biographical note on the author; a 100-word abstract of the main argument or significance of the article.
10. Suitable illustrations for articles are welcome. Initially send clear hard photocopies, not originals. Scanned images at 300dpi can be emailed or sent on disk. Further requirements for final images and permissions will be sent if your article is accepted.
11. Titles should be concise, indicative of the subject, and can include a subtitle. The editor reserves the right to alter the title in consultation with the author.
12. Send an electronic copy of your manuscript, either on disk or preferably as an email attachment (.rtf or .doc or .docx file format). Email attachments should be sent to office@historyvictoria.org.au. Telephone enquiries to the RHSV office 9326 9288.
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