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## Expanding Contacts: Aboriginal Nations of Australia

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**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 4:** The nature of contact between Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islanders and others, for example, the Macassans and the Europeans, and the effects of these interactions on, for example families and the environment (ACHHK080) **AC**

## An Aboriginal History of Yarra

Yarra City Council, with Wurundjeri Tribe Land & Compensation Cultural Heritage Council | *Agora* vol. 48, no. 4, 2013

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**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 4:** The diversity and longevity of Australia's first peoples and the ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are connected to Country and Place (land, sea, waterways and skies) and the implications for their daily lives. (ACHHK077) **AC**

**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 5:** The nature of convict or colonial presence, including the factors that influenced patterns of development, aspects of the daily life of inhabitants (including Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) and how the environment changed. (ACHHK094) **AC**

## The Chinese in Australia 1818–1918

Diana Millar | *Agora* vol. 44, no. 3, 2009

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**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 5:** The reasons people migrated to Australia from Europe and Asia, and the experiences and contributions of a particular migrant group within a colony (ACHHK096) **AC**

**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 6:** Stories of groups of people who migrated to Australia (including from ONE Asian country) and the reasons they migrated, such as World War II and Australian migration programs since the war. (ACHHK115) **AC**

## An Artist on the Goldfields: The Extraordinary Legacy of S. T. Gill

Marion Littlejohn | *Agora* vol. 45, no. 2, 2010

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**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 5:** The impact of a significant development or event on a colony; for example, frontier conflict, the gold rushes, the Eureka Stockade, internal exploration, the advent of rail, the expansion of farming, drought. (ACHHK095) **AC**

## Remnants of a Life's Work: Caroline Chisholm

Dr Moya McFadzean | *Agora* vol. 48, no. 1, 2013

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**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 5:** The role that a significant individual or group played in shaping a colony; for example, explorers, farmers, entrepreneurs, artists, writers, humanitarians, religious and political leaders, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. (ACHHK097) **AC**

## Artworks and Australian History

Grace Di Muzio | *Agora* vol. 45, no. 2, 2010

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**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 5:** The nature of convict or colonial presence, including the factors that influenced patterns of development, aspects of the daily life of inhabitants (including Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) and how the environment changed. (ACHHK094) **AC**

**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 6:** Experiences of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islanders, migrants, women, and children. (ACHHK114) **AC**

## The Ins and Outs of Federation

Diana Millar | *Agora* vol. 44, no. 04, 2009

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**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 6:** Key figures and events that led to Australia's Federation, including British and American influence on Australia's system of law and government. (ACHHK113) **AC**

**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM YEAR 6:** Experiences of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islanders, migrants, women, and children. (ACHHK114) **AC**



# ergo: Primary Sources online from the State Library of Victoria

How teachers can contextualise documents and images from Victoria's past.

Linda Angeloni, State Library of Victoria

*ergo* is a website from the State Library of Victoria designed to support teachers and students in the exploration of Victorian history and research skills. *ergo* provides over 750 digitised primary sources from SLV's collections, grouped thematically according to key themes in Australian Curriculum: History.

This article will look at some of the key themes and resources explored in *ergo*. In particular, I will discuss how the site supports students by providing contextual information, which helps them to identify bias and evaluate a range of texts. Additional support in the form of writing guides and templates help students apply their research. There will also be a discussion of teaching resources available in the For Teachers section of the website.

The *ergo* website consists of three sections: Explore History, Learn Skills and For Teachers. The For Teachers section contains a range of primary source 'kits,' supporting activities and a range of writing, document and image-study templates. Learn Skills provides clear and easy-to-follow guides to research, while Explore History looks at hundreds of carefully selected images, manuscripts, maps, newspaper

articles, realia and much more from the SLV's collections. With the introduction of the national curriculum, some aspects of Australian history moved into upper primary. *ergo* is an excellent resource to engage younger students in the study of history by using primary sources like original letters, objects, artwork and photographs as a starting point.

## Explore History

The Explore History section groups resources around key strengths in the collection and links to the Australian Curriculum. Sources include everything from protest badges and cartoons to original nineteenth-century pamphlets and manuscripts. *ergo* also highlights a number of recent digitising projects that have made thousands of primary sources relevant to the Australian Curriculum freely available online.

Each Explore History page groups together resources that collectively illustrate and raise questions about key issues, events and people from Victoria's past. The aim of each page is to provide enough contextual information to develop student awareness of how

historians understand the people, period or events in question. Drop-down 'annotations' discuss bias and historical context in selected primary source quotations and provide bibliographic details of sources used. *ergo* aims to make students aware of the forces that shape both the production of primary sources and the way they are interpreted. The focus is on developing critical thinking skills essential to good research.

Every collection page also includes links to relevant digitised material in the State library of Victoria's online collection as well as reliable resources outside the library including cultural institutions, government, universities and reputable public organisations. In this way, *ergo* acts as a pathfinder for students, directing them to relevant, reliable online sources and modelling the thinking process that underpins good research. Critical thinking and information literacy skills are further explored in the Learn Skills section.

The themes currently available in Explore History and most relevant to AC: History 4–6 are:

- Colonial Melbourne
- Fight for Rights
- Golden Victoria
- Land & Exploration

### Colonial Melbourne

As Victoria's premier research institution, the SLV holds important documents from Victoria's early years and the Port Phillip settlement. Many primary sources from this period have recently been digitised and are available online. These documents, images and pamphlets form the core of the section on Colonial Melbourne, which explores Port Phillip prior to the gold rush.

Colonial Melbourne provides primary source material to support AC: History Year 4 (First Contacts) and Year 5 (The Australian Colonies).

#### 1) CONVICTS

Although known as a 'free' settlement, Port Phillip and Victorian regional centres

were home to convicts. This sometimes-overlooked group is explored in this section. Issues discussed include the embarrassing failure of the 1826 expedition to Western Port, prison 'exiles,' the 'Pentonvillains' and the horrific conditions experienced by convicts on board convict ships and hulks.

One of the narratives explored in the Convicts section is the story of William Buckley, an escaped convict from the ill-fated 1803 penal settlement. Buckley escaped from the settlement and lived with the Wathaurong people of the Bellarine Peninsula for over thirty years before being 'discovered' by John Batman's party in 1835. Sources include three different accounts of Buckley's life: the first was written by George Langhorne, who recorded Buckley's story at a local mission just months after he left the Wathaurong; the second was written by John Morgan, Tasmanian journalist, near the end of Buckley's life when both were in need of funds; and the third is an account by John Bonwick, which is based almost entirely on primary sources from the time (he never spoke to Buckley in person).

Another remarkable source document is Third Lieutenant Nicholas Patershall's personal account of the doomed journey

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Canvas Town, between Princess Bridge and South Melbourne*. Tents used as makeshift houses in the 1850s. De Gruchy and Leigh, artists, 1850-1860. Colour lithograph. SLV Pictures Collection H25127.

BELOW: Poster announcing Port Phillip's separation, distributed in the *Melbourne Morning Herald*, 11 November 1850. Letterpress printed on buff paper. SLV H38464.

All images published with kind permission of the State Library of Victoria.

**THE MELBOURNE MORNING HERALD EXTRAORDINARY.**  
MELBOURNE, MONDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 11, 1850. No. 1508.

**GLORIOUS NEWS!  
SEPARATION  
AT LAST!!**

We have not a moment in communicating to the PUBLIC the Good-tiding Intelligence that  
**SEPARATION HAS COME AT LAST!!**  
**The Australian Colonies' Bill,**  
WITH THE AMENDMENTS MADE IN THE LORDS, ON THE 5th JULY,  
**WAS AGREED TO IN THE COMMONS ON THE 1ST AUG.,**  
AND ONLY AWAITS THE QUEEN'S SIGNATURE TO BECOME  
**THE LAW OF THE LAND.**  
The long OPPRESSED, long HOPPEFORD Port Phillip, is at length an  
**INDEPENDENT COLONY,**  
Gifted with the Royal name of VICTORIA, and endowed with a flourishing revenue and almost inexhaustible resources.  
Let all classes of Colonists therefore meet in their hour of triumph in celebrating the Imperial Epoch in a suitable manner, and observing our  
**GENERAL JUBILEE.**

The "Public Registering" Committee lately nominated by the Citizens of Melbourne, will assemble without delay, let one and all co-operate with them heart and hand in giving due effect to the enthusiastic wishes of our  
**New-born Colony!**  
It is an ERA in the existence of our adopted Land which can never again occur; and the glorious opportunity once past will be irretrievable.  
COLONISTS, - now is the day and now is the hour!! For this act of Justice to Port Phillip, and every other good gift, may  
**God Bless the Queen!!!**

Printed and Published at the "Melbourne Morning Herald and General Daily Advertiser" Office, Little Collins-street, Melbourne, New South Wales, by GEORGE CYRILL.

RIGHT: *Collins Street - Town of Melbourne, Port Phillip*, Elisha Noyce and William Knight, August 1840. Chalk lithograph on buff paper. View along Collins Street, Melbourne, looking west towards Russell Street. From the State Library of Victoria's Pictures Collection H18111.



of the *Calcutta* to Sullivan Bay in 1803, led by Lieutenant David Collins and carrying the convict William Buckley and a young John Pascoe Fawkner. The SLV holds one of only two remaining barrels from the settlement.

## II) PIONEERS

The State Library holds various sources relating to John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner, two men laying claim to the title of Melbourne's founder. The Pioneers section explores the influence and colourful history of both men. Through portraits, the accounts of contemporaries and documents they wrote themselves, this section explores both men's natures and the controversy surrounding the title 'founder.' A selection of digitised manuscripts includes Port Phillip's first newspaper, *The Melbourne Advertiser* (which Fawkner handwrote himself), and Fawkner's idealistic constitution, which spoke of equal political rights for all men and strict laws against alcohol; he left the name of the settlement blank. The Pioneers section concludes with a children's history of Port Phillip from the 1930s, depicting John Batman as young, vigorous and noble, and voicing prejudice against Indigenous people. These early student history primers provide a startling insight into how classroom education and perceptions of indigenous history have changed.

## III) EVERYDAY LIFE

Outside the foundation debate, Port

Phillip was a thriving and fast-expanding settlement. Everyday life explores the day-to-day existence of people on the street as well as the social groups and key events that shaped the town. Issues discussed include Separation, land sales, housing, women's experience of settlement and Garryowen's role in recording Port Phillip's social history in the form of his *Chronicles of Early Melbourne*.

Sources include the front page of the *Melbourne Morning Herald* exclaiming Port Phillip's independence, Robert Hoddle's surveyors' chain and an early map of Melbourne's controversial city grid. Also included are various images of Melbourne's changing streetscapes and early cartoons relating to alcohol and the Temperance Movement. This section illustrates how the SLV's digitised Picture Collection can be used to explore everyday life, which is rarely described in written sources from the time.

## Fight for Rights

An unexpected strength of the SLV's collection is political ephemera, held predominantly in the Riley Collection. Protest badges, documents and pamphlets from this collection are the focus of the Fight for Rights section of *ergo*, along with newspaper articles, Indigenous art and contemporary images.

The Indigenous rights section provides sources that support AC: History Year 6 (Australia as a Nation) in which

students explore how indigenous groups fought for the right to add their voice to the democracy during the twentieth century.

#### INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

With the ‘signing’ of John Batman’s treaty, arguably the fight for Indigenous rights in Victoria began. This section explores the struggle for political, social and cultural rights for Aboriginal people after European settlement in Port Phillip. Issues include the Yorta Yorta native title claim, the controversial 1997 Reconciliation Convention, social commentary by artists Tommy Mcrae and William Barak as well as Kevin Rudd’s historic Apology.

A number of narratives included in Indigenous rights explore how written documents from early settlement misrepresented Aboriginal people and culture and often neglected Indigenous oral traditions. One example of how written sources were given precedence over oral histories is explored in pieces relating to the Yorta Yorta native title claim.

*Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*, written by nineteenth-century squatter Edward Curr, was used in evidence against the Yorta Yorta claim, since it documented customs no longer practised in the local Aboriginal community. Justice Howard Olney gave preference to evidence from texts like Curr’s over Indigenous testimony. This not only skewed the balance in favour of European versions of colonisation, it also arguably failed to take into account Edward Curr’s own cultural bias. While he was writing *Recollections* he was in fact a member of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, which was responsible for closing missions like Coranderrk, and had an often-difficult relationship with Aboriginal communities. Tommy Mcrae’s artwork also explores non-written histories in the form of unique drawings caricaturing squatters, settlers and even migrants, as well as documenting Indigenous traditions.

This section includes links to Rudd’s complete Apology and John Howard’s speech at the 1997 Reconciliation Convention, in which he infamously described the treatment of Indigenous people as a ‘blemish’ on our history.

## Golden Victoria

Every level of society was affected by the discovery of gold in Victoria in the 1850s. Without thought to Indigenous peoples, the environment, family or friends, it was every man and woman for themselves in the search for gold. Much of the State Library of Victoria’s heritage collection was funded by the gold rush. Melbourne as a city grew exponentially and everything from migration to public transport, cultural institutions and politics changed in a matter of decades.

The sources in this section relate to AC: History Year 5 (The Australian Colonies), particularly with reference to the experience of people on the goldfields and the social, political and economical repercussions of the gold rush.

#### I) FINDING GOLD

Which methods were used by diggers on the goldfields? Finding Gold looks at mining techniques from the time including original instructional images. Richest Discoveries looks at some of the more famous (or infamous) finds that transformed people’s lives.

#### II) LIFE ON THE GOLDFIELDS

The experiences of indigenous people, women, Chinese migrants, children and a number of key public figures and artists are explored in Life on the Goldfields. Each group is explored through primary sources that depict their day-to-day life and the challenges they faced.

#### III) IMPACT ON SOCIETY

The gold rush transformed Victoria, its cities, towns and population. Nothing would ever be the same. This section looks at the impact of gold on architecture, migration, transport and government. There is also a discussion of key events and issues like the Eureka Stockade, taxation and social change and its impact on the role of the landed gentry - many of whom had begun their time in Victoria as squatters.

## Land and Exploration

As European settlement transformed Victoria, exploration not only reached into the wilds of the bush but into the unforgiving Antarctic. Land and Exploration looks at early settlers’

RIGHT: *An encampment of Aboriginal Australians on the banks of the Yarra*. John Cotton, c. 1845. Painting: watercolour with graphite pencil and glazing medium. SLV H252.



struggles with the Victorian landscape and the environmental consequences of settlement.

Sources relate to AC: History Year 4 (First Contacts).

#### I) ENVIRONMENT

Deforestation, erosion and drought form part of the legacy left by European farming and industrial practices. This section looks at how Europeans introduced new varieties of plants and animals, often with catastrophic effects on native species. Mining and water management are also discussed.

#### II) EXPLORATION

Exploration looks at the journeys of men like Douglas Mawson and Alfred Howitt as well as discussing the role of Indigenous guides in Burke and Wills' tragic expedition. John King Davis' papers are held by the SLV, and rare photographs and maps from the five trips he made to Antarctica with Mawson, Shackleton and others are highlights of this section.

#### Resource kits for teachers

The For Teachers section of *ergo* includes the following support materials:

#### EXPLORERS

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/activity-burke-and-wills-decision-making](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/activity-burke-and-wills-decision-making)

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/activity-burke-and-wills-timeline-untangle](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/activity-burke-and-wills-timeline-untangle)

#### GOLD

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/source-analysis-gold-fever](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/source-analysis-gold-fever)

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/source-analysis-danger-goldfields](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/source-analysis-danger-goldfields)

#### PIONEERS

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/source-analysis-john-batmans-treaty](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/source-analysis-john-batmans-treaty)

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/student-templates-source-analysis](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/student-templates-source-analysis)

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/activity-comparing-sources](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/activity-comparing-sources)

[ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/activity-how-analyse-images](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/teachers/activity-how-analyse-images)

#### Other resources

The Learn Skills area of the *ergo* website offers easy-to-follow guides on the research process and essay writing, which help students evaluate and apply the wealth of primary sources available on the site. In resource kits in the For Teachers section, links are given to items exploring bias in written material and images.

*ergo* is supported by onsite programs and exhibitions at the State Library of Victoria. The Education Programs unit provides exhibition tours and related workshops for students. For more information about *ergo*, email [ergo@slv.vic.gov.au](mailto:ergo@slv.vic.gov.au) or visit the website [ergo.slv.vic.gov.au](http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au).



# An Aboriginal History of Yarra

**A history of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the land currently known as the City of Yarra.**

*Yarra City Council in partnership with Wurundjeri Tribe Land & Compensation Cultural Heritage Council*

The Wurundjeri-willam people of the Kulin nation are the traditional owners of the land that is now known as the City of Yarra. Their relationship with the land extends back tens of thousands of years to when their creator spirit 'Bunjil' formed their people, the land and all living things.

The Wurundjeri's connection to land is underpinned by cultural and spiritual values vastly different to those of the Europeans. The Wurundjeri did not 'own' the land in the European sense of the word, but belonged to, or were 'owned by' the land. They did not live in permanent settlements but, rather, camped for periods within defined clan boundaries where food was plentiful, and moved on when the land needed to rejuvenate. The land provided all the Wurundjeri needed – food, water, medicine, shelter – and they treated it with the respect due to such a provider.

The moment Europeans arrived in the area, they began changing the land to suit the European way of life. For the majority of settlers, the driving force was land ownership. For at least some of these settlers, underlying this drive was an imperial belief in British superiority combined with a desire to 'civilise.'

Settler relationships with the Wurundjeri and

other Aboriginal people in the area varied, but the settlement and development of Melbourne impacted heavily on the Wurundjeri. Dispossession of land, dislocation, frontier clashes and introduced diseases led to a dramatic decline in the population.

Despite the effects of colonisation, Aboriginal people and culture survived, and the strong bonds between families and clans could not be broken.

The *Aboriginal History of Yarra* website explores the relationships between the traditional owners and settlers through the early years of Melbourne's establishment. The following is a selection of excerpts from this new resource. It is not an easy history, but one that is essential in understanding where we have come from and where we are going – and for all its local detail, it speaks to a national history.

## **Pre-contact Wurundjeri**

Australia's state and territory borders have existed for a relatively short period. For thousands of years before European settlement, the country now known as Australia consisted of 500–700 Aboriginal nations, each with their own systems of government, cultural practices, religions and languages. Part of the area

OPPOSITE: Aboriginal people fishing and camping on Merri Creek. Tinted lithograph by Charles Troedel, 1864.

now known as the City of Melbourne and all of the City of Yarra (as well as land extending north into central Victoria) are the traditional lands of the Kulin nation. The City of Yarra area was looked after by the Wurundjeri-willam family group. They belong to the Wurundjeri-balluk clan, which is part of the larger Wurundjeri tribe. The Wurundjeri-willam mainly spoke Woiwurrung language, but also spoke other languages of their nation. Each clan was governed by a *ngurungaeta* (pronounced na-run-getta) or head-man.

All clan members knew their land in great detail, including the best times to visit each area according to weather and availability of food. In winter, the Wurundjeri-willam regularly camped in the higher areas, as the land near the river flooded. In spring and summer they travelled more frequently, moving between nine and sixteen kilometres a day, hunting and gathering food, and visiting sacred sites. According to historian Penelope Edmonds, 'Spring and early summer were times of movement and change, for it was then that crops such as yam (*mirr-n'yang*) were ready for harvesting, birds' eggs plentiful and wildfowl and game more accessible. As summer wore on the Aborigines visited fishing and eeling sites and camped for longer periods.'<sup>1</sup>

Land boundaries for each clan were clearly defined, with strict protocols governing access to the land of other clans. While each clan or family group travelled on its own, they still maintained relationships with others within their language group. Marriage played an important role in this, as people would not marry within their own clan. Instead, partners were chosen from different clans within the Kulin nation.<sup>2</sup> Visiting the land of other clans was therefore an important and necessary right.

Ties were also cemented through gatherings and corroborees, where clans within the Kulin nation would meet, with sometimes hundreds of people together. Corroboree dances and storytelling performances were a focus of these gatherings, with different clans often competing to outdo each other. These gatherings were also an opportunity for a council of *ngurungaeta* to be formed to settle disputes or decide on punishment for those responsible for serious crimes against Aboriginal law.

## Dispossession

Wurundjeri dispossession of land took place not just through displacement, but also through disconnection. Land was sold, bush was cleared for the creation of roads and buildings, and wetlands were drained. Over time, even the course of the Yarra River was changed. The disruption of sacred sites might be termed desecration. For the Wurundjeri, who had a spiritual connection to the land, these changes had a devastating impact on all aspects of their health and wellbeing.

Prior to Melbourne's settlement, European sealers and whalers had lived and worked along the Victorian coastline for decades, and the British had made attempts to establish settlements further out on Port Phillip Bay and Westernport Bay. The arrival of settlers during the 1830s was considered illegal under British law, but settlers came anyway, unable to resist the lure of prime pastoral land. The settlement grew through the early thirties and by the end of 1836, the British government conceded it couldn't stop it. The settlement was officially named Melbourne by Governor Sir Richard Bourke in March 1837.<sup>3</sup> During the ceremony Bourke used William Buckley, an escaped convict who had lived with Watha wurrung people for thirty-two years, to tell the Aboriginal people present that he would be a friend as long as they were peaceable and obeyed the law.<sup>4</sup>

As the settler population increased and the built environment developed, the European hold on the land was strengthened. The first land sales took place in Melbourne on 1 June 1837. The following year, forty-one allotments of twenty-five acres each were sold in the areas that would become Collingwood and Fitzroy. It was intended that they would be paddocks.<sup>5</sup> In the building boom of 1850, the allotments were subdivided and forest was cleared for firewood. The European population during this time rose from 600 people in 1841, to nearly 3000 people in 1850, and 3449 people in 1851.<sup>6</sup>

Aboriginal people were pushed further and further out, and freedom of movement across the land became increasingly difficult. The settlers created new land boundaries with fences and often had guns to back them up.

- 1 M.F. Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1979), 9.
- 2 Gary Presland, *First People: The Eastern Kulin of Melbourne*, Port Phillip and Central Victoria (Melbourne: Museum Victoria, 2010), 15.
- 3 A.G.L. Shaw, 'Foundation and Early History,' in Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, online edition, [www.emelbourne.net.au](http://www.emelbourne.net.au).
- 4 Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 82.
- 5 Bernard Barrett, *The Inner Suburbs: The Evolution of an Industrial Area* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1971), 14.
- 6 Barrett, *The Inner Suburbs*, 20; Shaw, 'Foundation and Early History.'



For the Wurundjeri, finding food within traditional clan boundaries became increasingly challenging. The settlers hunted wildlife on an unprecedented level, for sport as well as for food, reducing the amount that was available.<sup>7</sup>

Introduced animals such as sheep and cattle trampled and killed vegetation that had been a staple of the Aboriginal diet.<sup>8</sup> This sometimes forced Aboriginal people onto the land of other clans – a breach of protocol that sometimes led to inter-clan violence. Devastation from introduced diseases also influenced the willingness of Aboriginal people to return to former campsites, as happened at the confluence of the Yarra River and Merri Creek after the influenza epidemic of 1847.<sup>9</sup>

The Wurundjeri-willam and other Aboriginal people of the Yarra and Melbourne area did not concede their land easily, but as the settlement grew and space to hunt and gather diminished, many of the dispossessed were eventually drawn to the settlement, where food and alcohol was available. As Melbourne developed into a town and then a city, there continued to be a strong Aboriginal presence in and around the settlement.

## Treaty

On 6 June 1835, just under two years before Melbourne was officially recognised as a settlement, John Batman, the leader of the Port Phillip Association presented Wurundjeri Elders with a land use agreement.

This document, now referred to as the Batman treaty, was later given to the British government to claim that local Aboriginal people had given Batman access to their land in exchange for goods and rations. Today, the meaning and interpretation of this treaty is contested. Some argue it was pretence for taking Aboriginal land in exchange for trinkets, while others argue it was significant in that it sought to recognise Aboriginal land rights.

The exact location of the meeting between Batman and the Kulin *ngurungaeta*, with whom he made the treaty, is unknown.<sup>10</sup> According to historian Meyer Eidelson, it is generally believed to have occurred on the Merri Creek near modern-day Rushall Station.<sup>11</sup>

Opinions around why Kulin *ngurungaeta* signed the treaty (if in fact they did) are open to speculation. One opinion is that 'the clan-heads may have made a very informed decision' to 'limit the number of settlers in Port Phillip' in an attempt 'to at least curtail the destruction' they had heard about happening elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

In attempting to understand Batman's intentions, it's worth noting that the Port Phillip Association's principal aim 'was to depasture stock as profitably as possible'.<sup>13</sup> The aim of the Association as given to the British authorities, however, was to establish a nucleus 'for a free and useful colony, founded on the principle of conciliation, of philanthropy, morality and temperance ... calculated to ensure the comfort and well being of the natives.'<sup>14</sup> It is unlikely that these two aims could peacefully coexist.

Batman's treaty was deemed invalid. It was also noted that 'if it was acknowledged that the Aborigines had the right to dispose of their land as they saw fit, then the Crown's claim to all Australian lands would be in doubt.'<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, Batman's treaty had no legal significance in the European settlement of Melbourne and the taking of Aboriginal land. However, it was an important first step in this process, and also holds significant symbolism. It is symbolic of European relations with the Kulin, in that self-interest and deceit were central to colonisation. To this day, Batman's treaty is the only land use agreement that has sought to recognise European occupation of Australia, and pre-existing Aboriginal land rights.

## The Protectorate

At an official level, an important influence on policy makers and political leaders was Enlightenment thought

ABOVE LEFT: *The Signing of Batman's Treaty at Merri Creek, 1835*, by John Wesley Burt. SLV Pictures Collection, H92.196. Image courtesy State Library of Victoria.

ABOVE RIGHT: William Thomas, 1860.

- 7 Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria*, 42.
- 8 Richard Broome, 'Aboriginal Melbourne,' in Brown-May and Swain, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*.
- 9 Ian D. Clark and Laura M. Kostanski, 'An Indigenous History of Stonnington – A Report to the City of Stonnington' (2006), 83–4.
- 10 Isabel Ellender and Peter Christiansen, *People of the Merri Merri: The Wurundjeri in Colonial Days* (Melbourne: Merri Creek Management Committee, 2001), 19.
- 11 Meyer Eidelson, *The Melbourne Dreaming: A Guide to the Aboriginal Places of Melbourne* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997), 32.
- 12 Eidelson, *The Melbourne Dreaming*, 65.
- 13 Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria*, 25–26.
- 14 Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria*, 26.
- 15 Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria*, 26.

and what was known as the 'Exeter Hall movement' in Britain.<sup>16</sup>

This humanitarian influence, well-intentioned but imperialistic, is evident in such things as the establishment of the Aboriginal Protectorate. 'Protection' was a key idea of the early settlement years, and had a strong influence on government policy. In many ways William Thomas was the epitome of this idea of protection, and the contradictions it contained.

In his role as Assistant Protector, Thomas had good intentions. He made efforts to learn the ways of the Wurundjeri, learning both Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language. But he was an Englishman and fervent Christian, and his ultimate goal was to 'civilise' the local Aboriginal people by settling them in villages and converting them to Christianity.

In 1837, prior to the protectorate's establishment, a mission and school had been set up on the south side of the Yarra River at a meeting place and corroboree site that is now occupied by Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens.<sup>17</sup>

The mission and school failed, however, because the people of the Kulin nations refused to give up cultural practices of travelling and hunting at certain times of the year.

The Aboriginal Protectorate was established to replace the mission. Under orders from the Chief Protector George Robinson, William Thomas established a station at Narre Warren in 1840 and based himself there from 1841. However, he was not successful in convincing the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung to move so far from Melbourne and, by 1843, Thomas had moved to the popular camp site at the confluence of the Yarra River and the Merri Creek. At this time, the Merri Creek School was established for Aboriginal children, with some success.

As the settlement grew, the Wurundjeri found themselves faced with a variety of requests and demands from the European settlers. The protectors wanted to keep Aboriginal people out of the town, to 'civilise' them and eventually enable them to be part of society. The merchants wanted Aboriginal people to continue coming to the town so they could profit from them. The general public and colonial officers simply wanted the protectors to remove

the Aboriginal people from the area and ensure they did not return. There were also some who saw the injustice of dispossession (although this was only because the Europeans had taken the land without allocating an area for the Aboriginal people to go).<sup>18</sup>

The protectorate system was seen as a failure and, unsupported by the government or the public, it was dismantled in December 1849. Thomas was named Guardian of the Aborigines on 1 January 1850. His instructions were nearly identical to when he was appointed Assistant Protector, except Superintendent Charles La Trobe now emphasised that Thomas was 'to keep the blacks out of Melbourne.'<sup>19</sup> With Thomas the sole authority looking after the welfare of the Aboriginal people, as Penelope Edmonds has noted, 'the 1850s have been described as a period of almost complete government neglect of Aboriginal peoples.'<sup>20</sup>

In 1858, a 'Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines' was formed by the Victorian Government, to enquire into the state of the Aboriginal population at this time. The committee published a report in 1859 that recommended the establishment of government reserves for Aboriginal people. The result of this was the creation of the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines in 1860 to establish a series of reserves, onto which the Aboriginal people would be 'more vigorously compelled' to move. These reserves included Ebenezer, Lake Tyers, Framlingham, Lake Condah, Ramahyuck, Coranderrk and Yelta. Many of the Wurundjeri moved to Coranderrk, which was created by a group of Kulin in 1863, and retroactively approved by the government.<sup>21</sup>

## Disease

One of the biggest impacts on the Aboriginal population in the City of Yarra area was the introduction of diseases previously unknown to the Wurundjeri. It has been estimated that disease accounted for up to sixty per cent of the Aboriginal deaths across the Port Phillip area.<sup>22</sup> Even before Europeans began arriving in the Melbourne area, up to a third of the population of the eastern Australian tribes had been killed by an epidemic of smallpox that spread from Sydney.<sup>23</sup>

16 James Boyce, 1835: *The Founding of Melbourne & The Conquest of Melbourne* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2011), 37–38.

17 Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 87; Shaun Canning and Frances Thiele, *Indigenous Cultural Heritage and History within the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation Area: A Report to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council* (Melbourne: Australian Cultural Heritage Management, 2010), 12.

18 *Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on The Aborigines; Together with the Proceedings of Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendices* (Melbourne: John Ferres, Government Printer 1859), iv.

19 *Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines*, 1.

20 Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 153.

21 Canning and Thiele, *Indigenous Cultural Heritage and History within the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation Area*, 14.

22 Presland, *First People*, 90.

23 Don Garden, *Victoria: A History* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1984), 5; Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 27.

‘While the European population had a strong resistance to diseases, and even the common cold, exposure was often fatal to Aboriginal populations.’

While the European population had a strong resistance to diseases such as bronchitis, measles, scarlet fever, chicken pox and even the common cold, exposure to these diseases was often fatal to Aboriginal populations. Added to this were other diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis and venereal disease (such as syphilis) that were deadly for European and Aboriginal populations alike.<sup>24</sup>

Changes to diet also became a source of ill health and disease. Some changes were caused by restricted access to traditional food – from land being fenced off, native animals being shot for sport and the introduction of hoofed animals such as sheep (which trampled and destroyed native plants that had served as staple foodstuffs). For some, these changes led to starvation, for others this led to the adoption of a European style diet including refined sugar, flour and offal, replacing what had been a high-protein diet.<sup>25</sup> The impact of a diet based on these introduced foodstuffs was made worse by the provision of rations that consisted of the worst quality and cheapest grains and meats available.

Movement away from a nomadic life also had a massive impact on the Wurundjeri’s health. Constant availability of European food led to gatherings of more Aboriginal people, which in turn facilitated spread of disease.<sup>26</sup> One of the reasons for travelling in small bands was to ensure there was adequate food available and to enable an area to regenerate once it had been exhausted. Moving camp after they had exhausted supply also prevented issues with natural waste – ‘mobility gave them a sewerage system.’<sup>27</sup> By making permanent camps, the Aboriginal people had a greater exposure to germs, leading to a number of outbreaks of dysentery.<sup>28</sup> Even the adoption of European dress caused the Aboriginal people harm, preventing their skin from absorbing the sunlight that had previously aided in the destruction of bacteria. Furthermore,

Geoffrey Blainey argues they ‘had no tradition of washing clothes,’ ‘they often had no access to soap and to clean running water,’ and ‘they did not realise the danger of sleeping in a wet dress or damp blanket. In putting on clothes they were often putting on burial garments.’<sup>29</sup>

The other big lifestyle-based cause of ill health and disease that came with the European population was alcohol.

As stated by Megan Goulding and Mary Menis, ‘by the 1850s alcoholism was endemic across the Victorian Aboriginal population and contributed greatly to population decline.’<sup>30</sup> Issues with alcohol were made worse by the fact that spirits were the primary form of drink in this period. William Thomas reported: ‘At the Merri Creek, one morning at daybreak, there were four or five lying bedded in the mud, drunk, not dead; cold comes on, and as soon as disease touches a black man’s chest you cannot save him.’<sup>31</sup>

In June 1847, an epidemic of influenza hit the large encampment at the confluence of the Yarra River and Merri Creek particularly hard. Those who survived the initial impact of disease had to live with the grief and devastation within their community. In the wake of this, what had once been a popular and significant camping spot for the Wurundjeri was no longer used to any great extent.<sup>32</sup> This then acted as yet another force to drive the Wurundjeri from their land.

Declining birthrates was another issue. The diseases mentioned above impacted the young more than the elderly, causing a decline in the number of people of childbearing age. Depression also may have had a role to play. Both Billibellary, Elder of the Wurundjeri, and Derrimut, Elder of the Yalukit-willam, are repeatedly quoted as stating that there was no point having children as the Europeans had taken all the land.<sup>33</sup> On top of this, the European introduction of syphilis caused sterility. Similarly, a decline in health from dietary and other changes also affected fertility.<sup>34</sup>

24 Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria*, 42.

25 Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria*, 43.

26 Clark and Kostanski, ‘An Indigenous History of Stonnington,’ 68–69.

27 Geoffrey Blainey, *A Land Half Won* (South Melbourne: Macmillan Company), 91–92.

28 Blainey, *A Land Half Won*, 91–92; Clark and Kostanski, ‘An Indigenous History of Stonnington,’ 68–69.

29 Blainey, *A Land Half Won*, 91–92.

30 Megan Goulding and Mary Menis, *Moreland Post-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study*, Prepared for Moreland City Council (North Carlton: Goulding Heritage Consulting), 62.

31 Goulding and Menis, *Moreland Post-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study*, 62.

32 Clark and Kostanski, ‘An Indigenous History of Stonnington,’ 3–4, 179.

33 Broome, ‘Aboriginal Melbourne.’

34 Blainey, *A Land Half Won*, 91–92.

Ultimately, the introduction of European diseases and lifestyle-related health problems had a devastating and ongoing impact on the Aboriginal people of Victoria.

### Violence

Violence was a common issue in frontier history across Australia, and Victoria was no exception. While many British colonists and officials 'were benign if sanctimonious ... a large proportion of colonists moved from a sense of superiority to a feeling of contempt ... Contempt, combined with greed for the land, fear and insecurity, led to violence.'<sup>35</sup>

In the Yarra area of Melbourne, reports of Wurundjeri-willam violence against Europeans are limited, despite intense provocation and a number of confrontations.<sup>36</sup> In part, this was because the rapid increase of the European population in and around Melbourne limited the ability of the local Aboriginal population to form a resistance. It would be wrong, however, to state that there was no violence in the Melbourne region. Relations between the Wurundjeri and Europeans were influenced by the guerrilla warfare that was occurring in outlying areas. Word of this conflict accentuated fears in the city area, and influenced the attitudes of many colonialists.

While the official British policy towards the Aboriginal population was one of protection, instances of institutional violence still occurred, particularly as a result of police inaction. There were many who did not like the Aboriginal camps being close to the town, and in April 1840, when there was a gathering of six or seven hundred Kulin, their *mia mias* (bark huts) were burnt and the camp dismantled.<sup>37</sup> Other acts of violence, harassment and indignities frequently occurred on the streets of Melbourne. Such acts included beatings and horse whippings, often in response to acts that the European population 'perceived as begging.'<sup>38</sup> Such acts of violence were perpetrated by Europeans of all classes. Violence against the Aboriginal people served only to increase the number of infractions against British law committed by them. While the police were quick to enforce laws against Aboriginal people in the town, they often refused to take action in response to crimes committed against

Aboriginal people, referring them to the protectorate as their responsibility.

Official violence also came in the form of criminal executions, with the first executions in the district being two Aboriginal men, Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner. These men were among the group of Aboriginal men and women who were brought over from Van Diemen's Land by Robinson, but broke away and engaged in a campaign of resistance against the Europeans.

Sexual violence against Aboriginal women was common throughout the Victorian frontier. One of the first acts of the Port Phillip Association, following the creation of Batman's treaty, was assisting with the return of Aboriginal women abducted from Victorian coastline areas by sealers and whalers. William Thomas also recorded a number of instances of rape in his reports.

Such instances would often occur at the Aboriginal camps on the borders of the growing town of Melbourne. These were seen by the European population as a place of curiosity; 'a place of entertainment, drunkenness, gunfire, violence, and interracial sex.'<sup>39</sup>

Not all violence was interracial. There were ongoing feuds between different clans within the Kulin, and established enmity between members of the Kulin and those outside, such as the Gunai/Kurnai from the Gippsland area.

These conflicts were exacerbated by the sprawl of European settlement pushing Aboriginal groups outside their traditional boundaries. The introduction of alcohol into Aboriginal society also fuelled domestic violence. When asked about murder among the Aboriginal people by the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines in 1859, William Thomas stated that the only murder that occurred within the Wurundjeri while he was with them was brought about by intoxication.

Between 1836 and 1844, an estimated 40 European and 113 Aboriginal people were officially recorded as killed in conflicts in the Port Phillip area. It is worth noting, however, that 'officials routinely tried to obscure the high rate of Aboriginal deaths.'<sup>40</sup>

### Pollution

One of the more pervasive aspects of European settlement was the

<sup>35</sup> Garden, *Victoria*, 53–4.

<sup>36</sup> Ellender and Christiansen, *People of the Merri Merri*, 22–3.

<sup>37</sup> Ellender and Christiansen, *People of the Merri Merri*, 129.

<sup>38</sup> Ellender and Christiansen, *People of the Merri Merri*, 127; Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria*, 50–1.

<sup>39</sup> Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 123.

pollution of the air and water. While the Wurundjeri lifestyle had a low impact on the environment, the European lifestyle took a heavy toll. A particular problem for the Wurundjeri was pollution around the confluence of the Merri Creek and the Yarra River – an important meeting place for the Wurundjeri and visiting Aboriginal people, and also the base for the Merri Creek School, Native Police and Protectorate Station. Noxious trades established along the river, particularly in Collingwood, Abbotsford and Richmond, were some of the worst offenders. Historian Bernard Barrett states that settlers were attracted to these areas ‘because of the free water supply for washing skins and wool and as a sewer and garbage dump.’<sup>41</sup> This dumping ground was the drinking water supply for both Europeans and Aboriginal people.

The process for fellmongery and woolwashing involved soaking animal hides in the river for days, then in hot water, soap and soda that was later dumped back into the river (along with pelts, heads and legs of the animals). Tanneries also soaked the animal hides in the river, then in lime water, then river water again. Sometimes they also soaked the hides in a mix of water and fowl or pigeon dung, which, along with the hair that was scraped off, was later dumped into the river. Soap and candle-making from boiled down animal fat also contributed to the air pollution, which could be smelt for miles around.<sup>42</sup>

The result of an 1851 enquiry by the Melbourne City Council was to prohibit any new fellmongers or tanners. However, a second enquiry in 1854 showed that the number had increased, and that combined they were handling 5000 sheepskins and 200 cattle hides per week.<sup>43</sup>

The everyday lifestyle of settlers living in suburbs such as Fitzroy and Collingwood also had impacts on the landscape. There was no general garbage collection service, so household waste was simply thrown into yards and trampled underfoot. Anything not eaten by household animals such as dogs, chickens, goats, cows and pigs, was then dumped in the laneways, streets, swamps or drains. Rubbish dumped in drains would flow downhill to the flat, and eventually to the Yarra. The other issue associated with drains was sewerage. Most households used

a cesspit, frequently not water tight, so waste would filter through the ground, and overflow would go out in the gutter. Waste from those living on the Fitzroy hill would travel down to the Collingwood flat, meaning the cesspits there also gathered this waste. Barrett notes that ‘Often the contents, augmented by rainwater, overflowed around, and even under, buildings.’<sup>44</sup> By the late 1850s, nightmen were employed to collect sewage, but many simply dumped it, with most ending in the Yarra.

The Wurundjeri’s experience of this pollution has not been recorded, but it cannot be doubted that this would have had an extremely negative impact. Their drinking water was fouled, noxious smells polluted the air and the land was littered with the by-products of life in the settlement.

### **Establishment of municipal government and the impact on the Wurundjeri**

In 1836, Governor Bourke received authorisation from the Colonial Secretary in London to allow private settlement in the Melbourne area, stating it was for the protection of the Aboriginal people and the establishment of law. William Lonsdale was appointed police magistrate of the Port Phillip District in September that year. The first move towards establishment of a local government, however, occurred at a public meeting three months earlier. One of the decisions reached at this meeting was: ‘that all subscribing parties pledge themselves to afford protection for the Aborigines to the utmost of their power and further that they will not teach them the use of firearms or allow their servants to do, nor on any occasion allow the Aborigines to be in possession of any firearms.’<sup>45</sup>

While there are few references to the Aboriginal people in official notices of motion, by-laws were created that directly affected Aboriginal people. The Dog Act of 1844, for example, ‘ensured that the “hoards” of diseased dogs, if unregistered, were routinely killed in the streets.’ Assistant Protector William Thomas stated that the women in camps ‘cried for their dogs.’<sup>46</sup> A week later, this Aboriginal group that included these women left the settlement ‘on account of their dogs being killed.’<sup>47</sup>

41 Barrett, *The Inner Suburbs*, 88.

42 Barrett, *The Inner Suburbs*, 89–90.

43 Barrett, *The Inner Suburbs*, 88.

44 Barrett, *The Inner Suburbs*, 76.

45 ‘Public meeting agrees on temporary method of government,’ minutes of residents’ meeting, June 1836, cited in Pauline Jones, ed., *Beginnings of Permanent Government: Historical Records of Victoria* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1981), 36–8.

46 Edmonds, ‘The Intimate, Urbanising Frontier: Native Camps and Settler Colonialism’s Violent Array of Spaces around Early Melbourne’ in Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds., *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 136.

47 Edmonds, ‘The Intimate, Urbanising Frontier,’ 136.

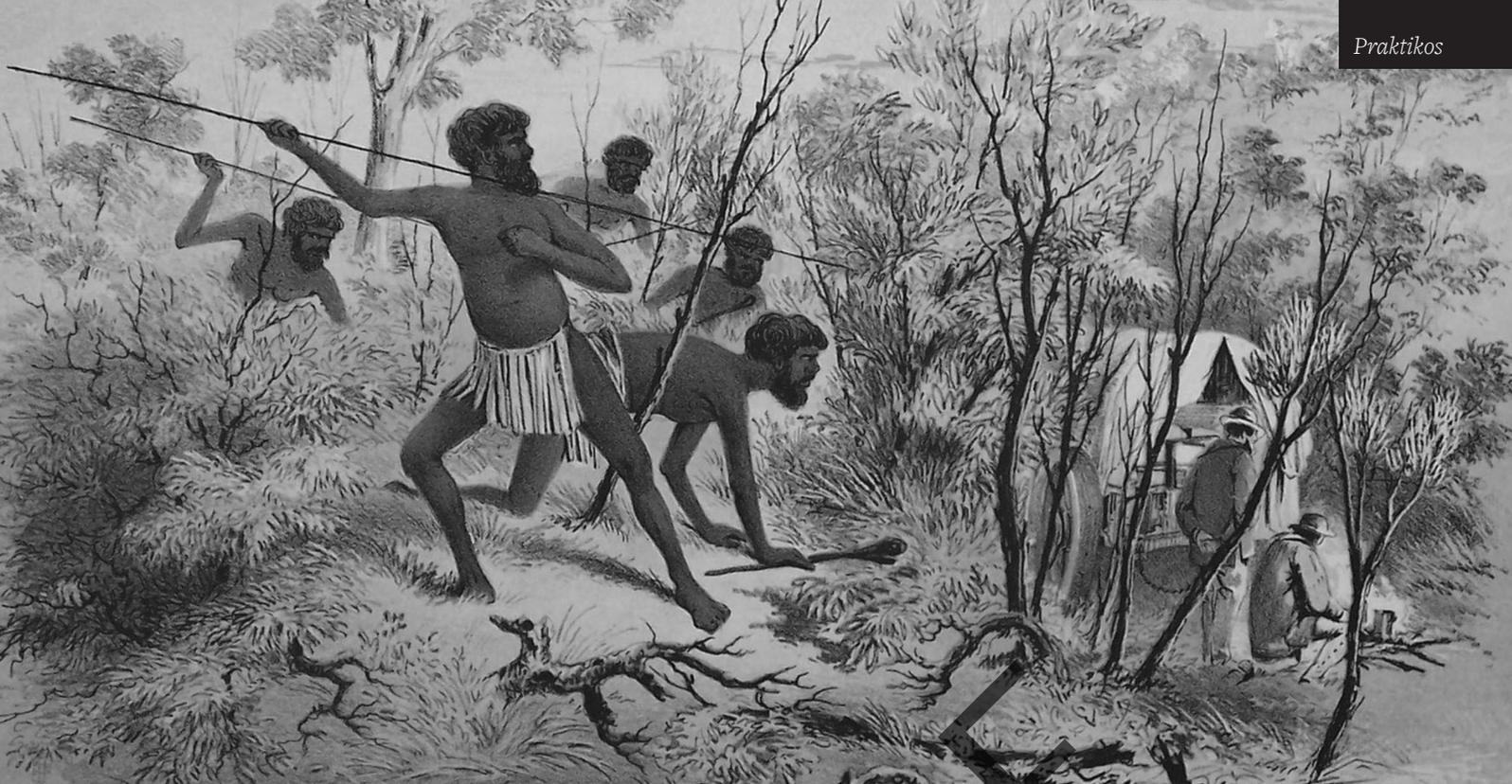
The bulk of items for consideration by newly formed councils during this time are concerned with public works – the development of streets, drainage, buildings, and locations for bathing houses, manure deposits and so forth. This in itself is telling regarding the post-contact story of the Aboriginal people, as it is the story of the land being taken over and reshaped, pushing out Aboriginal people. While the European population was reshaping the landscape and overlaying their ideas of order onto it, the Aboriginal people continued to occupy the land, inscribing their own ideas onto it. It was a simultaneous occupation of the land underpinned by disparate understandings of what it meant to occupy the land.

### **Wurundjeri today**

Despite the impacts of colonisation, the strong bonds between Wurundjeri families and clans could not be broken. Today, the Wurundjeri are active in the community – practising culture, performing ceremonies and passing on knowledge to the younger generation.

*Please visit [www.aboriginalhistoryofyarra.com.au](http://www.aboriginalhistoryofyarra.com.au) for a longer version of this article, an interactive map of significant sites and a selection of videos.*

SAMPLE



## An Artist on the Goldfields: The Extraordinary Legacy of S.T. Gill

**Engaging visual tasks based on the artwork of the Victorian goldfields.**

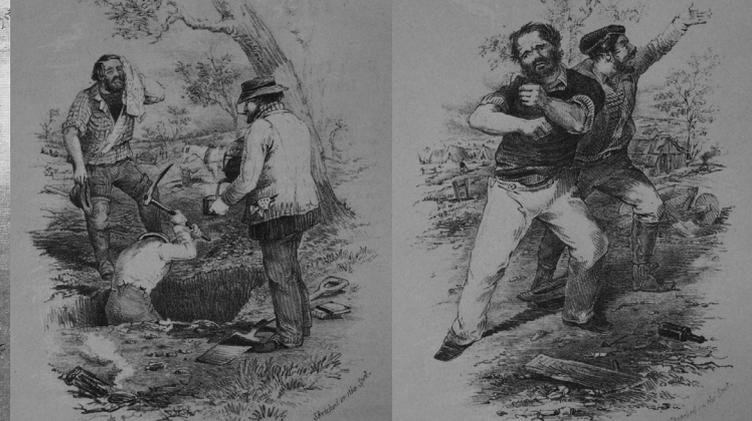
*Marion Littlejohn, The Sovereign Hill Museums Association*

Today the work of colonial artist Samuel Thomas Gill (1818–1880) is highly sought after. Disregarded in artistic circles for many years, Gill has left us an amazing record of life in South Australia during the 1840s and Victoria, in particular the goldfields, in the 1850s. His vibrant sketches and watercolours of people engaged in everyday activities constitute an incredibly rich resource for students and historians. The Sovereign Hill Museums Association in Ballarat has used Gill's work as a reference point for staff costumes and when recreating the old post office, diggings area, John Alloo's restaurant and butcher's shambles.

Born in Devon, England, Gill arrived in South Australia in 1839 at the age of twenty-one. For the next thirteen years he earned his living producing portraits and in 1846 he accompanied the explorer J. A. Horrocks on his expedition to Spencer Gulf. Many watercolours of bush scenes survive from this time and Gill later called on his memories and sketches to produce a picture he called *Attack on Store Dray*, which was published in Melbourne in 1864.

This representation (pictured above) can stimulate deep discussion in your class if you explore inquiry questions like:

- What do you think is happening in this picture and why?
- When was it produced?
- Why might S.T. Gill have painted the picture?
- Who seems to be in the most powerful position in the scene?
- What is suggested about the relationship between Aboriginal people and Europeans?
- What evidence is there that this sort of event took place in Victoria?
- Which emotions might Gill be trying to evoke in the viewer?
- What kind of reaction might this picture have prompted in 1864?
- Is this a primary or a secondary source? (be careful, note date of creation)
- To what extent is the picture a reliable piece of historical evidence?
- What does it suggest about European fears and beliefs?
- How might such a representation have been used to political ends?



- What does this painting make you think about?

In 1852 Gill, along with thousands of others, was lured to Victoria by the news of the alluvial gold discoveries around Ballarat and Bendigo. Possibly because of his preference for too much alcohol, he was unsuccessful as a digger and frequently short of money. To earn a living he reverted to selling his sketches, many of which were turned into hand-coloured lithographs. The numerous lively images produced at this time have left us an invaluable insight into everyday life on the goldfields in the time before colour photography. In 1853 twenty-four such works were published in the book *Victoria Gold Diggings and Diggers As They Are*. At the time they were pored over by an excited public in Melbourne and London.

In 1869 the Melbourne Public Library (later to become the State Library of Victoria) commissioned Gill to produce forty drawings of the Victorian goldfields as they were in 1852–53. These watercolours can be used to good effect in the classroom, particularly in exercises assessing whether artworks created from on-the-spot sketches done sixteen years earlier should be classified as primary or secondary sources, and whether or not this compromises their value as evidence.

Presenting students with the image *The New Rush* (pictured above) would be an excellent way to introduce the topic of gold to your class. You might ask your students:

- Where might these people be going?
- What are they carrying and why?
- When and where do you think this scene is occurring?
- What might the people be hoping and dreaming?
- Are there any women and children?
- Which modes of transport can you see?
- Are they using temporary or permanent shelters? Why?

- Why might the men be wearing knee-high boots?
- Why might someone have taken a dog along?
- Would you describe this scene as a rush? Explain.

A more sophisticated class might consider the impact on the environment and the Indigenous inhabitants and how this experience will change the lives of those involved.

*The New Rush* can also be used as a stimulus for a creative exercise such as: *put yourself in the shoes of one of the characters you see and write a letter home to your family telling of your hopes and adventures.*

Another way to use Gill's work is to ask students to select four to six contemporary images of the goldfields, beginning with *The New Rush*, and make a storyboard for each. The images could be presented as a photo-story with relevant quotes added in a soundtrack.

In the process students will be viewing, selecting, researching and analysing primary sources.

Podcasts of suitable quotes are available from the Sovereign Hill Education website audio library. These include extracts from writers who visited the goldfields plus a selection of readings from a Ballarat miner's diary, now owned by the State Library of Victoria, which records in meticulous detail the daily life of a Scottish miner living in Ballarat in 1855.<sup>1</sup>

It is with some justification that Gill is best remembered for his documentation of daily life on the diggings. He was a prolific artist who left behind a wealth of accessible images, many containing perceptive social observations. Gill often liked to comment on the society he saw around him through his art.

A favourite ploy was to produce two images depicting opposing views. For example, if we were to mistakenly study only the *Diggers of Low Degree* sketch (pictured above) we might conclude

ABOVE LEFT: *The New Rush*, by S.T. Gill. A colour plate from *The Australian Sketchbook Melbourne*, published by Hamel & Ferguson (Melbourne, 1865) held in the collection of the Gold Museum Ballarat.

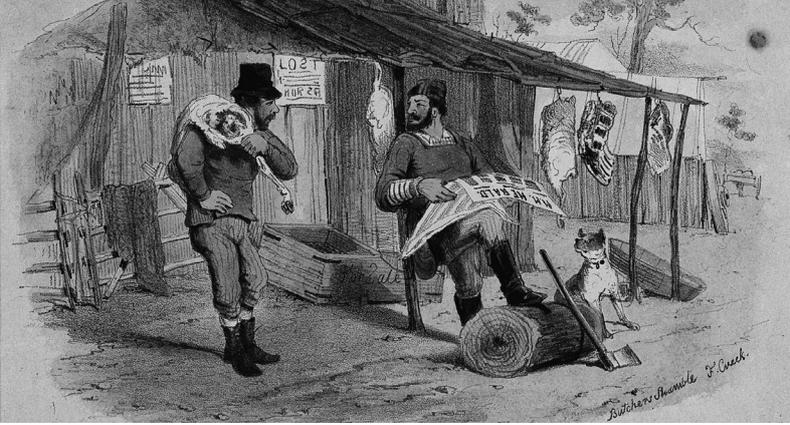
ABOVE CENTRE: *Diggers of High Degree*, sketched on the spot, by S.T. Gill.

ABOVE RIGHT: *Diggers of Low Degree*, sketched on the spot, by S.T. Gill.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Attack on Store Dray*, by S.T. Gill. A colour plate from *The Australian Sketchbook*, published by Hamel & Ferguson (Melbourne, 1864) held in the collection of the Gold Museum Ballarat.

All images courtesy of the Gold Museum, Ballarat.

<sup>1</sup> These podcasts can be found at [www.education.sovereignhill.com.au/teachers/podcasts/](http://www.education.sovereignhill.com.au/teachers/podcasts/).



ABOVE LEFT: *Butcher's Shamble, Forest Creek*, by S.T. Gill.

ABOVE RIGHT: *Diggers Hut* Canvas & Bark 1852, by S.T. Gill.



that the goldfields were lawless places inhabited by pugilistic, drunken, uneducated classes. However, Gill is careful to counterbalance this view by presenting us with the opposing image *Diggers of High Degree* (pictured opposite), in which we see well-educated gentlemen working a claim. (Note the deliberate inclusion of a book lying next to the shovel, a kettle for making tea and hints of a tailored waistcoat and silk handkerchief.) Gill is pointing out that all classes of people took off for the goldfields where, for possibly the first time in history, all people (well, all males of Anglo origin!) were equal and where Australian democracy began to flourish.

Similar instances of contrast are given in the pairs *Provident Diggers in Melbourne/Improvident Digger in Melbourne* and *Lucky Digger that Returned/Unlucky Digger that Never Returned*. In these pairs Gill is asking us to think about the complexity of life on the diggings and the wide diversity of human reactions and experiences. Students could compare and contrast the pictures, research the 'winners' and 'losers' of the goldfields, or compose poems from the different points of view.

In *Diggers Hut* (pictured above), obvious deductions can be made regarding building styles, mining tools, cooking methods, diet and health. But the image of two young men dressed in rough working-class attire sitting in front of a primitive dwelling while avidly reading a newspaper creates a strange paradox. These men are literate. You might ask students:

- Where have they come from?
- Where did they learn to read?
- Why are they prepared to live in such appalling conditions?
- What might their hopes and aspirations be?
- What kind of society would men like these hope to create?
- Are these men typical of the thousands of people on the diggings? How do you know?

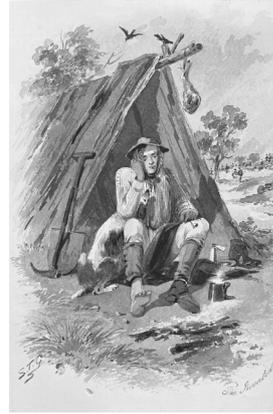
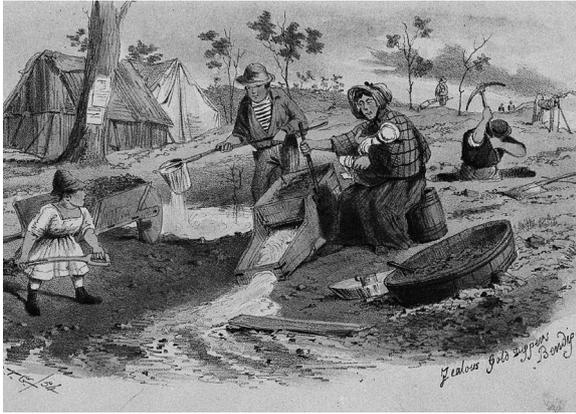
In *Butcher's Shamble* (pictured above) Gill has again drawn a rough worker reading a newspaper. You could ask students:

- Was there a high level of literacy on the goldfields?
- What implications might this have had for the development of democratic government in the young colony?
- How did news spread at Forest Creek?
- Would a newspaper editor have been an influential person?
- How are these men earning a living?
- Where would the meat the butcher is selling have come from?
- Who else earned a living supplying services and entertainment to the diggers?
- Did you have to find gold to become rich on the goldfields?

Not everyone was successful on the goldfields and Gill makes this point very strongly in *The Invalid Digger* (pictured over). Here we see a rather tragic figure down on his luck, suffering toothache and blisters, with only his dog for company. Is he completely without hope? He has a leg of lamb waiting to be cooked for dinner, the sun is shining and beside the bark shelter are his mining tools – his pick and shovel. Today might be grim but on the goldfields tomorrow always offered hope.

This sketch *Invalid Digger* is useful as an example of the problems presented by sketches in terms of their historical accuracy and usefulness as evidence. A simple google images search for 'Gill Invalid Digger' will quickly reveal that Gill created several versions of this sketch. In one he shows a leg of lamb hanging on the tent ridge pole waiting to be cooked for dinner. But in another version there is no meat and the digger's prospects are, therefore, gloomier. How does this discrepancy effect the value of these sketches as evidence of life on the goldfields?

Although sketches of men predominate, Gill does not totally neglect women.



FAR LEFT: *Zealous Gold Digger Bendigo*, by S.T. Gill.

LEFT: *The Invalid Digger*, by S.T. Gill.

The famous scene *Zealous Gold Diggers* (pictured above) can be used at face value as evidence of the presence of women on the goldfields (though they were vastly outnumbered by men) and the appalling conditions they endured. If you are planning a visit to the Children's Cemetery at Pennyweight Flat near Castlemaine this image provides a sobering illustration of why infant mortality was so high on the goldfields.<sup>2</sup> However, all may not be as it seems in this Gill work. This is a sketch, as opposed to a photograph, so immediately it raises questions of accuracy. You might ask students:

- Do artists always draw exactly what is in front of them?
- Can we be certain Gill was watching a family group cradling for gold?
- What is the woman rocking?
- What is she holding?
- Could this picture be a cartoon involving a pun on the word cradle?
- Do you think Gill witnessed this scene, or, given the scarcity of women, might he have been indulging in wistful longing? Can we ever know?

Students studying these images will therefore be exposed to one of the key problems of historiography: the value and reliability of primary sources as evidence. Is history just what someone records and what is remembered?

Just how valuable are artworks as evidence? Paintings are the view of only one person. Could they be biased? Are paintings as reliable as photographs? Who and what does the artist leave out? It is interesting to note that in almost all of Gill's Ballarat images the sun is shining. Is this an accurate record of the weather conditions in Ballarat?

Gill died a pauper in Melbourne in 1880 and for many years his work was ignored. Today collections of his

work are found in the National Library (Canberra), the Mitchell Library (Sydney), the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Galleries of New South Wales and South Australia, and the Gold Museum in Ballarat. For me he is more than an artist – he is an invaluable eyewitness to history. Gill's works deserve to be scrutinised as historical evidence lest his extraordinary insights be forgotten.

All images included in this article are from the collection of the Gold Museum in Ballarat. A significant collection of Gill's work is on permanent display in the *Ballarat: Inspired by Gold* exhibition at the Gold Museum.<sup>3</sup>

All images can be easily found doing a simple google images search. Just type Gill's name followed by the title of the image into the search bar.

See worksheet opposite.

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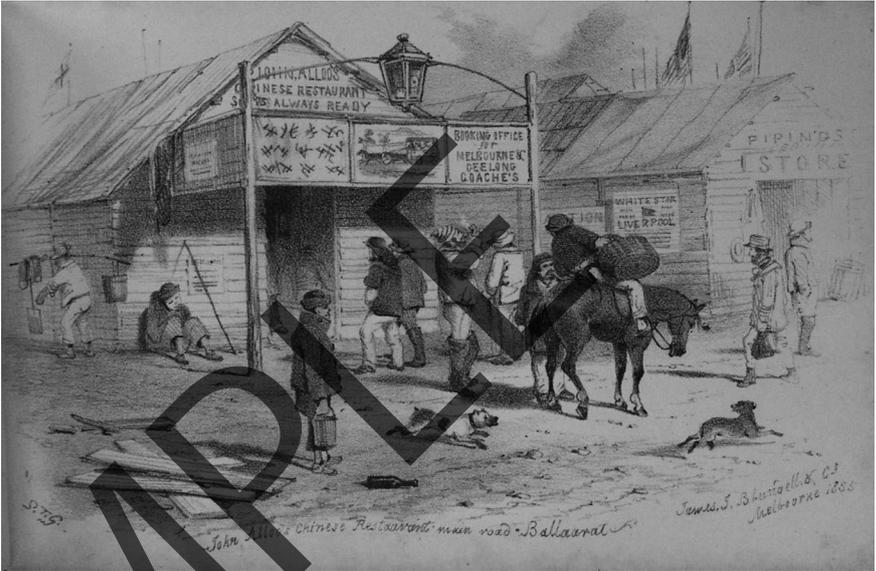
<sup>2</sup> Pennyweight Flat Children's Cemetery is approximately two kilometres from the centre of Castlemaine. It contains almost 200 burials, most in unmarked graves, from a short-lived gold rush to the nearby Pennyweight Flat. Almost all the burials in this cemetery are young children.

<sup>3</sup> The Gold Museum is part of the Sovereign Hill Museums Association in Ballarat. The Gold Museum extends Sovereign Hill's story of Ballarat and is located in a modern building opposite Sovereign Hill in Bradshaw Street. Entry to the Gold Museum is free with your Sovereign Hill ticket. Separate entry is also available.

WORKSHEET

**Who** can you see?

**What** is happening in this scene?



John Alloo's Chinese Restaurant, Main Road, Ballarat, by S.T. Gill, 1855-56. Image courtesy of The Gold Museum, Ballarat.

**Why** do you think Gill might have drawn this sketch?

**How reliable** is it as historical **evidence**?

**Where** is this scene?

Is this a **primary** or a **secondary** source? Explain.

**When** was it drawn?