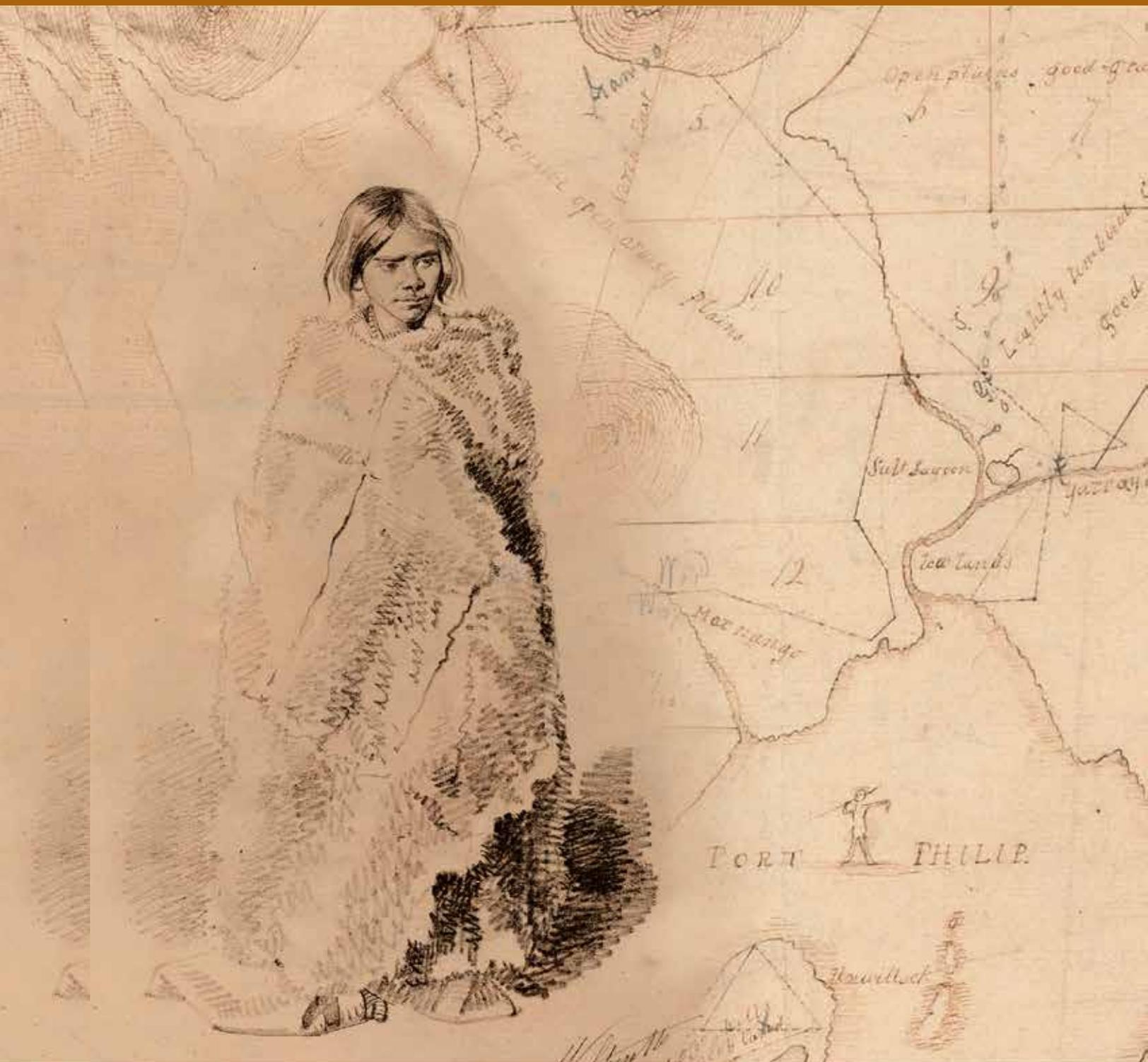


The Invasion

of Wadawurrung Country 1800 - 1870



Fred Cahir

“MY COUNTRY ALL GONE
THE WHITE MEN HAVE
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William Strutt, 1852, *Waran-drenin*, Waran-drenin, [of the] Warreneep [Warrenheip] Tribe. Warran-drenin, alias Mary, Lubra of Morum-morum-been, © The Trustees of the British Museum, (Davis Catalogue MS 145 RAI 1867) Oc2006-Drg41-Str.

Wedge, John Helder, 1856, *MAP OF PORT PHILLIP FROM THE SURVEY OF MR. WEDGE AND OTHERS*. National Library of Australia, nla.obj-416707851

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This book really began on the Nullabor Plain in 1983 when I was cycling solo across Australia from Perth to Melbourne. I was young, dumb and blonde – a bad combination. Not surprisingly, I ran out of food and water for several days. Standing despondently beside the highway, I vowed to myself that if I survived my ordeal I would learn all I could about ‘surviving in the bush’ skills. When I returned to Victoria, I began researching by consulting with Aboriginal community members and in history books. I found it remarkable that there was a bevy of history books written about resourceful white pioneers – yet there was a pregnant silence in these history books, which spoke of the Aboriginal Countries and communities. There was an even greater silence in the history books about Aboriginal resourcefulness, which I came to find, had expressly informed the white colonists ability to survive and thrive in Australia. I began to see that historians for over a century had placed a veil of sorts on the Aboriginal narrative about the *settlement* of Australia. Yet when I read the primary records – the written and pictorial records of the colonists who were the principal agents in the conquest of Aboriginal lands they often spoke frankly about both the frontier violence and the major contribution that Aboriginal people had played in the making of our regional and subsequently our national legends – our story lines. This book is my attempt at contributing to *a* reversal of this memory loss at least at a local level by reconstructing *a* telling of the invasion of Wadawurrung Country in the period 1800-1870. Subsequently this is not so much an Aboriginal history book; it is rather a Shared History book.

It is doubtful that this book would have come about without my wife Sandy's unstinting enthusiasm for my research. Thanks are also very much due to my friends and colleagues at Federation University who have generously shared their knowledge and time with me. In particular, I wish to highlight the support and guidance I have received for many years from Professor Ian Clark. I thank Jary Nemo at ‘Wind and Sky’ – and my daughter Chloe Cahir for the cover design and Stephanie Skinner, a proud Wadawurrung woman for the graphic design work. I would like to also thank many friends and family (too many to mention) who have encouraged me.

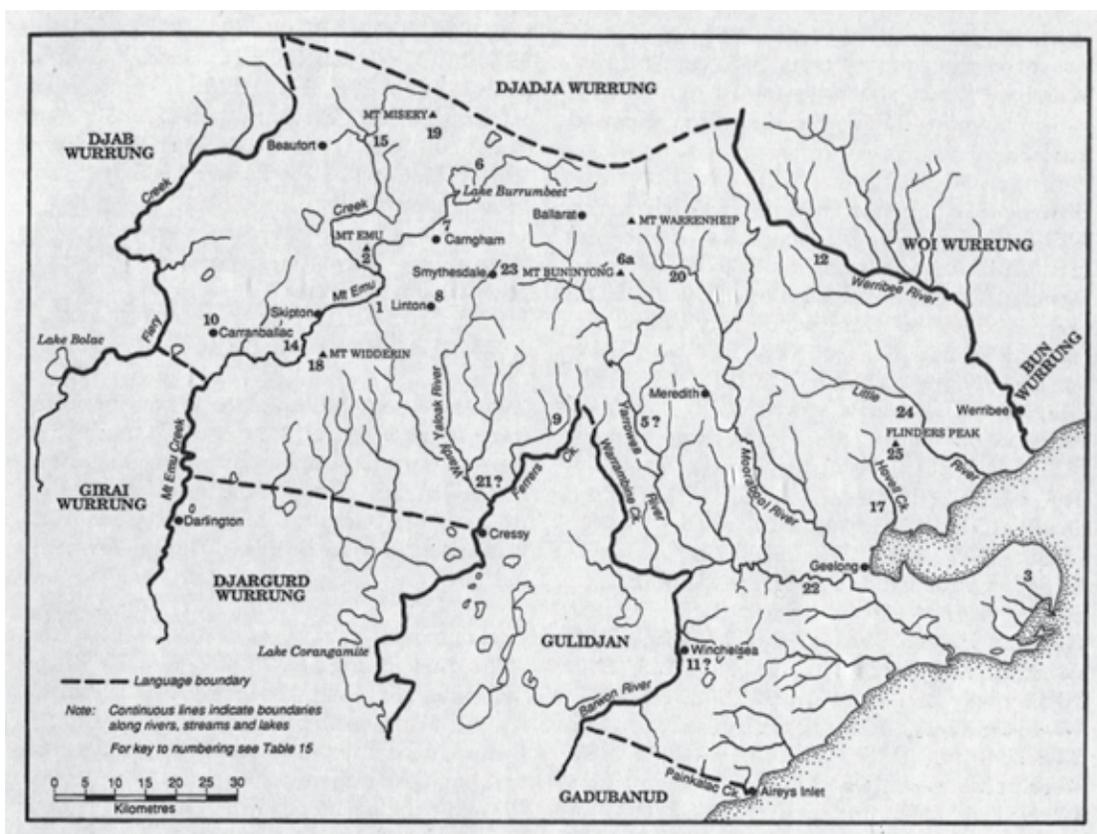
WARNING Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people should be aware that this book contains words and descriptions written by non-Indigenous people in the past that may be confronting and would be considered inappropriate today. It also contains graphic descriptions of historical events that may be disturbing to some readers.

INTRODUCTION

One of the difficulties in writing a regional contact history lies in the selection of appropriate terminology and spelling conventions. Conflicts arise between conforming to the standardisations of the discipline of history and a desire to accommodate the wishes of Aboriginal communities. The absence of trained linguists in the white community during the period of initial colonisation resulted in considerable differences of opinion over terminology and the spelling derivatives surrounding Aboriginal people and groups living in what is now known as the Geelong–Ballarat region. The first white chroniclers referred to the Wadawurrung using various names (over 100 different names were recorded by Ian Clark for the people in this study area) including *Watowrong*, *Wartowrong*, *Wotowrong*, *Watourong* and *Wodowrow*.¹ Throughout this book, I have applied the term ‘Wadawurrung’ to all Aboriginal groups in primary documents that involve the known language area of the Wadawurrung. I have included other language groups such as the Boon Wurrung and the Dja Dja Wurrung, as the historical record clearly demonstrates that the Wadawurrung were at amity with them and co-existed along their borders at the time of initial colonisation.² I have, in the main used Professor Ian Clark’s (1990) *Aboriginal languages and clans: an historical atlas of western and central Victoria, 1800-1900* and Victorian Aboriginal Corporation of Languages (VACL) as reference points for clan naming, language boundaries and spelling.

The period of recorded contact researched in this book is 1800–1870. The book has chronological and thematic chapters that, at times, crossover, reflecting the interconnections and interrelationships between some of the themes covered. The Wadawurrung are the Aboriginal people whose land includes the cities now known as Ballarat and Geelong. The estates of the Wadawurrung clans are associated with four major rivers: the Moorabool, Woody Yaloak, Barwon and the Werribee. Fiery Creek and the upper reaches of Mt Emu Creek are *generally considered* the western boundaries of the Wadawurrung, and the towns of Lismore, Shelford, Winchelsea and Aireys Inlet fall within the traditional western cusp of their estates.³ It is *generally considered* that the northern boundaries incorporate the towns of Ballan, Myrniong, Learmonth and Beaufort. Signifying their boundaries to the east is the mouth of the Werribee River, the Bellarine peninsula and part of the Cape Otway coastline and their northern boundary is the Great Dividing Range.⁴

Colonial observers in the 1840s often disagreed about the exact boundaries. By way of example Assistant Aboriginal Protector, Edward Stone Parker, considered that the Wadawurrung ‘inhabited the Mt Macedon District’. Parker’s colleague in the Western Port District, William Thomas, concurred and always referred to the tribe in the Mt Macedon District as ‘Wattowrongs’ (Wadawurrung). GA Robinson, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District, on his first journey onto Wadawurrung country wrote in March 1840: ‘They informed me that the mountains War.ren.neep [Warrenheip] and Pun.nen.yong [Buninyong] belonged to the Wartowerong [Wadawurrung].’ Robinson also initially conjectured at the Wadawurrung’s boundaries, noting ‘I think the Wartowerongs also extend as far NW. as Mt Cole’ but later revised his position.⁵



'Wadawurrung language area and clans' based on Clark, Ian D. (1990). *Aboriginal languages and clans: an historical atlas of western and central Victoria, 1800-1900*. Melbourne, Monash University. Permission to reproduce courtesy of Ian D Clark.

No.	Clan name	Approximate location
1.	Barere barere balug	'Colac' and 'Mt. Bute' stations
2.	Beerekwart balug	Mt. Emu
3.	Bengalat balug	Indented Head
4.	Berrejin balug	Unknown
5.	Borogundidj	Yarrowee River
6.	Burrumbeet balug	Lakes Burrumbeet and Learmonth
6a.	Keyeet balug	Mt. Buninyong
7.	Carringum balug	Carrgham
8.	Carninje balug	'Emu Hill' station, Linton's Creek
9.	Corac balug	'Commeralghip' station, and Kuruc-a-ruc Creek
10.	Corrin corrinjer balug	Carranballac
11.	Gerariture	West of Lake Modewarre
12.	Marpeang balug	Blackwood, Myrning, and Bacchus Marsh
13.	Mear balug	Unknown
14.	Moijerre balug	Mt. Emu Creek
15.	Moner balug	'Trawalla' station, Mount Emu Creek
16.	Monmart	Unknown
17.	Neerer balug	Between Geelong and the You Yangs
18.	Pakeheneek balug	Mt. Widderin
19.	Peerickelmoon balug	Near Mt. Misery
20.	Tooloora balug	Mt. Warrenheip, Lal lal Creek, west branch of Moorabool R.
21.	Woodealoke gundidj	Wardy Yallock River, south of Kuruc-a-ruc Creek
22.	Wada wurrung balug	Barrabool Hills
23.	Wongerrerr balug	Head of Wardy Yallock River
24.	Worinyaloke balug	West side of Little River
25.	Yaawangi	You Yang Hills

Wadawurrung table of clans' based on Clark, Ian D. (1990). *Aboriginal languages and clans: an historical atlas of western and central Victoria, 1800-1900*. Melbourne, Monash University. Permission to reproduce courtesy of Ian D Clark.

My writing of this book is from a non-Aboriginal standpoint. It is a history about relations between the Wadawurrung and the *ngamadjidj* (generally translated as white stranger belonging to the sea) in the period 1800 -1870. The historical sources I use to make my interpretations are principally from British written (and visual) archival evidence. In writing this book, I have taken great care to address ethical issues surrounding a research project of this nature. I have endeavoured to respect the Wadawurrung community by paying close attention to the role that Wadawurrung culture played in shaping Wadawurrug people's post-invasion history; equally, I have striven not to write on behalf of the Wadawurrung. Wadawurrung Traditional Custodians have indicated to me that they want to write their own stories from their perspectives. It is extremely difficult to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into a shared history of this nature. There are very few written stories of the historical past written by the Wadawurrung in the colonial period, as passed down from witnesses, and these are fragmentary; for the most part, Wadawurrung voices from this period are gleaned through the invaders' records.

As historians Tsari Anderson and Bain Attwood have noted, a reading of the history of Aboriginal–European relations in the nineteenth century is unavoidably weighted towards non-Aboriginal perceptions and interpretations. Attwood explained that ‘we are usually forced to perceive Aborigines as others saw them, rather than as they saw themselves.’⁶ Many writers have highlighted the ethical difficulties of writing Aboriginal history as a non-Aboriginal historian. Questions continue to be asked regarding whose set of ‘truths’ are perpetuated within a society dominated by the power of non-Aboriginal voices and interests. Following Anderson and others, I acknowledge the necessity for non-Aboriginal Australians to recognise and confront their own place and role in the history of Aboriginal–colonial invader relations.⁷ This book represents my attempt to further this goal. The style of this history differs from many history texts in that it deliberately uses long transcripts of the archival records so that readers can make their own interpretations.

As will be shown, the history of inter-racial relations between the Wadawurrung and the British colonisers is distinctive. This singularity derives in part from the role of convict William Buckley, an escapee of a short-lived British convict settlement at Sorrento on the east coast of Port Phillip Bay in 1802. The Wadawurrung—Buckley's ‘saviours’—recognised him as a resuscitated clansperson. Buckley subsequently lived in isolation from the British community for thirty-two years, learnt the Wadawurrung language fluently and proved, initially, to be an influential mediator between the white colonisers and the Wadawurrung when the predominately-British colonisers' invasion of Wadawurrung estates commenced in June 1835. Writers and storytellers have lionised Buckley over the past two centuries. Others have been far more circumspect in their treatment of Buckley's telling of his story—or, more accurately, the telling of Buckley's story by others. For instance Peter Corris, an ethno historian, wrote how one version of Buckley's life published in 1852 by Morgan ‘purports to be almost a transcript of information given by Buckley to the author.’ However, Corris warned scholars that the literary embellishments limit its usefulness and cites one eminent researcher who would not use Buckley's recount in Morgan's publication as a source at all whilst Corris noted it was ‘unreliable for ethnographic detail’ and he always ‘tried to find some other support for points made in it before placing much faith in it.’⁸

The first section of this book demonstrates the significance of the transference of cultural knowledge that occurred in the thirty plus years (1800–1834) before official colonisation began, when white invaders, sometimes with Aboriginal guides from other areas of Australia, trespassed onto Wadawurrung lands. It also sheds light on some of the religious, political and economic ideas that existed among the colonisers and the Wadawurrung that had significant repercussions on early frontier relationships. It seeks to contribute to the reversal of the fragmentary historical image of the Wadawurrung during the early colonial period, often referred to as the pre-pastoral or pre-squatting era. Another aim is to remedy historians' almost exclusive focus on the squatting and gold eras, thereby neglecting the substantial interaction that occurred between predominantly coastal clans of the Wadawurrung and the sometimes dissimilar parties of foreign sojourners on Wadawurrung land and waters. It examines early cultural adaptations of the Wadawurrung to the European trespassers in some detail by including lengthy excerpts of valuable source material. Indeed, a feature of this book is the lengthy transcripts from the archival sources, often unabridged, which increases its historical value and provides the detail and the tone of the events as no historian can.

The First Invasion on Wadawurrung Country, 1800-1834

Chapter 1: Initial Contact

The coastal clans of the Wadawurrung and other Victorian Aboriginal peoples had considerable contact with non-Aboriginal people (and occasionally their Indigenous companions from New Zealand, New South Wales and Tasmania) before the permanent invasion of their lands began in June 1835. The type of contact varied according to the type of non-Aboriginal groups or individuals and their motives. This chapter sets out to reflect these different motives, beginning with official exploratory parties. The following chapters examine interactions with sealers and whalers, convict colonies and, finally, shipwreck survivors, maroons and merchants.

This is a contact history as chronicled by European people (predominately British) of their interactions with the Wadawurrung people of the wider Geelong-Ballarat region, Victoria, whose country encompasses sections of the central and western Victorian waterways, mountains and volcanic plains. The Wadawurrung have lived on this land for millennia. They have stories of ancestral beings that predate human occupation and evidence of their deep human past exists in the physical environment. Those nineteenth century colonists who were 'schooled' by the Wadawurrung in some of their deep histories occasionally recorded the lessons they learned—some of which have survived in the written historical records. One Wadawurrung creation story describes disagreements among ancestral beings that places Aboriginal people on the land at the time of volcanic eruptions. For example, as recorded in the *Buninyong Telegraph* in 1897, an 'old colonist' with an 'extensive knowledge of the customs and traditions of the aborigines' recalled hearing stories from Wadawurrung people that related to the volcanic origins of Mt Buninyong, Mt Derrinallum and Mt Rouse:

The gentleman states that in 1844 when travelling to Mt Rouse he was informed by the blacks that 'once big fellow Buninyowang get sulky and throw up big stones and dirt', and that also Mt Elephant, near Camperdown, was also known by the blacks to have been in eruption.⁹

These events are consistent with volcanic activity in the region, which scientists estimate occurred between 5,000 and 20,000 years ago. Another version of this creation story was provided by an unidentified Wadawurrung person in around 1846 and published in 1861:

One of the legends that these tribes are fond of relating is, that Tyrinallum (Mt Elephant) and Bouningyoung [Mt Buninyong] (two volcanic hills about thirty miles apart) were formerly black men, that they quarreled and fought the former being armed with a leewil and the latter with a hand spear, and after a prolonged contest, Tyrinallum thrust his spear in Bouningyoung's side, the cause of the

present hollow in the side of the hill, which so infuriated him that he dealt the other a tremendous blow, burying the point of the leeowil in his head, which made the present large crater, and knocked him to the spot where he now stands.¹⁰

According to Wadawurrung beliefs, all of the animals and geographical features of the land and the seas (including Port Phillip Bay) that are visible today resulted from the actions of ancestral beings. Physical features in the landscape such as Lal Lal Falls near Ballarat were created by Bunjil, who was said to have created these places as physical reminders of their exploits and the laws that originated because of their actions. Colonial observers of Aboriginal culture such as Edward Stone Parker, the assistant protector in the Aboriginal Protectorate established in the Port Phillip District of New South Wales (now Victoria) between 1838 and 1849, wrote:

Other traditions exist among them referring to the origin of certain natural objects. Thus they believe in the existence of another mythological being called Bonjil [Bunjil] or Pundyil, who, however, is said to have been once a 'black fellow', and a remarkable locality is indicated as his residence when on earth. This is the deep and basaltic glen or hollow, forming the fall of 'Lal lal' on the Marrabool [Moorabool], near Mr Airey's Station. He is now represented as dwelling in the sky, and it is curious that they call the planet Jupiter 'Pundyil', and say it is the light of his fire. This Pundyil is said to have found a single kangaroo, emu, and other animals on earth: that he caught them, cut them up, and by some mysterious power, made each piece into a new kangaroo, &c., and that hence the country was filled with these animals.¹¹

Occasionally, some receptive colonists received tutoring and recorded some aspects of Wadawurrung social and political structures. Wadawurrung clans belonged to either the Waa (crow) or Bunjil (eaglehawk) moieties. In 1909, Ellen Richards, a Wadawurrung /Djabwurrung woman, explained to anthropologist R.H. Mathews that the land around Ballarat from Smythesdale to Geelong was Bunjil territory and that the 'Wa' people inhabited the area around Mt Emu and Skipton. Richards had several interviews with Mathews respecting the language and customs of her people. Richards shared information that she had acquired through knowledge passed down through the generations. Her people knew exactly when, where and how to find food and water, the meaning and significance of different places, and which ceremonies needed to be performed where, when and by whom. They knew how to behave in certain areas and where access was restricted or forbidden. Richards told Mathews, in general terms, about various ceremonies and the people involved in them, including those related to the initiation rites of a girl becoming a woman.¹²

Other oral histories were shared with white colonists by Wadawurrung and neighbouring Kulin people about events 2800–1000 years ago such as when Port Phillip was dry. One colonist recorded the account given to him:

Blacks say 'their uncle' (unspecific for all progenitors) recalled when Hobson's Bay was a kangaroo ground. They say 'plenty catch kangaroo and plenty catch possum there' and Murray (an Aborigine) assured me that the passage up the Bay, through

which the ships come is the River Yarra, and that the river once went out at the Heads, but that the sea broke in, and that Hobson's Bay, which was once a hunting ground, became what it is.¹³

Another account attests to how the Wadawurrung could, at one period, 'cross, dry-foot', from one 'side of the bay [in the east] to Geelong [in the west]' until a time when 'the earth sank, and the sea rushed in through the Heads, till the void places became broad and deep, as they are today'.¹⁴ These deep time stories about the unstoppable inundation of Port Phillip Bay mirrored, to some extent, the deep lament expressed by Wadawurrung women in 1853 about the unrelenting waves of British invaders onto their country:

The stranger white man came in his great swimming corong (vessel), and landed at Corayio [Corio] with his dedabul boulganas (large animals), and his anaki boulganas (little animals). He came with his boom-booms [double guns], his white miam-miams (tents), blankets, and tomahawks; and the dedabul ummageet (great white stranger) took away the long-inherited hunting grounds of the poor Barrabool [Wadawurrung] coolies and their children.¹⁵

It seems likely that the Wadawurrung would have recorded the arrival of large vessels in ceremonial songs. This is what occurred at Yardea in South Australia. Sung by Aboriginal women, the song tells of a beautiful white bird that flies across the ocean, then stops and folds its wings and is tied up so that it cannot escape. The story has its origins among the Aboriginal people of the Denial Bay area, behind the Nuyts Archipelago. It is widely believed that the song refers to the arrival in the region of a sailing vessel. It seems likely that the vessel in question was either Flinder's *Investigator* or Baudin's *Geographe*, since both visited the area—both also sailed near to Wadawurrung coast lines.¹⁶

Exploratory parties from the sea and the land

In October 1798, Governor John Hunter sent George Bass and Captain Matthew Flinders of the British Royal Navy out in the sloop *Norfolk* from Sydney to find evidence of a strait that divided mainland Australia and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). On their historic trip of exploration, which proved to the British that the strait existed, Bass and Flinders were surprised to discover 14 European men on the Glennies, a group of islands in the Bass Strait. The existence of this group off the coast of Victoria gives some indication that privateers, sealers and escaped convicts may have been making contact with the Kulin people of Port Phillip from as early as 1797. Bass landed five of them at Wilson's Promontory with some rice and other rudimentary goods and pointed them in the direction of Sydney. These sojourners may have headed north around the bay and then westwards and thus encountered Wadawurrung clans, but no record exists of their returning to Sydney or their survival. The explorers did not examine the territory west of Western Port.

A story was related to a squatter by some Wadawurrung of 'the Geelong Bay tribe' that may explain what happened to the men Bass landed at Wilson's Promontory. In 1848, George Hobler

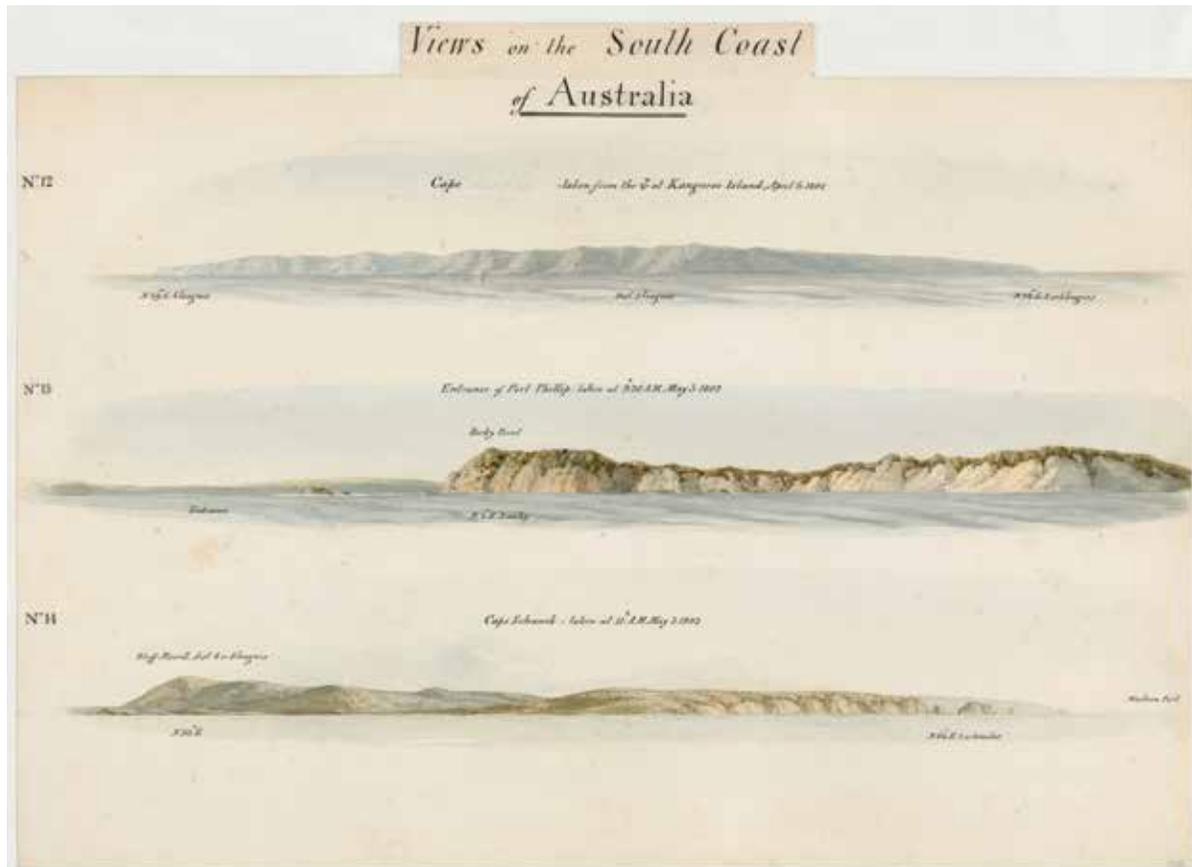
took Wadawurrung land in the Bacchus Marsh district. In his diary for 5 March, he recounted the following curious story:

Some old blacks of the Geelong Bay tribe have always reported that many years ago four white men appeared in the Bay and stayed with them for some time. At last, three of them went off in the direction of Sydney. The one who stayed behind was called 'Doctor' and used to walk about with a black's rush basket, collecting plants, insects, and all sorts of objects of natural history. Among other things he was accustomed to catch snakes—and could not be persuaded they were poisonous—he used, they said, to hold one in his hand and frighten them by putting its head towards them and frighten them. At last one bit him and he died, and they said he was buried where Miss Drysdale [near the present day suburb of Drysdale] lives now. A short time ago all this story was confirmed by the grave of a white man being opened in digging there for foundations of a new building ... Now this must have been Dr. Bass [?], a surgeon in the Navy, who first explored the strait dividing New Holland and Van Dieman's Land in a whale boat from Sydney—for the straits, was never heard of.¹⁷

Lieutenant Grant, a British Naval Officer on board *HMS Lady Nelson*, surveyed the Bass Strait area in late 1800; however, Grant's charts were too vague for Governor King who sent him back to repeat the task. Grant returned to Western Port in January 1802 with two soldiers, two officers and two Eora people (Worogan and her husband Yeranabie, both from the Sydney region) who acted as guides.¹⁸ Grant, like most British explorers in the early period of their explorations of Aboriginal Australia made note of the fact that he purposely chose Yeranabie as 'his companion' as he found 'Euranabie [Yeranabie] to be in many respects very useful, especially when penetrating a thicket, as he usually went first and cleared a passage for me to follow him.'¹⁹ They stayed in Boon Wurrung country for five weeks. On 3 January 1802, Grant recorded that some of his crew had made friendly contact with local Aboriginal people while on a swan shooting expedition, but little reference is made to the Wadawurrung apart from their observance of 'native fires' in the direction of Corio Bay. The presence of large numbers of Aboriginal fires and huts—but not people on Kulin country was frequently remarked upon in the maritime explorers journals. For instance, a report by French explorer Captain Millius upon 'his examination of Western Port' in April 1802 noted how 'Some young trees had been deprived of their leaves by the flames which daily devour the vast and fine forests of New Holland.'²⁰ More specifically, acting Lieutenant John Murray of the *Lady Nelson* wrote of the presence of Aboriginal fires on many occasions, such as:

I went on shore and walked through the woods a couple of miles. The ground was hard and pleasant to walk on. The trees are at a good distance from each other and no brush intercepts you. The soil is good as far as we may be judges. I saw several native huts and very likely they have burnt off several hundred acres of ground. Young grass we found springing up over all the ground we walked... After dinner I took a walk through the woods of this part of the country... To describe this part I walked through is simply to say that it nearly resembles a walk on Blackheath and the Park if we set out of question the houses and gardens of the latter. The hills and valleys rise and fall with inexpressible elegance. We discovered no water nor any

new wood of consequence, but it is impossible that a great want of water can be here from the number of native huts and fires we fell in with in our march... if we may judge from the number of their fires and other marks this part of the country is not thin of inhabitants.²¹



William Westall, 1802 *Views on the south coast of Australia*, 1802, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-138893194.

The following ship's log entry, dated 4 January 1802, is one of the earliest written accounts of intercultural exchange between the Kulin and the British. It is highly likely that the actions of the British would have been communicated to the neighbouring coastal clans of the Wadawurrung. Murray wrote

At 2pm the Launch returned on Board, we have at last got some kind of knowledge of the Natives of this part of the Country the following is the Substance of the report of Mr Bowen 1st Mate. As the Boat approach'd the Beach these Blacks were perceiv'd sitting in the same form as those of Sydney and each of them a Bundle of Spears in their hands, our people hollow'd them, which they instantly answered, and did not seem at all alarmed on the nearer approach of the Boat three Boys made their appearance; as between the Beach and the Boat there lay a Bank of Mud about 200 yards across. Mr Bowen could not get Quite so close as he could wish however he singly got out and began to walk towards them, which when they perveiv'd [perceived] they jump'd up on their feet and it now was perceived that one of them was a very old man with a large bushey beard and the rest of his face besmeared with red ochre, the others were young men; they were all cloathed with

the skins of apposums [possums] as far as their middle and this old man seemed to have command over the others as Mr Bowen advanced they all pulled off their dress and made signs to the officer, that before he came any nearer he must do the same this was immediately complied with.

They then all sat down again, and Mr Bowen, plucking a root of fern, advanced pretty close to them holding it up. (they seemed to understand to what it was meant) when he got within a few yards of this party the old man seemed rather uneasy, and began to handle his spears. Mr. Bowen then threw them a tomahawk, and one of the young men picked it up on Mr. Bowen beckoning them to sit down he doing the same, they again threw him back the tomahawk and all except the old man sat down. Mr Bowen then broke a piece of stick and but it with the tomahawk and tyed [tied] a handkerchief to it and again reached it to them, upon this one of the young men ventured to reach his hand, and take it out of the officer, but would by no means be so familiar as to shake hands. Mr. Bowen then [gave] some bread and then bade them some, which they did not eat, but carefully laid it by under some fern roots or leaves. On getting some ducks they took no other notice of them, than to examine in what manner they were killed what their ideas on that head were we know not as they did not take the least notice of our fire arms, even when towards the latter end of the Parley it was found necessary to point one at the breast of the old man who all along was very suspicious of our designs. All this time they expressed a good deal of wonder at the colour of Mr. Bowen's skin and one of the young men made very significant signs to him that he must have washed himself very hard. They now made signs for Mr. Bowen to go back to the boat and pointed down along the beach to Crown Head. Mr Bowen accordingly went into the boat and pulled down as they walked, after pulling about 1 ½ mile they stopped and beckoned for the boat to come in, here 3 women made their first appearance, each with a child at her back. Mr Bowen went on shore.

Here little passed on either side further than on Mr Bowen asking for fire to warm himself. They pointed to the boat and made signs for him to go there and get it. The women sometimes shook their hands to him and the boys laughing and hooping, a few more trifals [trifles] were here given to them, a little before this all our people got out of the boat stark naked as was desired and walked somewhat near the Natives on which the old man send the boys away to the women, and he after having in a great passion made sings [signs?] for us to go to the boat, began to retire with his face to us and brandishing his spear, so that every one thought he would heave [launch his spear]. When our people turned their backs. The young men seemed more quiet as we saw that all hope of further intercourse for the present was at an end. Mr Bowen ordered Bond to fire his piece over their heads in order to make good his retreat to the boat. This had the desired effect as they one and all were out of sight in an instant, before this they must have taken the musket for nothing but a stick.

All the weapons they were possessed of was their spears (them of a small size) and a stone tomahawk along with the wumara [woomera] they throw with, with respect to their size the young men were much the same as those of Sydney, but the old man was very stout. Their hair was in the same nasty manner as those of Sydney. Their understanding however, seems to go beyond those of Sydney, or Jarvis's [Jervis] Bay. They were not deficient in making out our signs and we were easy able to understand from their motions what they would be at from their being but little food for them on the beaches here – and their being clothed [clothed] in the skins of opossums [possums] I presume they are bush natives, the women I forgot to mention, appeared to be middling well shaped and good looking children. They were however always at some distance - Mr. Bowen and the people having joined the boat came on board – observed that all remainder of them retired back into the woods and about 6pm doused their fire at once although it must have covered an acre of ground.²²

A month later, Murray described an encounter with the Boon Wurrung near present day Port Nepean. He had sent a small boat with 'Mr. Bowen and 5 men armed with 14 days' provisions and water down to the westward giving him particular instructions how to act both with respect to the harbour and natives should he fall in with any'. Murray stressed to Bowen that 'at all times to deal friendly with the natives'. The Boon Wurrung and the British danced with one another and displayed a great deal of mutual interest in acquiring articles of each other's material culture.

I sent the launch with Mr. Bowen and 4 hands armed to see if any natives were here, and before the boat was half-way on shore we had the satisfaction of seeing 18 or 20 men and boys come out of the wood and seat themselves down on a green bank waiting the approach of our boat with which I had sent some shirts and other trifles to give them; the boat accordingly landed in the midst of them, and a friendly intercourse took place with dancing on both sides. In an hour the boat returned. Mr Bowen had dressed them in our white shirts and invited them on board. This however, they declined, but exchanged for all this. Got a basket of straw neatly enough made. They were all clothed in the skins of opossums and each had a bundle of spears, a strong mogo [axe?] and one basket. They wished to know that our arms were and their use and did not seem entirely to believe Mr Bowen that they were only walking sticks. No women were amongst them. I sent the boat again with some bread, looking glasses, tomahawk and a picture as presents to induce them to part with some of the weapons and dresses as also to inform us where there was water.²³

The next day there was a fiercely violent altercation. Murray recorded his impressions of the violent encounter:

The boat (as mentioned in latter part of yesterday's log) proceeded to the shore and was as before received in a friendly manner by the natives, all of whom were seated in a circle on a beautiful spot of grass near a high point of land. Mr Bowen and all

the crew, consisting of 5 men and the boy Mr Brabyn went up with their dinners in their hands and sat down in the midst of them (18 in No.) and began to eat shewing [showing] the natives how to eat bread &c. and gave them anything they chose to ask for as well as the things I had sent. Stripping himself almost naked to comply with their wishes, and his example was followed by the whole of the boat's crew as there was two fine looking boys amongst them I sent Mr Brabyn on shore purposely to try and gain their confidence by his attention to their youngsters, both of whom he dressed in his shirts, handkerchiefs, trowsers, etc.

All matters continued in this state while our people had anything to give, and all we got was two spears, a basket, and a mogo [axe] and even those they again took from the Seaman that had them in keeping this however, the Officer took no offence at, being determined, if at all possible, to keep on friendly terms with them, it was in vain that the Officer and Crew tried (by signs too significant not to be understood) to gain intelligence where water was to be found or on what Beaches Shells were most Plenty, to all such enquires they turned a deaf ear and only seem'd intent on getting what our people had, even to the last Shirt, by this time our people had nearly finished their Dinners, and Isaac Moss, having the Boat in charge got up and was slowly walking down to her, at this time the Boy Mr Brabyn happen'd to turn his Head towards the Wood and saw a Man in the very act of throwing a Spear at Moss, as well as a large Body (not before seen) behind a large fallen Tree, with their Spears all in readiness for throwing.

The Boy immediately Cried out to Mr Bowen (who was at that very time in the Act of Serving out Bread to all the party he was sitting among) that he would be speared, but before the words were out of his Mouth a Spear of a most dangerous kind was thrown at, and did not escape Moss by a Yard, and in an instant the whole of the Treacherous Body that Mr Bowen and four of our people were sitting the Midst of, opened to the right and left and at once left them all open to the Party in Ambush, who immediately were on the Feet and began to throw Spears, still such was the forbearance of the Officer, that only one Piece was Fired over their Heads, but this was found only to create a small Panic, and our party were oblig'd to teach them by fatal experience the effect of Walking Sticks, The 1st Fire made them run, and one received 2 Balls between his Shoulders, still some of them made a stop to heave [throw their spears], the 2nd Fire they all set off with astonishing speed, and most likely one received a Mortal Wound, before another Piece was Fired Mr Bowen laid hold of one of their Number, and held on till three of our people came up and also grappled him, strange to tell, he made such Violent Struggles as to get away from them all, nor did the Contents of the Officers Piece bring him up, although one Ball passed through his Arm and the other in the Side, he was traced a good distance by his Blood, the remaining Pieces were this time Fired, and our party gave Chase to them all...

On Board I kept a strict lookout with the Glass...I plainly saw the Natives running through the woods, which were by no means thick. One fellow in particular had been dressed in one of my White Shirts, and the Officer had tied the Wrists of it

with String which hindered his getting it off. Him we plainly saw from the vessel pass the roots of black Trees with such speed as more to resemble a large white Bird flying than a man. To increase their Panic as they passed along I gave them a discharge of our Guns loaded with round and grape, but am almost certain they did them no damage.²⁴

It is noteworthy that Murray, who was trespassing on Boon Wurrung land, considered the Boon Wurrung to be treacherous aggressors—and thought that a measured punishment had been dealt for their resisting the British. Murray opined: ‘Thus did this treachery and unprovoked attack meet with its just punishment and at the same time taught us a useful lesson to be more cautious in future.’ Murray completed his exploration of Boon Wurrung and Wadawurrung land and waters by following his instructions to ‘take possession of this port in the name of his Sacred Majesty George the Third of Great Britain and Ireland, King, etc., etc.’²⁵

Between 10-17 April 1802 a French naval expedition was also on Boon Wurrung land and seas. Captain Millius, like Murray recorded a pleasant and welcoming reception, and unlike Murray was able to maintain peaceable relations for the duration of their stay. Millius particularly commented on their intense distrust.

I discovered a column of smoke in the great basin [Western Port], and saw fires on the cape. I approached, and heard the cries of aboriginals who signalled to me to come to them, and by their gestures I understood that they indicated a place where I could conveniently disembark...I urged all on board not to be afraid because of the numbers of these peaceable natives...and we made signs to them to come to us, giving them significations of friendship. They responded to our invitation only by signs of the greatest mistrust. Not one of them dared descend though they had called to us. They babbled a very long time, without our being able to understand what they desired. Believing nevertheless, that they were inviting us to leave our clothing, and that they would descend the cliff to get it, I took off my socks and my shirt. That appeared to satisfy them...When I reached the plateau at the top they all chattered at once, moving away from me. I perceived that my pantaloons and my shoes troubled them, and that they wished to see me naked like themselves...I took out my watch, which they regarded with cries of astonishment. I pointed to the sun, and traced upon the soil its daily movement, which they appeared to understand. I gave them my pantaloons and my shoes, which they took, carefully covering up the shoes. Then they made signs for me to follow them to warm myself and take food...They looked at me very much and appeared very satisfied to see that my form resembled theirs. They made some movements to induce me to imitate them, and when I had executed these they manifested their joy by laughing. Having demanded to see my mouth, showing me theirs – which I found well furnished with teeth – I complied, whereat there was renewed laughter. I saw that they were great children, whom it was necessary to amuse, and I succeeded perfectly in so doing when I chanted to them a little piece, at the same time making grimaces and dancing.²⁶

On 26 April 1802, more unannounced visitors came. Captain Matthew Flinders and crewmembers on board the *Investigator* came ashore onto Boon Wurrung and Wadawurrung country at Mornington and the Bellarine Peninsula. Flinders was a little taken aback when a number of Boon Wurrung 'came down to the whale boat's party [on the beach] with very little hesitation...they behaved in a friendly manner'.²⁷ Writing about the Boon Wurrung at Wilson's Promontory, Flinders observed that the land:

Does not appear to be inhabited; but upon the low neck by which it is connected with the main, large smokes were seen, as well as in various places at the back of the long beach. Only four natives were seen about this port, and that at a distance. Paths and other marks of them were common, but none very recent. No canoes, or signs of any, were met with.²⁸

Flinders and his crew then sailed to Corio Bay and met several groups of Wadawurrung people at Indented Head (near Geelong). Flinders thought were timid:

In the morning, a fire was perceived two hundred yards from the tent; and the Indians appeared to have decamped from thence on our landing. Whilst I was taking angles from a low point at the north-easternmost part of Indented head, a party of the inhabitants showed themselves about a mile from us; and on landing there we found a hut with a fire in it, but the people had disappeared, and carried off their effects. I left some strips of cloth, of their favourite red colour, hanging about the hut.²⁹

Flinders and several of his crewmembers climbed the You Yangs, and then gazed over almost all of Wadawurrung land from the summit. Three Wadawurrung men approached them 'without hesitation'. Flinders wrote of their assuredness when mediating with him:

[They] received a shag [or cormorant, a bird] and some trifling presents [presumably food and cloth] with pleasure, and parted with such of their arms as we wished to possess without reluctance. They afterwards followed us along the shore; and when I shot another bird, which hovered over the boat, and held it up to them, they ran down to the water-side and received it without expressing either surprise or distrust. Their knowledge of the effect of fire-arms I then attributed to their having seen me shoot birds when unconscious of being observed.³⁰

Krichauff, writing about the Narungga people of coastal South Australia, noted that Flinders' habit of hunting specific birds may have 'unintentionally signalled his affiliation with particular people, country and animals' to Aboriginal coastal groups. After trading, Flinders and his party had 'a dinner of which the natives partook, we left them on friendly terms'.³¹ Flinders found evidence that coastal Wadawurrung people had had contact with white people; he found boiled rice in one of their huts, observed their familiarity with 'the effect of firearms' and noted that they were 'desirous of possessing many of our conveniences'.³² Further, he recorded that:

Fires had been seen moving along the shore, but the people seemed to have fled; though we found two newly huts with fires in them, and utensils which must have belonged to some of the people before seen, since there was boiled rice in one of the baskets.³³

Flinders's party stayed in the Wadawurrung huts for a night. He noted that:

Nothing was seen of the Indians till we pushed off from the shore in the morning, when seven showed themselves upon a hill behind the huts. They ran down to examine their habitations, and finding everything as they had left it ... they seemed satisfied; and for a short time three of them followed the boat.³⁴

Flinders did not describe the huts; however, it is likely they were cupola-shaped shelters typically covered with reeds, limbs, bark, grass and a variety of foundations according to available materials. Such shelters, generally considered to be seasonal accommodation, were used only for a few months. One of the earliest written descriptions of seasonal cupolas was provided by Collins who, in 1803, reported that he 'saw on the sea-coast huts formed of pieces of bark from several trees, put together in the form of an oven, with an entrance, and large enough to hold six or eight persons. Their fire was always at the mouth of the hut, rather within than without'.³⁵

Flinders, being a naval man, was keen to investigate the Wadawurrung's watercraft. After exploring the bay for seven days in May 1802, he commented: 'I am not certain whether they have canoes, but none were seen.' Flinders reported that he found it very difficult to speak of Port Phillip in general terms; however, of Indented Head he waxed lyrical, noting that it 'had an appearance particularly agreeable' due to the Wadawurrung having practiced their seasonal Autumn burns. As a consequence the grass had 'sprung up green and tender' and the wood was so thinly scattered that one might see to a considerable distance'.³⁶ A crew member on board *Investigator* shared a similar version of his time on Wadawurrung land:

I had no opportunity to examine the soil on the hills but to the West of the Hills and South of the Bay there is an extensive plane which is chiefly rich Meadow land, the soil a considerable depth of rich black bog soil which everywhere gives evident proof of great fertility by the luxuriant growth of its vegetables - which if it were not frequently cleared by burning would soon become impenetrable as was the case with several spots which had escaped the last general conflagration, which it had experienced a few months before... They Spoke highly of the country as being beautiful and fertile, saw a vast quantity of wild ducks, swans & had interviews with the natives which they describe as brave and at the same time harmless & inoffensive people and readily parted with their arms and utensils which are manufactured with more ingenuity than those about King George the Thirds sound [present day Albany], their spears were well finished & fishing utensils which consist of long straight stick well pointed with bone joined with cement and thread - some have two bones about 6 or 8 inches long which stand parallel about two inches apart well pointed & fixed to a long handle by cement and string.³⁷

Another crewmember on board the *Investigator*, Samuel Smith, explained that he and his fellows were under strict instructions to avoid violence unless directly attacked. In Smith's view, the 'orders [were] so humane towards the Natives that we must put up with everything but heaving Spears.' Smith also described the gifts given to Flinders by the Wadawurrung: '2 Swanns [swans] & A number of Native spears.'³⁸

As Ian Clark and other historians have observed, there are many recorded instances in western Victoria (including in Wadawurrung country) during the colonial period in which Aboriginal people reportedly recognised Europeans as deceased clan members who had returned to life.³⁹ According to R. H. Mathews, a surveyor and self-taught anthropologist, the belief in transmigration or reincarnation was widespread during the early years of the European invasion, being 'observed in every part of Australia where investigations have been made'. Charles Griffith, a squatter who stole Wadawurrung land near Bacchus Marsh in 1840, understood that they 'have an idea which they entertain that white men are black men who have died and have risen up white men or as they say themselves: tumble down black fellow plenty jump up white men.'⁴⁰ In western Victoria, these resuscitated people were known as *ngamadjidj* (generally translated by linguists as 'stranger' or 'white man'). Some Kulin people considered white people to be sky beings. Edward Stone Parker, a government official who took up the role of assistant Aboriginal protector to the Dja Dja Wurrung and northern Wadawurrung people (1839–1849) considered himself to be 'literally worshipped' by them and, on one occasion, he was told to return to the sky from 'whence he had come'.⁴¹

Anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt suggested that, while the sight of returning spirits might have been frightening and unpredictable for Aboriginal people, it was at least something that could 'be fitted into the local scheme of things, explained in terms of the local people's own experience, if not assumed to be related to them through kinship'.⁴² In doing so, historian Henry Reynolds has argued that Aboriginal people were drawing a reasonable conclusion premised on important and widely shared beliefs. The Aboriginal world was spatially and socially limited; those outside the sphere of known and at least partially intelligible clans belonged to a 'cosmological periphery' that had little geographical definition.⁴³ According to Clark and Cahir, the arrival of Europeans caused many Aboriginal people to conclude that these newcomers must have belonged to the land, or at least knew of it, in a previous life.⁴⁴ As white people arrived and took residence at particular places, it was easy for the Wadawurrung to assume they must have held an attachment for these places in some previous state of existence. That Europeans failed to recognise their former relatives and friends, and could no longer speak their language, was probably rationalised by assuming that the trauma of reincarnation or resuscitation had expunged the memory of their real, former identity. It seems likely that the reception Flinders and his crew received from the Wadawurrung and the Boon Wurrung when they sailed to Port Phillip and Corio Bay in April 1802 was one of receiving *ngamadidj* onto their country. The generous gifting of goods by the Wadawurrung, as reported by Flinders and many other colonists who followed, was probably an enactment of what one colonial observer called the Kulin's 'ceremony of mutual friendship'.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it seems apparent many Aboriginal people recognised that some white trespassers had no existing kinship ties to their people or possibly considered that some white trespassers were traditional enemies.⁴⁶

Governor King sent yet another naval detachment to Port Phillip in 1802. Their instructions were to make 'minute investigations of that spacious harbour'. King dispatched acting Lieutenant Charles Robbins, acting Surveyor-General Charles Grimes, James Flemming and fourteen others (including a number of convict bolters they had rescued from King Island) in the *Cumberland*. Robbins and his party went ashore near present day Sorrento in December 1802. Their first sighting of the Boon Wurrung was fleeting—probably because it occurred near two huts, which Flemming believed had been built by Europeans, presumably sealers who were renowned for their violent methods of recruiting Aboriginal women. Flemming noted that two of the Boon Wurrung he met 'appeared to be marked with the smallpox'. This may indicate, as some historians suggest, that the smallpox virus had spread from Sydney in the 1780s via Aboriginal trading routes and decimated southeastern Australia Aboriginal populations. Historian Janet McCalman has argued that Victorian Aboriginal populations with no herd animals and a dispersed human population were at particular risk as they had no exposure to infectious diseases, and it is believed that the first impact of smallpox on the immunologically naïve population reduced the Victorian Aboriginal population by half. A second smallpox epidemic is believed to have swept through eastern Australia in the late 1820s and early 1830s, just before permanent white invasion began in Victoria, and it is believed by some scholars that 'the remaining Aboriginal population was cut by half again, so that when European settlement began in 1835, the estimated surviving population was just 15,000'.⁴⁷

For five weeks Robbins and his party had almost daily contact with the Wadawurrung and other Kulin peoples around Port Phillip Bay. Flemming deployed the commonly used phrase 'fell in with body of natives' on numerous occasions; he encouraged them to share his company and on several occasions used the water hole caches built by the Wadawurrung. Grimes recorded the following about his encounters with the Wadawurrung:

Fell in with a body of natives, fourteen men, besides women and children: they pointed to us to follow the ship; I gave them some biscuit; some of the men gave them some old hats and a handkerchief; they followed us a considerable way, seemingly asking for more. There are some huts on the side of the river ... We went up the river till we came to rocks; could not get the boat over ... Saw a canoe and two native huts ... Sowed some seeds by the natives hut, where we slept ... At the end of the salt water found a hole made by natives; drank of it and returned back to the beach where the boat had 'brought up' [The Werribee] ... Two of them appeared to be marked with the smallpox. After dinner we went on shore with an additional guard; they all met us again. Gave them some fish, a tomahawk, and an old hat; they put our hands to their breast, and looked into my haversack. The boat loitered behind us, and the sailors said that they took the leadline and a hoe out of the boat, and some fish; got the line again but not the hoe ... Soon after our arrival [Swan Island] ... on shore two of the natives we had seen on the preceding day came to us. They looked much at my buttons; I cut two off and gave each of them one, and some biscuit. They went with us upwards of a mile and returned.⁴⁸

On Friday 18 January 1803, near present day Point Cook, a group of eleven Wadawurrung initiated a meeting of the two cultures, apparently with the intention of cultural exchange:

As we went out of the boat eleven natives met us; they were very civil, I gave one of them a biscuit; he looked at it; I took it again, eat of it, when he did the same; whatever we said they said after us. There was one who appeared to be their chief. They handed us their spears to look at ... They followed us as we went on ... when the boat came up we went on board. I made signs for them to come into the boat, but they would not venture.⁴⁹

In December 1804, the *Integrity*, a colonial cutter captained by Charles Robbins explored Boon Wurrung country around the area now called Western Port and reported that their movements were closely monitored as they sailed along the coast. The captain noted how 'a large Native fire has been kept up abreast of the vessel on the Main[land] since we anchor[e]d'. In these remarks are clear indications that the Boon Wurrung exhibited a great deal of familiarity with white people: 'We fell in with a party of natives and parted from them in the most Friendly manner. Some of them had had coverings of Kangaroo skins, their spears were barbed and were used with a throwing stick. They are a plump race of men.'

On another occasion, Robbins wrote:

two natives that were with the party we fell in with before—gave them some Biscuit wh[ich] they eat immediately—gave them a Swan. They exchanged their Shield & Kangaroo Skin (wh[ich] was composed of sev[eral] pieces neatly sewed together) for a couple of handkerchiefs. They parted by shaking hands with us & Appear[e]d much pleased.⁵⁰

Exploratory parties by land

In November 1824, an expedition led by William Hovell and Hamilton Hume set off from Lake George, New South Wales. The party, which included six servants, was heading towards Western Port but they inadvertently travelled to Corio Bay. They concluded that the 'numerous fires which were being made around them' by the Wadawurrung clans near present-day Lara (west of Melbourne) were signal fires and became uneasy that their presence was being communicated to other Aboriginal peoples in the district.⁵¹ On their journey, they were approached by a large group of Wadawurrung people at a creek they named Kennedy's Creek (Hovells Creek). Judging from the 'largeness of their bally [sic] and their appearance', Hovell surmised that the Wadawurrung lived well. This was the first group of Aboriginal people that had approached them since leaving Lake George, though they saw plenty of evidence along the route that large numbers were present. Hovell was convinced that the principal reason they had not seen any Aboriginal people to that point was the presence of their horses and bullocks. However, the Wadawurrung did not shrink away. Hovell recorded on 17 December 1824, near present day Lara, that 'they [the Wadawurrung] did not appear to be astonished at the sight of the horses and bullocks'.⁵²

The relationship between the Wadawurrung and Hume and Hovell's exploration party started badly, as one of the white men (Fitzpatrick) was chased and feared for his life. Henry Angel, one of the expedition members recalled his version of the events.

On the 17th December we reached the spot where the flourishing town of Geelong now stands, encamping on the left bank of Kennedy's Creek. While we were encamped on the coast, Fitzpatrick went to shoot ducks ; the blacks pursued him, and his shouts brought Thomas Boyd and myself to his assistance. Mr. Hovell did not stir from the camp. I went afterwards to the blacks, had a palaver with them, and brought them to our camp. While with us, they pointed in the direction S. by W., intimating, by signs that white men in ships were there, and engaged in sawing timber, representing this by see-saw movements. They described the sailors, and vessels under sail, and made use of some English expressions. This left no doubt on our minds of the presence of white men, then or recently, in the direction pointed to.⁵³

Fitzpatrick's account of the Wadawurrung pursuing him, hardly surprisingly, painted the scene in far more dramatic tones. He noted that

While we were in camp, on the coast, at the end of our journey, I went a shooting ducks, about half-a-mile or a mile from the camp, when five blackfellows ran me for my life; I sung out as I ran towards the camp, the blacks got close up, and had thrown some spears at me, when Mr. Hume and Boyd came to my rescue.⁵⁴

Thomas Boyd, another expedition member placed a slightly less confrontational pitch in his recount

When we were in camp, on the coast of Geelong, Mr. Hovell and Mr. Hume were one day lying on the ground. Mr. Hume had thrown off his boots; hearing shouts he started up, and asked if any of the men were absent. Fitzpatrick was away; Mr. Hume started up, took his gun, and called upon us to take ours and follow him, as the blacks must be after Fitzpatrick; I went with him for one; Captain Hovell did not stir. Sure enough, we soon met Fitzpatrick running for his life, and a lot of blackfellows after him. They vanished when they saw us.⁵⁵

Hovell for his part claimed that when Fitzpatrick's comrades came to his aid by showing their willingness to fire upon them, the Wadawurrung party immediately showed their intimate knowledge of Western firearms and the injury it could inflict. The Wadawurrung laughed off the altercation and both sides adopted a friendly approach. They told Hume their names for several places within their view: 'the harbour they called Geeloong [Geelong] - the downs, Iramoo [Werribee Plains] - and a remarkable high hill on the downs, they informed me was called Wilanmamartar [You Yangs]'. Hume's account corroborates Hovell's very closely:

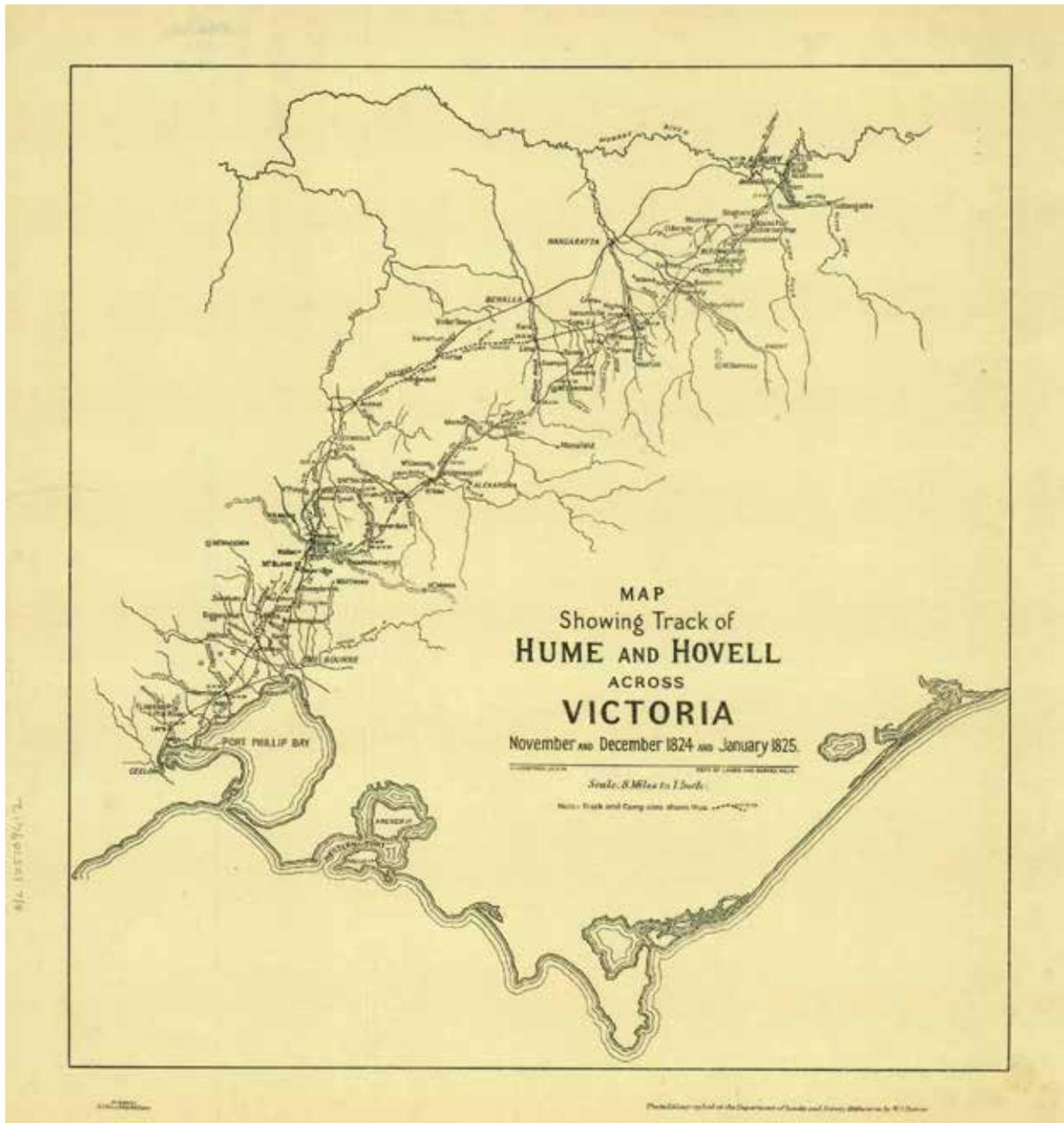
At Western Port [Hume and Hovell mistakenly assumed the area around Geelong to be Western. Port] we met a tribe, with whom we were on amicable terms, though at first they gave us reason to apprehend they were hostile inclined. On our return we met about 100 men, women and children; they behaved themselves toward us in the most friendly and peaceable manner. These natives we considered superior to any we had previously seen in any part of the colony.⁵⁶

Hume also wrote that he considered 'that these ancient Australians were admirable adepts in the art of thieving'. Spoons, pocketknives, tin cans and other small items were 'stolen' from their tents. It is interesting that neither Hume nor Hovell considered they were trespassing or stealing goods from communal Wadawurrung property. A party of Wadawurrung near present day Lara related a baffling tale to Hume and Hovell. Through clever mimicry and English type expressions (bodily and verbal) the Wadawurrung gave very clear indication that some white people were establishing what sounded to be a permanent camp in a WSW direction to Geelong, possibly the western end of Corio Bay. The Wadawurrung indicated to Hume that they were keen to take him there. James Fitzpatrick, one of six servants who accompanied Hume and Hovell stated:

They [the Wadawurrung] described the action of men pulling boats, cutting trees, and rolling logs; they used white men's expressions, and pointed at the same time over some hills in sight of us, intimating, apparently, that white men and ships were there.⁵⁷

Hume, as noted earlier, concluded from the 'very clear account' the Wadawurrung gave them that the party they described 'must be a gang of sealers, or perhaps some runaways from Sydney'. The mysterious presence of a possible sealer camp at Corio Bay was never confirmed due to lack of time on the white explorers' part. The exploratory party 'all heard a loud report', which they took to be the 'sound of a ship's gun', significantly increased the veracity of their belief that there was a white man's camp at Corio Bay.

...a days journey from Geelong, the report of a cannon was distinctly heard in the direction of the place pointed out by the natives the day before; it was the extreme bight of the Bay of Geelong...So convinced were we that the report was that of a cannon, that one and all agreed to turn back for Geelong.⁵⁸



H.J. Green, acting Govt. Printer, 1924 *Map showing track of Hume and Hovell across Victoria November and December 1824 and January 1825*, Department of Lands and Survey, Melbourne.

Owing to doubts about their supplies lasting for the return trip to Lake George, they did not turn. Judging from the descriptions of rolling logs, felling of sizeable trees and the possibility of a cannon, it is likely that the 'Corio Camp' was sizeable and semi-permanent. Hume and Hovell saw evidence that the Wadawurrung or Woiwurrung (it is impossible to tell with any certainty as Hovell's journal only indicates the location as several days riding south of King Parrot Creek) had used iron tomahawks to cut out grubs from trees. The use of iron tomahawks by the Wadawurrung and their neighbours prior to the occupation of the land by white squatters indicates a greater deal of material cultural transference than has previously been acknowledged.

Ethnographic and archaeological data demonstrate that traditional greenstone axe heads were prized and extremely valuable commodities in Australian Aboriginal societies. Yet, historical records also indicate a keenness by Aboriginal groups in the Port Phillip region to obtain, modify and adopt the newcomer's utilitarian objects, such as iron axe heads, in favour of their existing technology. Hume and Hovell complained, as did the officers at Sorrento and Robbins's earlier exploratory party on the Bellarine Peninsula that the Wadawurrung were 'inquisitive, troublesome and great thieves'. Their eagerness to acquire (by stealth or trade) utilitarian objects arguably displayed their prior knowledge of Western technology. This is further demonstrated in a story told in 1836 by William Buckley to the Rev. Langhorne (the first missionary appointed by the Government in the Port Phillip District, now Victoria). According to Buckley, he first saw the Wadawurrung with a steel tomahawk in about 1808. Rather than originating from the failed convict settlement at Sorrento (1802–1803), he believed it came from an unknown party of colonists seeking water. Buckley recalled that:

About twenty-five years ago, about the fifth year of my living among them, I first saw an iron tomahawk among them. On asking how they obtained it, they said that while I was absent some distance, some white men had rowed up the Barwon in a boat and left the tomahawk in question on the bank. On going to the place I observed their tracks where they had been to obtain water.⁵⁹

Buckley's account highlighted the value of iron to the Wadawurrung. In his reminiscences, he noted that, on finding a cask washed up on shore, he removed the iron hoops that he 'knew were valuable to the natives. Having broken up the iron hoops into pieces, I some days after divided them amongst those who were most kind to me, and by these presents added greatly to the influence I had already acquired over them.'⁶⁰

As Hovell rightfully deduced, axes were used to procure important foodstuffs, such as edible insects, possums and honey. What Hume and Hovell may not have fully grasped was the integral role that axes played in Aboriginal societies. Axes were essential not only for the manufacture of essential food gathering tools, but also for a myriad of other uses including weapons for combat, ceremonial objects, the butchering of meat and the construction of fishing weirs, houses and canoes. The sometimes audacious and fearless behaviour displayed by the Kulin in obtaining steel axe heads from the white intruders on their land is an indication of the high value placed on these items. The ceremonial importance of axes to the Wadawurrung was shared in a story Buckley related to Rev. Langhorne in 1839:

Just before the settlers came to Port Phillip this personage [supernatural being] was the subject of general conversation. It was reported among them that he had sent a message to the Watourings [clan of Wadawurrung with whom Buckley lived] ordering them to send him a certain number of tomahawks to enable him to repair a new prop for the sky, as the present [one] had become rotten and their destruction was inevitable should the sky fall upon them. To prevent so dreadful a catastrophe and to supply the offering of tomahawks as speedily as possible, some of the blacks repaired to Western Port and stole the ironwork from some settlers' carts left there.⁶¹

Chapter 2: Sealers and Whalers

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, sealers desperately sought new hunting grounds to supply the profitable fur trade. Skins of the southern fur seal and southern hair seal (*Arctocephalus* spp.) were in high demand in China, Europe and North America. Both species of seal were found throughout the shores and islands of Australia's southern coast. Other ships cruised these waters in search of the southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) whose migration route runs along the coastline of south-east Australia and whose bones and oil were greatly coveted by Europeans. In 1791, Governor Arthur Phillip dispatched two ships that had just arrived from England, the *Mary Ann* and the *William and Ann*, on a sealing expedition to the south coast of New Holland (Australia). When the ships returned with a load of oil and skins, Phillip was convinced that sealing in the antipodes could provide a profitable undertaking. In 1799, William Reid returned to Port Jackson from the Bass Strait Islands loaded with sealskins and oil. The fame of these fishing waters soon spread and numerous sealing ships came from far afield to share in the spoil. By 1800, their numbers were large enough for colonial authorities to be concerned with the long-term viability of the industry. Governor King made an effort to 'restrain individuals from resorting there in too great numbers, and to fix certain times for their visiting these places to prevent the destruction of that commercial advantage'. Further indirect evidence that substantial commercial sealing operations were occurring in Western Port is indicated by a communique from Governor King to the secretary of state, the Duke of Portland, in August 1801 that boasted of the 'great abundance of seals near Western Port'.

By 1802, it was estimated that crews totalling two hundred sealers were in Bass Strait. These ships would remain for long periods cruising about the islands. Typically, the nature of the sealing operations in the Bass Strait was carried out by ships of forty to ninety tons with gangs of up to twenty sealers. Once in the sealing waters, a gang was placed ashore, often with minimal provisions and shelter, while the mother vessel sailed off to deposit or retrieve another gang. The limited stocks and accommodation for the sealing parties meant the sealers would have been entirely dependent on either the bushcraft they had acquired directly from their own experience or upon Aboriginal 'indentured' labourers. In this early period of white occupation, surviving in the Australian landscape was achieved almost entirely through the aid of Aboriginal people. Historian Lynette Russell has chronicled how maritime workers who were accompanied by Aboriginal workers fared significantly better, both economically and physically, than their counterparts who were not so accompanied.⁶² Statements submitted to colonial authorities by sealers demonstrate that they held female Aboriginal workers in high esteem. Sealers complained that they would be financially ruined if their Aboriginal workers were taken away from them. While there is little direct evidence of Wadawurrung being forced to labour for sealers and whalers, it seems likely that the coastal clans suffered a similar fate of forced servitude and sexual exploitation as many people of the coastal Boon Wurrung had experienced in this regard.

The seal colonies on King Island, Phillip Island (off Western Port) and Sealer's Island (off Wilson's Promontory) attracted fishing boats, primarily to the Boon Wurrung coastline and, to a lesser degree, the Wadawurrung. Between 1802 and 1806, 100,000 tons of sealskins were landed at Sydney.⁶³ The sealing operations in this period stretched westward as far as Kangaroo Island in South Australian waters. By necessity, the sealers became familiar with a land-based existence and some established semi-permanent settlements on the coast. For example, Joseph Murrell, with six companions, spent three years on Kangaroo Island from 1806, largely without provisions, by adopting a lifestyle that mirrored an Aboriginal one.⁶⁴ In 1825-1826 a small vessel, presumably a sealing vessel, was reputedly cut in half and lengthened at Western Port.⁶⁵ That sealing parties assumed a more permanent occupation of their bases in the Bass Strait region was noted in 1802. A French naval expedition carrying out a scientific survey of Australasia (1801-1803) was reportedly greatly helped by six sealers on King Island who had adopted a sedentary lifestyle.⁶⁶

Historian Stephen Murray-Smith considers the decade 1800-1810 as the heyday of the organised sealing industry. Sealing declined from about 1808 and large-scale entrepreneurs found it of rapidly decreasing interest to them. Small capitalists and adventurous individuals filled the vacuum, a situation analogous to 'the picking over of the tailings of the goldfields, after the main rushes.'⁶⁷ Due to a decrease in the number of seals on the islands on the eastern approach of Bass Strait, the sealers' attention turned increasingly to islands closer to the mainland or the mainland itself. Since the captains of sealing and whaling vessels were primarily concerned with hunting their prey and collecting a full cargo of oil and skins, they made little or no attempt to record precise dates, times or descriptions of anchorages or visits to the shore. Crewmembers were in the main illiterate or lacked the desire or resources to record their experiences on paper.

In the Port Phillip and Western Port Bay regions, the Boon Wurrung were the main recipients of visits by sealers and whalers, as their territory was located in a region that was rich in marine resources and offered a spacious and safe port. Although the Wadawurrung would have seen much activity on their coasts, historical records of cross-cultural relations during this period are extremely sparse and fragmented. However, it is arguable that the Wadawurrung's experience of contact with sealers and whalers would have been similar to the Boon Wurrung, but to a lesser extent. Moreover, as the Wadawurrung were at 'amity' with the Boon Wurrung, and as their territories bordered one another, it is very likely that the Wadawurrung would have heard about and witnessed this contact.

Some meagre written evidence of the impact the sealers had upon coastal Aboriginal people can be gleaned from early maritime explorers' accounts. For instance, in November 1826, a European exploratory party paid a visit to the coastline neighbouring the Wadawurrung. A French scientific expedition visiting Western Port under the command of Captain Dumont D'Urville briefly came ashore upon Boon Wurrung land. The French visitors saw a 'large number of dwellings', which they believed 'proved that the tribe that usually lived in them must have been quite numerous'. However, d'Urville noted that:

Despite our search we only found some not so recent traces of a native sojourn, although their huts, numbering between forty and fifty were still there a short distance from the shore, surrounded by the remains of their domiciles and fragments of the shells of the shellfish that they had eaten. Some of the huts had a framework of large branches covered with big pieces of bark, and primitive as it was, this feeble attempt at architecture indicated among these tribes a germ of intelligent organization which I thought was foreign to all Australians. Moreover, the large number of these dwellings proved that the tribe that usually lived in them must have been quite numerous.⁶⁸



Langlumé, Pierre. & Sainson, Louis Auguste de. & Adam, Victor. & Dumont d'Urville, Jules-Sébastien-César. & Victorian Vision. (1833). *Habitation de pecheurs de phoques au Port Western (Nouvelle Hollande.)*. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-134870071>.

Note the presence of European dogs and the presumably Boon Wurrung woman and willum [Kulin house] depicted by the artist in the background to the left.

His crew also found sealers in Western Port who had been abandoned by a vessel some ten months before hand. They were without any provisions but reported that they had been able to live on good terms with the Boon Wurrung and survive tolerably well. The colonial newspapers reported that

The description of Western Port and its localities, given by some men who have been brought from thence by the Corvette L'Astrolabe, is extremely interesting. These men had been left there by a sealing vessel about ten months since, for the purpose of prosecuting the ostensible object of their voyage, but the master of the vessel never returned for them - destitute of provisions other than what Nature in her wildest state afforded them, they were on terms of friendly intimacy with their natives, whom they represent to have been amiable in their dispositions, and their outward appearance prepossessing.⁶⁹

They were reported to have been glad to return to Sydney but do not seem to have endured a very hard existence. D'Urville rather doubted this and later heard about a fracas between them and the sealers, who, he was sure, had been trying to abduct their women, writing

We had no way of finding out which side had started the trouble; only I know that in general the Europeans who take to that sort of existence are not very gentle with the savages and are especially free with their women.⁷⁰

Substantive evidence that sealers had established a permanent base at Western Port Bay as early as 1802 is contained in Lieutenant John Murray's log. Murray went ashore at Western Port in December 1802 and saw evidence, as noted earlier, that a sealing party had found a spring of fresh water and put up a 'large board', with directions for any stranger to get to the 'Watering Place'.⁷¹ Similarly, Charles Grimes, the surveyor general of NSW, on an exploratory party of Port Phillip in 1802-1803, noted the presence of two huts 'apparently built by Europeans'.⁷² The shipping news in newspapers of the period 1803-1835 also provides written accounts of epic voyages, wrecks and whaling and sealing activities in the waters near to, or on, the Wadawurrung's coastlines.

The *Sydney Gazette* reported in 1803 that sealers from the Kent group of islands had informed the captain of a visiting schooner that the British whale ship *Pandora's Packet* was cruising off Wilson's Promontory. The report implied that whalers were making occasional, if not regular, visits to Boon Wurrung waters and, possibly, had operational stations for the boiling down of whale blubber on Boon Wurrung land.⁷³ Sealers' movements closer to Wadawurrung waters were reported in 1804 when the sealing vessel *Edwin* arrived in Sydney 'from Port Phillip with 1600 [seal] skins and some [whale] oil' and noted that an escapee convict 'was landed by the *Edwin* at [an unspecified location in] Port Phillip'.⁷⁴



Dubourg, M. & Clark, John Heaviside. (1813). *Shooting the harpoon at a whale*. National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-135900319>

Also in the same year, there was a report of more substantial operations and evidence of sealing groups living on Boon Wurrung and possibly Wadawurrung land. The *Nancy* put into Western Port where the vessel took aboard sealskins procured by one of her sealing gangs. Moreover, it appears that the sealing operation had been there for some time, as the crew tried to load over 7,000 sealskins. The *Sydney Gazette* further reported the safe arrival of the *Nancy* at an unspecified location at Port Phillip in January 1804. From eyewitness reports around Melbourne in the mid-1830s, it is apparent that the Wadawurrung regularly visited Port Phillip, as it adjoined their territory. Though there is no direct evidence that sealers regularly visited the Bellarine Peninsula, which was the Wadawurrung's principal coastal territory, it is likely that intermittent encounters between sealers and Wadawurrung people occurred when currents or curiosity drove one to the other. In the records of Hume and Hovell's exploration of Wadawurrung land in 1824, there is inconclusive evidence of sealing and whaling activities occurring at Geelong. As noted earlier, the Wadawurrung clan accompanying the white explorers described the actions of white men working on a vessel in such vivid detail that Hume and Hovell were convinced it was a sealing or whaling party. Circumstantial evidence that sealers were operating in Wadawurrung territory comes from John Pascoe Fawkner, a squatter who stole land from the Boon Wurrung in 1835. Pascoe recalled how from 1804 to 1835 he had been engaged in collecting information about Port

Phillip 'from the Sealers and from the Mimosa bark gatherers at Western Port and from the Whalers'.⁷⁵ Further indirect proof that sealers were operating in Wadawurrung territory comes from the first squatter to illegally occupy Wadawurrung land at Indented Heads, in June 1835. On two occasions, he noted that 'some sealers at the Heads' had returned the firing of his gun. Buckley did not reveal any specific knowledge of the existence of sealing operations within Wadawurrung territory aside from seeing two ships during his sojourn with the Wadawurrung, presumably off the Bellarine Peninsula. An overlander from Sydney to Melbourne in 1839 made Buckley's acquaintance and noted how Buckley had had contact with colonists, possibly sealers or whalers, during his sojourn with the Wadawurrung:

For a long time he lived in the hope of being able again to rejoin his own countrymen, but only on one occasion did he perceive any chance of accomplishing his wish; a vessel with Europeans came to Port Philip about fifteen years ago, and he endeavoured to speak to the people, but they were afraid, and made off on his approach, and he then despaired of ever seeing his countrymen again.⁷⁶

Buckley acknowledged that the sealers frequently visited Boon Wurrung territory and implied that the Wadawurrung regularly visited the sealers' camps:

I always avoided going to Western Port to fall in with the sealers who often came over ... During thirty years residence among the natives I had become so reconciled to my condition that although opportunities offered, [of leaving his Wadawurrung family] and I sometimes thought of availing myself of them, I never could make up my mind to it.⁷⁷

In 1826, D'Urville confirmed Buckley's belief and further noted that he had spoken with a sealing party at Westernport. The Frenchman had made inquiries regarding the whereabouts of the Boon Wurrung, and the sealers had indicated that they had withdrawn inland where the food supply was better. As noted earlier D'Urville doubted this, he thought it more likely that the sealers had been trying to abduct Aboriginal women.

The records show that contact between sealers and Aboriginal people was frequently violent. Hovell remarked he was aware that 'the natives of Western Port had been occasionally maltreated by the boat crews of vessels, principally sealers'.⁷⁸ However, this was not always the case. In 1804, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* reported that: 'The Natives of Port Phillip became friendly a day or two before the [sealing vessel] *Edwin* sailed for Port Jackson, they appeared totally to throw aside doubt and apprehension, and wished to maintain a friendly correspondence.'⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the weight of evidence suggests that such friendly relationships were an aberration rather than a normal state of affairs. Encounters between coastal Kulin people and sealers in this early period of contact (1800–1835) were often violent, reflecting the underlying dynamics of sealing, an often-exploitative form of imperial extraction. Official reports in this period vividly describe sealers kidnapping and enslaving coastal Aboriginal people along the south-eastern seaboard. By way of example, the surveyor at Swan River (Perth) stated that:

There were 4 Port Phillip [Kulin] natives, 3 women and a boy at St Georges Sound [Albany, Western Australia] who were stole away by the sealers in the year 1834. They were stole[n] by the Captain of the *George*, the fourth cutter, which left Sydney touched at Western Port on its way to St Georges Sound.⁸⁰

There was also a deal of scapegoating of the sealers in this period. The sealers were considered the harbingers of many ills afflicting the colonies, including bushrangers, runaway convicts, sour relations with Aboriginal people and general lawlessness. Colonial newspapers in Sydney and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) published damning reports of sealers and their destructive effects upon the Aboriginal people. It was reported that most sealers in the Bass Strait and at Western Port had Aboriginal 'wives' who they depended on for their commercial and physical existence.⁸¹ Decades later, in 1838, the newly appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines in Port Phillip, George Augustus Robinson, advised Governor Charles La Trobe that he would be accompanied by a 'New Holland [mainland Australia] woman who had been abducted from her country by sealers, and her son a little boy about eight years of age.'⁸² John Wedge, a squatter on Wadawurrung land, hinted strongly at the strain such abductions were placing on frontier relations:

Some native women, I believe four in number, who have been forcibly taken from their husbands and families, from the southern coast of New Holland, by some men employed in sealing, and who frequent the islands in Bass Strait and request necessary measures for restoring these women to their families ... I need not advert to the very powerful effect such an act of justice would have on the minds of the natives, and how much it would tend to cement the good understanding that has prevailed and to forward the progress of civilisation which has been happily commenced.⁸³

A month later, Wedge and William Lonsdale, chief magistrate of Port Phillip, reiterated their concerns about the deleterious effects that sealers would have on the 'Port Phillip natives' if allowed to go unchecked and warned of 'the very serious evils that will result if some decisive steps be not taken to prevent the outrages that have for a series of years been committed upon the natives on the coast of New Holland by the lawless people frequenting Bass Strait.'⁸⁴ Wedge's report took on an urgent tone due to a party of Portland whalers having 'shot and wounded an Aboriginal mother and three children' of the Boon Wurrung people some months earlier. George Langhorne, who had established an Aboriginal Mission at Port Phillip, noted that one of the reasons for the decrease in Boon Wurrung numbers was due to their proximity to sealers:

As the coast about Western Port was their principal location, and for years they had been in contact with the sealers from Van Diemen's Land, it is not improbable that an occasional affray with these men might have also tended to thin their numbers.⁸⁵

Langhorne's summation cannot be discounted. He had recently had a conversation with Buckley who had told him that self-preservation was the reason he avoided going to Western Port. Buckley explained that he had not thrown his lot in with the sealers because 'these men ill-treated the blacks and were attacked and ill-treated in their turn'.⁸⁶

There is enough evidence of the presence of sealers and whalers along the Victorian coastline in the period 1790–1836 to argue that white mariners affected Aboriginal peoples whose territories extended to the coastline, such as the Wadawurrung. Most of the extant historical records indicate the prevalence of violence. Ethnographic evidence shows strong links between the Boon Wurrung, whose territory was trespassed upon frequently by sealers and whalers, and the Wadawurrung. It is clear that before official colonisation in 1835, these activities had considerable scope and that a system of enslavement existed. The Wadawurrung were not only exposed to the whalers and sealer's buildings and weapons, but also suffered the environmental effect of seal and whale colonies being severely diminished. Other types of *ngmadjidj* (white spirit) people also arrived during this period. On the basis of reports made by official exploration parties and mariners, British and colonial authorities decided to establish convict settlements on Boon Wurrung lands directly adjoining the Wadawurrung.

Chapter 3: Convict Settlements

The first recorded contacts between convicts and the Kulin occurred in 1798 when Bass was forced to put five escaped convicts ashore at Western Port. Other escaped convicts may have landed in the region independently, but no official record exist. While the bulk of contact between convicts and Aboriginal people in Port Phillip—as with the sealers and whalers—was with the Boon Wurrung, there were a number of significant meetings and collisions between the Wadawurrung and convicts and convict overseers.

Two convict settlements were established in Boon Wurrung territory. The first, in 1803, was established near present day Sorrento. The decision by Lord Hobart, secretary of state, to send 455 people (including Salamander, an Eora man, who took his Anglo name from a whaling ship) to Port Phillip was based upon numerous surveys carried out in the Port Phillip and Western Port region since 1798. The commanding officer of the convict colony, Lieutenant Governor David Collins, chose Sullivan's Bay as a temporary site for the new convict colony, but it proved to be unsuitable for his purposes. Collins directed two of his officers, Lieutenant James Tuckey and Surveyor George Harris to explore the options to the north. Initially, Tuckey and Harris enjoyed friendly encounters with some of the Wadawurrung clans around the Corio Bay area and as noted previously the Wadawurrung were considered 'very civil'.⁸⁷

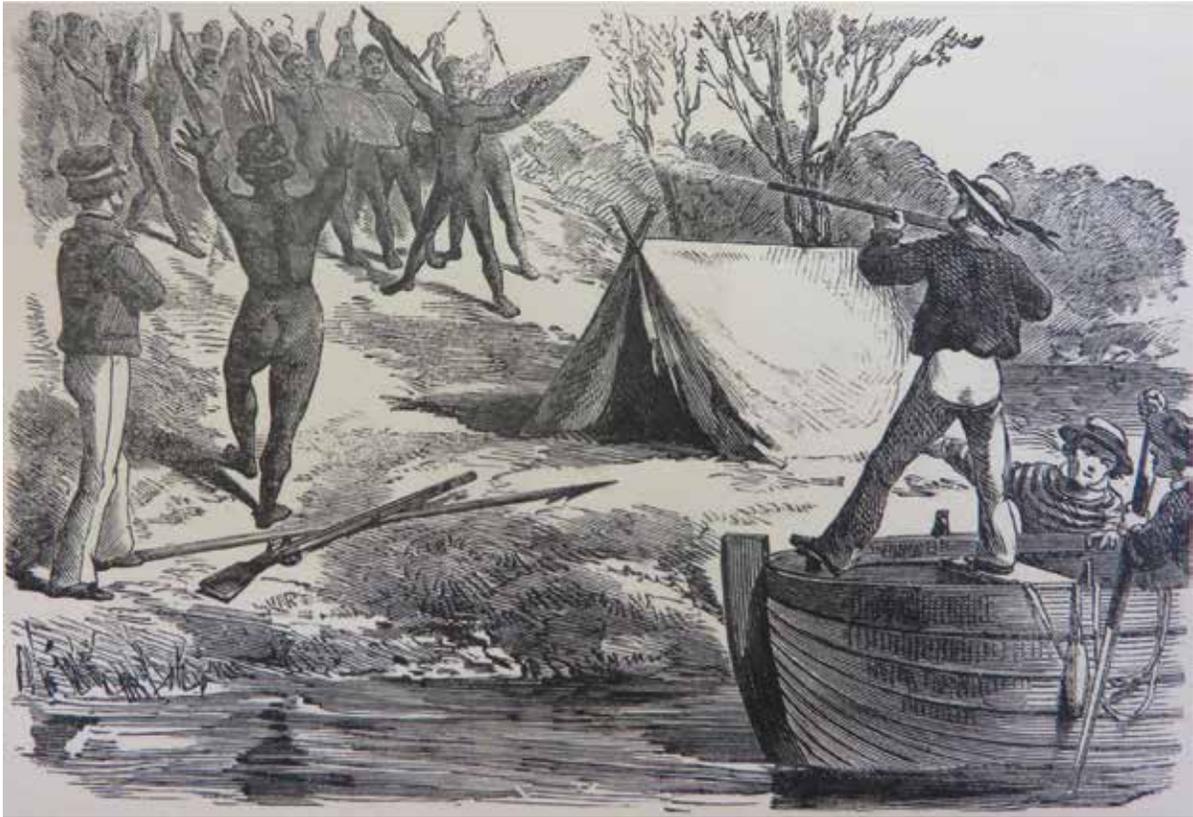
Based on the journals kept by officers and civil staff, the interactions between the Aboriginal people of Port Philip and the new occupiers were frequent. The Boon Wurrung and Wadawurrung exhibited both interest and anxiety towards the newcomers. Nicholas Pateshall, a British officer at the convict colony who spent a great deal of time hunting, had many encounters with the Boon Wurrung and Wadawurrung. He commented that 'the Natives in general were very friendly ... altho' they stole from us axes and saws'. He became convinced that fire was being used to thwart and intimidate the new arrivals, writing on 20 November that: 'We soon perceived the natives to be greatly alarmed, for the country in a short time was in a perfect blaze'.⁸⁸ Later, on the *Calcutta's* return trip to Sydney, Pateshall made a similar observation regarding 'native fires' being a response to the British incursion, recording that 'the natives appeared to be much alarmed as we run along shore, by their innumerable large fires, kept up day and night'.⁸⁹

Violent encounters did occur. William Crook, a member of the convict settlement described several encounters with unidentified Boon Wurrung and Wadawurrung clans:

When we first came into the harbour Capt. Mertho went with a few people into a lagoon that is in the northwest part of the harbour to examine it. Here as they approached the shore, they perceived a native on the beach with a shield and spear, brandishing his weapon as if to prevent their landing. A musket was fired over his head, when he ran, and was joined by others out of the bushes ... The party landed, went into a hut, where they found fire. They brought away a bark basket with them,

and threw about the fire in such a manner that it communicated to the hut and burnt it . What impression this first visit made on the savages I leave you, sir, to judge. A party has been out twice for several days together, and have explored the whole harbour. They saw natives in several places ... At one place, they assembled in great numbers when the parties separated, and alarmed them so that the other party arriving at the time they were called on to fire, which they did, and wounded some and made them all fly. It was thought necessary to show them the effects of firearms; therefore one native, who had sat for some time under a tree, but who was following after the rest, was fired at by three persons at the same time and killed. The sailors stripped him, and brought away his ornaments and weapons.⁹⁰

Tuckey also recorded violent encounters. A group of men under Tuckey's command explored Corio Bay and confronted the resident Wadawurrung clan, made up of not less than 150 men. The encounter turned violent when one or two Wadawurrung were shot and several wounded. Tuckey observed that the Aborigines appeared to have perfect knowledge of the use of firearms and were terrified at the sight of them. One of the officers present recorded some of the most perplexing comments recorded in the nineteenth century about the Wadawurrung. The officer who witnessed the murder of 'their King' stated he was wearing a 'turban crown', was carried around 'on the shoulders of four men' and, moreover, that he 'had a much fairer complexion' than the others.⁹¹ It is difficult to know what to make of this fair person being carried around like a 'King'. The diaries of Lieutenant Nicholas Pateshall and the chaplain assigned to the convict colony at Sorrento corroborate accounts of what they perceived to be a 'Chief' or 'King'. Pateshall observed that when the Wadawurrung 'approach you with hostile intention their Chiefs are carried upon the shoulders of 4 men and are otherwise distinguished by having a bone or reed from 10 to 12 inches long run through their noses.'⁹² He further described the Chiefs as wearing 'cloaks on their backs of small skins sewn very neatly together with grass ... head dress composed of feathers of the cockatoo and parrot, and kangaroo teeth'. He added that 'they seldom approach you without their instruments of war which are spears pointed with sharp bones and shields neatly carved and ingeniously made'.



Reproduction of 'First Encounter with Natives of Port Phillip' in Bonwick, James & Westgarth, William, 1857, *Discovery and settlement of Port Phillip : being a history of the country now called Victoria, up to the arrival of Mr. Superintendent Latrobe, in October, 1839*, George Robertson, Melbourne, p.2.

Pateshall was wary in his relations with the Boon Wurrung and the Wadawurrung for, as he explained:

Upon their approaching the shore two Natives appeared brandishing their Spears and making signs of hostile motion but a musket being fired over their heads they ran into the woods with a hideous yell leaving their war weapons behind ... The two boats before mentioned under the command of Lieut. Tuckey and some civil Officers belonging to the Colony Establishment well armed and fitted out in every respect for 14 days proceeded upon the intended survey. Arming the boats was thought prudent for although as yet few of the Natives had appeared there could be no doubt that the place was swarming with them from the constant fires round the Bay.⁹³

Pateshall's observations represent some of the earliest British accounts of Wadawurrung culture and frontier violence:

On the evening previous to his [Tuckey] return, he had had a serious skirmish with the natives, which proceeded from their wishing to steal or take by force everything he had on shore in a tent, or even in the boats. From the account he gave it is

evident that they are brave and clever as to their mode of attack. A small party of them came down first, with every sign of friendship and received several presents. Lieut. Tuckey then left the shore in one of the boats to survey a small spot while dinner was preparing; this the look out party of the natives observing, they stole off from about the tent, without giving the least suspicion of any thing improper. In less than half an hour a large body was seen advancing on the right, carrying their chiefs as before described, and another party on the left equally large.

Mr Gammon a midshipman, who was commander of the small party left by Lieut. Tuckey ordered them immediately to seize their arms but on looking round saw they were completely encircled by another party which had advanced in the rear through the woods. Lieut. Tuckey very fortunately had observed them in their first approach and had used all possible exertion to get on shore, as he happily did, just as they had begun to brandish their weapons and to sing their war songs. He immediately commenced a firing over their heads, which for the moment made them retreat, but in a short time afterwards they advanced again, seemingly with double resolution. Our party then took to their boats and began firing of ball and swan shot: this after a short skirmish made them retreat hastily, leaving one dead and having several others wounded.

Their King who was the centre party, wore a beautiful turban of feathers, and a very large cloak, he was a man of two or three and twenty, remarkably handsome, well made and of a much fairer complexion than the rest. Those of our party who wore fur caps were supposed by them to be females. Except the chiefs as before mentioned all the natives were entirely naked, but had much disfigured themselves by painting their bodies with a red and white clay. Before they fight they make all the horrid faces imaginable, by way of defiance which no doubt in many instances have great effect. When in a good humour they are constantly laughing. At first we found them very curious in opening our shirts and taking off our hats etc. Their language is far from harsh and differs from that spoken in many parts of the same continent: the words Warree! Warree! Mallo! Mallo! They are constantly repeating which words I rather think express astonishment. A party of them one day followed me along the beach shouting; a pelican being within shot, I made signs to them to keep behind, and they immediately ran into the bushes. I then fired and killed the bird, this alarmed them so much that they could not be prevailed on to come near me for a considerable time and then they would not upon any account touch the bird, but kept at a great distance from the person who carried it. They have in general many dogs with them large and swift enough to catch the kangaroo; but they are if possible wilder than their masters.⁹⁴

The build-up to the murder or 'serious skirmish with the Natives' as Pateshall described it, was chronicled by Tuckey 'with some degree of minuteness':

The plain stretching from N.W. harbor to the Hummocks is evidently far more populous than any other part of this port; this doubtless proceeds from the

abundance of oysters and very large cockles found in the harbor. At this place between one and two hundred natives assembled in less than an hour while I was surveying the harbor, and, as their obviously hostile intentions made the application of force absolutely necessary, by which one of them was killed, it appears necessary to detail the circumstances with some degree of minuteness.

Previous to this event we had two interviews with separate parties of eight and ten, during which the most friendly intercourse was maintained, and presents of blankets, beads, etc., were given them. In both these instances, they signified their knowledge and fear of the effect of fire arms, which in order to quiet their apprehensions and as they were totally unarmed, I ordered to be kept out of sight. Our last interview, which terminated in the death of one of them [at Cowies Creek in Corio Bay], had at its commencement, the same friendly appearance. Three of them first came to the boats and received fish, bread and a blanket each, but, as they appeared by many degrees more savage and ferocious than our first acquaintances, and wishing to handle and examine every thing, particularly the theodolite, I drew a line at some distance round, and with difficulty kept them without it.

Feeling no apprehensions from three naked and unarmed savages, I pursued my original intention of surveying the harbor with one boat, while the other remained with a Master's Mate, the Surveyor of the Colony and five men to procure water from the ponds and dress our dinner; and of the masts, sails and oars of this boat, a tent was constructed. They had with them four musquets [guns], tomahawks and boarding pikes. The moment I put off from the shore in my boat, as I afterwards learnt, the three natives disappeared, and in less than an hour returned with about forty others, headed by a chief and accompanied by several, who seemed to possess inferior authority. This party immediately divided, some surrounding the tent while the remainder kept by the boat. Their intention to plunder was immediately obvious, and all the exertions of Mr Harris at the tent and the masters mate at the boat were insufficient to keep them back. In this situation it was impossible to get the boat away, her masts, sails, oars, provisions and water being on shore. It was, therefore thought advisable to temporize and wait my return if possible; for this purpose, bread, meat and two pieces of blankets were given them. These condescension's, however, seemed only to increase their boldness, and it was by force alone that the tomahawks and peoples' blankets were wrested from them.

This was their situation when, after examining heaving down Cove, I was returning slowly along shore for the purpose of sounding, when about a mile from the tent I first perceived the natives surrounding it, and at the same moment sixty or seventy appeared in a close body on the beach opposite by boat. The greater part of these had war spears, and while running towards the tent with all their speed, shouted and hollowed with great vociferation. I now saw the necessity of gaining the tent before them, and, in consequence of two steep hills which lay in their course, we just enabled to accomplish it. When within a quarter of a mile of the tent, another party, from about thirty to forty, some of whom carried bundles of spears, appeared on the hill over the tent, running towards it and shouting like the others. This party

reached the tent some minutes before me. As I approached, I observed a native with his arms folded round the master's mate, and another holding one of the boat's crew in the same manner, while two other men in the boat were struggling with several natives for the blankets. Mr Harris and two of the boat's crew I could not see, and from the crowd, which appeared to have entire possession of the tent, I feared for their safety.

At the moment my grapnel was let go to prevent the boat grounding, the masters mate called out to fire, which, from the noise among the natives, I could scarcely hear. Hoping to intimidate them by the report only, I directed two Musquets to be fired over them. For a moment they seemed to pause, and a few ran from the tent behind the trees, but almost instantly returned. The last party being now within a few yards of the tent, still shouting and running, I directed four musquets with buck shot to be fired among them, and from an immediate howl supposed one to have been wounded. This discharge created a general panic and throwing aside their cloaks they ran in every direction among the trees. I hoped the business was now terminated and ordered the tent to be struck and prepared to depart. While thus employed, several natives again appeared, coming forward from among the trees, while the main body were seen peeping over the brow of the hill. Among those who approached nearest was the chief, holding a very large war spear and shield, and accompanied by another without a spear, but who spoke with great violence. The chief's cloak and necklace having been found under a tree, I laid down my gun and, advancing, delivered them to him. His gestures and countenance all this time betrayed more of anger than fear. The other cloaks were given to his attendant, who also appeared very violent. While this was transacting, the body on the hill began to descend, shouting as before, and the stragglers among the trees to unite. I endeavoured to make the chief understand that if they approached any nearer, I should fire at them, and at the same time ordered the people to present their musquets, This I thought was understood, for the chief spoke to his companion, who went back to those on the hill. They however still kept advancing, apparently led on by this person who had taken a spear from one of those who held the bundles, which he flourished violently, and by his gestures appeared to possess authority over the rest.

I conceived it now absolutely necessary, as well for our own safety as for the benefit of the Colony, to prove the superior effect of our Arms, which they seemed to despise, and, selecting this violent leader as a proper example, directed three musquets to be fired at him while advancing at about fifty yards distance; two of them took effect and he fell dead on the spot. The chief, who remained near us all this time, turned round at the report and, seeing his companion fall, instantly fled up the hill. A general flight succeeded, but many were seen skulking about the place as we quitted it. Among those savages I could distinctly observe gradations of rank, founded most probably on personal qualities and appearance. In these respects the chief far excelled the rest, his figure was masculine and well proportioned, and his air bold and commanding. Besides his cloak, which was only distinguished by its superior size, he wore a necklace of reeds and several strings of twisted hair over his breast; on his head a coronet of the wing feathers of the swan was very neatly

arranged, and had a pleasing effect. The faces of several were painted with red, yellow and white clays; others had a reed stuck through the septum of the nose, apparently increasing in length according to rank, as the chief's was by far the longest and measured at least two feet. Ornamental scars on the shoulders were universal, and the face of one was deeply pitted as if by the small pox, though that disease is not supposed to have yet reached this part of the world.⁹⁵ Their cloaks consist of from ten to twenty opossum skins, neatly sewn together, and the fleshy side, which is worn inwards, ornamented with various devices, such as squares, cheques, and sometimes human figures in dancing attitudes; this is done by some sharp instrument, which is lightly drawn over the skin, so as not to cut it through. Their war spears are barbed at one end with pieces of white spar fixed on with the red gum, their length about ten feet, and when used with the throwing stick (which is the same as at Port Jackson) must be very dangerous offensive weapons. Their fish gigs are pointed with the leg bone of the kangaroo, and with these they strike the rays which abound in the shoal water. No appearance of canoe or water conveyances of any kind was seen, and this circumstance seems to verify what I have already said of the scarcity of fish in the harbor.

Their ingenuity in procuring food seems confined to the construction of a rude trap, composed of sticks and grass upon the projecting stony points, where the water fowl lighting at night are entangled and caught; but, from the decayed state of these traps, this does not appear to be the season when they are useful. The scarcity of food must at times reduce the natives to the greatest extremities; several of those seen had live lizards which they signified were to eat, and the sods in every swampy spot were turned up, probably in search of worms, as no root was found there that could serve for food.⁹⁶

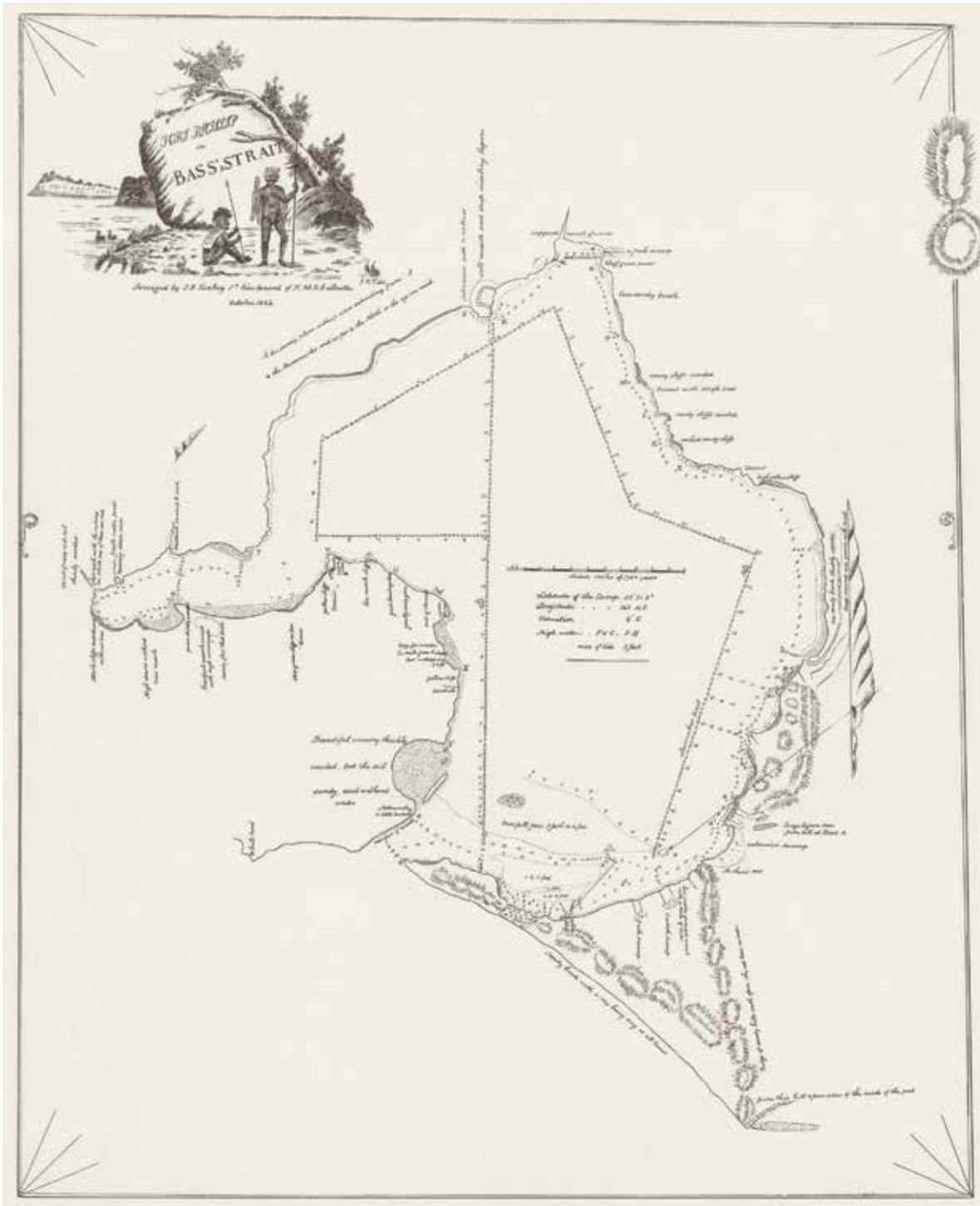


Illustration of title page of Tuckey, J. H. (1805). *Tuckey's voyage*. London, Richard Phillips.

The depiction of the two Aboriginal people posed outside a bark shelter is probably one of the earliest known pictorial records by a non-Aboriginal person of Victorian Aboriginal people. The figure on the right appears to exactly answer Tuckey's description of the Wadawurrung *Ngurungaeta* (Clan Head) encountered by Tuckey's party on Cowie's Creek, Corio Bay. Tuckey wrote he was 'holding a very large war spear and shield...his figure was masculine and well proportioned, and his air bold and commanding. Beside his cloak, which was only distinguished

by its superior size, he wore a necklace of reeds and several strings of twisted hair over his breast; on his head a coronet of the wing feathers of the swan was very neatly arranged...a reed stuck through the septum of the nose...measured at least two feet.'

Although large numbers of Boon Wurrung people made contact with the convict settlement at Sorrento, they did not interfere with its general proceedings. A conventional war did not occur. This was almost certainly due to Collins's influence. Collins officially reminded his people that taking 'spears, fishgigs, [fishing tackle] gum, or any other articles from the natives, or out of their huts, or from the beach where it is their custom to leave these articles' was robbery and would be punished as such. Further, Collins demonstrated his awareness of the chief cause of frontier conflict by deeming that any violence towards an Aboriginal woman was punishable by death: 'If any of the natives are wantonly or inconsiderably killed or wounded or if any violence is offered to a woman, the offender will be tried for his life'. At the same time, Collins was perfectly aware that violent frontier relations were likely. In a letter to Governor King, he explained that one of the primary reasons he was leaving Port Phillip for Van Diemens Land was due to the probability of attack from the large population of Kulin, including Wadawurrung. Collins was unequivocal, writing afterwards: 'Were I to settle in the upper part of the harbor, which is full of natives, I should require four times the force I have now to guard not only the convicts, but perhaps myself from their attacks'.⁹⁷ It is interesting that, decades later, William Barak, a Kulin Ngurungaeta (an eminent Elder or clan head), recalled the initial arrival of the British and the presence of an escaped convict (William Buckley) from Collins's failed convict colony:

Captain Cook [referring to Lt. Col. Collins] landed at Western Port. Then Batman came in looking for the country. Looking around the sea he found a lot of blacks other side of Gealong [Geelong]; and found Buckley in the camp. Know [no] trousers, all raggety; he wore opossum rugs, and he fetch him back to Batman's house.⁹⁸



Charles Henry Theodore Costantini, 1837 *William Buckley 6 feet 6 inches 3/2 in height, who lived for 30 years amongst the natives of Port Phillip*, DL Pe 256, SLNSW

During the three and a half months (9 October 1803 – 24 January 1804) of occupying the site at present day Sorrento, twenty convicts belonging to the penal colony at Sorrento managed to escape. Twelve returned or were recaptured and one was shot in the bush. Seven convicts made their way into the bush and two of these were known to have lived with the Wadawurrung—one of these was William Buckley. George Langhorne, an early missionary in Melbourne, recorded a verbatim account of Buckley's experiences. The earliest recorded version on Buckley's story, Langhorne's *The Reminiscences of James [William] Buckley for Thirty Years resident among the Watourong Blacks at Port Phillip* was subsequently retold, embellished and published many times. Buckley told Langhorne of his first encounter with Wadawurrung near Geelong. He had walked for about two months and was beginning to suffer greatly from a lack of reliable food:

Up to this period I had not seen any of the natives but at length I fell in with an Old Black—fishing near the sea with his wife and a large family of children. By this

savage I was treated with the greatest kindness partook of their food and laboured with them I gradually became capable of expressing my wants in their language. I left this old man and wandered further into the Country and then fell in with several more families of Blacks. Our meeting took place thus: I was sitting under a tree near a lagoon not far from the River Barwin [Barwon] dispirited and almost worn out with my sad condition when some Black women made their appearance. I learnt afterwards that they had come hither to gather the gum from the mimosa tree which forms a favourite article of food.

I had been I believe about two months resident in the country but I do not think they had heard of me. On seeing me they retired and informed their companions who were nigh at hand. These came up and viewing me for some time with evident astonishment at length made signs to me to follow them. I immediately did so although I despaired of my life as my impression was that they intended to kill me. They took me to their encampment, one black holding one of my hands and the other, on reaching a hut or Willum near which was a Waterhole, I made signs [signs] that I was thirsty and they gave me some water and without being asked offered me some gum beat up and prepared after their manner. They then all sat down and general howling was set up around me as the women crying and sobbing and tearing their faces and foreheads with their nails (a token of excessive grief—I learnt afterwards that they believed me to be a black who had died some time since and who had come again to them in the shape of a white man). In the evening a great dance took place, I believe in honour of my arrival, and from this time I was to them an object of the utmost care and solicitude—they never allowed me to walk any distance unattended—and if I happened to leave them for a little, Blacks were immediately sent in search of me—when tears were often shed on my reappearance.

I lived as they lived and was careful not to give them offence in the smallest thing, yielding to them at all times, and sharing with them whatever I took fishing or in the chase. They gave me a black woman for a wife but observing that this occasioned jealousy among others of them I relinquished her to the native and contented myself with being single, this seemed to please the men much, and I was no longer apprehensive of danger from them. I had lived about six months with them when I fell in with one of my companions whom I found living with some Blacks on the Sea Coast. He then came and lived with me. But from his faithless conduct to the Blacks and dissolute behaviour towards their women I was so apprehensive of danger to us both that I resolved to part from him and I therefore told him that it was necessary for our mutual safety that one must leave the Tribe. He left and I never heard of his more except by a vague report that he had been killed by the Blacks; this fate I felt assured from his imprudent conduct awaited him. My other companion I never heard of after parting from him at the Yarra it is probable he met the same fate as the former and perhaps on the same account. I now made up my mind to continue with the Tribe (Watourongs) and principally lived about the River Barwin [Barwon], my favourite place of abode being the part now called Buckley falls.

I soon lost all reckoning of time. I think after I had been about two years in the country I soon after was enabled to express myself in the Blacks language pretty well—so as readily to make known my wants and after a few years residence among the natives I could speak the language quite well. When I had attained this knowledge of their tongue I found I was fast losing my own. My situation however was not less irksome as I was able to converse with them respecting themselves and their connection with the different Tribes, the subject of Religion I was careful not to introduce as I was afraid that they would kill me if I meddled with their customs or superstitions. I have frequently entertained them when sitting around the camp fires with accounts of the English People Houses, ships, great guns etc. to which accounts they would listen with great attention – and express much astonishment. The affection of the Tribe for me always remained the same if I hinted at the probability of some day or other re-joining my own countrymen they manifested grief and shed tears. As I always kept up at night the best fire and had the best Miam Miam [hut] in the camp (the Blacks, notwithstanding cold, being often too lazy to attend to their fires) the children would often prefer to sleep with me and I was a great favourite among them. On one occasion feeling uncomfortable from the dirty state in which I was, it was soon after I had joined them, I repaired to the Lagoon before mentioned to wash myself, thinking I had ran away from them as I had not mentioned my intention they were presently engaged in searching for me ... an Old Man named Bow ... on discovering me among the reeds took me out by the hand and immediately burst into tears they appeared over joyed at having found me and over afraid lest I should again leave them. When engaged in their fights which were very frequent when I first came among them, I was always obliged to accompany them but never compelled to take a part. They would arm me with a spear and place me aside in some bush or other concealment but if discovered by the opposing party I was never disturbed or attacked—the wars between the Waworong and Watourongs have been numerous and bloody. I have accompanied the latter in their night expeditions.⁹⁹

Many historical accounts exist from elsewhere in Australia of convict escapees or ship wreck victims who, like Buckley, were dependent upon Aboriginal people for sustenance. Many reported that they were treated with the ‘greatest kindness’ by the local people or were not interfered with as long as they made conciliatory gestures. It is certainly possible that some of the other five unaccounted for convicts from Sorrento may have lived with neighbouring clans of the Wadawurrung for a time. Reports of mysterious vessels at Port Phillip appeared in the colonial press which demonstrate that castaways and escapees were making their way onto the Kulin shorelines. The *Sydney Gazette* reported in January 1804 that the crew of the *Ocean* shortly before leaving the failed convict settlement at Sorrento had discovered

a hewn rudder had drifted on to a sandy beach; and on the North side Mr Rushworth found the wreck of a boat, together with some stove casks, with the name ‘Porpoise’ marked upon them; for which we can in no other probable way account than to suppose this to be the boat in which Druce [a convict escapee] and the unhappy companions of his rash enterprise attempted an escape from the [convict] Settlement on the Derwent [Tasmania]; and this conjecture receives considerable strength from the appearance of the rudder, which was only roughly hewn, and evidently the resource of extreme necessity and inability.¹⁰⁰

Within a few weeks of the new convict settlement being established on the Derwent in Tasmania, a group of convicts absconded, reaching sealers in Bass Strait. Other convicts escaped from the Derwent, including a party of 25 who, according to a report in the *New South Wales Advertiser* in October 1814, built a boat to sail to the mainland, and may have landed on Kulin coastlands.¹⁰¹ Likewise, in 1819, seven convicts escaped in the *Young Lachlan*, eventually reaching Java, most probably having come on shore in Victorian waters along the way.¹⁰² Another convict crew seized a little boat at Oyster Bay, Van Diemen's Land, in 1822, beached it on an unidentified part of the coast of New Holland, and took to the bush. Two were recaptured later but a number were not.¹⁰³

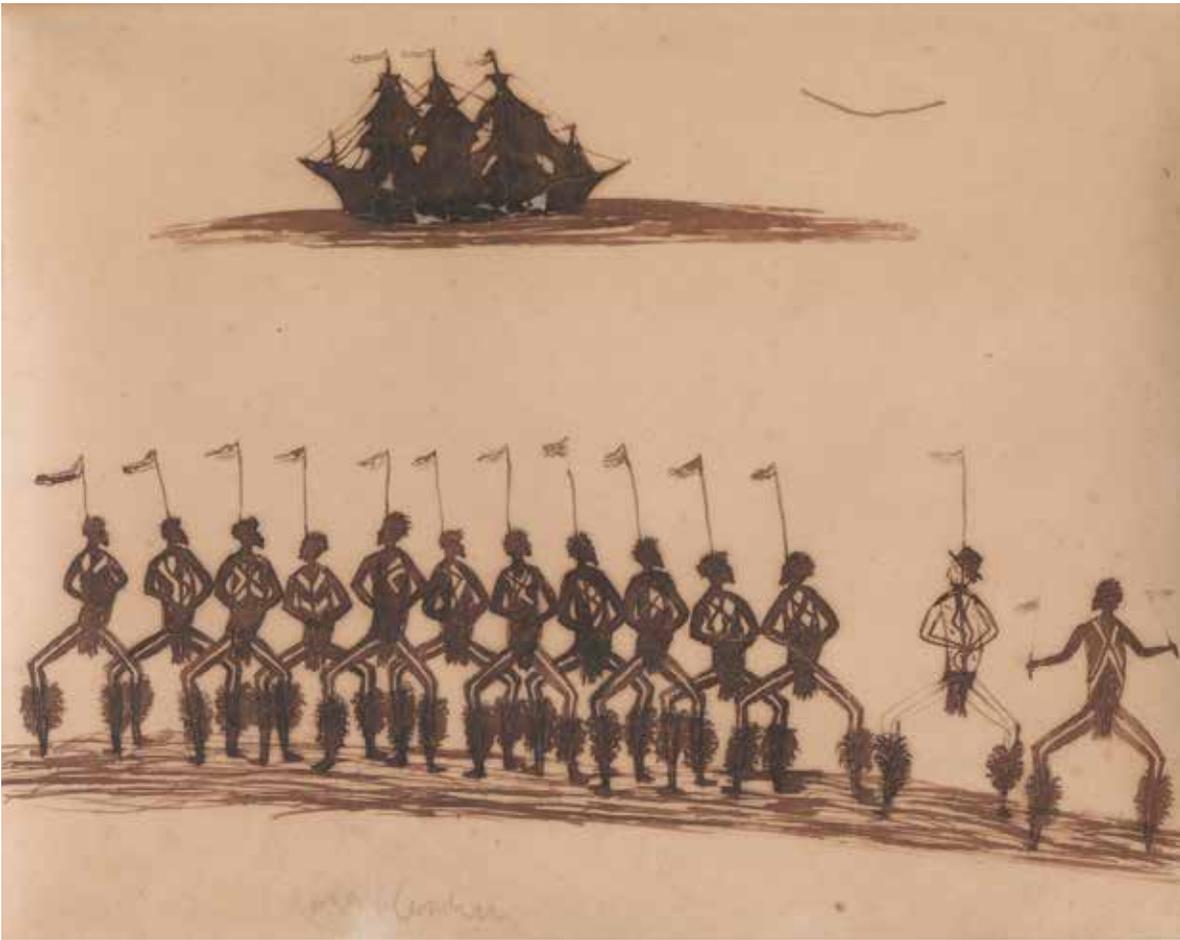
In evidence given to the Bigge Commission in 1819, Captain Kelly explained that 'many convicts had escaped on vessels to Bass Strait' and that most of them lived on the islands and in Western Port. In 1826, the *Hobart Town Gazette* reported that convicts had joined the sealers in Bass Strait:

They are a set of pirates moving from island to island and from rock to rock, from Bass Strait to Rottnest Island in open whale boats ... they raid the mainland to carry off native women by force ... it is the home of many desperate runaways from Sydney and Van Diemen's Land.¹⁰⁴

Other observers, such as Captain John Laughton in 1825, reported that the islands of Bass Strait were infested by gangs of escaped convicts and that four men from the schooner *Liberty* had been murdered by natives and runaway convicts at Western Port.¹⁰⁵ A sloop with escapees on board, later captured at Preservation Island in 1826, had hauled out their boat at Western Port. It was reputed that they dry cut the vessel in two, dug a sawpit, felled the trees required to lengthen it and paved the seams with gum from the grass trees that grew thickly in the area.¹⁰⁶ Work of this magnitude would have taken some months at a semi-permanent camp. This was possibly similar to the camp that the Wadawurrung had endeavoured to inform Hume and Hovell about in 1824, as noted earlier.

As a consequence of these convict visitors' incursions, a vivid mental picture about white people's philosophy and technology would have been evolving among the Kulin many years before the permanent occupation of their lands. Confirming this, Buckley boasted that, after about two years in Wadawurrung country, he was able to express himself 'pretty freely' in the Wadawurrung language and communicated a great deal about his Western culture to willing listeners:

At night a great number of visitors of all ages, young and old ... would listen with the greatest interest while I talked to them about the English people, their firearms, cannons and great ships, and also about the fighting in Holland in which I had a part.¹⁰⁷



Tommy McRae, c 1890 *Corroboree or William Buckley and dancers*, Courtesy of University of Melbourne, 1961.0008.00001

Buckley's lasting influence on inter-racial relations is evident in the words of William Barak, an eminent Woiwurrung clan head:

I remember Buckley's word every time ... Buckley told the blacks to look at Batman's face. He looks very white. Any man that you see out in the bush not to touch him. When you see an empty hut not to touch the bread in it. Make a camp outside and wait till the man come home and finds everything safe in the house. They are good people. If you kill one white man white fellow will shoot you down like a kangaroo.¹⁰⁸

In 1826, another attempt to establish a permanent convict colony commenced near present day Corinella at Western port. The British officers wrote of the Kulin that:

They seem to be a timid inoffensive people, strongly impressed with a sense of the superiority of our weapons, which they appeared to have only known by report before they saw us; and by no means deficient in intellect, we parted on good terms and obtained a promise from them to visit the settlement...appeared to be numerous...counted at one camp 100 men, women and children...and they were healthy.¹⁰⁹

This favourable reception by the Boon Wurrung and the Wadawurrung was probably due to the white colonists' giving a large amount of Western goods as gifts to them. Hovell, a member of the fledgling convict colony in 1826-7, made an 'expedition from Western Port to the spot [Geelong] which terminated the journey of Mr Hume and myself [in 1824]'. On Hovell's journey back to the Wadawurrung estates he had visited with Hume two years previously Hovell reported he gave away a quantity of tomahawks, fish hooks and other trifles. It is noteworthy that Hovell had remarked when preparing in Sydney for the expedition to Western Port that he was 'aware that the natives of Western Port had been occasionally maltreated by the boat crews of vessels, principally sealers; and in anticipation that he would need inducements to befriend them, requested gifts from the Commissariat. Amongst a variety of items, 50 tomahawks and 110 fish hooks were provided for that purpose'.¹¹⁰ He was able to negotiate the countryside in the Geelong region by following numerous native paths, which frequently led to 'hut clusters', well located on dry land and near water. At one camp, he found the Kulin in possession of iron made into tomahawks, a steel pot and some pieces of cloth.¹¹¹ The origin of these items is not known; however, it is possible they were obtained from escaped convicts or sealers who had encroached on Kulin lands. It is also possible that they came from shipwrecks, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Shipwrecks, Maroons and Merchants

In 1797, a group of survivors from the shipwrecked *Sydney Cove* made their way to the mainland near present day Gippsland. There they encountered various groups of Aboriginal people, probably Brautolong language group members, who occasionally aided them over a six-month period. The Boon Wurrung, whose territory straddled the Brautolong's, would, in all likelihood, have heard about the men who looked like cadavers. It is certain that the Boon Wurrung would have seen the remnants of the ship's cargo on their shoreline for, as Matthew Flinders noted, 'the remains of the cargo [from the *Sydney Cove*] was seen as far as Wilsons Promontory'.¹¹² It is also likely that news of white people and or the wreckage items washed up on the shoreline would have been relayed to the Wadawurrung at the ceremonial and trade gatherings regularly held by the Kulin near present day Melbourne. Assistant Aboriginal Protector (1839–1850) in the Port Phillip and Westernport districts, William Thomas, observed that:

There was a kind of confederacy between the five tribes near Melbourne ... It would seem that the Western Port and the Barrabool [Wadawurrung] tribes are sworn friends and not the Western Port and the Yarra tribe as might be supposed on account of their proximity...the five tribes near Melbourne are united together altho' always fighting and quarrelling with each other, yet they understand each others language, to secure this confederacy their law is that not a black take a lubra from his own tribe but from one of the four tribes in confederacy with them thus they become allied by blood.¹¹³

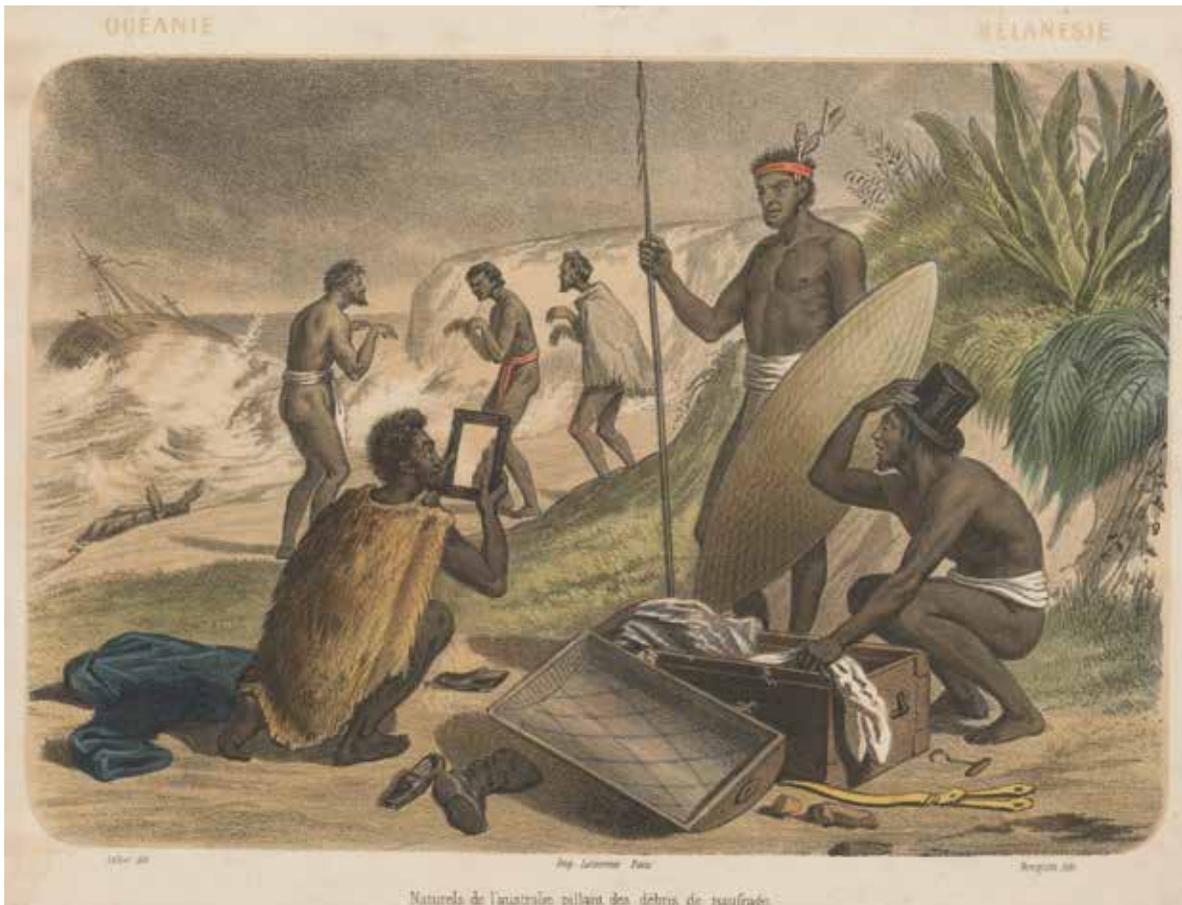
William Clark, one of the survivors of the *Sydney Cove* shipwreck, recorded the following account of the Europeans' first meeting with the GanaiKurnai:

We this day [18 March 1797 near Cape Howe] fell in with a party of natives, about 14, all of them entirely naked. They were struck with astonishment at our appearance, and were very anxious to examine every part of our clothes and body, in which we readily indulged them. They viewed us most attentively. They opened our clothes, examined our feet, hands, nails, &c., frequently expressing surprize by laughing and loud shoutings. From their gestures during this awkward review it was easy to perceive that they considered our clothes and bodies as inseparably joined.¹¹⁴

This account suggests that Victorian coastal clans had limited knowledge about not only the presence of white people but also their technologies at the time of the wreck of the *Sydney Cove*. Later that same year, five escaped convicts were known to have lived in Boon Wurrung and possibly Wadawurrung territory. Bass saw a smoke signal from the Glennies Islands off Wilsons Promontory when making his sea voyage along the coast of New Holland. He found seven men stranded there. Upon questioning them, he discovered that fourteen of their party had left with the intention of visiting the wreck of the *Sydney Cove* to loot her cargo of rum. These men (whose whereabouts or travels were not known, but who almost certainly would have gone to

the mainland for water, food and shelter from the tempestuous strait) had deserted the seven. Bass could only take two of the seven onto his small vessel. He gave the remaining five a musket and ammunition, a cooking pot and fishing lines and left them at Wilson's Promontory. They were never heard of again. It is conceivable that desperation for food and water may have driven them to seek refuge with the Boon Wurrung, as the marooned sealers that the French liberated in 1826 had done, or to walk around Port Phillip Bay thereby encountering the Wadawurrung, as Buckley had done in 1803.

The Bass Strait is recognised as one of the most treacherous stretches of ocean in the world and claimed many vessels prior to (and after) being charted. Tuckey's party (1802) found 11 escaped convicts at Elephant Island in the Bass Strait who had been shipwrecked there. Indeed, Tuckey assumed that Port Phillip had been examined by ships before the arrival of the *Calcutta* in 1802 owing to the wreck of a large boat 'built partly of teak and partly of the Port Jackson sheoak'. Although Tuckey reported that 'nothing appeared that could lead to a discovery of what she was',¹¹⁵ a merchant brig, *Harbinger*, is known to have visited the coast near Cape Otway (west of Port Phillip) in January 1801.¹¹⁶ There are numerous recorded instances of ships that succumbed to the breakers and vicious riptides of Port Phillip and Western Port. In June 1809, the Sydney newspaper reported that the New Zealand ship *Active* 'on a sealing and whaling voyage, having experienced many heavy gales', and that it had 'sustained much damage from her being driven on shore at Western Port'.¹¹⁷ Similarly, bad weather forced at least three other ships to take refuge in Port Phillip prior to permanent white occupation in 1835. In 1815, the *Estramina* and the *Geordy*, both enroute from Hobart to Sydney, also sheltered there.



Bocquin, J. & Leloir, Jean Baptiste Auguste. (1858). *Naturels de l'Australie pillant des debris de naufrage*. National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-135905341>.

The schooner *Geordy* was driven by adverse winds through Bass Strait as far as Port Phillip Bay. Being in need of wood and water, they decided to enter the Port Phillip Heads and obtain supplies. Four crewmembers landed on an unspecified spot, possibly near Indented Head, whereupon a 'large group of Aborigines invited the party ashore.' A fight took place—'400 men fired spears at the white men'—and the white men made a speedy withdrawal. One report of this encounter added that:

an immense crowd of natives made their appearance, and invited them on shore—one, who appeared their chief, at first requesting, but soon after demanding, that Mr. M. should leave his gun (which was the only one they had) in the boat. Becoming very importunate for presents from the strangers, the latter gave them their handkerchiefs from off their necks ; but this was not sufficient, they soon assumed a more turbulent, and at length a desperate manner and as all but Mr. M. were unarmed, at one instant all were seized upon, and had no other expectation than that of being immediately over-powered and destroyed. The chief seemed to have reserved the attack on Mr. M. personally for himself: he accordingly seized upon his Musket with one hand, while with the other he held him by the arm; they both stood on a rock which was of considerable depth on one of its sides, which circumstance tended not a little to the rescue of the assailed party; for Mr. M. still keeping a firm hold of the musket, threw himself off the rock, which freed him from his adversary's grasp. Collecting himself as soon as he found himself upon his legs, he had the mortification to see that his companions were captives.—At each [?] alternative remained—a determined [?] oppose force to force :—he fired; the chief who had made him his particular object, fell, and in a paroxysm of dread which pervaded the assailant, but which in fact was only momentary, all his companions escaped, and made towards their boats. As soon as the whites had separated themselves from the blacks, the missile war commenced. The whirling spear whistled about their ears in all directions from three or four hundred savages, and one solitary musket was their only impediment to a closer manner of attack, from which it would have been impossible for any to have escaped. The retreat towards the boat was nevertheless so well managed that only one received a spear wound, which was in the arm. One of the spears split a plank of the boat, and after a necessity of answering the attack with seven discharges, Mr. M. got into the vehicle, and was soon out of the reach of further danger leaving behind his water casks and axes, the latter of which might have possibly stimulated the nature to the desperate aggression.¹¹⁸

The newspaper report concluded by adding a word of warning to other sealing and whaling vessels who were frequenting Port Phillip.

This instance adds to the numerous previous accounts of the same natives, and some of which have been truly tragical in their catastrophe, that should serve as a caution to our crews against trusting themselves among the natives of these coasts without being sufficiently prepared against attack; which experience has acquainted us almost certain, when the difference of number, an unguarded confidence, or any other circumstance affords the prospect of a successful issue to the contest.¹¹⁹

The *Lively* was forced into Port Phillip Bay in September 1831. Again, the exact location of their landing place is unknown. The Sydney newspapers reported that the *Lively*

put into Port Phillip in the very utmost state of distress. There, while himself and his two surviving companions were on shore, endeavouring to obtain refreshment, the vessel was either driven away, or carried off by the natives, and after the lapse of a fortnight, when they gave themselves up for lost, and were so exhausted by want of food that they were unable hardly to move, they fell upon her by accident in one of the bays of that port.¹²⁰

The Hobart Town newspapers version of the events was similar but noting that the ship was navigated into Port Phillip near the entrance and that a fortnight later, the survivors found their boat being plundered by coastal clans who were so intent on their exploitation of the vessel that the ship's party could only regain possession by using their firearms.¹²¹ Following his return to white society, Buckley reported that a boat had been rowed up the Barwon River sometime around 1808. An altercation with the Wadawurrung probably occurred, the visitors leaving an iron tomahawk on the bank —perhaps in their hurry to make a hasty retreat, as the crews of the *Geordy* and *Lively* had done.

The wide range and significant incidence of situational encounters between the Kulin and the colonists in the Port Phillip region—ranging from bloody conflict to the harmonious exchange of gifts, singing and dancing — demonstrates that the nature of interaction varied considerably. The history of Wadawurrung and non-Aboriginal relations is unique in Victoria due to the presence of an escaped convict, William Buckley, who completely adopted the lifestyle of the Wadawurrung people for 32 years. An accumulation of knowledge about each other's propensity for warfare, weapon and maritime technology, customs relating to clothing, housing and food gathering, civil organisational behaviour and structure and utilitarian tools undoubtedly occurred.

This accumulation of knowledge on the part of the Kulin (including the Wadawurrung) and the non-Aboriginal sojourners on Kulin Country was not solely attributable to Buckley. Official colonial records covering the period 1800–1835 demonstrate that over 600 non-Aboriginal people officially encroached on Kulin Country and waters in the Port Phillip and Western Port region. Other records indicate that perhaps another 200 unofficial non-Aboriginal strangers also encountered Kulin people in this region. However, it is not solely the large number of *ngamadjidj* (white spirit people) who trespassed, nor the frequency of these incursions, that is noteworthy. The Wadawurrung and their immediate neighbours encountered first hand, and heard second hand reports of, white spirit people from a wide range of the social strata. Officers and crew of the British and French navies, scientists, commercial whaling and sealing gangs, convicts and their military overseers, escaped convicts, free families, surveyors and explorers, servants, soldiers, mariners and Aboriginal people from Van Diemen's Land, New South Wales and New Zealand made their presence felt over a period of 30 years *before* the invasion of Wadawurrung lands began in earnest in 1835.

CHAPTER 5: The squatters and their sheep

The initial invasion of Wadawurrung country formally began in 1802 near present day Port Nepean when acting Lieutenant John Murray of His Majesty's Armed Survey Vessel *Lady Nelson*, followed his instructions to 'take possession of this port [Port Phillip Bay] in the name of his Sacred Majesty George the Third of Great Britain and Ireland, King, etc., etc'.¹²² It is noteworthy that Murray, an acting Officer in the British Navy took possession of Wadawurrung and neighboring Kulin lands and waters immediately after firing his ship's naval cannons at a party of Kulin warriors on the shoreline who were retreating after a bloody battle with them. The British military tactic of firing their cannons on a military enemy who was retreating was according to Murray a 'just punishment' upon the Kulin for their supposed 'treachery and unprovoked attack' upon the British Naval party raiding their shores. Several more battles or shows of military power between the Kulin, including the Wadawurrung, and British military personnel as has been shown ensued over the following year. The military art of the Kulin attacks on the British also served, according to acting Lieutenant Murray, to teach 'us a useful lesson to be more cautious in future'. The British did not seek formally to occupy Wadawurrung country until several more decades had passed.

News of First Encounters

Prior to their battles with the British colonists in the early 1800s the Wadawurrung would have first heard of Europeans - or as they were commonly known *Ngamadjidj* (loosely translated as white spirit people) perhaps as early as 1797. Colonial writers frequently remarked about the Kulin nation's extensive communications network. Colonists often noted the dissemination of news spread hundreds of kilometers into the inland of Victoria by envoys or *Waygeries* of important economic, political and ceremonial meetings and that subsequently hundreds - and occasionally a thousand or more Kulin people gathered in present day Melbourne to conduct political and ceremonial business. It was also common knowledge that performances of song and dancing at the large conferences was a means by which news would be shared that emanated from hundreds and sometimes thousands of kilometers away, including news of and about the whites. Moreover, the colonists were also very much aware about how news communicated by smoke signals foretold their shipping movements and the progress of exploration parties on land - sometimes a week ahead of the advancing British party. However, the documented contacts with the British (military and non-military) prior to 1835, specifically dealing with the Wadawurrung, were sometimes bloody but brief. British military expeditions into Wadawurrung territory led by British Royal Navy Officers such as acting Lieutenant Murray (1801-2) stayed for a month on Boon Wurrung land and only fleetingly visited the Wadawurrung's estates at Corio Bay. A reconnoitre of Port Phillip led by Lieutenant Charles Robbins' (January 1803) exchanged foods at Point Cook - but only stayed briefly. Captain Matthew Flinders' expedition (April 1803) stayed only long enough to climb the You Yangs and feast with a clan at Indented Head. Similarly non-military trespassers such as Hume and Hovell (1824-

5) also did not stay in Wadawurrung land for long – staying only for a day on Wadawurrung country and then returning to New South Wales. There is also much evidence that unofficial semi-permanent camps existed on Wadawurrung land in the early 19th century, as indicated in earlier chapters was reported by the Wadawurrung to Hume and Hovell. These were probably base camps for sealers, whalers, bolters (escaped convicts) and castaways. However, the permanent occupation of Wadawurrung lands and the usurping of their economic and cultural resources did not occur until 1835.

The Treaty That Never Was

The destruction of the Wadawurrung's land tenure by the British colonials effectively began when John Batman, with three fellow British colonists and five foreign Aboriginal men from the Sydney region sailed into Port Phillip on 20 May 1835. The colonisers who followed in John Batman's wake knew Wadawurrung country (until 1850) as part of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales (now known as Victoria). They were in the main sheep and cattle graziers, commonly called squatters, seeking to occupy new grazing lands by squatting on what the British Government considered Crown land.

The dispossession of Kulin country, including Wadawurrung country was different in nature from the military styled convict colony conquest of Aboriginal land that had occurred in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1803 and at Sydney in 1788. John Batmans now infamous private treaty with eight Kulin *Ngurungaetas* or Clan Heads was to have ceded vast tracts of land that included a significant portion of Wadawurrung territory to John Batman and his associates. There were two treaties, each executed on parchment in triplicate. The first was titled 'Grant of the Territory called Dutigalla, with livery of Seisin endorsed, Dated 6 June 1835', and covered an area some 65 kilometres in length or 500,000 acres - commonly referred to as the Melbourne treaty.¹²³ The second treaty ceded 100,000 acres of the Geelong, Indented Head area, but was not enacted with Wadawurrung *Ngurungaetas*. Batman's private treaty over Aboriginal land was criticised roundly by newspapers of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Reports in the *Hobart Town Courier* pointed out that it was 'incomprehensible the Aboriginal people would knowingly sign an agreement to give over all their lands' and a report in the *Cornwall Chronicle* cynically called Batman the 'Tasmanian Penn', referring to William Penn's 1681 treaty with First Nation Americans. The British Government represented by a military officer - Major General Sir Richard Bourke, the Commander of His Majesty's Forces and also 'Captain General and Governor in Chief of the Territory of New South Wales and its Dependencies, and Admiral' promptly annulled the private treaty in August 1835. Major General Sir Richard Bourke's proclamation on behalf of the King of England (reproduced below) served as a rebuttal of any private individual the right to enter into purchasing land from Aboriginal people. A newspaper writer more succinctly summed up the crux of Major General (Governor) Bourke's annulment of the so-called treaty between Batman and the Kulin in June 1835 by chiming the doctrine of terra nullius: 'Aboriginal people could not sell land to which they had no title; since it belonged to the Crown, it was for the government to dispose of'.¹²⁴



PROCLAMATION.

By His Excellency Major General Sir RICHARD BOURKE, K.C.B., Commanding His Majesty's Forces, Captain General and Governor in Chief of the Territory of New South Wales and its Dependencies, and Vice Admiral of the same, &c. &c. &c.

WHEREAS, it has been represented to me, that divers of His Majesty's subjects have taken possession of vacant Lands of the Crown, within the limits of this Colony, under the pretence of a treaty, bargain, or contract, for the purchase thereof, with the Aboriginal Natives; Now therefore, I the Governor, in virtue and in exercise of the power and authority in me vested, do hereby proclaim and notify to all His Majesty's subjects and others whom it may concern, that every such treaty, bargain, and contract with the Aboriginal Natives as aforesaid, for the possession, title, or claim to any Lands lying and being within the limits of the Government of the Colony of New South Wales, as the same are laid down and defined by His Majesty's Commission; that is to say, extending from the Northern Cape or extremity of the coast called Cape York, in the latitude of ten degrees thirty-seven minutes south, to the southern extremity of the said Territory of New South Wales, or Wilson's Promontory, in the latitude of thirty-nine degrees twelve minutes south, and embracing all the country inland to the westward, as far as the one hundred and twenty-ninth degree of east longitude, reckoning from the meridian of Greenwich, including all the Islands adjacent in the Pacific Ocean within the latitude aforesaid, and including also Norfolk Island, is void and of no effect against the rights of the Crown; and that all persons who shall be found in possession of any such Lands as aforesaid, without the license or authority of His Majesty's Government, for such purpose, first had and obtained, will be considered as trespassers, and liable to be dealt with in like manner as other intruders upon the vacant lands of the Crown within the said Colony.

Given under my Hand and Seal, at Government House, Sydney, this Twenty-sixth Day of August, One thousand eight hundred and thirty-five.

(L.S.)

"RICHARD BOURKE."

By His Excellency's Command,

ALEXANDER M'LEAY.

GOD SAVE THE KING!

Stephens and Stokes, Printers, "Herald Office," Lower George-street, Sydney.

Proclamation by Sir Richard Bourke re. Possession of vacant lands of the Crown within the limits of the colony, under the pretence of a treaty, bargain or contract, for the purchase thereof, with the Aboriginal natives are void and persons found in possession will be considered as trespassers, 26 August 1835. State Library of New South Wales, (Call No.: D 356 vol. 1 no. 7: microfilm CY 1118, frame 44)

Whereas, it has been represented to me, that divers [many] of His Majesty's Subjects have taken possession of vacant Lands of the Crown, within the limits of this Colony, under the pretence of a treaty, bargain, or contract, for the purchase thereof, with the Aboriginal Natives; Now therefore, I, the Governor, in virtue and in exercise of the power and authority in me vested, do hereby proclaim and notify to all His Majesty's Subjects, and others whom it may concern, that every such treaty, bargain, and contract with the Aboriginal Natives, as aforesaid, for the possession, title, or claim to any Lands lying and being within the limits of the Government of the Colony of New South Wales, as the same are laid down and

defined by His Majesty's Commission; that is to say, extending from the Northern Cape, or extremity of the Coast called Cape York, in the latitude of ten degrees thirty seven minutes South, to the Southern extremity of the said Territory of New South Wales, or Wilson's Promontory, in the latitude of thirty nine degrees twelve minutes South, and embracing all the Country inland to the Westward, as far as the one hundred and twenty ninth degree of east longitude, reckoning from the meridian of Greenwich, including all the Islands adjacent, in the Pacific Ocean within the latitude aforesaid, and including also Norfolk Island, is void and of no effect against the rights of the Crown; and that all Persons who shall be found in possession of any such Lands as aforesaid, without the license or authority of His Majesty's Government, for such purpose, first had and obtained, will be considered as trespassers, and liable to be dealt with in like manner as other intruders upon the vacant Lands of the Crown within the said Colony.

Given under my Hand and Seal, at Government House, Sydney, this twenty sixth Day of August, One thousand eight hundred and thirty five.

(Signed) Richard Bourke

By His Excellency's Command¹²⁵

Anthropologist, Dianne Barwick, has argued that the Kulin Clan Heads probably interpreted John Batman's actions on the day of the Treaty as a 'puppyish' or culturally naïve form of *Tanderrum*. Barwick argues that Batman's actions of ritualistic marking of the ground and trees and providing gifts – and receiving gifts closely resembled the Kulin's *Tanderrum* ceremony whereby permission for temporary access was granted in a ritual exchange of gifts and formal presentation of tokens (soil, plants, water, food) symbolising the Clan Head's hospitality.

From the outset, Batman greatly admired the physical beauty of the region describing the coastline adjoining Wadawurrung land as 'one of the finest basins of water I ever saw...Just called upon deck to see about 100 [magpie] geese flying near the vessel'.¹²⁶ Batman and his crew anchored at present day Indented Head and then proceeded on foot for some miles over what the Wadawurrung called 'Iramoo', now the Werribee plains. The splendid tracts of land belonging to the Wadawurrung moved him to write 'we came to a beautiful plain...of as rich as I ever saw'. They noted that the rich black soil was covered with kangaroo grass about twenty-five centimetres high, and as 'green as a field of wheat'.¹²⁷ Batman perceptively thought the landscape closely resembled English agricultural farmlands.

This land forms an isthmus which is about twenty miles long by ten miles across... Most of the high hills were covered with grass to the summit, and not a tree, although the land was as good as land could be. The whole appeared like land laid out in farms for some hundred years back and every tree transplanted. I was never so astonished in my life.¹²⁸

Likewise, George Russell, a squatter who took Wadawurrung land noted upon his arrival in Melbourne that

The country immediately round Melbourne at this time looked very pretty. The grass had been all burnt off by bush-fires, and the autumn rains had caused it to spring up again. Batman's Hill looked so green and fresh that when I got my first sight of it, on coming up the river, I thought it was cultivated ground and that a crop of grain had been sown on it.¹²⁹

Later, Governor Bourke, the first Governor of the Port Phillip District, and other writers were equally observant. Bourke noted in his diary on 9 March 1837 that the Wadawurrung estates were 'Very pretty country having the appearance of an English park' and indirectly attributed this to Wadawurrung techniques of deliberately using fire for land management by noting that 'a great part of herbage lately burned'.¹³⁰ A month later Bourke commented again on the evidence of Autumn burning.

The plains from hence and to the Head of Gellibrand's Creek [referring to plains between Werribee River and Little River] dry & bleak and of rather coarse herbage. Passed down the valley of Gellibrand's Creek (which is a good chain of Ponds) but the grass burned to the roots and there appeared but little food for Sheep tho' in wet seasons it is probable the pasture is good.¹³¹

Andrew Russell, travelling through the Werribee plains in 1839 noted evidence of 'the blue gum and iron bark, of very considerable thickness, many of which were partially decayed' due to having 'being burned by the natives'.¹³² Similarly, Charles Wedge noted in his journal that the Werribee Plains 'are as open as the heaths of Cambridgeshire'. A British Gunnery Officer at Port Phillip in September 1836 also complimented the 'richness and beauty' of the land by noting 'the ground is like a beautiful carpet, covered with grasses, herbs and flowers of various sorts - the scenery was that of an extensive park'.¹³³ Charles Griifh, a squatter who took land near present day Bacchus Marsh in 1840 considered the Wadawurrung landscape to be so similar to the English countryside that he found it 'difficult to believe that I am in a foreign country'.¹³⁴ The Englishmen's frequent reference to the fact that Wadawurrung land was remarkably similar to farmlands created by human hands was accurate. The Wadawurrung were initiators of ecological change. Using fire they molded the environment and acted effectively as 'park rangers' implementing what archaeologist, Rhys Jones famously dubbed 'Fire stick farming'.¹³⁵

Rudimentary but firsthand Kulin perspectives about their customary use of fire to create open parklands can be glimpsed via the pen of William Thomas in March 1840 residing on Boon Wurrung country adjoining Wadawurrung estates. Thomas had spent several days remonstrating with the Boon Wurrung about their customary burning of the bush practices. Thomas was incensed that they continued to 'set the bush on fire in all directions' and persistently exhorted them to discontinue, holding the opinion that 'Natives do great injury through continuing [to] burn [the] bush'. The Boon Wurrung were equally consistent in their insistence to burn the bush in all directions – only being worried by a 'great fire' nearby which 'much alarmed

them' – made by white people. The following lengthy excerpt from Thomas' journal provides clear evidence of the many purposes to which fire was put by Kulin people, including: clearing and cleaning country, conserving significant remembrance sites, and allowing greater access to plant and animal food supplies. It is one of very few first-hand accounts in the written records that demonstrate senior Victorian Aboriginal peoples' intimate knowledge of fire and of the conditions required to mitigate the danger of uncontrollable fire.

After breakfast an old man ... went and set fire to the Bush, on the opposite side of [the] river to [the] encampment. Immediately on perceiving it I [crossed the] river and tried to stop it and him but he had done it too [effectively] ... I bid him desist but he said Black fellows ... would not know where they were if he did not make fire, and made one so [effectively] about him that I could not get aside him.

[The fire] Burnt furiously beyond conception for a thick scrub but a quantity of old grass [decayed] was underneath which accounted for it. The Old Man persisted, at half past one I again went where it was burning and to my great surprise what 2 hours before was a dense forest was now passable [and I was compelled] to be on the move for it was very hot under my feet and all trees half burnt through [and] falling here and there ... I came up [to] the old man who had an old close body coat on, which I suppose he had put on to keep his body from being burnt and kept perhaps for the purpose as I never saw him with it on before. I was angry and bid him desist, he said all gone fire and [returned] to [the] encampment, but I consider that he left off because he had accomplished his object as I met him not above 100 [yards] from brink of [the] River ... I went on till I came to the end of that already burnt [section] about half a mile and was surprised at the extent [of the fire.] As far as the eye could take in was still in flames and burning. At a little distance it sounded like water coming down a gentle fall, [but the] fire appear[ed] like a wall around you ... and everything that [impedes] gives way, the very green saplings and large trees remain except foliage of saplings, leaving them like thin sticks sticking up. I gazed upon this scene having come to a part about 60 yards in space free from even saplings, while the space before me seemed for a mile free from timber but the wall of fire prevented me approaching ... As I [traversed] this place I observed native paths in various directions which the fire had left visible, the paths made by a race now no more for they are all dead [murdered] that once owned this spot, they were deeply bedded in the earth all bearing to the river and onwards in direction to the part then burning ... The Lubras return[ed] in the Even[ing] well supplied [with] 3 kangaroos, 7 opossums, all in good spirits.¹³⁶

The English occupiers also encountered other explicit signs of Wadawurrung land tenure: recently used trails, marks on trees to indicate ownership of food resources, temporary shelters on the beaches (containing the leftovers of mussel feasts) and domesticated dingoes. Batman's entourage also came to a permanent 'hamlet' (village) comprised of substantial huts. Near the Werribee River, Batman's Aboriginal guide Stomert found 'seven large huts' and directed the newcomers to a group of 20 Wadawurrung women and 24 children. Batman observed that all of the women except one had a child on her back and noted that they had obtained and innovatively modified some Western implements.

They had four native dogs and every woman had a load of 60 or 70 lbs. on her back, of one thing or another. Each had two or three baskets, net bags, native tomahawks, bones etc. I found in one of the net bags a part of a tire of a cartwheel, which had two nail holes in it. They had ground it down to a sharp edge, and put it in a stick to cut with as a tomahawk. They had also several pieces of iron hoop, ground sharp to cut with; several wooden buckets to carry water in....

Batman thought that the children were good looking and had a healthy appearance. He speculated that they might not have heard report of a gun or seen one as they all 'dropped down immediately' when a large number of wild turkeys were shot at in their presence.¹³⁷ However, this reaction could equally be interpreted, as an indication they were well informed of a gun's potential to harm rather than an ignorance of its effects. Batman also saw substantial Wadawurrung weirs on Hovells Creek 'in about ten or twelve places'. He reported on several occasions finding an intricately engineered fish farming system, which incorporated inter-connecting walls spanning a width of 'fifty or sixty yards'. In one part of the journey through Wadawurrung country he wrote

We passed many dams of stones across the creek, made by the natives [Wadawurrung] for the purpose of catching fish during the summer months. These dams were from four to five feet high, and excellently contrived. Three or four of these stone walls were built in succession, with floodgates formed of sticks and bushes.¹³⁸

On another occasion, he repeated his finds.

We found at least a dozen of these dams or weirs in different parts of the creek built of stones about four feet high, and well done and well placed out. Two or three of these places following [sic] each other down the stream with gates to them, which they appear to stop with a bundle of rushes.¹³⁹

These descriptions of weir manufacture were similar in description to weirs observed elsewhere in the western and central highlands districts on or adjoining Wadawurrung land. Near To-ol (Mt William) GA Robinson observed extensive weirs (covering 10 acres) in 1841 similar in description to the Wadawurrung weirs Batman observed. One writer noted that to the west of Wadawurrung country the weirs of the Djabwurrung and their neighbours

were numerous at the time of my residence, and had apparently been much more so, judging from the traces left by them in the swampy margins of the river. At these places we found many low sod banks extending across the shallow branches of the river, with apertures at intervals, in which were placed long, narrow, circular nets (like a large stocking) made of rush-work.¹⁴⁰

Similarly, Patrick Costello, a sheep station labourer near Mt Emu (c.1840s), also noted that the 'Native blacks seem to have a knowledge of constructing what we called eel weirs at home'.¹⁴¹ J.Cary, a naturalist and writer at the turn of the twentieth century, consulted historical records

and interviewed longtime residents of Geelong about their knowledge of Wadawurrung coastal clans and their utilization of resources. Cary concluded that 'From the Barwon and its affluents, the Moorabool and the Leigh, they [the Wadawurrung] drew in season an abundance of black fish and eels, and with weirs...captured the bream, the delicate smelt and other fish from the sea'.¹⁴² Thomas Learrnonth, a squatter in the Ballarat region also remarked on the wellmade Wadawurrung weirs he saw (and his theft of fish from the Wadawurrung nets in the weir).

Near our encampment [near the 'mouth of the Pirron Yalloak'] we found a fishing weir of the natives, in which were small conical nets of good workmanship. Nearly a bushel of delicious little fish like white-bait was in the nets, part of which we took and faithfully remunerated the owners by giving provisions in return to a couple of men whom we induced to approach us.¹⁴³



Knights, S. 1852, *Natives spearing eels on Back Creek*, National Library of Australia, BibID: 327460, PIC Screen 88 #R3925

The squatters in the Port Phillip District, initially tempered by the pretence of 'Batman's treaty', that purported to represent the interests of the 'aborigines of Iramoo' (the Wadawurrung) sought in some regards to accommodate the Wadawurrung into their economic and social framework.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, there is evidence that the Wadawurrung sought to accommodate the squatters into their kinship and trade networks and began to incorporate themselves into the complex nature of capitalist work relationships.

‘The Most Friendly Feeling Exists’

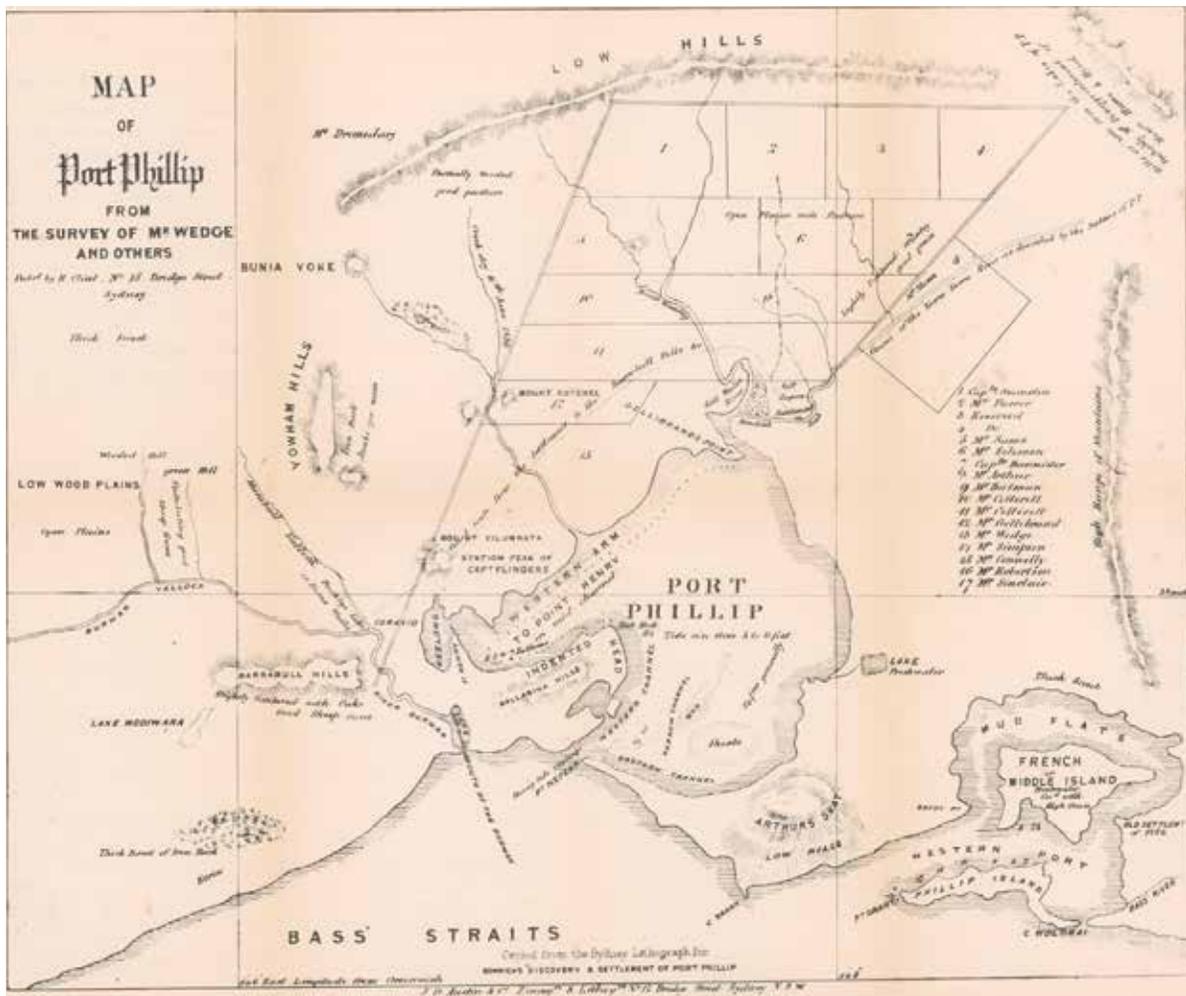
After completing his treaty with Kulin Ngrungeeta near present day Melbourne John Batman returned to Tasmania, leaving a small party of colonists and ‘Sydney Natives’ on Wadawurrung land at Indented Head. A local Wadawurrung clan made contact almost immediately and friendly relations were established. William Todd, the leader of the small party, recorded how his party ‘fell in with the Natives which were five in number’. Within the next fortnight Todd complained on many occasions that the Wadawurrung would not leave them on any account and the number of Wadawurrung had increased to ‘upwards of 90 natives around us.’¹⁴⁵ This party, much to John Batman’s disbelief was able to maintain a non-violent relationship for the entirety of their stay. Batman reported to John Montagu, the Colonial Secretary, in November 1835, five months after he had left his small party at Indented Head that ‘In fact, however sanguine I may previously have been to as to the complete success of the undertaking, I feel now infinite reason to be much more so.’¹⁴⁶ This seems largely attributable to the presence of the Aboriginal workers from Jervis Bay and Sydney, colloquially known as the ‘Sydney three’ or ‘Pidgeon’, ‘Joe’ and ‘Bunget’. The Wadawurrung it seemed were highly pleased with them and conferred a wife and child to them. The exceptionally friendly overtures the three foreign Aboriginal men received from the local clans was extraordinary in light of the fact that it became well known that Aboriginal people from different language groups were generally considered to be *mainmait* (undesirable foreigners considered untrustworthy) and were often killed. Some explanation for their favourable treatment may be found in the fact that the ‘Sydney 3’ entered into a reciprocal relationship with the Wadawurrung by regularly hunting with guns and English hunting dogs for the local clans and supplied kangaroo meat for them. They also gave a local clan two of their hunting dogs and distributed large amounts of flour and other Western supplies.¹⁴⁷

There is also little doubt that William Buckley’s appearance at their camp aided the party’s survival and maintenance of good relations. Buckley or Murranghurk as the Wadawurrung had renamed him was a convict escapee who thirty two years previously had escaped from a convict settlement at present day Sorrento. Buckley’s story is an oft-repeated remarkable one. Having escaped from the convict settlement in 1803 he found himself on the verge of dying from starvation near present day Indented Head. At this perilous point, the Wadawurrung recognized him as a ‘resuscitated blackfellow’ took him in and gave him succor for the next thirty-two years believing him to be the living reincarnation of their recently dead compatriot. Buckley proved to be crucial in some ways for the colonists who had come to usurp his adopted Wadawurrung countrymen and women of their country. Buckley received a pardon (for escaping from custody) and hired as interpreter and more importantly as a sort of mediator. On two occasions, Buckley was able to alert Batman’s men to the risk of attack and many commentators considered him to have been instrumental in ‘laying the foundations of good feeling between the Aborigines and the Europeans.’¹⁴⁸ Charles Wedge considered that the ‘[Wadawurrung] Tribe of natives were peacefully disposed due to Buckley’s influence’. Captain Parker King, a visiting Naval Officer, also believed Buckley ‘probably has been the principal cause of the friendly bearing displayed by them towards us.’¹⁴⁹ John Batman communicated to the Colonial authorities that he considered Buckley’s presence in Port Phillip as extremely beneficial to the peaceful inter-racial relations experienced at Port Phillip.

The intercourse with the natives had gone on well. Once since our establishment as many as 400 natives were assembled for the purpose of settling some ancient quarrel; and, although so many different tribes were collected together, uniform goodwill was shown by all of them towards the white people... Here, I cannot refrain expressing my thankfulness to that good Providence which threw 'Buckley' in our way, for certainly he has been the medium of successfully establishing between us and the natives an understanding, which without his assistance, could never have become effected to the extent it has been.¹⁵⁰

In August 1835 another group of would be squatters visited Indented Head and met up with the group left there by Batman. John Helder Wedge, a surveyor with the Van Diemens Land Association (John Batman's business associates) led the new party that also consisted of John Batman's brother, Henry, his wife and their 4 children. Wedge recorded that the Wadawurrung clan at Indented Head were on very friendly terms with Batman's crew and that the Wadawurrung were intent on acquiring all they could of new foods and implements. This thirst for new foods was not out of necessity, Wedge (and others) observed, but out of a curiosity to acquire new goods and to enter into reciprocal relationships with the newcomers:

I soon learnt that the most friendly understanding exists with the natives... Although they [the Wadawurrung at Indented Head] brought home with them plenty of provisions, consisting of various edible roots, kangaroos, bats, and calkiet (the young ants, in a fly state, taken from decayed hollow trees), they soon began to importune us for bread and other things, not excepting the cutlery. From this I inferred at once that, to satisfy their newly acquired taste for our food and other things which we bought with us, such as knives, tomahawks and blankets, was a sure way to conciliate them.¹⁵¹



Wedge, John Helder, 1856, *MAP OF PORT PHILLIP FROM THE SURVEY OF MR. WEDGE AND OTHERS*. National Library of Australia, nla.obj-416707851

Wedge and his group began examining the ‘Balarine [Bellarine] Peninsula’ accompanied by two Wadawurrung guides, Joan Joan and Diabering. This practice of employing Wadawurrung guides to explore the region was part of a general pattern used extensively across Aboriginal Australia. He then spent seven weeks exploring the land west of Indented Head (Wadawurrung land) accompanied by Murranguurk (William Buckley). The relatively friendly relations that were established between the Wadawurrung and this first wave of surveyors and squatters were quite apparent to visitors from Van Diemens Land (now called Tasmania). Another party of colonists keen to usurp Wadawurrung land anchored off Indented Head in August 1835 were visited by a whaleboat out on a fishing trip. The whaleboat was crewed by Wedge’s survey party but also included a Wadawurrung man. It is clear that there was a mutual sense of amazement about each other’s exotic features and culture. The Captain of the ship wrote that the whaleboat was:

...commanded and manned by his [Wedge’s] sable crew and a passenger of the Port Phillip tribe. I should remind you that this boat did not come off purposely to us. The native black that was in her, I must inform you, had good features, somewhat poxbitten about the nose and forehead, and had a double spirit sail

yard [bone ornament] through the centre of the nose, and two fine rows of regular ivory [teeth], with thin lips; but in all, to my fancy, a very friendly feature. He was quite astonished to see the horses and poultry, and particularly my old sow and her pickaninnies [piglets].¹⁵²



ST Gill, c. 1850, *Explorer and Aboriginal Guide*, National Library of Australia, PIC SOLANDER BOX A54 #R463

Wedge set off in September 1835 for the present site of Melbourne. He again drew on the local expertise of the Wadawurrung and arranged to be accompanied by 'one white man, two Sydney natives, and two of the Port Phillip aborigines'.¹⁵³ There were numerous attempts by the squatters in the Port Phillip District to ford the differences between the colonists and the Aboriginal people that largely sprang from a desire to impress the Colonial authorities of the squatters' good intentions. Andrew Thomson, a squatter on Wadawurrung land, for instance was one of the sixteen squatters who held an open-air meeting in June 1836. The meeting, probably not coincidentally, was held while the newly appointed magistrate George Stewart was in Melbourne. The subsequent letter that detailed the proceedings included two proposals that dealt with the squatter's concerns about inter-racial conflict at Port Phillip. It seems likely the two proposals were interpreted by Stewart as a mixture of self-interest and genuine concern for the Aboriginal people's well-being. Stewart reported to Governor Bourke that the residents were law abiding and seemed anxious to treat the Aborigines kindly and noted their hope that the 'Government would extend to them its protection'.¹⁵⁴ The squatters were aware that they needed to demonstrate to Governors Arthur and Bourke that they were not acting out of contempt for the government by illegally occupying Crown land - as they had done. By portraying a united front of agreement on the issue of frontier relationships, the squatters hoped they would be viewed as respectable entrepreneurs who deserved the support of the government.

Proposed by David Ramsay Pitcairn seconded by Alexander Thomson and carried unanimously, that all parties do bind themselves to communicate to the Arbitrator any aggression committed upon or by the Aborigines, that may come to their knowledge, by the earliest opportunity, and that he be empowered to proceed in the matter as he may think expedient.

Proposed by John Helder Wedge seconded by John Pascoe Fawkner and carried unanimously that all subscribing parties pledge themselves to afford protection to the Aborigines to the utmost of their power, and further that they will not teach them the use of firearms or allow their servants to do so nor on any account to allow the Aborigines to be in possession of firearms.¹⁵⁵

Amicable Arrangements

In the first few years of colonization it is possible to detect a certain air of reserved optimism and determination on the part of some squatters, newspapers and the British Government that inter-racial relations at Port Phillip would be more harmonious than that experienced in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). A state of initial violent hostilities and then war had raged between the colonists and the Palawa (Aboriginal) people in Tasmania and there was a certain degree of resolution to try to avoid war at Port Phillip in the correspondence of many colonists. A report in the *Launceston Advertiser* intimated that the onus was on the colonists to maintain good relations: 'natives are not yet troublesome and we make little doubt that it will rest with the whites themselves whether they ever become so.'¹⁵⁶ George Frankland, the Van Diemen's Land Chief Surveyor, received a letter from Charles Wedge about the Wadawurrung being 'very tractable, and open to imbibe any habits that may be inculcated in them.' Frankland also reported that according to Wedge, the Wadawurrung were actively engaging in a trade in cultural artefacts with the colonists: 'Mr Wedge has been teaching them to make baskets by rewarding the industrious with increased rations.'¹⁵⁷ George Mercer, spokesperson for the Port Phillip Association, reminded the Secretary of State of the aggressions and murders that had occurred on the Hunter River in New South Wales when no 'amicable arrangements' had been made, and insisted that matters would be different at Port Phillip.¹⁵⁸

Wedge recorded in 1835 that large numbers of Wadawurrung people at Indented Head had helped build houses. Batman also wrote in a letter to Arthur that relations with Aboriginal people were on a friendly footing and 'from eighty to a hundred natives have been clothed and supplied with daily rations at the expense of the [Port Phillip] Association.' Batman also claimed that the Wadawurrung were 'partially occupied in habits of industry, and I have not the least hesitation in affirming that if no unforeseen obstacles occur, a gradual system of civilization' would be possible.¹⁵⁹ Batman's letter to Arthur is an attempt to win the Governor's confidence, and consequently the genuineness of its kindly moral foundations is suspect. A private memorandum written by Swanston, Gellibrand and Wedge (all squatters who had stolen Kulin lands) to Batman in October 1835 asserts that a 'friendly feeling' was established with the Wadawurrung and the Woiwurrung whose land they had encroached. The memorandum also confidently presumed that a sizeable number of Kulin people would willingly commit themselves to working on their sheep stations on a large scale if peaceful relations continued.

The first point to be attended to is to keep up a friendly feeling on their [the Kulin's] part to the establishment, and to ensure on their part a feeling of confidence, and the next is to make them as useful to the association as possible ... That civilization will best proceed by dividing the natives into families, and employing six or eight at each of the station [sic] if they can be induced voluntarily to do so - but it must not be done by compulsion. Habits of labor will only be acquired by degrees and if each party were allowed to have a small piece of ground to cultivate for themselves.¹⁶⁰

Joseph Gellibrand, one of the signatories to the Port Phillip Association, was plainly highly optimistic in February 1836 about his prospects of cordial relations with the Wadawurrung and their neighbours: 'I am quite delighted with my trip [to Port Phillip] and particularly the intercourse with the natives'.¹⁶¹ A memorandum signed by forty-five squatters on 8 June 1837 to Governor Bourke contended that squatters and workers alike had overlooked daily 'annoyances and inroads' from the Aboriginal people in the Geelong District and called on the Governor 'for protection both for the natives and ourselves'.¹⁶² The British government also gave clear indication they were not going to countenance the financial cost or the moral turpitude that they had borne from the 'Black War' in Van Diemen's Land. They subsequently directed the Colonial authorities to 'advance the interests and maintain the security' of the Aboriginal people at Port Phillip.¹⁶³ The British Government's resolve on this matter became apparent with the establishment of an Aboriginal Protectorate system, which at the time constituted half of the public service staff in the new district.¹⁶⁴ The order given to Chief Protector, George Augustus Robinson, and his four Assistant Aboriginal Protectors: William Thomas, Charles Sievwright, Edward Parker and James Dredge was to ensure the 'protection and civilization of the native tribes'.¹⁶⁵ The Protectors were also invested with a commission as Magistrate, to achieve that end. Moreover, a government mission had commenced at Melbourne in 1836, which the Wadawurrung visited, and official aid granted to the Wesleyan Mission to the Aborigines of Port Phillip at Buntingdale, located on Wadawurrung land, in 1838.

The Colonial Secretary instructed William Lonsdale, the newly appointed Police Magistrate at Port Phillip, in September 1836 that

It will be one of your most important duties to protect the aboriginal natives of the District from any manner of wrong, and to endeavor to conciliate them by kind treatment and presents, assuring them that this Government is most anxious to maintain a friendly intercourse with them, and to improve by all practicable means their moral and social condition.¹⁶⁶

Lonsdale immediately appointed Buckley as noted earlier as 'District Interpreter' (the first local public servant appointed at Port Phillip) and according to Parker King was 'a very useful person in that capacity'. There was however, a variety of factors at play, which the London and Colonial authorities did not consider fully when deliberating over what action to take in reference to the Aboriginal people of the Port Phillip District (now Victoria). These included the rapacious greed of the colonists who were determined to dispossess Aboriginal people of all their land with no regard for Aboriginal law, the swiftness of this theft, the presence of convict labourers

and overseers renowned for their violent and sadistic actions towards Aboriginal people and the unwillingness of the Aboriginal people to assume a British peasant's lifestyle.

The Pace Quickens

Whilst the early entrepreneurs at Port Phillip sought to assure the Government that they had the welfare of the Aboriginal people at heart the reality was that good pastures for the colonists' sheep was the prime motive. A private letter written by John Simpson, a business associate of pastoralist Charles Wedge, saw through the facade of the altruistic claims made by the Port Phillip Association with regard to the Aborigines of Port Phillip. Simpson lampoons the suggestion that anything but land acquisition was the Association's motive.

G. [Joseph Gellibrand, the lawyer acting on behalf of the Association] as well as Batman appears to have taken up the case [of convincing the Colonial Government of the Association's good intentions] with the additional impetus of *religious zeal* – 'We attempt to colonize not by knocking the aborigines on the head but by buying their property and endeavouring to introduce industrious habits' and other very plausible matters - *Little George* [referring to George Arthur, Governor of Van Diemen's Land] may like to hear this well enough but he is not to be gulled by it either.¹⁶⁷

Simpson was not wrong. In October 1836 Sir George Arthur, the Governor of Van Diemen's Land impressed upon his counterpart from New South Wales, Governor Bourke, that the parties sending stock to Port Phillip had been trying to partly disguise their entrepreneurial activities in a shroud of philanthropic concern for the Aboriginal population. Arthur scoffed at their contention that

...their object has also been the civilization of the natives. This of course, is all stuff, and it is better for all parties to be sincere, and plainly state that the occupation of a good run for sheep has been the primary consideration, if not the only one.¹⁶⁸

The pace and nature of the British invasion significantly affected inter-racial relationships in the region. The area around Indented Head, on Wadawurrung country, was a setting down point for ships crammed with livestock from across the Bass Strait and by the end of 1836, sheep runs spread around Geelong within a semi-circle of 40 kilometres radius. In the following year, a steady flow of squatters followed the Barwon and other watercourses in a westerly direction towards the Colac District, and a northerly direction towards Ballarat. By 1838-9, the occupation of all Wadawurrung clan estates by the sheep graziers was effectively complete.¹⁶⁹ The squatters took great swathes of Wadawurrung land. W.C Yuille travelled north from Geelong and moved onto a 10,000 acre run at Ballarat-Buninyong in 1837 beside the Learmonth brothers who amassed over 100,000 acres. Overlanders travelling south from New South Wales, such as Captain Hepburn, occupied 25,000 acres on the northernmost border of the Wadawurrung boundaries in around 1838-9.

By 1840, squatters' journals and government correspondence also indicate that the squatting runs were becoming increasingly insolvent and consequently changing hands on a frequent basis during the 1840s. Historian A.G.L Shaw wrote that of the 481 squatters in Port Phillip who held pastoral leases in 1840, 'fewer than half remained in the field in 1845'.¹⁷⁰ The increasingly ephemeral nature of pastoral leasehold was in part due to a drought and the new laws regarding squatting leases and the poor financial position of the Colonial government. It is likely the frequent transfer of the colonist's leaseholds (on what had formerly been clan estates) hampered the building of inter-racial relationships forged by a number of squatters in the early period of colonization (1835-9). Research about northern Australian frontiers by historians including Reynolds, McGrath and May has stressed the mutually binding work relationships that developed between squatters and resident Aboriginal clans' people.¹⁷¹ Similarly, many historians have also noted how Aboriginal people in South Eastern Australia quickly adapted their traditional skills to the new economy imposed upon them by the colonialists during the nineteenth century.

The Dearth of Labour

During the initial period of colonisation (1835-9) the Wadawurrung were in a position whereby they were both numerically stronger and in high demand as sheep station workers. Their bio-cultural knowledge and well-developed bushcraft skills ensured that the Wadawurrung were eagerly sought after workers on the sheep stations that sprang up on their lands. The first wave of squatters (and their workers) that occupied Wadawurrung land were predominantly young and inexperienced in founding and operating sheep stations. They were characterised by their initial ineptitude at finding suitable pastoral runs, handling their stock and surviving in the bush. Robert von Steiglitz took up sheep runs first in the Geelong district and later at Ballan on the Werribee. acknowledged meekly that he became hopelessly lost on his first foray into the bush and was so 'green' he barely knew 'a ewe from a ram'.¹⁷² Likewise, William Hamilton, a squatter who took Wadawurrung land near Trawalla lost himself in the bush one night and spent an uncomfortable night under a tree, 'as he had not the least idea where he was'. He woke in the morning to discover he was within two hundred metres of a neighbour's hut.¹⁷³ Two squatters on the Barwon River in 1836, George Russell and Archibald Anderson, also floundered in the bush as Hamilton had and spent a miserable night under a tree in pouring rain, only to discover in the morning that a neighbour's hut was 'almost within sight from where we had camped'.¹⁷⁴ Robinson, (the Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1838-1850) frequently wrote of bush workers becoming lost on their own stations such as a hut-keeper at Black and Steele's (near present day Smythesdale) who admitted 'he always lost himself in the bush'.¹⁷⁵

Moreover, there was a critical shortage of labour in the Port Phillip District and starting up costs were very high.¹⁷⁶ Not only the shortage of labour but also the near absence of reliable workers immediately impressed an overlander from Sydney when he arrived at Port Phillip in 1838. He wrote 'the dearth of labour seems the greatest trouble. Agricultural labourers are getting forty and fifty pounds per annum with immense rations and co and are very scarce and ill-conducted'.¹⁷⁷ Many squatters such as Thomas Learmonth and his brother, Somerville who seized land at Buninyong, were forced to endure their workers' 'promiscuous drinking' habits and general poor attitude to work, due to the acute shortage of 'well conducted' workers at Port Phillip. Learmonth recorded numerous instances where he felt compelled

to supply his workers with alcohol simply in the hope of keeping them in his employ. In one journal entry, he wrote that 'All the men drunk and unruly except James Coleman and Edward Ferriss, James Harper said he intended to bolt but was persuaded to remain on being given a bottle of wine.'¹⁷⁸ The Kirklands, a squatting family at Trawalla were aware their workers had the upper hand: 'So long as the country was so ill-provided with servants; *they* were the masters; they had the impudence always to keep the best pieces of the meat, and send into their masters the inferior bits.' The squatters suffered this indignity because 'the truth was, they were afraid to speak, in case the hut-keeper would be offended and run away.'¹⁷⁹ The high rate of wages for pastoral workers was a matter investigated by the Select Committee Inquiry of NSW in 1843 on immigration. Evidence given by Alexander Thomson, a squatter on Wadawurrung land at Geelong who in reply to a question from the Chairman regarding the high wage of workers in earlier years, replied:

Almost every day throughout the shearing season they would have several bottles of champagne and rum; they would have it by bucketful and deal it out. I have frequently seen a shepherd offer to treat his master with champagne.¹⁸⁰

In the economic climate sheep station workers, especially in the 'unsettled districts' (outside the Geelong region), were able to dictate to a large degree the conditions of work that hitherto was considered unheard of. Steiglitz also observed the labourers from Van Diemen's Land to be 'intemperate and aware that there was no law to restrain them'.¹⁸¹

Seeking Relationships

A significant number of squatters moved quickly to maximise the economic advantage of employing Wadawurrung workers not only as a cheaper source of highly skilled individual workers on a permanent basis but also family and clan groups on a seasonal basis. For instance the surveyor H.W.H Smythe, enlisted a Wadawurrung guide, Jack, 'to conduct me to the place provided I mounted [supplied a horse] him and furnished him with a gun'. Judging from the historical records, it is evident Wadawurrung workers were commonly paid in rations and by a means of barter. The Wadawurrung sought the new and valuable material goods that the squatters made available such as guns, tobacco and foods. There were however many instances where Aboriginal workers from the Port Phillip District were paid cash by the colonists for their labour. George Langhorne, a missionary at Melbourne (1836-39) reported the Wadawurrung were not interested in receiving rations as they could obtain 'white money' (gold coins) for their work to townsfolk in Melbourne.¹⁸² Similarly, the journal entries of many squatter's stations testify to Aboriginal workers being paid 'cash and tucker' - as did the white workers.¹⁸³ The Wadawurrung workers on the Brisbane Ranges and Exford runs in the Werribee and Melton region were known for example to have insisted on receiving wages for the work they performed on Simon Stauughton's sheep stations. Staughton had arrived in the region in 1841 and according to Pollitt's 'An Historical Record of Melton' the Wadawurrung workers were unequivocal about how they were to be paid.

A tribe of natives under the leadership of John Bull lived on Simon Staughton's property. John Bull had two lubras and wore a plate engraved with the name of the tribe. Staughton employed the tribe to build fences and cut timber, and it is reported that they were only interested in paper money in payment for services. Staughton, however, gave them full rations as well as pay.¹⁸⁴



ST Gill, c. 1864 *Bushmans hut*, National Library of Australia, PIC VOLUME 608 #S70

The historical sources however stress that most of the labour performed by Aboriginal people for colonists was an attempt to incorporate the colonists into their kinship networks, possibly to initiate the colonists into the Aboriginal exchange cycle and draw them into a closer reciprocal relationship.¹⁸⁵ William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Western Port District (1838-1849) noted the Port Phillip Aborigines' attitudes towards giving and receiving gifts and the importance they placed on reciprocity above all else.

They are truly generous among themselves...those who have been successful thro' the days tramp invariably distribute to those who have not been unsuccessful and what surprised me was that it was not considered as a gift but as a right and no thanks to the giver - I was I think the first white man that taught them the meaning of the word thank.¹⁸⁶

A century later Anthropologist Annette Hamilton discussing the Aboriginal people of central Australia argued that the reciprocal relationships formed by the Aboriginal people with the colonists have a value in itself.

It is the expression of the highest moral good. The best man is he who will give everything away; the worthiest, he who will go hungry himself in order to feed someone else who has a legitimate claim on him. This claim has nothing to do with relative need; it is not a charity; you do not give because someone is needy; you give because it is the right thing to do...in order for them to make claims on the whites they attempted to incorporate them into their own social system, a fact of which the whites were generally ignorant.¹⁸⁷

It is likely that the rescue of a colonist's servant in the 1830s by an unidentified Wadawurrung by making a canoe, fording the Barwon River and guiding the lost servant to a homestead was an instance in which reciprocal gift giving was required.

I wandered about for some time, not knowing which way to turn, then I was attracted by a fire on what is now called Buckland's Hill. I made for it hoping to get help. As I neared the fire, two or three dogs bounded towards me barking loudly, and in an instant I was surrounded by a number of aboriginals [Wadawurrung] each holding a tomahawk in his hand. I was greatly alarmed and could scarcely speak, but knowing that Dr Thomson had been very kind to the natives, I called out: "I have lost my way; I want Dr Thomson's". Immediately one of them, in his own language, ordered the others away, and seizing me by the arm, pulled me off at a pace I could scarcely keep up.

We were soon on the banks of the Barwon, where the native with his tomahawk cut a large piece of bark from a tree, and, in less time than it takes me to tell, placed it on the water, laid me on it, and plunged into the river beside me. I was conscious of being slowly paddled across the stream. All the time, I could feel his hot naked body touching my face, and hear his heavy breathing. Soon I was lifted up on the other side, and, in the same manner, almost dragged on until we reached Kardinia.¹⁸⁸

Dr Thomson, the squatter at Kardinia, whose servant had been rescued by the Wadawurrung rewarded the Wadawurrung man's efforts with some food but did not recognize that he had not yet discharged his debt. Thomson was probably not sensible of traditional exchange cycles that dictated: 'to remain under debt was to accept a feeling of inferiority, of shame and humiliation', but unwittingly discharged his debt anyway when the Wadawurrung man revisited Thomson's house.¹⁸⁹

A few evenings afterwards, I [Thomson's servant] chanced to look up at the window, and saw a black face smiling at me. I recognized at once my rescuer. I called the Dr., who once more rewarded the native with plenty of food, but made him understand that he was not to come again.¹⁹⁰

Anne Drysdale, a squatter and neighbor of Dr Thomson, was likewise ignorant of the Wadawurrung's exchange cycles and the important meaning behind their traditional

movement patterns on country. Drysdale's perceptions, written during the 1840s, about the Wadawurrung's 'wandering habits' are typical of many squatters who failed to see the spiritual and social obligations Aboriginal people had of caring for country. Drysdale, like many of her contemporaries was disappointed that they could not coerce the Aboriginal people to remain permanently on their sheep or cattle stations – and work unceasingly for the squatters as their labourers. Instead, the Wadawurrung continued to practise their ceremonial economics that involves a far more aristocrat style of working – and expected to be provided with tribute by the colonists.

There have been very few natives here since we came, & these only passing: this very well, as we can do them no good, & they are troublesome, & eat a great deal... their wandering habits are so inveterate... Yesterday a tribe of natives, all men, came marching past the house, about 60 in number: they walked in regular order, each carrying his spear, & a cockatoo's feather in his head; the women and children followed, & made their miam miam close to the house: they are quite tame, & seldom do any mischief here; this morning one of them came to the parlour & begged a pair of trousers from Dr. T[homson]: he said the weather was warm & he did not require them; but Bardé Murradock [an eminent Elder] answered he was 'like a wild man', pointing to the scanty bit of an old gown he had round him.¹⁹¹

Drysdale and many of her contemporaries often reflected on the aristocratic countenance the Wadawurrung assumed in their dress and deportment. Drysdale for instance observed that 'none of them are ever seen naked: many have a blanket, & others kangaroo skins; but they walk with a proud erect step, & look rather graceful'. The Wadawurrung seeing unequivocal evidence of distinctions in colonial culture based on 'gentlemen' bosses who did no work but had access to valuable resources, and workers who toiled unremmitingly for few resources - saw themselves as the equivalent of gentry – or 'gentlemen'. James Furse, a labourer living near Melbourne writing home in 1842 to his brother in England noted as did many observers of Kulin people that they had no desire to work incessantly as farm labourers but eagerly worked in the cash economy using their traditional skills. Furse bemoaned how

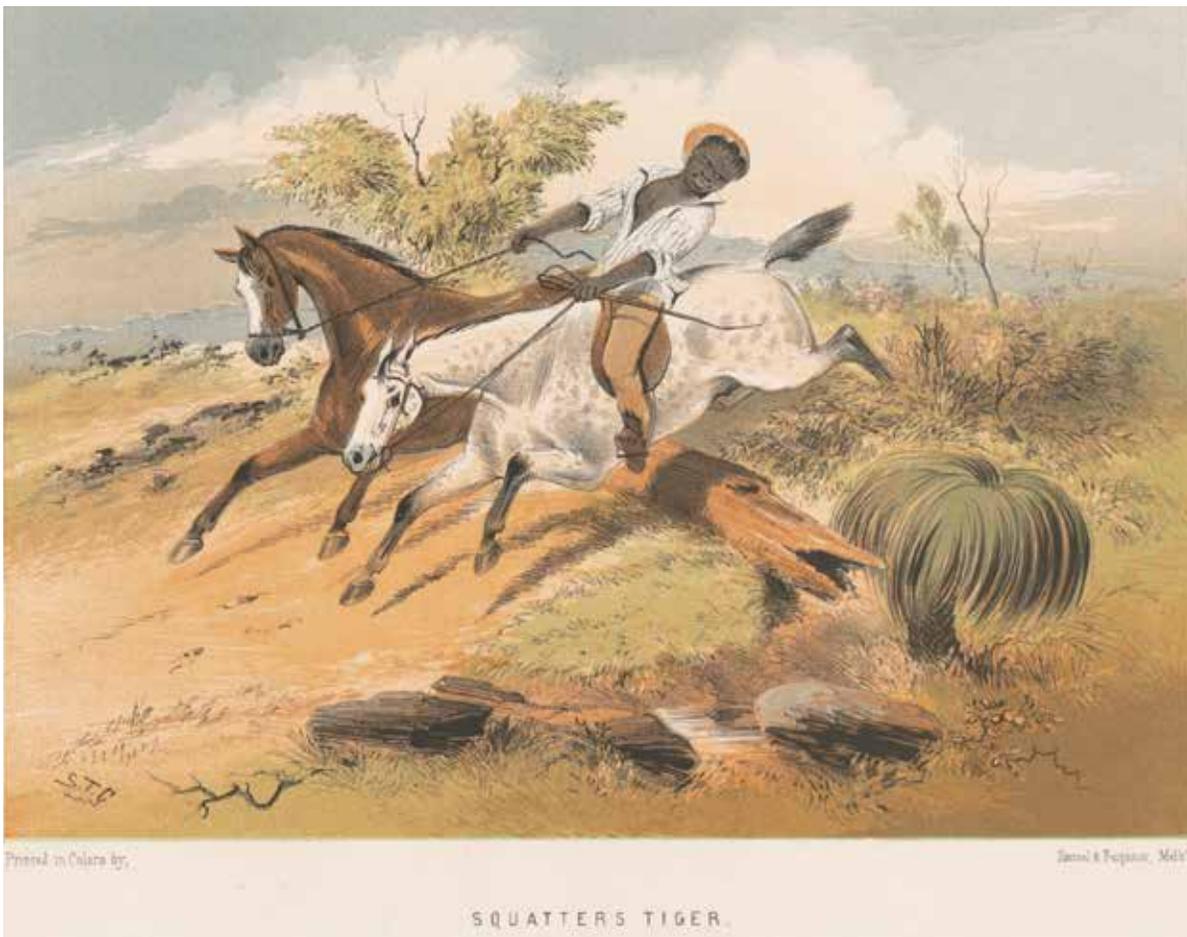
they will not work, they call "white men fool for working, he [Aboriginal people] plenty gentlemen no work"...they can get any kind of bird or beast that you ask them for white money [gold or silver, not copper].¹⁹²

Kinnear Swanston, a young man on the frontier wrote to his father with a picture of the Wadawurrung as he met them.

Native Creek [c.1845] My dear papa-William has just started for Geelong, so I am here all alone ... I have just been looking at the native Boys playing at a game. They first cut two or three pieces of round Bark out of a gum tree with their tomahawks, and they cut them remarkably round too. One of them then catches hold of one of the pieces with the thumb out side, and rolls it about

100 yds at one throw. The others then, while it is rolling, fling at it with their tomahawks and a piece of wood with a knob at one end, or else, spear it, and they fling with such precision that they invariably hit it. There is a Black over here, called King William, he is the chief of the Barabool tribe, he told me he was king, and that they were all his Black fellows & that he never smoked or worked but only walked about; the other natives do not pay him any more respect than if he was a common Blackfellow. They obey him in war and at the corroborees; Jack that was over at Newtown is his brother and he always begins to laugh when I tell him he will be King Jack when the other King dies...

Native Creek Sept. 29th 1845. I have 5 blacks stopping with me, Grimy of course is one of them, he says he will always live with me and be my Tiger, they went to try & sleep in the mens hut the other night, it being very cold, but could not manage it on account of the fleas they say. "Borack quanbie longa hut any more too much flea quambie longa white fellow: which means that they wont sleep in the hut any more for there are too many fleas amongst the white fellows, and it is a curious fact that the fleas will not stop with or in fact even go amongst the blacks. I don't know whether it is so in all countries where there are any Blacks and some of the tribes will even pick the fleas of the Blankets hanging out to dry and eat them more especially the women, & even the ants don't seem to trouble them at all for they are always climbing trees, and will squatt down amongst or rather close by a nest of them. I went the other day to where they had pitched their maimais [Wadawurrung huts] and the ants stung both me & my horse & a Blackfellow just picked them off me and popped them in the fire as if they were nothing there is a species of white ant here that they eat before they are full grown they get them in hundreds and put them into a piece of bark with some ashes & shake them up till they get them clean again. When they peel away it looks just like rice that they are eating & I dare say it is quite as good.¹⁹³



Gill, Samuel, c.1864, *Squatters Tiger*, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-139535865.

Many squatters learnt that most Wadawurrung people who worked on the sheep and cattle stations did not view themselves as station workers under the yoke of the squatter. The Wadawurrung were regularly working on sheep stations in order to gain or maintain social and political influence with the squatters. Mrs Linton, whose family had stolen Wadawurrung land for their sheep station near present day Linton in central Victoria, told GA Robinson (the Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1839-1850) an important Wadawurrung clan head had insisted on working at their station because his honour and reputation was wrongly vilified and he desired to rectify the situation.

The chief of the Bare.re.bare.re bulluc is a shrewd and sensible man; Mr Linton however complained that he was passionate and that his wives stole things from their garden. Mrs Linton said that on one occasion when Mr. Linton was at Corio, Jem Crow [Wanghonebeet] came down with a spear and was going to the garden; she opposed herself to him and he got into a rage and beat the ground with a stick... She gave him hard work to do, falling or grubbing trees, and the man did it cheerfully and was satisfied with what he got [rations]. It seems this was all he wanted, he had been prohibited working at the station on account of his wives stealing the vegetables and he thought it hard that he should be an outcast especially as he had chastised his wives for the offence.¹⁹⁴

ES Parker, one of the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, also reflected on the different legal views the Kulin people had about theft after a conversation regarding what the white colonists regarded as their complicity in the theft of some sheep by Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung people in April 1842 from a sheep station in the Marrabool area. Parker recorded that one of those who had informed him of the theft by the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung had seen

The black Weembourin bring a sheep to the camp – he was himself very hungry, and he went up to the thief and told him if he did not give him “a big piece” he would “tell Mr Parker”. He obtained a leg of the sheep... That it was wrong to steal [sheep] he and others appeared fully convinced – but to participate in the plunder when obtained they did not seem to imagine was at all wrong, and they were quite indignant when I classed them with the thieves.¹⁹⁵

CHAPTER 6: WORK ON THE FRONTIER

From the colonists perspective the Wadawurrung were in the main eager to assume the role of cultural intermediaries or 'guide' in the early period of the invasion. A guide's role encompassed determining the most direct and easily traversable route (often along traditional pathways) and locating food, medicine and water in order to sustain their white companions.¹⁹⁶ The guides also expertly assisted the colonists in fording rivers safely, preparing temporary shelters, acting as interpreters and diplomats negotiating passage through the country of resident clans met on the line of march, locating waterholes for the colonialist's stock and detecting bushrangers.¹⁹⁷ Historian Henry Reynold's research into Aboriginal people's contribution to the colonial economy throughout Australia, confirms the argument that Wadawurrung guides, as elsewhere in Australia, smoothed many of the British colonialists' potentially calamitous moments. GA Robinson, (the Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District 1838-1850) for instance noted his admiration of his Wadawurrung guides: 'Arrived at Mr Linton's [central Victoria]; it was astonishing with what precision the natives guided me through this country'. It is clear that while some Aboriginal guides were contracted to guide, others spontaneously took on the role when seeing the plight of a colonist. Historians such as Clark and Broome also suggest that a significant number of Aboriginal people in the Port Phillip District were the initiators of work relationships. Broome contends that Aboriginal people in the Port Phillip District, including the Wadawurrung, keenly brokered working relationships and actively laboured alongside colonists.¹⁹⁸ Other historians have noted that the rationale for Aboriginal people to take on the role of guide and then of cattle or sheep station workers was complex and that clearly many took on the role spontaneously out of a sense of sheer enjoyment they derived from walking and talking their country. In addition, they ruled supreme and there was a natural incentive for Aboriginal people to feel empowered in their superiority over the clumsy and inept colonisers. Many Wadawurrung people it seems sought to find their niche in the newly imposed colonial economy. Colonists frequently 'hired' Wadawurrung people to not only guide them but to provide a tutoring of sorts in how to survive and thrive in the bush. It is clear that the earliest form of work contracts between the Wadawurrung and the colonists was in the vital role of guide, or in today's parlance, 'expert Aboriginal consultant'.

In August 1836 six squatters guided by Buckley (Murrangurk) and probably another Wadawurrung man explored the reaches of the Barwon River with 'the intention of exploring its embouchure [mouth]'.¹⁹⁹ The enlisting of a Wadawurrung guide was a common approach by colonists seeking to take Wadawurrung land – often with a view to liaise with any Wadawurrung warriors who might resist them militarily. Thomas Learmonth, one of six squatters who embarked on an inland expedition to Victoria's Central Highlands in August 1837, recounted to Governor Joseph La Trobe, how their group had taken 'one of the Moorabool [Wadawurrung] aborigines as a guide and to interpret for them if they met blacks' on their first journey to Mt Buninyong.²⁰⁰ Due to an absence of food the party had split up and some had returned to Geelong, but Learmonth acknowledged that their Wadawurrung guide enabled the remaining colonists to continue their exploration of the region; 'till led by the native to Lake Burrumbeet, twenty miles to the northward

of Buninyong'.²⁰¹ Learmonth wrote that shortly after being guided by the Wadawurrung guide on their reconnoitre through Wadawurrung country

my brother and I removed our flocks from the Barwon River, where we originally settled, and which we already found to be too confined, and pitched our tent at our present homestead at Buninyong, and in the course of the same year (1838) extended our runs to Burrumbeet and the Maiden Hills, which we still occupy [1859].²⁰²

GA Robinson discerned from a number of squatters that it was common practice for them to be guided to their runs by Aboriginal guides. Charles Evans, a grazier near the Pentland Hills, informed Robinson how he had deliberately recruited an unidentified Wadawurrung clan to accompany him into the bush and how when 'he first arrived he got a party of natives to join him and go with him into the country. It was the natives that showed him his run'. Similarly, Pettett, an overseer for W.J Clarke related how a local Wadawurrung clan head had guided him to his run at what is now Dowling Forest in central Victoria, provided local place name knowledge and generally schooled him in bush craft:

Before Mr Pettett took up the Dowling Forest run he was living at the Little River, and a native chief named Balliang offered to show him the country about Lal Lal. The chief in speaking of it distinguished between it and the Little River by describing the water as La-al La-al - the *a* long and by gesture indicating the waterfall now so well known, the name signifying falling water.²⁰³

Charles Wedge was among the first white squatters to utilise Wathwurrung guides, writing in July 1835: 'I have acquired sufficient confidence in them to trust myself among them. I went a circuit of about 35 kilometres with them yesterday'.²⁰⁴ Wedge was unequivocal about the usefulness of having a Wadawurrung guide when searching for suitable sheep station 'runs' on Wadawurrung estates: 'The reason why we proposed taking them [Aboriginal guides] was that in the event of our provisions failing we might avail ourselves of their forest habits and skill in procuring food'.²⁰⁵ Likewise, William Todd, Wedge's associate at Indented Head in June 1835 connoted that Wedge had made use of his two Wadawurrung guides' ability to sustain him from privation: 'At about 8 o'clock in the evening Mr. Wedge and his party returned after a long and tedious journey. Dykeburry and Johnyur [Wadawurrung guides] we understand behaved remarkably well during their travels'.²⁰⁶ Station workers too actively utilised Wadawurrung guides for much the same reason as their masters. Patrick Costello, a shepherd near Mt Emu related how he took full advantage of their skills in the bush.

I asked one of the blacks if he would guide me across the hills to the home station ... To go across country the distance was only about seven miles, whereas if we took the road the distance was fifteen miles. The black fellow agreed to do so... and [we] reached the station safely.²⁰⁷

Many colonists became very dependent on their guides to save them from perishing in the bush.²⁰⁸ As noted earlier an unidentified Wadawurrung man under extraordinary circumstances guided a servant of Dr Thomson's back to her home station by constructing a stringybark canoe. GA Robinson recounted many stories of bush workers saved by Aboriginal people from being lost in the bush. In one instance, a station worker in Djabwurrung or Wadawurrung territory informed Robinson of being lost in the bush and subsequently being guided back to his destination, Mt Rouse.

A man who lost himself for five days and fell in with a large party of wild natives as they are called, who not only pitied his condition but took him to their camp, gave him food, made him a bed. And in the morning went and conducted him on his way to Mt Rouse where he was going when he was lost.²⁰⁹

Shipwreck victims along the Victorian coast too were occasionally guided to safety by coastal clans. The survivors of the *Joanna*, a vessel wrecked near Cape Otway

...fell in with a party of natives who did not however show any hostility except in asking for clothes. The shipwrecked men gave them such as they could spare, and induced one of the blacks to go with them as a guide... next day they arrived at Geelong in a state of great exhaustion.²¹⁰

Colonists occasionally recorded the chagrin they felt for forsaking the employment of Aboriginal guides. In the beginning of January 1838 the Learmonth brothers set off on a second expedition over Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung country, but on this occasion did not take a Wadawurrung guide. The brothers were to pay dearly for such an imprudent decision. After travelling north towards present day Bendigo they followed the Loddon River south and then crossed the 'Beckwith [Beckworth] Ranges where being in great distress from want of water, we passed a most uncomfortable night under the highest point of them, which we called Mt Misery'.²¹¹ The widespread employment of 'native guides' by squatters certainly indicates there was a prevailing attitude that the bush was extremely hazardous and subsequently the procurement of 'native guides' was considered by many a necessity for most white people venturing outside the limit of pastoral boundaries of what they considered their fledgling colony. Alexander Thomson, a squatter in the Geelong district considered the bush southwest of Geelong to be 'an impenetrable jungle, in which an experienced bushman would run the utmost risk of being lost, and out of which escape would be impossible'.²¹² John Hunter Kerr, an experienced bushman vividly painted the perils of the bush for all colonists in the early period of the colonial invasion. Kerr wrote of how

To be lost in the Bush in Australia is indeed a most forlorn and bewildering position, for the general absence of salient features in the landscape renders it very difficult to recover a track once lost. The alarm and perplexity natural on finding one's self in such a situation increase the danger which attends it, by frequently robbing the wanderer of the presence of mind so necessary in such an emergency. When the sun is obscured by the clouds the most experienced traveller is apt to stray, and I have often lost myself for several hours in these wide solitudes, returning repeatedly by some inexplicable tendency to the spot where I first discovered that I had lost my way.²¹³

Joseph Gellibrand, a would be squatter who landed near present day Sorrento in the height of a summer promptly discovered what Kerr had emphasised, that the bush was hazardous. He, his entire party, and all their stock very nearly perished in an area that from his own observations obviously supported a sizeable Boon Wurrung population. It is ironic that the party heavily armed 'in case of any appearance of the natives' quickly learnt to follow the Boon Wurrung's tracks which inevitably led to wells and shelter. Gellibrand's baptism by ordeal into the bush made him reluctant to travel unaccompanied by the very people that he and his men had originally armed themselves against. He had learnt his lesson and was 'very much vexed on learning that the natives, with the exception of two, had left... and would not return for some time' as he was then loathe to travel without a guide. Eventually he persuaded Buckley to be his guide on a journey through Wadawurrung land. Other squatters and their workers on Wadawurrung land likewise learnt that Wadawurrung expertise was critical to their survival. Robert Von Steiglitz, a squatter who usurped Wadawurrung land in 1836 became disoriented in his new surroundings, became lost and was rescued by Murrydeneek, a Wadawurrung Ngurengeeta (clan head) of the Yawangi clan, who acted as Steiglitz's guide.

I saw a black fellow holding up his arms and calling me to stop. I had a brace of pistols in my belt so I did... he told me I was going wrong and signed that if I went that course the horse would be bogged, so I allowed him to direct me, he walking by my side patting me on the back and I appearing pleased but very watchful of him. His name was Murrydeneek and a right good fellow he was. I knew him for years after. That day he saved me from being lost in the bush.²¹⁴

Experienced colonists too, who had spent their entire lives in the bush such as John Batman, were immediately receptive to Wadawurrung overtures to act as guides and on occasion fostered an amicable relationship.²¹⁵ James Bonwick, a contemporary of Batman for instance wrote of how Batman had 'lived much among the aborigines. As a boy he had been, as it were, brought up with them in NSW. They were his constant companions in his bush excursions as a young man...his knowledge was beyond, perhaps, any man in the country'. Even with this level of proficiency in the bush John Batman ensured that on his three exploratory trips through Wadawurrung estates in 1835 (Point Henry, Pt Addis and Lake Connewarre) he travelled *with* Wadawurrung guides, before breaking up his camp and moving to a site near the Yarra River.²¹⁶

Judging from the available ethnographic evidence a guide was traditionally a highly respectable, male-only occupation in Aboriginal communities but there is evidence that colonists commonly employed women in the role of a guide.²¹⁷ On Major Mitchell's exploratory party that visited Western Victoria in 1836, an Aboriginal woman acted as a guide. At times Mitchell claimed she proved to be a crucial member of the party and acted as conciliator when avoidance rituals forbade Mitchell's male Aboriginal guides from talking with other resident Aboriginal groups met on the march.²¹⁸ Similarly, a group of Wadawurrung women guided Batman and his party in June 1835 on Hovell's Creek to a group of men who included some of the clan heads that he would later sign a treaty.²¹⁹ The McCraes, squatters at Western Port also had two 'particular friends' among the Boon Wurrung: Betbenjee and Eliza. Eliza accompanied and guided Eliza McCrae in her forays into

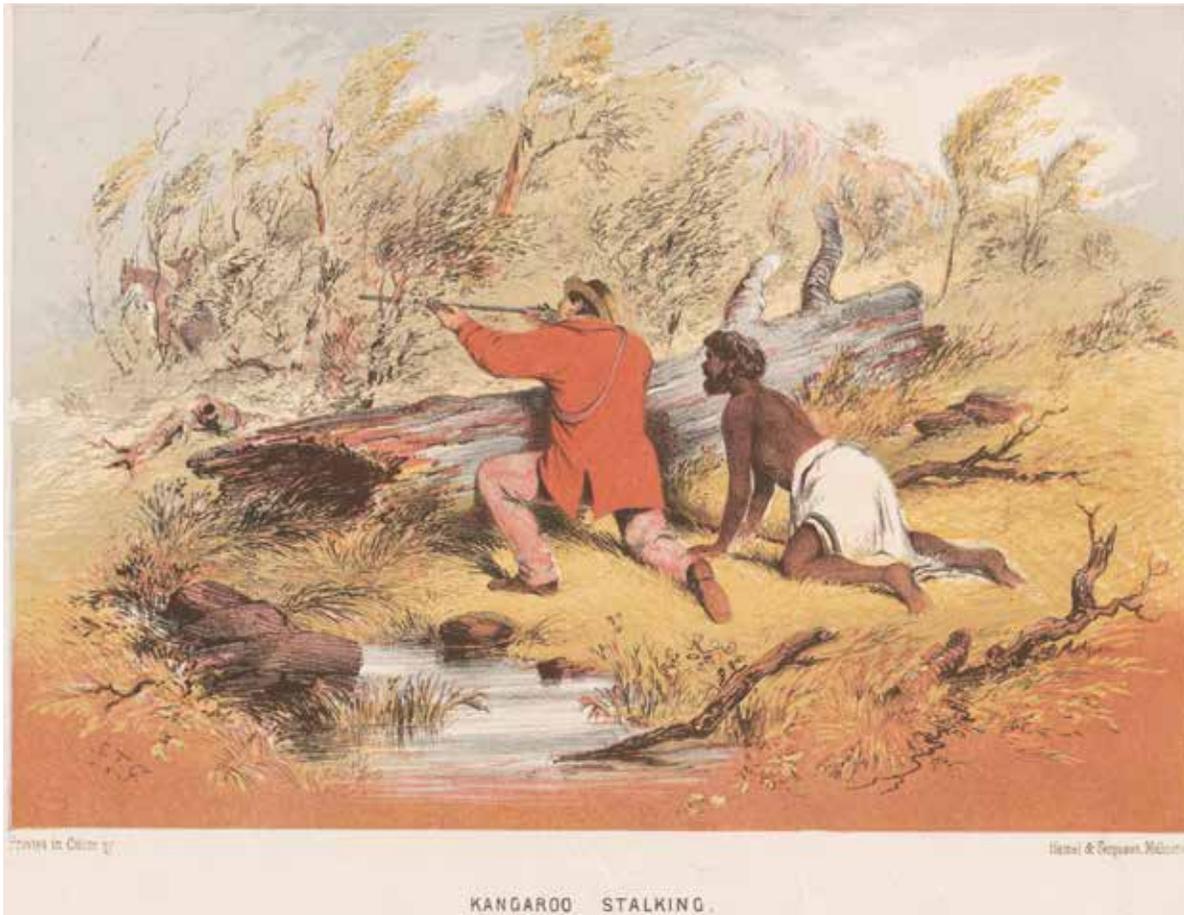
the bush with her and her children, and helped McCrae and her husband to make a serious attempt to learn the Boon Wurrung language.²²⁰ Two Wadawurrung women at Indented Head guided John Batman and Charles Wedge on hunting and surveying expeditions:

Mr Batman, Mr Wedge and two of the Sydney lubras [the three Aboriginal men from the Sydney region who accompanied John Batman's party were conferred Wadawurrung wives] gone hunting and returned with one Cangaroo... Mr Wedge, Allick and two of the Sydney lubras gone for four days surveying the land.²²¹

Katherine Kirkland at Trawalla station on Wadawurrung land in central Victoria also received tutelage in bush skills from female Wadawurrung guides. Kirkland writing of her time in the bush with Wadawurrung women in 1838 was very conversant with many Wadawurrung foods and methods of procuring them.

They are also fond of a large grub found generally in the cherry and honeysuckle tree: they can tell, by knocking the tree with a stick, if any grubs are in it. When they knock the tree, they put their ear close to listen, and they open it with a tomahawk at the very spot the grubs are to be found. It is a large white grub, with a black head. I know a gentleman who was tempted to taste them from seeing the natives enjoy them so much, and he said they were very good, and often ate them afterwards. Manna falls very abundantly from the gum-trees at certain seasons of the year, I think it was in March I gathered some. It is very good, and tastes like almond biscuits. It is only to be procured early in the morning, as it disappears soon after sunrise. We sometimes got some skins of the opossum and flying-squirrel, or tuan, from the natives. It was a good excuse for them to come to the station. I paid them with a piece of dress, and they were very fond of getting a red pocket handkerchief to tie round their necks.²²²

Kirkland was tutored in which bush foods were safe to eat. Kirkland also appreciated, and noted, how she had been present when Wadawurrung women went digging for 'maranong' (a root found in the ground; it is white and shaped like a carrot, but the taste is more like a turnip' and further noted how she had 'often eaten maranong' [murnong, *Macroseris Sp.*] and many other Wadawurrung foods.



ST Gill, c.1864, *Kangaroo Stalking*, National Library of Australia, PIC VOLUME 534 #U2850 NK2489/3

Many other squatters also made extensive use of Wadawurrung guides to obtain much sought after variation in the colonial diet and to acquire skills useful to their comfort in the bush. Kulin guides were renowned for training up white people. Henry Meyricks on the Mornington Peninsula described how he 'took every opportunity to be hunting for kangaroos' with the Boon Wurrung and how they instructed him in the 'building of shelters'.²²³ Likewise, Andrew McCrae also took advantage of the Kulin skills. He wrote in 1840 'The boys were useful in managing cattle and going messages, as well as serving as guides and instructors on hunting trips'.²²⁴ An overlander near Melbourne in 1838 had 'three natives who supplied him with kangaroos and wild geese' when at the time his party was subsisting only on damper and tea.²²⁵ One colonial writer at Queenscliff commented glowingly of the bounty that the Wadawurrung procured with ease – an observation mirrored by many observers.

When they went fishing, the black fellow would walk in the water up to his waist with his spear in position, ready for striking. The other black that did all the navigating was on the top of the Cliff by the Lighthouse. When he saw the fish he would call out to his mate in the water, who at once would strike with his spear and very rarely miss the fish. When they fancied shellfish, they would go out on the reef, below the Lighthouse, dive under the shelving ledge of rocks, and bring up a crayfish in each hand.²²⁶

The same writer quipped later that an exchange trade existed which suited both parties admirably.

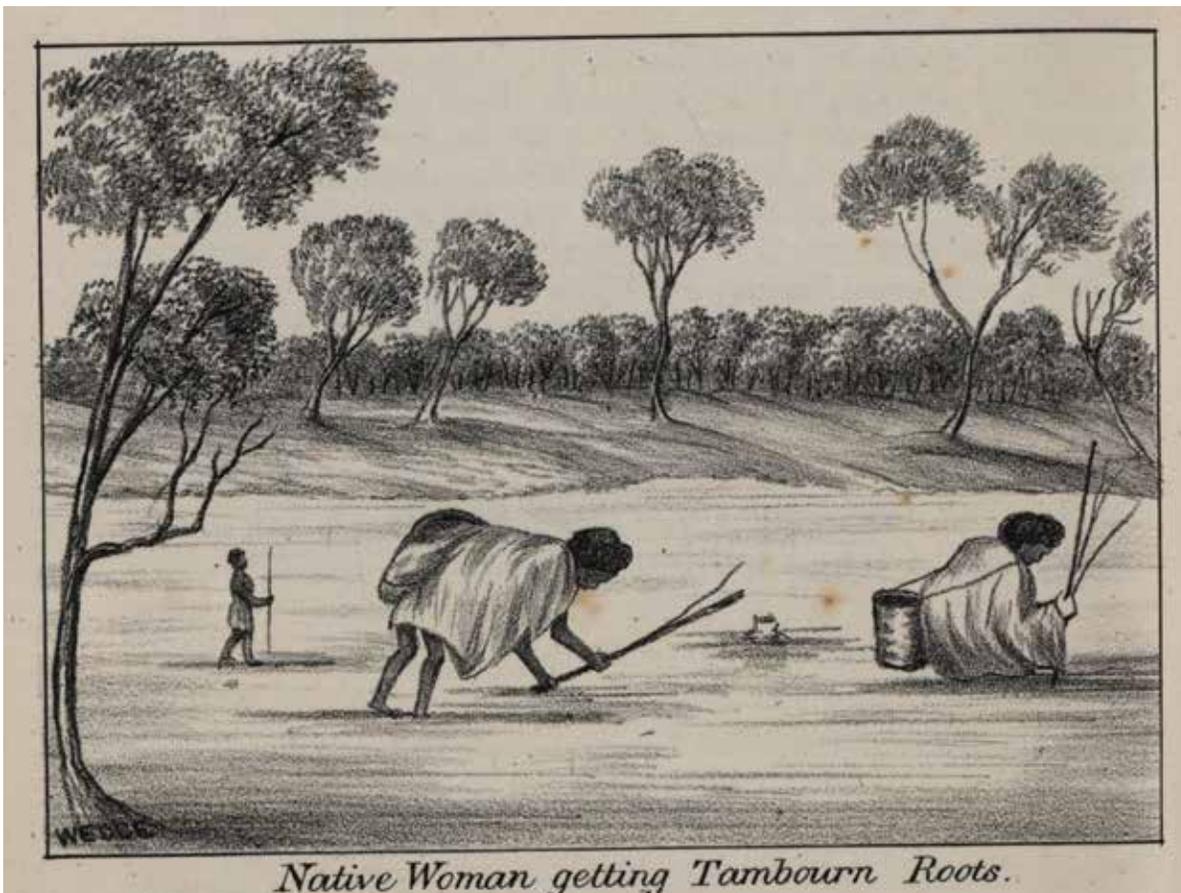
After paying us a few visits we found them trustworthy; we would lend them our guns, supply them with ammunition, and they would return with a good supply of wild ducks and other game. They also speared butterfish and crayfish, and we would give them goods in return.²²⁷

Anne Drysdale, a squatter who took Wadawurrung land at Boronggoop in the 1840s remarked in her diary 'today we had fish caught by the natives, who get great quantities in the river beside us'. Similarly, both Todd and Wedge recorded the wide variety of foods enjoyed by the white colonists at Indented Head in 1835 and stated that his party was dependent on the traditional food that their Wadawurrung guides procured for their survival.

Nine natives of the [Wadawurrung] mob that left us, have returned to us again. Some hands gone Cangarooing [kangarooing] and some fishing, returned home with a few fish but no Cangaroo.

Sunday August 3rd. Two hands gone Cangarooing, four gone fishing and mussel gathering. Boiled the last of our pork. We are now without flour or meat. Returned home with 4 flatheads [fish] but no Cangaroo. We have commenced eating roots [probably murnong], the same as the natives do.²²⁸

Likewise, David Wilson, a squatter who had occupied Wadawurrung land on the upper reaches of the Werribee River described the paucity of a white's diet that actively chose to shun the employment of Wadawurrung guides: 'Chops and damper, damper and chops with tea for breakfast, dinner and supper which forms all our variety for the table.'²²⁹ Some squatters such as Edward Wilson preferred not to try out the new foods offered to him. Wilson drew some images (c.1842) presumably of himself meeting with a group of Kulin people, wearing possum skin cloaks. The first image's title is 'He meets a few friends'. The second image titled 'But declines to partake of their refreshments' shows Wilson standing with a group of Aboriginal people, who have lit a fire to cook their food on. Other Aboriginal people in his drawing are gathering wood, while others, offering food to Wilson are dressed in possum skin cloaks and carry spears and a boomerang.²³⁰



John Helder Wedge, 1883, *Native Women Getting Tambourn Roots* Federation University Historical Collection, Image from Westgarth's *Port Phillip Settlement* (1883)

Some squatters occasionally clashed over their rights to claim Kulin guides as their own and tried to claim exclusivity to the trading networks of local clans.

Mr Hy [Henry] Batman sent blacks out to get parrots, got [William] Buckley to abuse William Watkins [Fawkner's servant] for buying squirrel [possum] skins for me and I found he (Batman) forbidding the natives to sell us any skins or birds. He wants them all himself. Government officials also made extensive use of guides to supplement their meagre supplies and to direct them through territory that was often unsurveyed.²³¹

Foster Fyans arrived in Geelong in September 1837 to serve as the first resident police magistrate and in 1840, he was appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Portland Bay District. Bonjon (spelt variously as Punjon or Bon Jon), one of the Wadawurrung balug clan from the Barrabool Hills near Geelong was in Fyan's employ for four years. He was often armed and effectively acted as a member of Fyan's Border Police Force, stationed on the Moorabool River. Fyans attested that Bonjon always attended him in the bush, and was often with him for three or four months at a time visiting stations in foreign country west of Wadawurrung territory.²³² Surveyor, C.J Tyers also made use of Wadawurrung guides on his surveying expedition of the road from Geelong to Portland

in 1839-40. Tyers wrote on 19 October 1839 that Tommy, the Wadawurrung guide he had employed had negotiated his terms of employment and listed the valuable skill of being able to provide place names as one of the prime reasons for employing him.

Thus far, a native black from Geelong has accompanied us. Promises to go to Portland Bay, but I doubt if he will perform it. Obligated to let him ride the pack horse Bandy, having declined coming unless he rode. Very useful in giving us the native names of rivers and hills.²³³

On the Moorabool River Tyers 'Employed several black fellows to make a canoe for the purpose of transporting the luggage to the opposite side of the river... Baggage taken across by our men, the black fellows, and on their heads.'²³⁴ Tyers' reference to his 'Geelong black' (Tommy) appear frequently in his diary. Apart from providing names of the topographical features of the land they passed through, Tommy also led Tyers to fresh water on numerous occasions, hunted emus for the party and directed Tyers along the easiest route to prominent hills. Tyers also sought Wadawurrung informants as he travelled and 'learnt from a native named Billy the native names of hills, rivers and lakes' and their sources.²³⁵ Similarly, newspaper reports noted how two exploration parties, equipped with unidentified Wadawurrung guides set out from Geelong in May 1846 in the direction of Cape Otway to 'make a complete survey, both geographical and hydrographical of all creeks, inlets and other natural features of the intervening country.'²³⁶ The Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Geelong District, Charles Sievwright considered the use of Wadawurrung guides to government and private parties to have been indispensable – and articulated why this was so.

Where from the state of the roads and rivers, I got them [Wadawurrung guides] to render, essential service to settlers and travellers, whose provisions must have been lost, and progress stopped but for their timely aid. The servants of Mr. Murray at Colac, and the Surveyors who were proceeding to Portland Bay, can bear testimony to the skill and safety with which their provisions and equipment were transported across the Nar-ra-hil [Moorabool River], in a bark canoe, when without such assistance they must have remained some weeks upon its banks ere the river subsided.²³⁷

Other colonists such as Mrs Hill who lived near Geelong came to depend upon the Wadawurrung canoes and their waterguides to 'cross the Barwon.'²³⁸ Likewise, George Russell explained how he and his party became very dependent on his Wadawurrung guides prowess in handling canoes when travelling through the bush.

We left for Mr. Roadknight's station on the Barwon River, about three or four miles from Cowie & Stead's. We left our horses on the north side of the Barwon and were put across the river in one of the natives' canoes, which consisted of a sheet of bark bent upwards at one end and having a few tussocks of grass with their roots built across the other end to keep the water out. Only two persons could get into the canoe at one time, and they dare not stand upright for fear of upsetting it.²³⁹

William Kyle, a squatter at Western Port, described how Boon Wurrung guides had facilitated his bush skills: 'in my intercourse with the blacks, I learned a great deal of bush craft that was useful to me'.²⁴⁰ Kerr who stole land in northern Victoria echoed this sentiment: 'As I was always on very friendly terms with my sable neighbours, I was often one of their party on their hunting expeditions, and was greatly interested in watching the patient and cat-like cunning with which they tracked and finally captured their game'.²⁴¹ George McCrae, a pastoralist squatting on Boon Wurrung land near Mornington, likewise wrote; 'They not only guided us accurately, but taught us many lessons in bush craft, and in the mode of approaching game, which perhaps we should never have picked up otherwise'.²⁴² It is evident that Kyle's, Kerr's and McCrae's apprenticeship was widespread however the usefulness of Aboriginal guides declined from a white perspective, though not completely, when it became apparent to colonists that a guide's knowledge was negligible when outside their filial boundaries. Henry Smythe, the leader of a rescue expedition in June 1838, searched for two colonists who had disappeared near present day Mt Derrinallum. Smythe employed Jack, a Wadawurrung man to be their guide and upon approaching present day Mt Derrinallum, Smythe: 'Informed the native that as we were now going into an unknown country he was to have sole guidance of the party'. Jack, however, told the disappointed Smythe 'that further than knowing the hill [Terrinallum] he was otherwise quite ignorant of the country'.²⁴³ At times the colonists used the Aboriginal people's fear of being in foreign country or 'off country' to their advantage. For instance, the surveyor Charles Tyers used his Wadawurrung guide's (Tommy) fear of being outside his country to the colonists' benefit. Tyer's surveying party in 1839 was followed by an Aboriginal party angered by the intrusion upon their lands near Mt Rouse, in the Western District of Victoria, and much to Tyers' displeasure, Tommy threatened the safety of the survey party by provoking the unknown Aboriginal party. Tyers held out to Tommy the dreaded prospect of being forced to travel through land that he was, according to Aboriginal laws, forbidden to enter. Tyers was aware the customary punishment for this would be death.²⁴⁴

Tommy, who is generally desperately frightened at these savage tribes, very improperly brandished his stick [gun] at them. We gave him a lecture upon the impropriety of his conduct and threatened to send him back to his country should he offend again. The fear of travelling alone through these tribes (hostile to his) will, I trust, induce him to be on his good Behavior.²⁴⁵

It is likely the importance of Wadawurrung guides to colonists would also have gradually waned as the dispossessors and their workers became acquainted with the topography of their chosen run. It is an irony that the bush lore taught them by the dispossessed would lead to a waning of their usefulness. By way of example Charles Griffith wrote disparagingly of two Wadawurrung guides in 1841 when he was guided to the Werribee River, whose existence Griffith was 'aware of already'.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, their valuable contribution to the sheep and cattle industry continued.

Working Relationships

In the colonial period, it was a well-known fact that a considerable number of Wadawurrung people worked alongside white squatters, at times playing a pivotal role. Foster Fyans, Police Commissioner in the Port Phillip District based at Geelong, recalled that

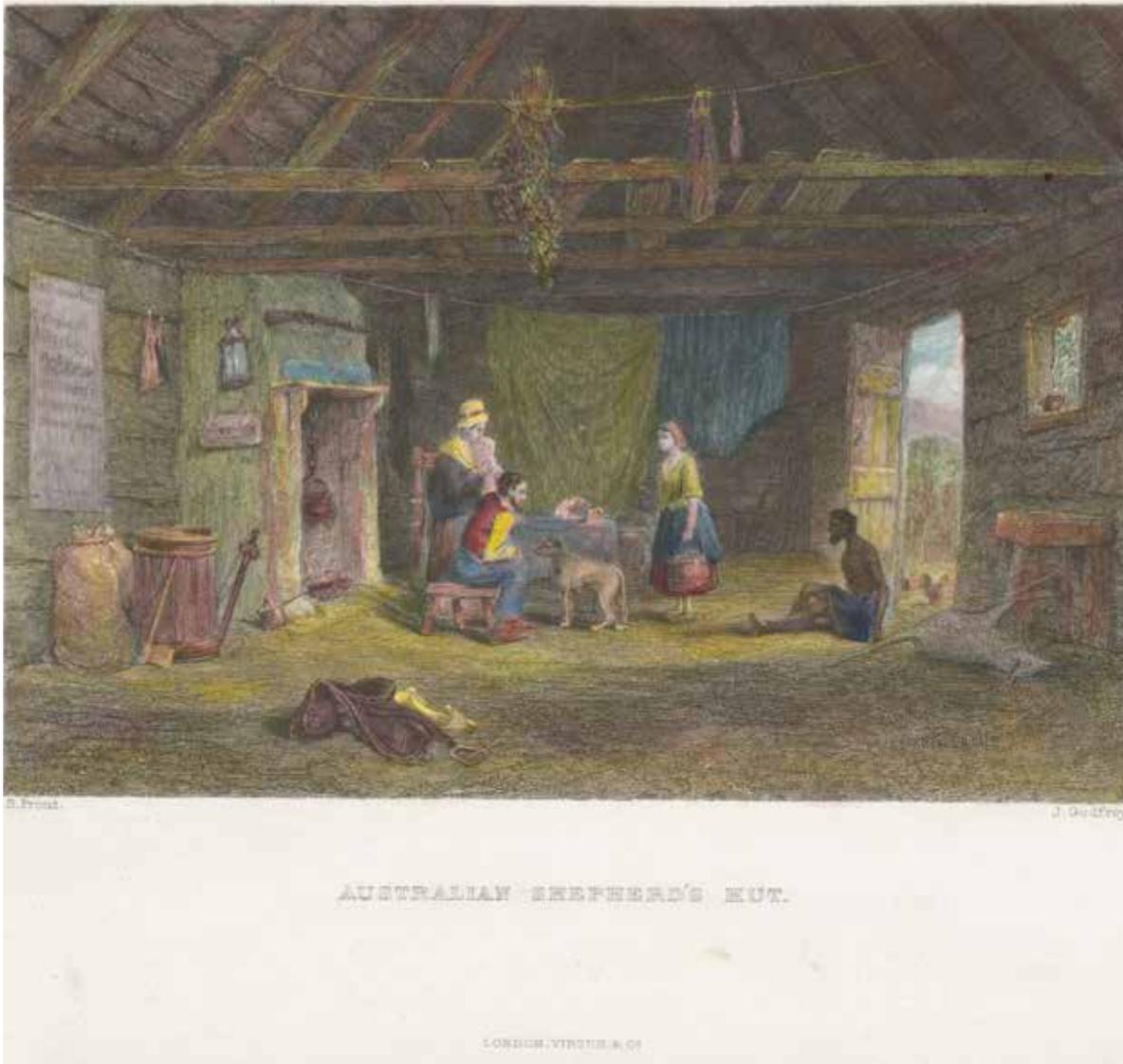
On my arrival here in 1837, I found scarcely an establishment in this neighbourhood without natives being employed thereon; many of them doing extremely well, and found useful; some acting as shepherds, and others in domestic uses; for these services they were well fed and clothed, and also well treated, and generally more kindly than the Europeans on the establishments.²⁴⁷

In the initial phase of dispossession by the colonisers as noted earlier, the work of Wadawurrung guides was deemed very significant. Some guides took on the role spontaneously - showing water on sheep stations, rescuing valuable stock, providing food, supplying tutoring in Aboriginal bio cultural knowledge, trading in precious goods and naming of features in the landscape. Ultimately, however, the role of the guide was a short lived one.

There were generally speaking three types of permanent working relationships that were established on the Wadawurrung frontier – firstly a very rare relationship that mirrors to some degree what we now term Native Title whereby Wadawurrung people remained on their clan estates and worked for the colonisers on what was ordinarily their own terms. Secondly, and much more commonly, a qualified right of access to the sheep and cattle stations where Wadawurrung people were in the main encouraged by the colonists to remain about the station and provide their labour – on the colonists terms; and thirdly a wish to exclude most Wadawurrung from the sheep stations – accompanied sometimes by a homicidal outlook. However, even in the last there was ambivalence to evict all Wadawurrung from their country, as there was a professed wish to cultivate a relationship with key Wadawurrung community members with the aim of gaining both valuable biocultural knowledge and to retain highly skilled Wadawurrung workers on the stations. In general, the Wadawurrung's long-term reactions to the coloniser's desires to acquire their labour and prodigious biocultural knowledge was to provide their labour to continue to have access to land. It seems clear that the Wadawurrung also supplied their labour in order to avoid a massacre of their people and to retain access to goods. By fostering work relationships with squatters who held leases on their clan's estates – and subsequently being indispensable workers whose intimate knowledge of the land was seen as invaluable to the colonist's economy– the Wadawurrung could negotiate some accommodation and teach the colonists about their cultural and legal perspectives. There was an underlying degree of contempt for the colonists whilst others involved the colonists in their kinship rituals.

Thomas Baillie (sometimes spelt Bayley or Baille) and James Dennistoun, squatters who occupied Wadawurrung land (Corrotenu) south of Trawalla in central Victoria in 1838 is the sole recorded example within the Wadawurrung language boundary where the resident clan was actively welcomed not only onto the pastoral lease but also into the huts of a squatter. G.A Robinson noted in his journal 8 August 1841 that a longstanding cooperative relationship between Baillie and the resident clan existed and that Baillie had allowed them uninterrupted access to his huts. Robinson wrote that '...for three years they [local Wadawurrung clan] had frequented his [Baille's] station and they had free egress to his house'. The Kirklands, Baillie's neighbours, confirm Robinson's account. Kirkland believed that the reason the Kirkland's station had so many visits from the Wadawurrung clans was due to Baillie being what she felt was too friendly with the Wadawurrung clans.

We had a good many visits from the natives lately. They were much encouraged at Mr Baillie's station, and we began to not tum them away so quickly as we used to do.²⁴⁸



Godfrey, John. c.1847, *Australian shepherds hut*, National Library of Australia, PIC VOLUME 17A #U263 NK2458/65

Note the relaxed intermingling of colonists and Aboriginal person – with a kangaroo carcass, presumably for barter exchange.

The Kirklands later thought better of Baillie being so accommodating when a ‘very large’ party of Wadawurrung people made themselves very much at home in the Kirkland’s hut: ‘I told them to leave the hut, but they would not, and one, a very tall fellow, took the liberty of sitting down beside me on the sofa’. Kirkland seems convinced that the bravado exhibited by the Wadawurrung was entirely due to Baillie allowing them free access to his station and hut.

All these natives left us before sundown, and went to Mr Bailles, where they were always allowed to remain as long as they chose. He was too kind to them, and gave them great encouragement in his own hut.²⁴⁹

Robinson listed 39 clans people (mainly Wadawurrung) who were present at Baillie's station when he visited on 7 August 1841. Moreover, Robinson noted the Wadawurrung sought work from Baillie and traded extensively with him.

The blacks at Bailles do regular work, they get no reward unless they give an equivalent - skins, baskets and other articles of native manufacture and other labour.²⁵⁰

Baillie's approach, judging from existing records, appears to have been very unusual. However, a considerable number of squatters welcomed the Wadawurrung onto their runs, or at least allowed them access to their sheep runs, but stopped short of an 'open house' policy. John Batman's group of workers who had established themselves at Indented Head found the local Wadawurrung clans to be friendly but too inquisitive for their liking. William Todd, the leader of their group wrote with a hint of annoyance that the 'natives [are] still with us. Find very difficult to get them to leave us.'²⁵¹ Todd did not allow the large groups of Wadawurrung to have access to the colonists' huts but did not attempt to drive them off their estate at any time. Moreover, Todd stated that he employed Wadawurrung men to go fishing in their whale boat and recruited Wadawurrung women to assist them in planting a crop of wheat: 'lubras [Aboriginal women] employed breaking up a piece of ground to sow wheat'. Squatters such as John Currie who took land (Larra sheep station) near Derrinallum, the southwestern edge of Wadawurrung country, implied in a speech that he made in 1894 that inter-cultural relationships at Larra in 1844 were somewhat amicable. Currie spoke of his familiarity with some of the local clan's place names and important economic sites, which is suggestive of a familiarity with Wadawurrung people.

The native name of the head of the spring is Anakie-boonnook. There was a strong tribe of natives, with some very fine men amongst them, owing I have no doubt to the abundance of food. In the swan egg season great numbers collected - the Elephant Marsh, Lagoon, Bailles Lake, Murnong Kiln Swamp, and c., were all favourite and extensive breeding places for waterfowl. The run was not named for some time after occupation by us. When this became necessary, and by official request, it was named Gelengla. This I believe, was the aboriginal name for the spring at the head of Gelengla creek now Ti-Tree. The name Larra was the native name for the locality of a spring in the horse paddock.²⁵²

Hugh Blackney, a squatter near Buninyong was comfortable for some time to have a Wadawurrung clan 'living with me at my place'. Blackney stressed that he had endeavoured to treat them well and had expended a good deal of money in accommodating them. He stated that he 'fed and treated' them as his own men until they took sheep and provisions from him.²⁵³ John Pascoe Fawkner, a landholder near Melbourne also allowed

Boon Wurrung, Woiwurrung and Wadawurrung people free access to his huts until he was warned that he and his party were to be the targets of an attack by the 'Barrabool and Goulburn blacks' on two occasions. Fawkner was not deterred by these threats and continued to regularly employ two Wadawurrung clan heads; Baitbainger and Ballyan and two other Kulin clan heads, Derrimut and Benbow, as labourers, guides, and hunters. Fawkner observed they 'worked well' at fencing, obtaining bark, guiding the colonists to water, warping Fawkner's vessel up the Yarra River, building huts, acting as messengers as well as providing fish, birds and large game. In return for their labouring Fawkner cooked food for them, supplied them with fishing lines, knives, guns, ammunition and clothes. It is also clear Fawkner allowed the local Kulin free access to his hut and property and traded extensively with Kulin family groups.

About 20 blacks here now... more blacks came in... About 30 blacks about this settlement...A number of blacks came in this day and their wives, got 3 kangaroo from them and two fine baskets.²⁵⁴

A report in a Tasmanian newspaper, *Bent's News*, in September 1836 described how Fawkner also cultivated his work relationship with Baitbainger and Derrimut by supplying them with labourer's clothes and voyaging with them to Hobart.

The native from the Settlement who first visited Launceston with Mr Fawkner was so pleased with what he had seen that on his return he induced two others to visit the colony. Mr Fawkner later brought them to Hobart Town and introduced them to the Governor. They were presented with a drummer's dress- and proudly wore it...One was an athletic young man Derrahmert, the other not so active, Baitbainger. Mr Fawkner had them clothed in labourer's dress.²⁵⁵

Part of the brief of the Chief Protector of Aborigines (George Augustus Robinson) was to scrutinize the work relationship the colonists were adopting with the resident clans on the pastoral leases and so Robinson paid some detail in his journals (1840-1) to this matter. At Joseph Linton's station, 'Emu Hill', west of Smythesdale, Robinson made himself conversant with neighbouring squatters' attitudes towards the Wadawurrung, especially in terms of work and land access relations. Robinson wrote 'Linton permits the natives to be at his station and employs them; Hoyle drives them away; Gibbs have [has] them [on his sheep station]'.²⁵⁶ Robinson also attempted to corroborate what he heard from the colonists by asking any clans people he met on his travels their opinion on the same. Robinson also noted other stations where Wadawurrung (and neighbouring Kulin people at amity with the Wadawurrung) were initially welcomed and employed by squatters included: McReadies, Coghill and Birch, Hepburn, Wright and Montgomery, Kirkland, Campbell, Black and Steel, Anderson, Bacchus, Smyth, McLeod, Roadknight and Jackson.

Robinson noted how some squatters possessed a kind of paternal intimacy. The Scotts at Buninyong, Robinson noted, had employed a Wadawurrung couple, Billy Lonsdale (an adopted Anglo name) and his wife on their station but the relationship between the Scotts and the

Lonsdales' was short lived. The Scotts were appalled when Billy Lonsdale and his wife were implicated in the murder of an Aboriginal boy from Sydney. The Scott family Papers contain brief references to Wadawurrung people who were seen on their sheep station dating from 1844 to 1847 which indicate a deal of familiarity characterized by occasional work for the colonists.

George the black boy came down from Rewell [?] for 1.2 lb of tobacco for Tom, Mr Wilson's shepherd...A no. of nat.s [natives] passed up the country yesterday having dogs with them, they stopped about the public houses, and have been prowling about outstations...I gave Johnny the black a blue shirt...Johnny the black bought home the cattle...Henry the native took 20 of the rams out to Nam [Narmbool?] and Robert also went...A number of blacks passed this forenoon.²⁵⁷

Horatio Wills, a pastoralist who was squatting on neighboring Djab Wurrung land at Mt William wrote that he had made great efforts to pursue 'conciliatory measures' in his dealings with local clan owners. Moreover, Wills also felt that the local clans were entitled to range in their country unmolested by the white interlopers. This view becomes evident in a letter Wills wrote to Governor La Trobe in March 1842 in which he exclaimed 'Now as I have frequently at the hazard of my own life, used means to effect a good understanding with the natives in my immediate vicinity... I am willing to concede the right of their hunting grounds to the original possessors and at my place for some considerable time back has been a general rendezvous for them.'²⁵⁸ However, Wills' statement about being conciliatory towards the Aboriginal people on his property clashes with evidence given to Robinson in July 1841. Robinson noted that an unidentified Aboriginal had said that Wills as well as others 'shot natives, plenty...'²⁵⁹

An interesting case study of frontier labour and racial relations on Wadawurrung country is available via Katherine Kirkland's recount of her time as a squatter at Port Phillip.²⁶⁰ Kirkland (nee Hamilton) was born in Glasgow, Scotland and sailed for Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and then Port Phillip (Victoria) in 1838/9. Kirkland's impressions of the journey to her new home and of her two years of life at Trawalla (w. of Ballarat) are recorded in the tract 'Life in the Bush'. The publication is important because it gives the woman's angle on the social life of the rural community of the 1830s – on Wadawurrung country. It also highlights some semblance of Wadawurrung perspectives on the new comers occupying their clan estates and an insight into early frontier relations from a female perspective. It is notable that in many reminiscences of frontier life by squatters, including Kirkland, there is a discernible pattern in how relations with Aboriginal peoples are presented to the reader. Initially there is often a portrayal of Aboriginal people as an omnipresent force that threatens the survival of the 'settler'. Kirkland's reminiscences are no exception. The early entries of Kirkland's account are populated with mental perceptions of being slaughtered by the 'savage aborigine'. Kirkland wrote with great trepidation at first, 'I kept looking around, expecting every moment to see some of the dreaded savages rushing upon us'. Near Geelong Kirkland further noted that

we saw some of the natives; they are very ugly and dirty. Some of them wore skins sewed together, and thrown over their shoulders; a few of them had some old clothes given them by the settlers; and some were naked. They kept peeping in at the windows to see us, and were always hanging about the huts.²⁶¹

Many squatters reportage on Aboriginal people changed swiftly from one of vexed and fearful undertones to hues that are more quixotic once they headed out of the towns and travelled into the bush. Kirkland for instance noted how instead of dreading the presence of Wadawurrung people, that she now considered the 'occasional adventures with the savage aborigines streak the homeliness of the picture with something like the hues of romance'.²⁶² Indeed, it is noticeable that Kirkland who had initially decried the Wadawurrung as 'filthy savages' later mimicked their method of tending to her baby child by placing him 'in a basket and hung him at my side, as I had seen the native women do'. Further, Kirkland learnt from them how to gather the bountiful bush foods and acquired some knowledge of the Wadawurrung language and their creation stories.²⁶³ Similarly, Andrew Russell, a squatter travelling through the Werribee plains region spoke highly of the tasteful designs that the Wadawurrung imbued in the skin rugs they manufactured – and sold to the white colonisers. Russell also noted how the closeness of the contact between the colonisers and the colonized on the sheep station frontier had resulted in the adoption of Indigenous motifs into their fashion tastes - and Indigenous culinary elements into the colonial cuisine.

The kangaroo is of so many species, that much taste is often shewn in sewing these skins together for rugs; with the many different colours and sizes, they form some good designs. I got one such made up, consisting of many sorts, having the opossum and native cat skins as borders. This latter animal is not quite so plentiful as the others, and therefore more prized. It has various shades, but generally of a dark colour with white spots. Those of a superior kind are worn by ladies as tippets, boas, &c. The rugs are much used by travellers in the bush, suiting, from their warmth and softness, the purpose of mattress and cover at the same time, as I have experienced in the chill of night. The hind quarters only of the kangaroo are used by Europeans. These are cooked in many ways, chops, steaks, or soups, quite an Apician morsel.²⁶⁴

Often the early accounts by squatters bent on usurping Aboriginal lands and acquiring Aboriginal people as workers on their sheep stations are also distinguished by their being summoned to observe the Aboriginal corroboree. George Russell's lengthy description of a corroboree he witnessed in Melbourne, which probably included Wadawurrung performers, is typical.

While we were stopping at Melbourne on this occasion there was a large gathering of natives, several tribes from the neighbouring districts having collected at Melbourne. They had a large camp on the low ground between Elizabeth Street and Swanston Street, which, at that time was all unoccupied. We were informed one evening that there was to be a grand corroboree at the natives' camping ground. We all went out to see it. It was the largest and most important corroboree that I have seen. About 300 natives were present, and I was very much interested in looking on at their dances and the different manoeuvres which they went through. A tall stately looking black fellow in middle life acted as master of ceremonies and directed the various movements, the whole of the dancers apparently being completely under his control. A large camp fire was made, and the light boughs or tops of trees were thrown upon it at intervals, giving out a great deal of flame and

lighting up the camp so that everything was seen almost as well as in daylight. The women of the tribes sat round the fire and acted as the musicians of the party. They sang a low monotonous tune, keeping time by beating their hands on a kangaroo or opossum rug and clicking two sticks together. The young men and boys of the tribes were the principal actors in the scene. Their bodies were all painted with white streaks for the occasion. The dancers had bunches of the small branches of the gum tree, with the leaves on, tied round their ankles. The leaves were dried over the fire, and when the men danced they made a loud rustling noise. The master of ceremonies arranged a party of dancers, probably about 50 or 60. They began their dance a considerable distance from the fire; they were arranged in a long row, about three or four deep. The dance consisted chiefly in their making short leaps forward and quivering their limbs in a way peculiar to the native dances. As they became excited they rushed in one before the other, gradually approaching nearer the fire, each man having a stick in each hand which he beat one against the other, keeping time to the music as they rushed forward and got nearer the fire, stamping the ground and shouting with excitement, until a signal given by the old man they all gave a loud shout and retired. In a short time the master of ceremonies, who walked about in a very dignified way, was seen in the distance mustering another party, when the same thing was repeated. The whole scene was very striking and interesting and gave a true picture of savages' life. Captain Wood however, soon got tired of it, and could not refrain from looking on and studying the countenances of the people around. He said he had never seen so many cut throat-looking fellows before in his life, and seemed quite impatient to get away from them.²⁶⁵

So magnetic was the attraction of the corroboree for the Kirklands that Katherine and her family and servants ventured in the unknown dark bush into an Aboriginal domain that only the previous day Katherine had expressed deep fear and repugnance for – purposefully to witness a Wadawurrung performance. Kirkland described how their party had made it their point – almost as if summoned – to ‘see a meeting of the natives, or a corobery, as they call it’ and noted also the great anticipation the Wadawurrung had to witness how the white people ‘corroberied’.²⁶⁶ Historians Cahir and Clark argue that this ‘anticipation’ was, judging from the ethnographic records, an expectation of formal reciprocal obligations being entered into by Kirklands party and the Wadawurrung.²⁶⁷ Kirkland records what is perhaps the first recorded instance of white people paying ‘white money’ (gold coins, not copper) to Victorian Aboriginal performers – an action that was probably seen as a symbolic way for these foreign people to gain rights to territorial resources and to travel through Wadawurrung lands. Kirkland wrote:

In the evening we went to see a meeting of the natives, or a corobery, as they call it. About a hundred natives were assembled. They had about twenty large fires lighted, around which were seated the women and children. The men had painted themselves, according to their own fancy, with red and white earth. They had bones, and bits of stones, and emu's feathers, tied on their hair, and branches of trees tied on their ankles, which made a rushing noise when they danced. Their appearance was very wild, and when they danced, their gestures and attitudes were equally so. One old man stood before the dancers, and kept repeating some words very fast in a kind of time, whilst he beat together two sticks. The women never dance; their employment is to keep the fires burning bright; and some of them were beating

sticks, and declaiming in concert with the old man. The natives, when done with their corobery, were very anxious that we white people would show them how we corobeyed; so we persuaded Mr Yuille to dance for them, which he did, and also recited a piece of poetry, using a great many gestures. The natives watched him most attentively, and seemed highly pleased. After giving the natives some white [gold not copper coins] money, and bidding them good night, we returned to Mr Russell's hut.²⁶⁸



Gill, Samuel Thomas, ca 1850, *A Native Corroboree at Night*, National Library of Australia, PIC SOLANDER BOX C19 #PIC/T1307 NK2124. Note the white spectators taking in the spectacle of the corroboree in the foreground.

Kirkland in an unpublished account of the same event noted that ‘while they [Wadawurrung] were going through their strange antics a tall handsome young man [William Yuille] jumped into their midst ... He let out a wild shriek and then began to dance a fierce [Scottish] highland fling. The blacks stopped and looked on half frightened and half amused. When he had finished he let out a tremendous highland war cry.’²⁶⁹ It is interesting that the Kirkland’s enjoyed considerably better frontier relationships with the Wadawurrung than their neighbours. Kirkland in fact complained about Wadawurrung people subsequently making themselves conspicuously welcome into her house, lounging on her couch with an air of familiarity and suggestive of a family member who had rights to free egress. The Wadawurrung visitors to Kirkland’s hut suggested that she was a kinsperson – and shared some of their spiritual beliefs with her about where they thought white people came from.

We were visited one day by a very large party of natives; I am sure there were a hundred of them. I happened to be alone in the hut. Some of the men came into it,

and examined all they saw very attentively, especially the pictures we had hanging on the walls. They were much taken with a likeness of my mother, and laughed heartily at some black profiles; they said “they were black leubras.” I told them to leave the hut, but they would not; and one, a very tall fellow, took the liberty of sitting down beside me on the sofa. I did not much like being alone with these gentry, so I rose to go to the door to call some one, but my tall friend took hold of my arm and made me sit down again; on which I cried out sufficiently loud to alarm my husband, who was building a hut behind. He came in and turned them all out; but they still kept hanging about the station for some time... The natives have some strange ideas of death; they think when they die, they go to Van Diemen’s Land, and come back white fellows. I know a young man who receives many a maternal embrace from an old black woman. She fancies he is her son, who died some time before; she saw him come back, and she calls him always by her son’s name.

Likewise, Charles Griffith, a squatter at Bacchus Marsh expressed surprise about the nonchalant manner of the Wadawurrung when entering his hut and like Katherine, he too had learnt the Wadawurrung thought ‘white people were the spirits of the black men who had come back here after death.’²⁷⁰

Early colonists, unaware that Aboriginal people were usually fluent in several dialects or languages, often commented on how accurately they repeated English words and phrases at first hearing. Katherine Kirkland, like many colonial observers, was appreciative of how keenly and quickly the Wadawurrung acquired proficiency in speaking English and the Wadawurrung’s penchant for the material culture of the new people – including doting on the white children.

Numbers of natives came this forenoon to see us. They examined my dress very attentively, and asked the name of everything, which they tried to repeat after me. They were much amused with my little Agnes [Kirkland’s infant daughter], and she was as much pleased with them... Whenever Agnes spoke, they all laughed aloud, and tried to imitate her voice; and that piccaninny dress was well examined. I put a little nightcap on a native baby, with which its mother was much pleased, and many a little black head was thrust out for one.²⁷¹

G. S. Lang, a Scot like the Kirklands who had also squatted on Wadawurrung land in 1845 at ‘Narmbool’, near Buninyong in central Victoria also marvelled on how Aboriginal people rapidly and seamlessly intermixed the two cultures. Lang wrote at length about a disquieting corroboree and signaled his unsettledness with the candour of the Aboriginal performance, which illustrated the colonial occupation story from the other side of the frontier in three acts. The first act of the corroboree was a representation of a herd of cattle, the second act was the acting out of a party of Aboriginal warriors stalking and spearing of cattle, which Lang observed, was ‘to the intense delight of the black spectators, who applauded rapturously’. The third scene depicted ‘manufactured whites’ on horseback, ‘remarkably well got up’, authentically painted to depict the clothes of local white stockmen. The corroboree participants then acted out the terrifying historical scene of ‘white men bit[ing] the cartridges, put on the [firing] caps, and went through all the forms of loading, firing, wheeling their horses, assisting each other,

&c, with an exactness which proved personal observation.' Lang conceals but concedes that he had personally witnessed this theatrical scene of a frontier massacre for real and alludes that he had in fact been part of or had 'personal knowledge' of such a group of white men galloping through an Aboriginal camp determinedly murdering Aboriginal people indiscriminately. For the Aboriginal spectator too there was a distinct sense of cathartic revenge occurring, which troubled Lang: 'The native spectators groaned whenever a blackfellow fell, but cheered lustily when a white bit the dust; and at length ... the whites were ignominiously driven from the field, amidst the frantic delight of the natives.'²⁷² The colonial observer on this occasion immediately appreciated that the performance he witnessed, although grafted on to traditional dance and song forms, was not a mere repetition, but a unique fusion, or what historian Paul Carter calls 'a unique rewriting' of these theatrical forms specially designed for the occasion.²⁷³

Many colonial writers noted the political nature of corroborees – and that the corroboree was used as a peace making ceremony between Aboriginal peoples. By way of example William Todd at Indented Head in June 1835 noted the frequency of the Wadawurrung ceremonies where dancing and singing continued throughout the night. Todd became increasingly aware that the Wadawurrung clans were performing their ceremonies not simply as a form of entertainment, as was often thought by colonists, but seemingly as a political introduction to the newcomers who included non-Aboriginal and foreign Aboriginal people (5 Aboriginal men from the Sydney region were with Todd's party). Performance historian Marie Casey has considered how corroborees for social occasions were usually created around topical themes, events and observations and that these types of corroborees were in the main 'performed for intra- and intercommunity gatherings.'²⁷⁴ Todd wrote of how 'highly pleased' the Wadawurrung were to see 'Pidgeon etc' (the five Aboriginal men from the Sydney region who had accompanied Todd) and further noted the Wadawurrung's joy was 'beyond anything when they saw them Corrobboring.' Later Todd reiterated how the Wadawurrung 'were highly pleased with the above singing and corrobboring most of the evening– remained with us all night.' The socio-political nature of the initial meetings continued over the next few weeks at Indented Head – cemented by ceremonies. Todd wrote on numerous occasions of the economic-political exchanges that occurred – in both material and non-material goods between the two groups – and the cordial working relations that the dancing and singing from both sides was affording them.

When we returned home, there was between 50 & 60 men, women and children which Momboring [Wadawurrung *Ngurungaeta*] has brought with him. Some of which belonged to the first mob you fell in with at Gellibrand Bay. They having the beads on their necks which you gave them. Jim Gum distributed the following to them, viz. 100 handkerchiefs, 30 knives, 6 tomahawks, 54 scissors, 14 shirts, being all that we were possessed [possessed?] of – NB, 5 looking glasses, 12 tin pots. They seemed highly pleased with these things – for that night Pidgeon [Sydney Aboriginal man] etc. Corrobboreed for them, which astonished them much. ..In the evening Meirri [?] danced. The King & his wife beat the drum (a kangaroo knapsack) while 16 of his men Corrobboreed, they painted themselves like Pidgeon etc does, & commenced assembling in one mob, close together. After they had consulted together for some time, they sang a song & stretched themselves in rotation on the ground, their heads being in each others laps, with their 2 hands up acting the part of a kangaroo. They then got up and acted the same as Pidgeon etc. does. After they had shook their legs awhile, they put their heads down in rotation

holding their heads down towards the ground with their hands pointed behind them & concluded at that – being well worth seeing...Still with us. Three have gone to catch a kangaroo for them. Returned with two. All very quiet & well satisfied, singing most of the evening...Pidgeon etc Cooroborreed for them which pleased them much & all retired to their huts for the night. The young [Wadawurrung] women corroborated for us, which was well worth seeing.²⁷⁵

Squatters and townfolk often experienced the advantage of receiving Aboriginal biocultural knowledge by participating in exchange protocols or by employing Aboriginal workers in the Port Phillip district. Richard Howitt and other writers noted that it was common to see the townfolk of Melbourne and Geelong employing the Wadawurrung and their neighbours to do tasks around their huts such as carting water, chopping wood, and delivering messages and as local constabulary.²⁷⁶ The Reverend Thomas Hastie, the first religious Minister at Buninyong, remembered the Wadawurrung ‘used to come to the manse for food, in return for which they would fetch or break up firewood.’²⁷⁷ Glendinning, Urquhart’s (a squatter in the Ballarat district) overseer near Mt Emu, ‘better known as Jacky Jacky, the nickname given him by the blacks’, related a story to Robinson about ‘William the Chief of this tribe’ that occurred in July 1840. William, after an altercation with Glendinning, attempted to reconcile himself with Glendinning by seeking work with some bark contractors in the area who, he believed, were working for Glendinning.

William did not come to our station again for some time and before he came here he came to some splitters in the ranges who told him I wanted some bark stripped. They gave him some rations and he went to work to strip bark believing it to be for me but the splitters sold it to another party.²⁷⁸

The appreciation of Aboriginal sheep and cattle workers was so considerable – as it had been for Aboriginal guides - that it was not uncommon for colonists to incorporate them into their extended family and to guard jealously against other colonists poaching them. This is not surprising given the advantages the Aboriginal workers had over their white counterparts. Many squatters in this period complained bitterly about their lazy white shepherds who kept their flocks penned for fear of losing them or alternatively of shepherds who consistently lost their flocks. The disappearance of sheep due to the ineptness of white shepherds financially disadvantaged many squatters.²⁷⁹ In addition, many squatters regarded the Wadawurrung’s extraordinary skills in the bush with awe. Colin Campbell, according to Katherine Kirkland (both squatters near Beaufort) had ‘a native boy with them who was famous for tracking.’ The Kirklands themselves had a permanent Wadawurrung employee, ‘whom we had determined to keep if he would remain, thinking he might be useful in finding stray cattle or sheep.’²⁸⁰ William Taylor, a squatter who took land at Mt Zero, was more effusive than Kirkland about the worth of the local clan workers when he declared:

On many of the stations their services were of great value in looking for strayed horses, and especially sheep. Several of them have shepherded for eight and ten months at a time, and were the best shepherds in the district.²⁸¹

He continued his accolades and left no doubt, as to why he believed the local clans people to be superior shepherds: 'Not being afraid of losing their flock, they allowed them to spread over a large tract of country. They were also useful in pointing out the permanent water holes.'²⁸² The ability to allow valuable stock (that were generally worth two pounds sterling each) to wander in search of good feed and water without fear of losing them was held in high esteem. E.B Addis the Crown Lands Commissioner for the County of Grant (Geelong region) informed Governor La Trobe in December 1841 that 'they are about 160 in number, that their wandering habits are as yet but little checked' and reported he found the Wadawurrung were not lacking in intellect. Addis emphasized that there 'had been no collision between them [the Barrabool] and the settlers within his district [the township of Corio]' and added that the young men from the Barrabool tribe [Wadawurrung] are 'more disposed towards making themselves useful to the settlers by riding in stray cattle and horses, cutting wood, and sometimes shepherding.'²⁸³ Robert Simson's farm diary for Carngham station, near Ballarat, for the years 1843-44, has a number of entries that relate to the Wadawurrung working on the station stripping bark, finding stray cattle, and shepherding. His diary mentions three Wadawurrung workers (Anglo names) in particular: Paddy, Cockatoo, and Tom.²⁸⁴ Similarly in the diary of William McGregor, an overseer of one of the Learmonth stations in the Buninyong district, there are several entries in his diary, relating to a Wadawurrung worker named Jackey working on the station and performing duties such as ploughing, finding lost cattle, and running errands.²⁸⁵ The pastoral Clyde Company, a joint stock concern formed in Scotland by six share holders who usurped Wadawurrung lands in central Victoria simply noted in their first ledger entry on 13 October 1838 how a Wadawurrung tracker received a generous amount of flour as a 'Reward to a Blackfellow for finding Horses.'²⁸⁶ George Russell at Golf Hill noted that he

occasionally employed some of the natives, especially boys and young men. I sometimes found them useful, but never could induce them to remain beyond a few weeks, when they became dissatisfied and generally left to join their tribe. One boy I got rather fond of. I called him Tommy, and found him generally useful.²⁸⁷

In a similar vein George Hobler, who had taken land near Bacchus Marsh wrote in his diary that 'Old Jack the Blackfellow', and his brother 'Billy', returned Hobler's flock after the sheep had strayed to where they were camped. Hobler rewarded Billy with a pair of old trousers, and gave Old Jack a supply of tobacco, flour and sugar.

Edward Curr claimed the Aboriginal stock workers from the Port Phillip District 'excelled the average stockman. He had better nerve, quicker sight and stuck closer to his saddle.'²⁸⁸ George McCrae of Arthur's Seat concurred with Curr's assessment: 'the youths always fearless riders and fond of horses made good stockkeepers.'²⁸⁹ The physical prowess of Aboriginal workers also impressed greatly squatters such as James Kirkland. He related to his sister in law the prodigious exploits of their Wadawurrung workers.

The native boy [employed as a tracker] mounted a horse, saying he would not walk a step; but as he mounted, he slipped off again, and the horse started on; the little fellow caught hold of the tail, and allowed himself to be dragged on till he got a good firm hold, and then sprung on the horses back. James said he never saw a cleverer piece of agility in a circus...

His body [a white man who had drowned] was not found for several days, although the hole was dragged with chains; but some natives were set to dive for it, and one of them brought the body up immediately...²⁹⁰



ST Gill, c. 1864, *Going to Work*, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134377067

Other squatters held a divergent point of view to that held by Baillie or Wills. A considerable number of pastoral leaseholders were of the firm opinion that as the Aboriginal people had not demonstrated that they tilled the land they had subsequently forfeited any rights to the land. Some squatters such as Robert Von Steiglitz, who had usurped Wadawurrung estates (65 km south-west of Melbourne) from June 1836, appeased his conscience about his land conquest by asserting that the Wadawurrung 'were completely harmless' and asserted that the Wadawurrung were 'well treated generally by the settlers'. Steiglitz appears callously inured to the devastation caused by the colonists land stealing juggernaut in claiming that 'their loss of hunting grounds was made up by the feed they got in exchange for skins and any trifling services they could render.'²⁹¹ Although colonists such as Learmonth, Steiglitz, Wilsone and Griffith – who had all seized Wadawurrung country - considered the Wadawurrung numerous

and sought to exclude large Wadawurrung family groups from their squatting leases, it is apparent that all four allowed select members of resident Wadawurrung clans to reside and assist on their stations. Learmonth for instance gave explicit orders to his employees that the Wadawurrung were 'on no pretext [to] be harbored about the station' after the murder of McMannis, his hutkeeper, but it is evident that select Wadawurrung individuals had access to their tribal estates and employed.²⁹² Learmonth admitted 'when [the Wadawurrung were] allowed to come near a station, the natives never injured us...' and that he had employed Wadawurrung people 'in gathering potatoes'. Similarly, Wilson, incensed by the raids made on his sheep by Wadawurrung people and the stealing 'from us of five fine ewe lambs' declared that

since then all our servants are armed and are desired to shoot anyone they see attempt it again or touch them, we are well off by many around us, soon a regular affair will settle the business and clear our part of the country of these regular cannibals [Wilson's underlining added].²⁹³

Paradoxically, within the same journal entry for September 1839, Wilson relates a conversation held with Bunjeet, a *Ngurungaeta* or Clan Leader, 'that generally lives near us' about leaving their estate for a time due to internecine conflict. Wilson described how 'the family that generally lives near us left or rather ran away, the leader Bunjeet told Mr Howe and I that it was in consequence of some of his tribe having killed three men and two lubras of the Goulburn tribe.'²⁹⁴

Steiglitz also recounted several instances of his murderous approach towards the Wadawurrung clans, Steiglitz frequently describes the Wadawurrung as 'dangerous blacks' and calmly considers a fellow colonists' (Flett) request for the 'head of the black' who had assaulted him. Steiglitz concluded his reminiscences (written in 1878) by stating: 'The Aborigines of Australia were of the lowest intelligence' and yet permitted 'well behaved' Wadawurrung clans-people such as Werryindjong to have access to their estates.²⁹⁵

We heard the loud voice of a black calling out "Werryindjong" bangake, the first his name, the last means 'me'. We knew him to be a well behaved fellow... A black had told him [Howe: Steiglitz's overseer] of an attack being planned on our station.²⁹⁶

Robinson recorded on several occasions squatters (Blackney, Ayrey and Hoyle) who claimed they had previously allowed Wadawurrung clans free access onto their stations and employed them, but did not any longer due to fear of theft or damage to stock such as Charles Griffiths, who stole Wadawurrung land near Bacchus Marsh.²⁹⁷ At first Griffith also appears to view the resident Wadawurrung clan as a benign entity and briefly noted that 'a number of natives came and settled here... they seem harmless'. Later in the same month, Griffith's journal reveals an eagerness to utilize Wadawurrung's biocultural knowledge about locating waterholes. Griffith was particularly keen to utilize the Wadawurrung's knowledge about providing and tanning skins. He wrote: 'I am at present tanning kangaroo skins, opossum skins and

touart [a Wadawurrung language name for a species of possum] skins which we got from the natives', and further noted his reliance on their skills in obtaining bark for their huts; '[Jack Mungit, a Wadawurrung Ngurungeeta] was useful to MacKenzie in getting bark to roof his hut & c. [etc]'.²⁹⁸

Ironically, Griffith adds in the same month that he no longer intends on accommodating the resident clans about his station: 'We are extremely anxious to get rid of them and how to do it civilly is the great difficulty'. Griffith made a halfhearted attempt to interrupt the Wadawurrung clan "quambying" [staying] at his station by declining to give any more food to anybody but a clan elder called Jack Mungit. 'We decided the day before yesterday to give no more flour to anybody but Jack Mungit whom we made work and c.'²⁹⁹

It is clear however that Griffith, who considered himself an amateur ethnologist, enjoyed observing and recording some details of Wadawurrung culture and the merging of the colonial culture upon Wadawurrung fashion. Of their appearance and visage, he wrote they are

well countenanced and handsome...his teeth the most beautiful things possible, his hair naturally waving but confined by a kind of coronet made of feathers... speak English very well and had the most musical merry laugh I almost ever heard...They seem an intelligent and cheerful race.³⁰⁰

Griffith also observed how the Wadawurrung sought to appropriate some vestiges of European attire to acquire a couture look when it suited.

They generally wear blankets as a covering and these by constant rolling in the earth soon acquire a reddish brown tint which quite takes off the vulgarity of the Leeds woolen warehouse look which a blanket has when rolled round a Christian. But these people have that common weakness of human nature I mean aping foreigners so that they are very desirous of getting any article of European clothing. One very hideous fellow (my guide across the hills) has got a complete suit consisting of a pair of old mankeen coloured trousers, a buff waistcoat, a blue shirt and a red woolen comforter tied round his waist. He, however, has tastefully engrafted some native dandyism upon his European costume by covering the top of his head and his whiskers with a thick coat of pipeclay; a kind of cire de moustache which would rather astonish a Grenach Coiffeur- that this wearing of European dress is merely the result of vanity is shown by the fact that whenever an opportunity occurs they resort to their blankets or opossum skins.³⁰¹



William Strutt, 1852, *Waran-drenin*, *Waran-drenin*, [of the] *Warreneep* [*Warrenheip*] *Tribe*. *Waran-drenin*, alias *Mary*, *Lubra* of *Morum-morum-been*, © The Trustees of the British Museum, (Davis Catalogue MS 145 RAI 1867) Oc2006-Drg41-Str.

On several occasions, Griffith demonstrated that he would occasionally accommodate the resident clan and visiting clans on his station providing they did not upset his sheep station operations. Griffith allowed several corroborees, involving 'different tribes' to take place on his station and paid the dancers on one occasion by giving them all a shirt.³⁰² Yet on another occasion intimidated the local *Wadawurrung* clan.

During the night the natives kindled immense fires which being very near our sheep fold made me rather uneasy so I got up at about 2 in the morning and went over to see what was the matter armed with my double barrellled gun and accompanied by Campbell also armed. They all hid themselves but one man who had a fire stick in his hand and when I told him to 'put out the wing (fire) or that it would plenty bum the bulgana (sheep) and I should be plenty sulky'. This being the kind of jargon in which we make ourselves understood by the natives. I then trampled out one of the fires which was close to one of our waterholes and returned to bed.³⁰³

On this occasion Griffith appears to have acquiesced in allowing the Wadawurrung to have access to their waterholes, under his conditions, and to have free range to their estates for hunting. The next afternoon two Wadawurrung men appear to attempt to appease Griffith by 'bringing me a kangaroo tail and skin', which Griffith seems to acknowledge and in return gives them some flour and sugar. The Wadawurrung men also attempted to reconcile with Griffith by stating the fires near the waterhole, which Griffith had 'strictly forbidden their going into it either for fishing or bathing', had been the 'Piccaninies' [colonial expression for children] fault. It seems apparent both the colonists and the resident Wadawurrung clan had reached an unspoken consensus in preference to resorting to physically ousting each other from what each saw as their mutual title. Griffith's attitude towards the Wadawurrung is disconcerting as we have evidence that he was undeniably racist, once describing them as 'the most hideous looking creatures' yet he was emphatic in his appreciation of their ceremonies describing his intense appreciation of a Wadawurrung corroboree as a

sight really well worth seeing what with the strong yet uncertain light given by the blaze of the fire, the bright reflection from the green leaves, & white stems of the trees relieved against the indistinct gloom of the more distant forest, the wild & picturesque figures of the natives accompanied as all this was by the plaintive regular chant of the performers. I never witnessed any scene so rich in dramatic effect. There had been the day before a large accession to the strength of the natives by the arrival of another body under Captain Malcolm [Wadawurrung Ngurungeeta] as he is called and some of these were very fine specimens of the savage of this country. We saw the operation of painting for the performance which was done with a great deal of taste. There was no uniformity in the design of their painting but each individual decorated himself as it suited his fancy with the exception, however, that they all had a line of white running up the inside of the leg which gave the appearance of being dressed in uniform.³⁰⁴

Relations between the colonizers and the colonized was an unpredictable dynamic which could not be said to be uniform from one squatting station to another and it seems apparent that the responses of both groups were largely directed towards accommodation. The accommodation that took place was also not homogenous and manifested differently in changing circumstances.

CHAPTER 7

CULTURAL INTERCHANGE AND COOPERATION

The Wadawurrung were, as in any other frontier conflict and subsequent guerilla warfare, caught between supporting and surviving it.³⁰⁵ A commonly adopted tactic by Aboriginal people was militarily repelling the aggressors whilst at the same time incorporating the invaders into the Aboriginal legal, social, economic and cultural framework. Some Wadawurrung sought to control the worst excesses of the invaders it would seem by attempting to form mutually binding relationships with the squatters who had usurped Wadawurrung lands. Coconmittantly, the invaders were likewise caught in a bind – obviously far less at stake than the Wadawurrung’s conundrum but real all the same – between surviving and thriving it. There is a discernable ideological shift by some colonists towards *indigenising* - in language, clothes, cultural values and a sense of belonging.

Across the Port Phillip frontier, a great number of squatters reported instances where Aboriginal clans befriended them and sought to incorporate the colonists into their kinship and exchange network. The usual methods, judging from squatters’ journals and letters, were by conferring wives, children, familial names, gifts and imparting their knowledge and skills. John Fawkner, considered a ‘pioneer’ of Melbourne discovered in December 1835 that a Boon Wurrung man, Derrimut, who was in his employ had ‘changed names with me this day’ indicating some kind of kinship ritual.³⁰⁶ Likewise, Georgiana McCrae, a squatter on the Mornington Peninsula wrote of the Boon Wurrung’s wish to ‘exchange names’ with her children as ‘a native compliment to be received with good grace’.³⁰⁷ Similarly, several colonists and the missionaries at Buntingdale (near Geelong) were encouraged to accept Wadawurrung children as “adopted” sons, a customary kinship practice which the missionaries misunderstood.³⁰⁸ At Indented Head, Wadawurrung families were insistent in their attempts to entrust the temporary care of their children to the colonists. William Todd recorded several instances in which the colonists were assigned with the provisional care of Wadawurrung children, and learnt that their entrusting with the short term care of children was a great gift to be received with honour.

At sundown, Jim Gum [a colonist in the employ of John Batman] went to the King’s [a title given by the colonists to a Wadawurrung *Ngrungeeta*] hut and requested of him to leave one of his sons with us until such time as he returns from the bush, which he consented & was much pleased at the offer. He is quite a young boy but will be of great use to us in case any of the other natives comes down. July 2. Denied them of any rations & tied up the dogs, thinking it would be the means of their leaving us, after which they consulted a while together & desired us to take care (?) of their children while they went cangarooing, which we consented. Bulliyan, the King’s brother-in-law offered Jim Gum one

of his children, which he refused, not properly understanding what he said, which seemed to annoy him much, hanging down his head & looking very sulkey, after which Jim found out what he meant and consented for him to stop so as he might be company for the other which pleased him highly...All the men gone a hunting as usual stopped all day and returned at Sun down with one kangaroo which Spring & Bawl (sic) [Todd's dogs] caught for them. The women also were away on the farrago most of the day, and all their children in our care. They seemed to be well satisfied and returned for the night.³⁰⁹

Furthermore, colonists routinely reveal in their journals and letters a similar willingness to explore - and exploit - any mutual benefits of inter-racial friendliness. The first wave of squatters that occupied Wadawurrung land were, as noted earlier, predominantly young and inexperienced in founding and operating sheep stations in a region that was devoid of government structure or even tracks. Robinson's journal and squatter's accounts illustrate how a significant number of them attempted to mollify Aboriginal people by offering food, clothes, guns, money and tools. The frequent trade in and gift giving of useful and valuable tools such as steel axes and the much sought after foods such as flour and bread caused something of a festival atmosphere whereby some squatters complained that they could not get on with their daily work. Todd at Indented Head in 1835 for instance frequently complains of 'Natives still with us. Find very difficult to get them to leave us... liking to the bread' and remarked on how the gifting of the colonist's hunting dogs to the Wadawurrung had a very positive effect on their frontier relations. Todd remarked 'They have taken a particular fancy to our dogs, on account of Jim Gum has given the King two of them (Ball & Spring) to prevent them taking the remainder.'³¹⁰ A letter written by William Lonsdale in February 1837 to the Colonial Secretary of NSW points out the substantial efforts being implemented by 'most families' in a bid to achieve an amicable relationship with the Kulin people of Port Phillip.

I have no doubt he [John Fawkner] did expend money on the blacks so to some extent as did most others whither from a feeling of humanity or to ensure their own safety by making friends with the blacks and I believe he has a friendly feeling towards them. I do not believe the blacks are more domesticated by Mr Fawkner than in most other families. There are commonly some who attach themselves to [white] people and some appear to have done so with Mr Fawkner but I cannot perceive they are more useful than others. There is a lad with Mr Fawkner who can speak something of the native language...³¹¹

The 'usefulness' of the Aboriginal people that Lonsdale and others wrote about was frequently equated with the Wadawurrung and neighbouring peoples' tendency to remain in one locality or not. G.S Airey, the Lands Commissioner in the Geelong District interpreted the Wadawurrung's strict adherence to traditional customs and practices as a major flaw in their potential as reliable workers for the colonists

... those that I have seen were, I am happy to say, very friendly and quiet, nor have I had any complaints from the settlers in my district of any outrages committed by

them, in the course of my visits. But from their migratory propensities I cannot see the slightest prospect of confining them to any limited boundary.³¹²

Squatters and others who sought to recruit a local Aboriginal work force quickly appreciated that local clans' people were restricted by traditional boundaries and cultural commitments that were rigidly upheld.³¹³ Edward Stone Parker, Assistant Protector to the Aborigines in the Loddon District, was frustrated in his attempts to establish a self-sufficient farmlet near Hepburn Springs in 1842 by the Dja Dja Wurrung's strict observance of traditional protocol.

This morning I found a great number of the Aborigines are on the point of leaving. They have heard that a body of the Witouro [Wadawurrung] people were near Captain Hepburn's and they must go and see them.³¹⁴

A memorandum to Governor Bourke written by forty-four 'residents of Geelong' in June 1837 suggests the sympathy and generosity squatters in the Geelong district believed they had dealt out to the Wadawurrung had backfired on them.

Attracted by the expectations of receiving provisions and clothing which have hitherto been liberally supplied them, an unusual number of natives have for some time past been collecting in this neighbourhood and these, forsaking their usual modes of procuring food, are depending upon the supplies they obtain either by begging or plunder. Hitherto the forbearance of our overseers and servants has been deserving of all praise...³¹⁵

Squatters' and Protectors' journals reveal Wadawurrung clans purposely continued to visit the home station of squatters who had usurped their estates and expected to be recompensed for their loss of land by colonists. James Butchart, a pastoralist on the Moorabool River in 1841 said the Wadawurrung 'are a quiet people' but that they often demanded food of the colonists immediately upon greeting them and that their reputation as ignorant was ridiculous in the extreme. He also noted that the Wadawurrung were quick to acquire proficiency in English and occasionally went to great lengths to help squatters:

On meeting one of them in the bush the first question is often damper (which is the bush loaf). They are far from being so low in the scale of civilization as they are generally represented to be, many of them are very knowing and it would be no job to take them in. Those who have an opportunity to learn English speak it with great precision. If they meet you they will ask your name, never forget your features although they have only seen you once...In one place we got a blackfellow to cut a sheet of bark from a tree and ferry us across...³¹⁶

The degree to which squatters accommodated the Wadawurrung's expectancy for white food, clothes tools and so on varied markedly from one station to another. Squatters were generally aware that the Wadawurrung clans were visiting other stations in the

neighbouring area and by 1840; the Wadawurrung clans were commonly reported to be largely non-intrusive. The majority of squatters that Robinson encountered during his journeys through Wadawurrung country in 1840-1 generally reported to Robinson that 'they have not been disturbed by the natives...and they spoke well of the natives.'³¹⁷ Bacchus Jnr and John Gray, squatters on the upper Werribee River, and Ward, a dairy farmer in the same district confirmed to Robinson that their relations with the Marpeang balug, a Wadawurrung clan, were congenial. Gray said to Robinson that there was a 'quiet tribe that visited the settlers and belonged to the district. He had no trouble nor had they, he believed, given trouble.'³¹⁸ Similarly, Ward knew the 'Barrabul blacks' and 'They had never troubled him or their station. They always had flour to give them, and had never done any mischief.'³¹⁹ Likewise, Bacchus said 'there was some natives a short time since at his station. They did him no harm. They remain first with one settler and then another. [Bacchus' men] spoke very well of the natives, said they were Malcolm's Mob.'³²⁰ A month later on 10 March 1840, Robinson stated 'At Bacchus's head station found some blacks belonging to the Wadewerong [Wadawurrung] tribe whom I know. Shortly after my arrival, other blacks of the same tribe came. They appear to be well treated at this station.' Coghill, a squatter in central Victoria also claimed:

Never had much trouble with the natives, only that they would sometimes steal a little; but I used always to make a point of going to them and talking to them as well as I could, and explaining to them that if they behaved themselves they would not be molested.³²¹

John Gray, on the Upper Werribee, 1838-39 and many other squatters came to know which clan belonged to what they now considered their runs and accepted the resident clan's presence while expressing an avowed fear of attacks by 'strange blacks'.³²² The perspective of the squatters or the one Robinson gained from questioning squatters would sometimes conflict with the Wadawurrung version of events. For instance, in February 1840 the Wadawurrung had advised Robinson of how Steiglitz did not 'encourage the blacks, tells them to "be off". So said the natives.' Yet Steiglitz's diary claims that he allowed the resident clan, who had bestowed upon him the tribal name of 'Bangake', to stay on his station.³²³ Government officials such as Crown Land Commissioners, Police Magistrates and Surveyors also came to acquire some knowledge about Wadawurrung social and political processes – particularly when these cultural practices affected the white community. In a report to La Trobe in December 1841, Addis reported his familiarity with some aspects of Wadawurrung land tenure, their strict adherence to their customs of caring for country and recognized that a degree of reciprocity existed between the Wadawurrung and the colonisers. Addis added emphatically that the colonists in Geelong were very much at ease with the Wadawurrung by late 1841.

The disposition for dress appears to be fast increasing among them; their wants to hitherto having been but few and easily acquired, little exertion on their part has been required. The inhabitants of the town and settlers of the district evince the kindest and most benevolent feeling towards the aborigines; and no distrust or fear as regards person or property appears now on either side. Not any school connected to this tribe has been established. Nor do I

believe, except for the very young, any direct system of education would yet be successful, by reason of their wandering habits being as yet but little checked, notwithstanding the town of Geelong attracts them greatly, partly from curiosity and otherwise by the facility they procure offal meat from the sheep and cattle killed at the butcheries, and rice, flour or sugar, in exchange for birds and skins, and occasionally carrying out parcels from the stores, or chopping wood. I consider the Barrabool tribe but little inferior in intellect to the uneducated peasantry of Europe.³²⁴

An early resident of Geelong, J McCann, when describing the Wadawurrung of the late 1840s mirrored Addis' assessment. McCann like many colonial youths in the early invasion period could recall being cared for by Aboriginal people and bush-schooling together:

They were all very harmless and were useful to the whites in many respects... One old lubra used to nurse me when I was a little fellow, and my mother and father were always kind to them when they came to Bellarine Street. My brothers and sisters used to make playmates of the younger ones.³²⁵

Some squatters such as William Moodie recalled how when as a child he and his family were initially alarmed by 'about one hundred black warriors' in their ceremonial attire, in the vicinity of Geelong, who came 'straight for us brandishing their spears and making most hideous noises' but upon seeing his family's alarm 'their yells changed to laughter and they went on their way'.³²⁶ Other squatters such as Thomson, Steiglitz, Wilson and Todd, within months of taking Wadawurrung land for their sheep stations reported how they became conversant with the local clan's boundaries and could name who their clan heads were. Thomson for instance identified 'the principal tribes, countries and chiefs within the country occupied by the Whites' in January 1836. In Wadawurrung and neighbouring countries, Thomson cited 'seven of the principal tribes' (probably referring to the principal clans), the boundaries of their country and 'chief' (probably referring to an eminent Elder or *Ngurungeeta*) as:

1. You Whamgeete; Between the Weariby [Werrabee] and Yaloak Rivers; Murradonnanuke
2. Wodewarrou; Barrabul Hills; Coralcurke
3. Gerarlture; West of Lake Modewarrie; Bodedonenuke
4. Beingalite; Indented Head; Hullamboir
5. Edeboligitoorong; East of the Weariby River; Engait
6. Dutigalla; North of the Yarro Yarro [Yarra] River; Jaga Jaga
7. Boatnarro; Between the Yarro Yarro and Western Port; Wodelanenuke³²⁷

William Todd at Indented Head likewise made note in June 1835 of the 'chiefs' of the Bellarine Peninsula and their approximate boundaries. Other neighbouring squatters such as David Fisher also recalled he was familiar with the local Wadawurrung clan head 'a very old native, King Murraddock'.³²⁸ Some squatters accommodated to a degree the Wadawurrungs' need to observe their ceremonial business, accepted their traditional duties as legitimate and did not fully impose nineteenth century capitalist servant and master contractual obligations upon them. Robinson and other writers observed many seemingly, from a colonist's perspective, satisfactory working relationships.

Mr McCleod [near Buninyong] said the blacks never troubled him, he was on good terms with them. One man and his wife and children stopped with him, excepting occasionally when he desired to visit his tribe. This man is faithful, does not steal, has rendered him good service. Him and his wife had charge of a flock of sheep for four days and nights at a time when he was short of men.³²⁹

It is unfortunate that the Wadawurrung's perspective is rarely articulated in the historical record however, it is probable that the Wadawurrung sought to establish cordial kinship styled relationships with the colonists in order to survive, avoid the worst excesses of frontier violence and to gain – and maintain access to new economic commodities.

By way of example, it is highly likely that the Wadawurrung clans' people whose country had been invaded by GS Lang, a squatter at Narmbool near Buninyong were placed in a situation whereby their hope of survival was made starkly apparent by Lang's avowed threat to kill 'every man that attacked them'. Lang acceded that the frontier experience for both the invader and the Wadawurrung was summed up best as 'being either in a state of active hostility or dangerous peace'.³³⁰ Lang wrote at length of his frontier experiences with Aboriginal people, noting that on one occasion he had found that a large group of Aboriginal leaders in flight from the police had congregated. Lang said that they were living there waiting for the winter rains, which would make the ground too wet for horses; then they would emerge to kill and plunder before they escaped. A 'parley' with the Aboriginal warriors occurred whereby Lang issued a threat of a war of extermination against them. In addition, Lang sought to subdue the Aboriginal warriors by offering to feed some of them as well as their families if there were no attacks upon Lang's men or their sheep. According to Lang, a bargain to share the land between them was enacted and faithfully kept by both sides.

My brother and I sent for old Flourbag, the chief of our own tribe, and told him what we had heard, adding that we wished to have a palaver upon the subject. He said that it would be also necessary to consult the strange blacks, and he brought two of them to confer with us. We gave them clearly to understand that, if they attacked our party, we would kill every man of them unless they killed all of us; that, even if they succeeded, all they could gain was a temporary feast of beef and mutton, while they "were certain to be attacked and cut up by the police; whereas, if they remained friendly with us, we would feed a certain number of them; that we would divide the country with them; that, if they kept

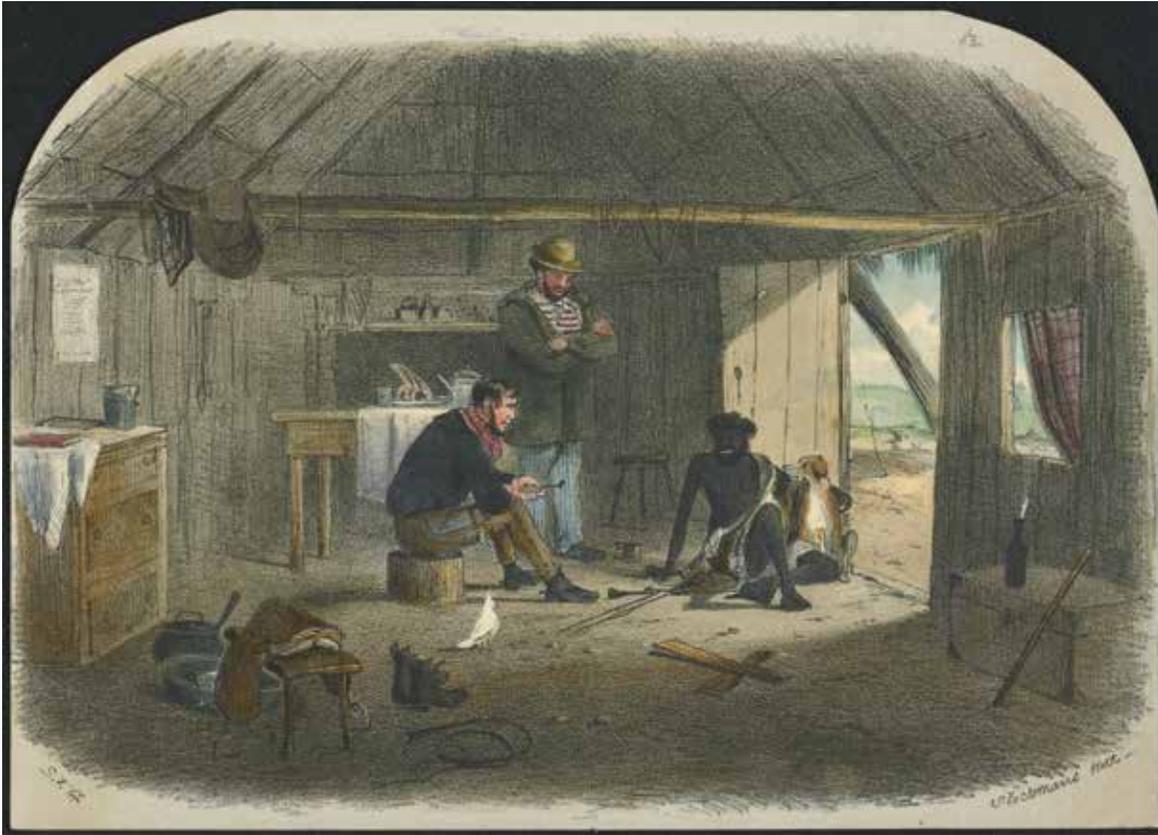
clear of the part occupied by the cattle, they might go where they pleased over the rest of the run, including the lakes and eel-beds.³³¹

Similarly, Thomas Chirnside whose chain of runs in the 1840s extended across the Western District including Mount William, Wardy Yallock, Curnong, Carranballac (near Skipton), Wyndham (Werribee) and Mount Elephant held out his aggressive demands of Aboriginal lands disguised as 'pacific'. A century later the *Terang Express* lauded the 'unique' manner in which Chirnside had pacified the 'blacks'.

Mr Chirnside claimed that at Mount William he did not lose twenty sheep through depredations by the blacks, and that he was the first to employ aborigines at station work in the Wannon district. When he went to Mt William, he was assured that the blackfellows would get away with all his sheep and that a neighbour had had to give up in despair, though he had two shepherds each armed with a double-barrelled gun guarding each flock. Mr Chirnside said that he determined to try his luck and to endeavour to get on friendly terms with the natives, who, however, invariably fled at his approach. Eventually he ran one down on horseback and in some way convinced him of his pacific intentions. A few days later, the blackfellow reappeared with several other members of the tribe. Chirnside met them and succeeded in conveying to them the intelligence that as long as they did not interfere with his sheep he would not interfere with them. Occasionally, he would give them some flour and mutton as a token of goodwill. When he went to the Wannon, he took with him two of the Mt William blacks, who brought to the station a number of the wild Wannon natives. Little more than a month afterwards, Mr Chirnside wrote, he had about twenty of them helping him with his sheep washing; and it was not long before they were employed on most of the district runs.³³²

Different arrangements or deals were struck between the Wadawurrung clans and the squatters. At William Roadknight's station near Geelong in 1842, two Wadawurrung men, Barney Woollow and a boy called Jack, worked as cattlehands. Adeney, the Crown Lands Commissioner noted the high regard with which these workers were held: 'These two are quite equal to any two white men, if not superior to any two white men for a job of this brand' and were implicitly 'trusted with a herd of cattle.'³³³ Moreover, Adeney appears surprised and pleased by the seeming compatibility between the two worlds of capitalist work ethics, and the cultural-economic mores of Wadawurrung society.

These two Wadawrong were dressed as working men and behaved as respectably as any of them; they stayed at the home station all day, making themselves useful for their food, and in the evening retired to the 'mi mai' [Wadawurrung word for house/shelter] where their tribe slept.³³⁴



ST Gill, c. 1864, *Stockman's Hut*, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-135636390. Note the relaxed atmosphere of workplace relations inside the stockman's hut, which existed in some instances.

A report in the *Port Phillip Gazette* by Government Surveyor Robert Hoddle in July 1841 echoes Adeneys' appraisal of the existing compatibility between sheep and cattle station work and observance of ceremonial duties.

they are remarkably clever in tracking the footsteps of animals, are expert riders, and make the most careful and attentive shepherds; and although they occasionally join their tribes to be present at their annual ceremonies, they invariably return to their employment.³³⁵

Squatters and Colonial authorities were also aware that Melbourne and to a lesser extent Geelong were traditionally a meeting place for what ethnographer A.W Howitt named the 'Kulin nation' a confederacy of linguistically and culturally allied peoples including the Wadawurrung, Dja Dja Wurrung, Daungwurrung, Woiwurrung and the Boon Wurrung.³³⁶ William Thomas noted on several occasions that the 'Barrabools and Goulburns [Daungwurrung]' carried out judicial combat and subsequent ceremonies in Geelong. John Hunter Kerr, a squatter who initially took Woiwurrung land in 1839, observed the 'remoter tribes' (such as the Wadawurrung) 'often camped' in the vicinity of his station near present day Heidelberg. Kerr, like many, also noted the rapid adaption to the presence of the squatters and the newly imposed economy, the swift acquisition of their language and culture - and (in racist and paternalistic 19th century language) the insistence upon retaining their culture.

...these once numerous people have undergone a great change of habits and character since their intercourse with white men. Many have been brought up entirely on the stations of Europeans, and though they rarely lose the wild roving instincts of their nature, they have learnt to copy the speech and manners of their white masters.³³⁷

Governor La Trobe lamented in July 1842 that it had been futile to get the Aboriginal people of the Kulin confederacy to stay in their home locality, as cultural protocols requiring their attendance in Melbourne was too big a legal and cultural requirement for them to resist.

...attempts to make the natives settle down and conform in any degree to regular habits has signally failed. Mr Thomas [Assistant Protector of Aborigines assigned to the Western Port district] justly attributes this failure in part at least to the vicinity of Melbourne. The town and neighbourhood are never free from a large number of the blacks either of the Western Port, Barrabool or Goulburn tribes.³³⁸

William Thomas's journals, spanning almost three decades (1839-1867) is frequently interspersed with his frustrated notations about Wadawurrung people visiting Melbourne such as 'Ningollobin [a clan Elder from Bacchus Marsh region] and a family of Blacks' who Thomas 'told to return to Bacchus Marsh'.³³⁹

Parker also vented his frustration towards the Wadawurrung people who he believed were instrumental in stymieing his efforts to encourage Dja Dja Wurrung to curb their visits to Melbourne: 'Most of them would not think of going to Melbourne but for their invitation from the Port Phillip natives'.³⁴⁰ Part of the attraction that Melbourne (and Geelong) held for the Wadawurrung and neighbouring people, besides being the forum for important ceremonies, was the availability of new trade networks, different types of work that brought increased status and new exotic foods, sights and experiences. Thomas for instance noted that the frequent visits made to Melbourne by a number of Kulin people including the Wadawurrung were not always exclusively for Kulin ceremonies. For example, in March 1849, Thomas wrote '50 Aborigines arrive to see the [horse] races'.³⁴¹

Ethnographic evidence strongly suggests that significant numbers of Aboriginal people of Australia offered many colonists what they probably considered was a temporary permit to travel through their land. William Thomas, Assistant Protector responsible for the western Port District, noted that traditional understandings and even ceremonies such as 'Tanderrum or freedom of the bush' ceremonies existed within Wadawurrung and other Kulin people's laws which allowed acceptable strangers to be welcomed and temporary access to traverse their estates. Such understandings of temporary access were common. As noted earlier Thomas Learmonth and a group of squatters were 'shown their runs' at Buninyong, Lal Lal and Lake Burrumbeet by the Wadawurrung. According to George Robinson, Chief Aboriginal Protector in Port Phillip, the showing, or directing to, of sheep runs by Aboriginal people was very common. George Evans of Wallan, informed Robinson, in 1840 'it was the natives that showed him his run'.³⁴² Robinson was of the conviction that this was not an isolated instance. He stated

‘I believe half of the runs have been shown by the natives.’³⁴³ Squatter’s diaries corroborate Robinson’s statement, such as Allen, on neighboring Dja Dja Wurrung country, who ‘was told by some of the friendly tribe that there was a piece of open country at the top of the BetBet Creek that was splendidly adapted for grazing.’³⁴⁴

I have constantly from the commencement [of his invasion of Kulin lands] maintained an amicable intercourse with the Native Tribes by kindness, by presents of clothing, food and tools of various sorts, as have also Messrs Batman and Company. I have kept from four to twenty of the Aborigines constantly at my house and have taught them to row my boat, which they frequently do... I have caused a youth in my employ to devote his time to learning the native language, which he has very successfully accomplished. The Natives also hunt and fish for me, and in order to impress upon their minds, the great power and kindness of the English, I have at my very own cost brought them over from Port Phillip to Van Diemen’s Land.³⁴⁵

Similarly, Thomson, a pastoralist at Geelong, seemed to be hinting at this when he claimed the Wadawurrung were exceedingly friendly and that he had learnt some of their vocabulary.

They [the Wadawurrung] were always friendly; I was well known amongst them, and wherever I went they received me kindly. In 1837, I built the present house of Kardinia, which I called after the aboriginal [sic] word for “sunrise”. I have had several in my family for years and taught them to read and go to church with my family.³⁴⁶

Demonstration of Thomson’s stature amongst the clans resident near his station can be gained from the escape one of Thomson’s servants effected by calling out Thomson by name when a party of Wadawurrung warriors confronted her in the dark bush.

I was greatly alarmed and could scarcely speak, but knowing that Dr. Thomson had been very kind to the natives, I called out: “I have lost my way; I want Dr. Thomson”. Immediately one of them, in his own language, ordered the others away, and seizing me by the arm, pulled me off at a pace I could scarcely keep up [to safety].³⁴⁷

Significant numbers of squatters and their workers stated explicitly and implicitly that they had acquired a workable knowledge of the Wadawurrung language. Steiglitz, as noted earlier, stated in his reminiscences that Murrydeneek, a Wadawurrung *Arweet* or *Ngurungeeta*, had saved him and strongly implied on several occasions he could communicate with the Wadawurrung in their language by about the second year of his residence at Port Phillip. Steiglitz stated in his reminiscences written in 1875 that his encounter with Murrydeneek occurred shortly after his arrival at Port Phillip in June 1836 and noted he had to use sign language to communicate ‘as I did not of course know his language *at that time* [my

emphasis].³⁴⁸ Joseph Ware, a shepherd employed by Thomas Learmonth reported to local Police Magistrate Foster Fyans in late July 1838 that he was able to communicate freely with the Wadawurrung people in their language.

Only for the timely assistance, I got at the hut, I firmly believe that I should have lost my life. I understood the language; they repeatedly told me to go or they would kill me. When the men appeared with guns, the natives ran.³⁴⁹

The biographer of William 'Big' Clarke, a squatter at Dowling Forest near Ballarat, suggested that 'Big Clarke' viewed language acquisition as an inherent aspect of the colonizing process. By conferring with 'chiefs' Clarke hoped to avoid suffering guerilla warfare tactics from local clans.

A friendly chief named Balliang had shown him his new country and enabled him to make contact with the Burrumbeet Bulluk blacks... The blacks offered no resistance... William Henry Pettett and John Cayle Francis [Clarke's overseers] soon learnt to converse with them in a mixture of their own tongue and a few phrases of broken English while Clark wrote down a list of native words in his notebook. He was able to boast in later years of his knowledge of their language.³⁵⁰

The acquisition of Aboriginal languages by the invaders was not simply to avert or mitigate the threat of guerilla warfare. From a British viewpoint, the remoteness of the Australian colonies was striking and perceived as horrific. There was a palpable desire to thrive in what the colonists saw as the remote and isolating bush. The lonesome lifestyle of shepherds in particular is well documented in song, verse and collective memory.³⁵¹ Reverend Hastie, the first religious minister in the Ballarat District, recalled meeting an unidentified sheep station worker near Ballarat who related to him the seclusion he suffered.

The hutkeeper said the solitude was so painful that he could not endure it, for he saw no one from the time the shepherds went out in the morning till they returned at night. I was the only person he had ever seen there who was not connected with the station.³⁵²

Shepherds' and squatters frequently wrote of allowing local Aboriginal clans access into their huts for a myriad of economic, political and social reasons including to trade in Aboriginal manufactured goods, gain Indigenous knowledge and skills about tanning skins, acquire local intelligence about combative clans, negotiate the employment of Aboriginal people – and to gain access to Aboriginal women for sex purposes. However, they also frequently wrote of their opening up of their inner sanctum (their huts where they slept ate and housed their families and belongings) and initiating conversations in language about belief systems and cultural practices, which was arguably to attain a greater ability to satisfy their longing to belong.³⁵³ Sarah Davenport, a resident of Geelong was fluent enough to produce a compilation of more than 300 words and phrases in the Barrabool dialect.³⁵⁴ Charles Griffith also compiled a list of Wadawurrung nouns and phrasal verbs presumably for trading purposes as he conducted

a significant amount of trade with the Wadawurrung. The Chief Protector of Aborigines, G.A Robinson noted in his journals 1839-1849 many instances where colonists claimed to be knowledgeable of an Aboriginal language in the Port Phillip District. On one occasion, an unidentified group of Aboriginal people in Melbourne told Robinson of a white man named Bill who could speak their language and dressed himself in a possum rug.³⁵⁵ At the same time, many colonial visitors expressed surprise at how quickly the local clans had learnt English or expressed a keenness to obtain some mastery of it.³⁵⁶ Presumably, this rough approximation of language from both sides of the frontier signals that there was a fair deal of curiosity and subsequent investment made by them both to acquire understanding of each other, in the British people's case with significant implications for their safety and ability to trade.³⁵⁷

Skins, Stories and Tails

The manufactured material culture items of the Kulin people who congregated in Melbourne, including the Wadawurrung, were highly sought after by the colonists. Some idea of the volume of trading that was occurring between the colonists and the Kulin can be gleaned from Robinson's journal. Robinson and his office clerks made numerous entries in his journal about 'cartloads' of 'native artefacts' being sent to 'Lilleys', one of the first general merchants in Melbourne and made special note of the prolific trade being conducted in possum skins and lyre bird tails.³⁵⁸

...the natives state that white men in the country and residents in Melbourne supply them principally for the purpose of shooting bullen-bullen, ie. Native pheasants [lyrebirds] and squirrels [possums], the skin of the latter and lyre tails of the former being given as an equivalent for the use of guns and ammunition. These skins and tails are I understand of valuable consideration and have by some been turned to very profitable account.³⁵⁹

EB Addis, Commissioner of Crown Lands (Port Phillip District, 1836) considered that the 'Barrabool tribe' [Wadawurrung] was attracted to the Geelong township chiefly because of the ease with which they were able to trade possum skins and lyrebird tails for the new foodstuffs:

...the town of Geelong attracts them greatly, partly from curiosity and otherwise by the facility they procure offal meat from the sheep and cattle killed at the butcheries, and rice, flour or sugar, in exchange for birds and skins...³⁶⁰

William Thomas, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Western Port and Melbourne districts also reported to Robinson of the extensive trade conducted in lyrebird tails and possums. One entry in September 1844 estimated that the volume of possum skins traded was very sizeable: 'Loddon blacks [Dja Dja Wurrung, northern neighbours of the Wadawurrung] arrive, bringing in some thousands of skins for sale.'³⁶¹ George Langhorne, Missionary to the Aborigines of Port Phillip, based in Melbourne, also observed in 1838 that a considerable trade occurred: 'A considerable number of the blacks obtain food and

clothing for themselves by shooting the Menura Pheasant or Bullun Bullun for the sake of the tails, which they sell to the whites.³⁶²

James Nealer, a shepherd employed by Thomas Learmonth at Buninyong (15 kilometres southeast of Ballarat) reported that a group of Wadawurrung had tried to hawk some possum skins in exchange for a sheep: 'On the 25th of July [1838] four natives came to [me and] my flock of sheep and wanted one, offering some squirrel [possum] skins.'³⁶³ GF Read, a squatter also at Buninyong, was the subject of an earlier business visit in April 1838: 'A great many natives came here today and exchanged skins for flour.'³⁶⁴ The rate of exchange on the inter-cultural trade network varied, but Charles Griffiths, near Ballan (60 kilometres west of Melbourne) reported on one occasion that two unidentified Wadawurrung men received flour and sugar for a kangaroo tail and skin. On another occasion he explained that he was busy tanning 'a number of opossum skins and touan skins, the latter is the flying squirrel ... which we have got from the natives in exchange for flour.'³⁶⁵

Squatters such as Griffith earnestly traded with the Wadawurrung in possum skins and enthused that an 'opossum rug forms the most delightful bed imaginable'. Griffith had mimicked the Wadawurrung's method of bedding, and further noted how comfortable it was when you 'lay part on the ground and roll the rest round you and sleep as warm as possible even on the coldest nights.'³⁶⁶ Historians have tended to evaluate the trade in Aboriginal manufactures such as possum skins solely in terms of inter-tribal trade and have largely neglected the intercultural trading aspects of this burgeoning inter-cultural economy. Judging from the large volume of historical evidence available this would appear to have been significant indeed.

The willingness of some Wadawurrung and the British colonisers to acquire a new language and exchange manufactured goods with one another was not solely for conciliation and trading. There was a genuine affection on the part of some squatters for not only their newly acquired land but also the new 'culture' that they felt they were forming. New arrivals from Britain often remarked on the distinct ideological shift on the part of squatters and bush workers away from the constrained Western world to the relatively class-less and liberating new environment in the colonies. Many newcomers to Port Phillip were aghast at first that the 'settlers prided themselves in dressing and looking as rough as possible' but on many occasions quickly assumed this position themselves. Katherine Kirkland is an exemplar of this phenomenon, initially despising the Wadawurrung and referring to them as 'filthy savages' yet later adopted their method of wearing a basket to carry her child, traded earnestly with them and learnt some of their language.³⁶⁷ Kirkland's adoption of Aboriginal manufactured goods was not an aberration and was replicated in many parts of Port Phillip.³⁶⁸ New chums (new arrivals) expressed amazement at seeing British gentlemen such as George Ebdon, a squatter near Mt Macedon 'dressed in possum [skin] jacket and cap' and employs 'two natives.'³⁶⁹ Squatters and their workers often noted how they used possum skin rugs to ease their way comfortably into the bush. Richard Grice explained how 'the way we explored the country was this – Thos. Myers and myself each took a horse and rugs made from opossum skin and a few day's provisions.'³⁷⁰

There is also strong evidence to suggest elements of Aboriginal cultural values held great interest amongst some colonists. A large number of squatters' appropriated or appreciatively adopted – it is difficult to discern which it was - Wadawurrung names for their sheep stations. Although the origin or meaning of many station names is not known many are believed to be of Wadawurrung origin including Anakie, Ballan, Ballanee, Ballanrong, Ballarat, Ballark, Ballangeith, Ballowra, Bargamie, Bunyenong, Bellarine, Beremboke, Bolwarra, Boninyong, and Borhoneyghurk.³⁷¹ Steiglitz refers to two neighbours who bestowed Wadawurrung names to their runs; 'Cowie and Stead gave their new run the native name of 'Bungeeltap' ... my neighbour called his station 'Ballynue', the native name'. Thomson, as noted previously, called his station 'Kardinia, the native name for sunrise'.³⁷² Presumably, part of the rationale for appropriating or adopting Wadawurrung names for their runs was similar to Kirkland's who admired the Wadawurrung names: 'Boning Yong is a native name and means big mountain. I like the native names very much. I think it a great pity to change them for English ones as it is often done'.³⁷³ It is a pity that Kirkland did not elaborate on the reasons why she enjoyed the Wadawurrung names but it is arguable, judging from her enjoyment and appropriation of elements of Wadawurrung culture that Kirkland adopted not just Wadawurrung land as her own. It appears that a degree of unconscious acculturation occurred that partly at least invoked the linking of Wadawurrung language to land and belonging.

Some colonists were tutored in the Wadawurrung's lore about volcano eruptions on their country. One colonist was provided with the local traditions relating to ancient volcanic eruptions whilst being led by a Wadawurrung guide.

In crossing the vast plains between Mount Elephant and Mount Shadwell, one of the natives in the early times said that, "Long while ago, Mount Elephant spit fire at Mount Shadwell;" this was his idea of the two great volcanoes.³⁷⁴

Likewise, as noted earlier an unidentified 'old colonist' with an 'extensive knowledge of the customs and traditions of the aborigines' was also the recipient of Wadawurrung oral tradition that related to the volcanic origins of Mt Buninyong.³⁷⁵

The gentleman states that in 1844 when travelling to Mt Rouse he was informed the blacks that "once big fellow Buninyowang get sulky and throw up big stones and dirt", and that also Mt Elephant, near Camperdown, was also known by the blacks to have been in eruption.³⁷⁶

Another colonist committed to posterity a version of this creation legend that given to him by an unidentified Wadawurrung person in around 1846 and published in 1861.

One of the legends that these tribes are fond of relating is, that Tyrinallum (Mt Elephant) and Bouningyoung (two volcanic hills about thirty miles apart) were formerly black men that they quarreled and fought...³⁷⁷

The colonists' interest in knowing Aboriginal names and stories of the country appears to have been inspired by a combination of factors. The colonists quickly came to appreciate that the valuable knowledge about the local physical environment and the fauna and flora held by Aboriginal people was inextricably bound up in their oral traditions and beliefs. Kirkland for instance learnt that the periodical drying up of lakes such as Lake Burrumbeet and Lake Learmonth was attributed to the coming of the British.

We passed an immense salt lake, which is gradually drying up; its circumference is forty miles. Many lakes, both salt and fresh, have dried up lately. The natives say it is the white people coming that drives away the water: they say, "Plenty mobeek long time, combarley white fellow, mobeek gigot"—in English, "Plenty water for a long time, but when the white people come, the water goes away."

Whilst the squatters generally considered these interpretations as 'quaint legends' they did greatly admire local Aboriginal knowledge that directly benefitted them financially. As noted earlier most colonists (including the Kirklands) initially struggled in an alien and financially precarious environment. Hepburn, a pastoralist near present day Hepburn Springs told of being saved by the local Dja Dja Wurrung (and possibly Wadawurrung people) by directing Hepburn's family and servants to a safe haven, thanks to the local clans' knowledge of fire. Similarly, a squatter on the Bolwarrah run near Ballan recalled how his crop was rescued on Black Thursday in 1850 when the largest bushfire in Victoria's history stormed across the landscape. He recalled that 'a crop of seven or eight acres of oats in the stocks at Bradshaw's Creek which would undoubtedly have been destroyed but for the assistance rendered by a lot of passing blacks to the station hands.'³⁷⁸

Knowledge about floods was also passed onto the colonists. The Reverend William Waterfield, based in Melbourne, noted local biocultural knowledge about flooding enabled local clans to predict an impending flood: "The Yarra had overflowed its banks... Ten days ago the natives foretold it."³⁷⁹ Not surprisingly many squatters paid close attention to their Aboriginal guides' explanations of stories that related to the squatters' financial and physical wellbeing. It is also possible to detect a desire on the part of the colonists to fill in the knowledge void that the bush landscape held for them with an Aboriginal oral narrative. The report of an overlander driving his sheep to Port Phillip from Sydney in 1838 is perhaps indicative of some colonists' child-like wonder and awe of the Australian land and its stories. The overlander related that he initially 'despised the natives' but after some time in the bush with sagacious Aboriginal guides he found them to be 'useful, cheerful and intelligent companions'. He and his companions 'desired to have their company' because they were 'anxious to elicit anything about this part of the country that may be useful' and consequently 'listened attentively' to the 'natives yarns' and bush legends.³⁸⁰

The Wadawurrung corroborees are clearly the most oft remembered and memorialized aspect of the coloniser's interactions with the Wadawurrung. In family recollections, there are frequently reflections about the novelty of and exotic nature of the Australian bush, often exemplified by a solitary reference to witnessing a corroboree. The Wright/Bartrop family (circa 1840s) for instance noted that upon arriving in Australia 'there was only a track through the bush from

Melbourne to Geelong and that the blacks were holding a corroboree on the banks of the Barwon River' as they passed through on their way to the Barrabool hills.³⁸¹ Many colonists wrote enthusiastically in the late 19th and early 20th century about large corroborees they had witnessed in an earlier period. A newspaper article in the *Geelong Advertiser* is an exemplar of this fascination with the unique spectacle of a corroboree performed in Geelong by Wadawurrung and neighboring people.

In 1848, I witnessed what was termed "the great corroboree" held on Market square about 2000 or more aboriginals taking part. The tribe known as the Geelong tribe had their boundary as far as Mt. Moriac, the tribe on the Colac side of Moriac right through to Lorne was the Gellibrand tribe. On a special great day known to the tribes they met in Market-square, Geelong. The dress of the warriors taking the active part in the corroboree was painted faces and bodies and bushes tied round their loins and knees. The old men and lubras and piccaninnies took up their positions about half a chain behind the warriors of their own tribe. Their dress was mainly the regulation blanket (issued by the British Government) bushes and a few old clothes, while a great number were clad in Nature's garments only. Some hundreds of dogs accompanied each tribe. The warriors faced each other about eight yards apart. When a start was made the men would advance from each side, brandishing their war implements, in short jumps, and uttering short whoops, and after showing skill in avoiding striking each other, although almost doing so, they would retire, and a fresh lot would come forward and go through the same manoeuvre. Then they would come towards each other with burning fire-sticks, and fence with them, which looked very picturesque. Music was provided by a sort of song by most present with about three notes and plenty of yelping by the dogs.³⁸²

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISPOSSESSION AND ITS OFFSPRING: VIOLENCE AND AVOIDANCE

There has been a tendency to represent both the British squatters and the Wadawurrung people as homogeneous cultural entities and subsequently prescribe to them a generic 'traditional' patterned response of 'tit for tat' styled frontier violence. Blaskett and more recently Ryan and Rogers however concluded that the motives behind inter-racial violence varied and that 'mere dispossession does not appear to have been sufficient motive'.³⁸³ At one level, there is a significant degree of uniformity in how the colonists perceived the violent Wadawurrung response to dispossession. Indeed, it is difficult to locate a non-Aboriginal analysis of inter-racial relations that does not include generalities. There is some basis for these generalities. However, it is arguable that a scrutiny of the levels of inter-racial experience reveals complex processes and responses at play. Historian Ian Clark argues that many analyses of dispossession have painted the historical landscape with very broad strokes and that 'some of these processes must be painted with the finest of brushes' to more fully understand frontier violence in the colonial period.³⁸⁴

The violent conflicts that had occurred between whalers, sealers, and Kulin people in the period 1800-1834 diminished after the squatting invasion had formally begun in June 1835 – but did not halt. For example John Helder Wedge, a squatter at Port Phillip, informed Governor Bourke in March 1836 of a brutal attack by Portland whalers on a Boon Wurrung woman and her three children.³⁸⁵ The arrival of the squatters and a little later by colonial government officialdom heralded in a new wave and a new 'type' of violent dispossession. George Augustus Robinson, the Aboriginal Protector and the Assistant Aboriginal Protectors assigned to each region of Port Phillip in 1838 were quick to realise that protecting Aboriginal people would be nigh impossible. Robinson noted that Wadawurrung women were regularly subject to violent sexual predation and abduction by colonists. In April 1839, his journal records how he sent

Mr Dredge [Assistant Protector of Aborigines] to enquire into the case of the abduction of two Aboriginal females by the whites. One of the girls was recovered the other had gone away. It seems that the girl was a Wartaworong [Wadawurrung] and was afraid of some of the people beating her. Pacified them and send them away.³⁸⁶

Physical clashes and abductions of Kulin women – and retribution attacks - frequently continued to occur in the 1840s causing acrid bitterness, intense distrust and a pervasive fear between the colonists and the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. John Wedge, a member of the

Port Phillip Association said in March 1836 that he had witnessed six Aborigines [probably Boon Wurrung] suffering from gunshot wounds, including a young girl probably crippled for life, inflicted by whalers collecting mimosa bark at Western Port.³⁸⁷ John Batman interpreted the frightened response of Wadawurrung women to his sudden presence near Little River in June 1835 as evidence that they had been 'ill-treated' prior to his arrival, presumably by sealers. Batman wrote that 'After some conversation, whole [Wadawurrung] party returned to the huts until they came within sight of the shore; they then stopped afraid of being ill-treated as some of their tribe had been already.'³⁸⁸ Todd, the first (permanent) squatter on Wadawurrung land reported on 28 June 1835 there were 'sealers at the heads', presumably what is now called Barwon Heads, and a week later also described 'We have heard guns firing for the last three or four days in the direction of the Heads.'³⁸⁹ In December 1836, Robinson visited Port Phillip in the Government schooner to pick up the husbands of four Boon Wurrung women who had been abducted by sealers, so that the right women could be identified and returned to their country and families.³⁹⁰

An excerpt from Robinson's office journal in January 1848 gives some detail of how the kidnapping of Aboriginal women from Port Phillip was still affecting coastal Kulin communities eleven years after the Protector's initial efforts to attempt to redress this issue.

King Bembo [an important Boon Wurrung clan Head Man] obtained a passage by steamer *Ephrasia* to go to Geelong for the following purpose some time ago a white man near Mount Eliza [situated on the Mornington Peninsula] took a black female Nan-nat-goor-rut down to King Island and thence to Geelong on board a ship and King Bembo is proceeding to Geelong to see the woman and give information of the case to the Chief Protector.³⁹¹

These violent racially driven incidents led to Governor Bourke's proclamation of 3 May 1836 outlining legal protection for Aborigines; the appointment of a Police Magistrate, George Stewart, to Port Phillip in June 1836; and arguably the hastening of plans for the official occupation of the district.³⁹²

There were however a number of inter-racial conflicts and near conflicts between the squatters and the Wadawurrung prior to the appointment of a Police Magistrate at Port Phillip. In 1835 one year prior to Stewart's arrival in the district Todd revealed on a number of occasions that his party felt very ill at ease due largely to being unsure of the Wadawurrung's motives.

June 30. Tried all we could to get them to leave us, but found it impossible. Three hands obliged to go again Cangarooing. All hands without breakfast etc. so as to shew [show] them we have got no more to give them. Remained all night quiet and satisfied but seem to have no idea of leaving us, which makes us extremely uncomfortable, not being able to get a meal of vittuals [victuals] in comfort and always obliged for our own safety to keep watch.

July 6. All the natives came running to our fire, told us there was a mob of blacks coming down to kill both us and them...The report they made we learned was no more than to frighten us.

July 13. Buckley overheard some of them saying in their language that they should wait for an opportunity to get one of us going for water so that they should spear us.³⁹³

The supposed motive for the feared attack was because of some Wadawurrung clan members being 'much dissatisfied on account of our denying our provisions.' However, as noted earlier, Todd's anxieties about the Wadawurrung did not manifest into a violent confrontation, in part due, Todd felt, to his party's strict adherence to not using 'rough means' in their dealings with the Wadawurrung.³⁹⁴ Three months later, in October 1835, Fawkner had claimed that a large body of Wadawurrung (Barrabool) and Taungerong (Goulburn) threatened to kill his party on the banks of the Yarra on two occasions:

28 Wednesday [October].The blacks we learnt intended to murder us for our goods...Sunday the 13th of Decr [December] 1835 Derramuck [Derrimut] came this day and told us that the natives intended to rush down upon us and plunder our goods and murder us.³⁹⁵

Fawkner felt that if not for the timely warnings from the Boon Wurrung youth Derrimut (Fawkner used various spellings) that many lives would have been lost. The motivation of the would-be attackers that included the Barrabool section of the Wadawurrung language group was attributed on both occasions, to acquiring the goods of the colonists. Inter-racial violence reached crisis point however, according to George Mackillop, a squatter at Port Phillip who informed the Colonial Secretary in July 1836 of the murder of Charles Franks, a well-known squatter and his servant Flinders, alias Hindes. MacKillop reported that 'no fewer than four Europeans have been murdered [by Kulin warriors]' at Port Phillip. Mackillop also stated that he feared that if the Colonial Government did not take action to stop the 'unfortunate transactions' there would be a war of retribution as had occurred in Tasmania.³⁹⁶ It seems probable the 'war of extermination' that had been feared, did not materialise partly because the white community of Port Phillip thought any punitive action might provide Governor Bourke with a reason to expel the squatters from Port Phillip. This opinion is evident in a letter from one of the leaders of the Port Phillip Association, John Helder Wedge, to a fellow member, Captain Charles Swanston, shortly after the death of Franks and his shepherd. Wedge advised Swanston not to 'take the law into our own hands' as such an action 'would only afford General Bourke a pretext which he is most anxiously looking for, to interfere with our occupation of the land'.³⁹⁷

It is also evident the assistance offered by Kulin clan heads to find the murderers of Franks and his shepherd provided a reason for the colonists to curb their violent retributions towards the entire Aboriginal population. Newspaper reports in Van Diemens Land and Sydney informed their readers of the 'service' offered by 'domesticated natives of Port Phillip' in revenging the killers of Franks and his servant, maintained that some justice had been done and remained

confident that racial relations would not be impugned by a relatively isolated incident. Reports differed markedly as to how many 'natives' were killed by the avenging party. A report in *The Australian* stated the 'treacherous tribe had been annihilated' whereas John Montagu informed the Colonial Secretary 'there can be little doubt that ten of the Port Phillip natives were killed'. However, numerous participants in the pursuit of the murderers swore none was killed.³⁹⁸ John Woods deposed: 'I am positive I did not know of any blacks losing their lives on this occasion, but reports were circulated that several had been for the purpose of satisfying our servants.'³⁹⁹ *The Australian* further reported

The barbarous murders of Mr Franks and his shepherd, have been, in some degree, revenged, which, we trust, will be a warning to the natives, not to injure or to commit wanton excesses upon our countrymen...The principal tribe that of Jagga Jagga - came from their ground, which lies considerably inland, upon hearing of the outrages committed, and solicited permission of the company to go after and destroy the miscreants of course sanction could not be given to their offer - yet, it evinced a better feeling on their part, and confirmed the general opinion, that they were in no wise connected with the murders.⁴⁰⁰

Moreover, many of the squatters involved in the pursuit of Frank's killers were convinced that the murder of Franks and his servant had not come about due to the Wadawurrung wishing to wage a guerilla styled warfare on the colonists. Wedge's opinion was that the murders were 'unfortunate' but did not apportion blame to a distinct clan, constellation of clans or a generic nation of 'blacks'. The reality in his estimation was the killings had not:

...arisen from a general feeling of hostility amongst the natives, but the act of a few individuals, who have been tempted to the perpetration of this deed by the unguarded manner in which I have understood Mr. Franks went about, for the sake of the plunder they would obtain.⁴⁰¹

The report in the *Australian* concurred with Wedge's, adding that the murdered pair was no doubt killed to avenge some affront that the pair gave to their murderers.

It will be said, as a matter of course, that in this instance, as in all others, some insult must have been conveyed to the natives, on the part of the unfortunate victims, or they could not have been guilty of so great violence.⁴⁰²

Neighboring squatter Robert Von Steiglitz's admission that Franks purposely made 'blue pills' (presumably poison) to kill Wadawurrung clans people points to the likelihood that the murder of Franks and his servant were revenge killings by the Wadawurrung as intimated by the report in the *Australian*.⁴⁰³ Five years later the Crown Lands Commissioner for the County of Grant (Western District) EB Addis, afforded the Wadawurrung's rationale for their part in the search, and punishment of Wadawurrung members for the murder of the two colonists. Murocdoruke, an important Wadawurrung clan head was well known to the colonists for 'his exertions after the wanton murderers of Mr Franks and that of Mr

Swanston's shepherds by a part of his tribe.' According to Addis, Murocdoruke, 'forseeing that it would end in the destruction of the whole tribe, if the aggressors were not punished, offered himself to accompany a party for that purpose.'⁴⁰⁴ It would seem Murocdoruke envisaged that it would be better for his people if the colonists saw Wadawurrung justice was commensurate with a white version of retributive justice. Henry Batman's deposition to the Melbourne Court Register in October 1836 also affirms Addis' statements: 'I have seen several of the same blacks (Wadawurrung people in the same vicinity as the alleged murderers) since in the Settlement- they have offered to kill the two blacks who committed the murder their names are Callen and Dundom.'⁴⁰⁵

Mackillop claimed that he had sought the 'natives' (unspecified Wadawurrung clan members) account of another double killing of colonists by the Kulin. An extensive quote from Mackillop's letter to the Colonial Secretary sheds considerable light on the attitude he held out for future frontier relations. MacKillop also indicates he had an implicit trust of Wadawurrung clan members generally not withstanding the 'horrible murder committed by the natives.' He also expressed the frontier conundrum that, arguably, all the dispossessors faced in the Port Phillip District when they occupied Aboriginal land, and that was how best to negotiate relationships with individual clan members and their immediate families without loss of life or livelihood. Few if any of the colonists understood the nuances of Aboriginal political structure or preparedness to engage in guerilla styled warfare but there was a general awareness amongst the colonists in the frontier period that distinct political groupings prevailed amongst the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip.

I doubt not, that with the assistance that Mr Buckley can give in explaining the objects of the Government to the natives, that all will go on smoothly in future and much bloodshed be spared. The particulars of the murders are as follows:

Five men belonging to a sheep farm on the Werribee River were sent in February or March last, with pack bullocks from thence to Corio...Soon after they had passed Corio, they were joined by a party of natives whom they had often seen before at the sheep farm. After the natives had walked a short way with the two men, they enticed one of them to go with them in search of a kangaroo, and while he was looking for it, one of them killed him by a blow from a tomahawk - the other was despatched in the same way by one of the natives who remained behind. There was no quarrel in this case. The deed was done solely for the sake of the flour that was on the bullock packs. This is the account given of the transaction given by several of the natives, who were present at the catastrophe, but they say they took no part in it.

The men who perpetrated the crime (their names have been stated by the other natives) are so far aware that Europeans will resent it - they never now come near a white man's house. They would however, I understand, readily be apprehended if anyone on the spot were authorised to act. The other case is that of Mr. Charles Franks and his shepherd ... The flour in this case too, was the natives' chief object.⁴⁰⁶

In September 1836, the Colonial Secretary instructed the new Police Magistrate William Lonsdale to make investigations into the murders of Franks and his shepherd and subsequently Lonsdale sought to uncover the motives for the murder of Franks and his shepherd. The depositions of fellow squatters taken by Lonsdale in Melbourne and squatters' journals reveal that Franks had a reputation for excluding the local clans from his station, having murderous intent for the Wadawurrung and for not negotiating reciprocal agreements with them. George Smith, Franks' partner felt the reason why Franks and his shepherd were attacked and murdered was probably because:

Mr Franks had a great aversion to the native blacks, and would not give them food, thinking it the best way to prevent them from frequenting the station. But seeing food in some considerable quantity in the tents, they no doubt resorted to the above act to obtain it.⁴⁰⁷

It is important to note that the squatters in general were ignorant of the strict laws related to all gift giving and exchange from a Kulin (and Wadawurrung) legal view. Many squatters were not attuned to the fact that both exchange and gift-giving to create friendship or to allow access to country - involve obligation. To fail in this was a very serious offence, and a cause of significant legal disputes. Many colonial observers of Aboriginal culture recognized that the majority of serious and bloody internecine violence the colonists witnessed were legal disputes where formal gift giving had not been correctly fulfilled. Charles Sievwright's (the Assistant Aboriginal Protector's based in Wadawurrung country) brief comments on a physically violent bout he witnessed displays some knowledge of legal significance of gift giving — 'this dispute was owing to the latter tribe having neglected to furnish the accustomed presents on the preceding night.'⁴⁰⁸ Similarly, William Thomas, the Assistant Protector based in Melbourne and Westernport was impressed by the severity of punishment meted out to people who transgressed the strict rules of sharing equally. Thomas wrote of many occasions he witnessed where foods were scrupulously shared equally by Elders to the community and of one event in particular whereby

The whole number of eels were daily brought to the Aged men and at night equally distributed according to their families. 2 young men one day being I suppose very hungry had got in a scrub made a fire and cooked a few before they brought them in, and were each punished with 3 blows from a waddy on their head, and was not permitted to have any at night.⁴⁰⁹

The disappearance in February 1837 of two prominent lawyers, Joseph Gellibrand and George Hesse, in the Geelong district also strained the relationship between the white squatters and the Kulin people of Port Phillip. The two colonists had set out from Geelong intending to visit Melbourne but apparently missed the junction with the Leigh River, and rode further west into unexplored areas towards the present site of Colac. Several search parties combed the region. Many squatters believed that the 'natives' had murdered Gellibrand and Hesse. One search party deliberately terrorized Wadawurrung people they suspected of being involved in their disappearance.

Surrounded the tea tree this morning, but the natives had decamped. Entered the scrub, and tracking the blacks to the seashore, and thence along the salt water, saw a woman digging murnong, a native root, about five miles from the scrub. Following the woman, who ran at our approach, we came upon a strong mob who had fled to a large rock on the water-side. Found there the remains of a pocket-book, of a night-cap of a pair of cossimir breeches, and of two or three little things answering the description of those worn by Gellibrand. Scattered the tribe in every direction; some of them, jumping into the water, dived, swimming off like wild ducks. Recovered most of Rickett's property from them, and took one man prisoner, who upon being threatened searched for and found an axe that had been cunningly concealed in the rocks. Returned to the tea tree for the night, keeping watch over the prisoner. Fine day.

Followed the black this morning, who traced another tribe of the blacks who he said had murdered 'fulet amagit pop fulet bulgannay' - meaning two white men and two horses- some time ago. We were unable however to come up with them, although we reached some fires that they had quitted about half an hour. Encamped for the night at the scrub. Cold windy day.

Kept the black with us till noon, but as he evidently did not know where the bodies of Gellibrand and Hesse had been concealed, we let him go, and the poor fellow was soon out of sight. Thinking that in consequence of the tribes' being alarmed we should gain no intelligence from them, we returned home.

Observations On The Last Expedition: It is my firm opinion that the recovery of the property was absolutely necessary to ensure the lives of the residents in the Barwon district; for if the natives had found that they would be allowed to commit such depredations with impunity, there is no saying to how great a length their temerity would have led them.

There is little evidence that the Wadawurrung were involved in the disappearance of Gellibrand and Hesse. Moreover, Wadawurrung people were actively involved in all four unsuccessful searches for the white men. The first searches were carried out in April 1836. The colonists, according to Lonsdale's report to Governor Bourke acted very indiscriminately during the search and were motivated more by economic opportunism than a desire to find the missing men.

7th April [1836]. Buckley returned today without obtaining any knowledge of Mr Gellibrand's fate, he went a considerable way to the westward and took some blacks [Wadawurrung] with him. They found some traces of him all of which showed him to have travelled in an opposite direction to that which he intended. He [Buckley] met with some tribes that are not in the habit of visiting the stations. From one of them he learnt that two white men on horseback were seen passing onward to the west...He says he could find no clue to discover that any murder had taken place. He could see no clothes among them, nor could

he discover in their conversation that anything of the sort had taken place. He has left he says a request with some of his black friends to find out and inform him if they hear anything hereafter. Now Buckley appears very much annoyed with some of the people [colonists] who went out also, he says they paid more attention to see what the country was like, than to pay attention to the search... One unfortunate black was nearly being roughly handled for having killed and eaten Gellibrand, only I happen to know he had been in town about the same time.⁴¹⁰

A party of unidentified 'constables and prisoners' also participated in the search, accompanied by 'a tribe of Barrabool [Wadawurrung] natives'. The Wadawurrung men subsequently became embroiled in a revenge killing of two members of a neighbouring tribe, probably Gulidjan people.⁴¹¹ The third search in June 1838 involved Government surveyor Henry Smythe, who recruited 'Jack, a native of the Barrabool tribe.'⁴¹² Three unidentified Wadawurrung people accompanied a party led by Alexander McGeary on the last attempt to find the two white men in August 1838.⁴¹³ Foster Fyans, the Police Magistrate of Geelong 1837-40, believed the Wadawurrung were aware of what had become of Gellibrand and Hesse but chose not to disclose that information on the basis that any knowledge about their disappearance might incriminate them.

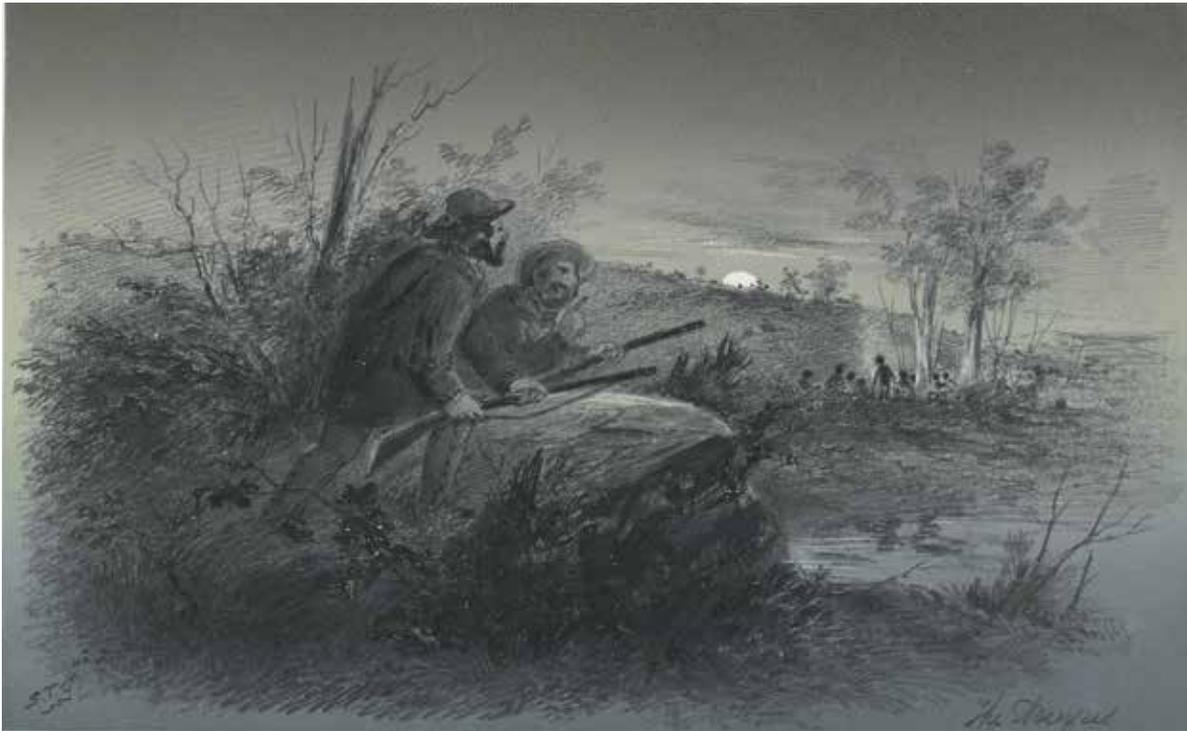
On the subject of the death of Messrs. Gellibrand and Hesse the natives appear to be much alarmed when spoken to, generally evading all questions. I have promised great rewards to them without effect. In my opinion they dread giving the true account, imagining they may be considered as the guilty.⁴¹⁴

Considerable Apprehension and General Discontent

However much Wadawurrung people appeared to be appeasing the colonists by assisting in the searches for Gellibrand and Hesse, it did not curb the 'considerable anxiety' that prevailed amongst colonists in the Geelong District according to Fyans. This was partly owing to the lawyer's disappearance and a spate of attacks by the Wadawurrung around the Geelong District throughout 1836-8. Reports by squatters about the pillaging of sheep stations by the Wadawurrung - and subsequent reprisals by squatters was common.

Left Modiwarra at 1pm. Arrived at Austin's about an hour afterwards, in company with Murray, Howell, and Armitage, the last-named gentleman having informed us yesterday morning that the natives had attacked Mr. Rickett's station on the Barwon and plundered it of nearly every movable article, in consequence of which we had assembled for the purpose of recovering the property stolen. Friday 11th. Was informed by Mr. Hawkins, Rickett's overseer, that the blacks had thrown him down when they rushed into the hut, and held an axe over his head to prevent him rising... Ascended the hill at sunset, and perceived the fires of the natives about three miles on the other side of us.

Started at daylight this morning, and arrived at the natives' mi-mias [huts] about an hour afterwards; surrounded their huts, when a slight skirmish took place – recovered part of Rickett's property, and riding briskly forward arrived at another native encampment about half a mile off; but they had taken the alarm and fled into the scrub of tea tree alongside, leaving a few things by their fires which they had abandoned in their precipitate retreat...Rode down to the scrub this morning, where we found the natives, who concealed themselves in it on our approach, and not wishing to enter the scrub from the fear of having to slay all that made any resistance, we told them that if ever they robbed another white man we would shoot every one of them – and so left them, taking with us a few things that they had dropped when running away into the scrub.⁴¹⁵



ST Gill, c. 1864, *The Avengers*, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134372916. The artist created a series of similar themed illustrations. In this illustration, a group of two heavily armed colonists stealthily approaches an Aboriginal encampment of families with the intent of 'avenging' the theft and killing of their sheep.

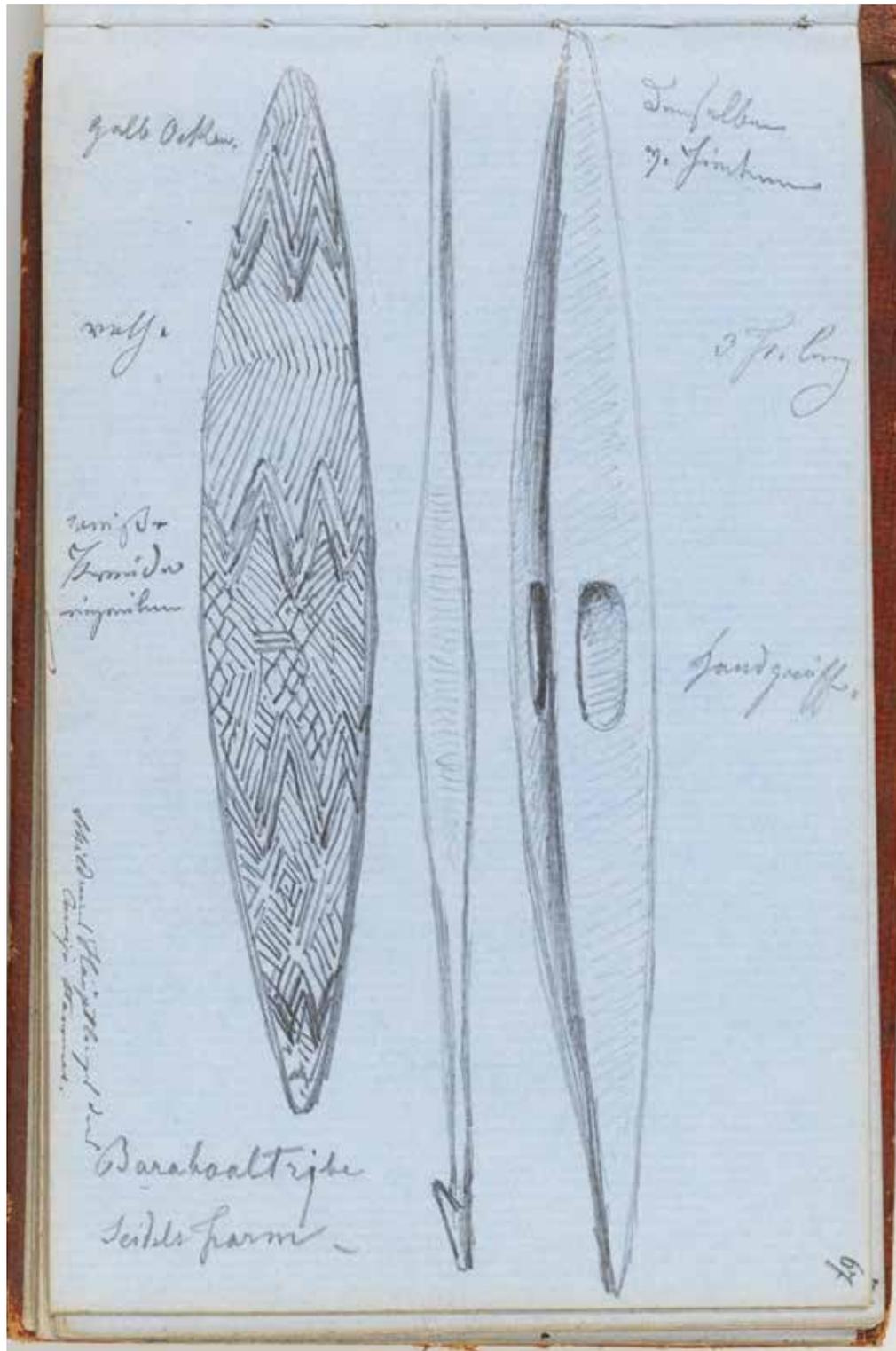
Squatters frequently banded together to form a formidable military styled force on the colonial frontier. George Russell retold how he and a well-armed group of squatters on horseback rode about all night in search of a Wadawurrung party who had stolen 'clothing, bedding, and provisions' from a neighbouring station on Native Creek. The motives of the Wadawurrung attacks on the flocks and station workers are unclear. There is certainly evidence that their attacks may have been to create a sense of unease amongst the colonists to expel them from their lands.

During the winter months of 1837 the natives became rather troublesome in some districts of the country. They robbed the shepherds' huts of rations and blankets and anything else that they fancied. Our shepherds got frightened

to follow their flocks, although well-armed; and I had to join two flocks into one, so that two men could follow one large flock of sheep. The Messrs. Yuille's station at Murgheboluc was attacked one afternoon about the month of June 1837 by a large party of blackfellows. The only person about the place at the time was an old cook or hutkeeper called Peter the swede. The black fellows, what with threats and yells and flourishing their spears, frightened Peter; and he ran for his life, and left all to the blacks. The natives soon cleared everything out of the hut in the shape of clothing, bedding, and provisions. Old Peter the hutkeeper made his way across the plains in the parish of Gheringhap, and appeared at the Clyde Company's station at Millar's Flat a little after dark in the evening. The Messrs' Yuille were there. We had all been attending a meeting of some sort which was held at Mr. Fisher's station (where South Geelong is now situated) on that day. After hearing old Peter the hutkeeper's account of the affair, we made up a party of five or six horsemen and started off in pursuit of the natives with the view of recovering possession of the things they had stolen. Our party consisted of Mr. Henry Anderson, Mr. Jos. Sutherland, the two Messrs. Yuille, and myself. A Mr. Scott joined us, from Inverleigh. We reached Murgheboluc about eight or nine o'clock in the evening, and found Robert Anderson the shepherd there by himself; he had put his flock into the fold as usual in the evening, and had not seen any of the natives. We rode about the whole night searching for them, expecting to see their camp fires; we searched about the Native Creek, and the lower Leigh where Inverleigh is now situated. The Derwent Company, which was managed by Mr. Fisher, had a station here at this time, the Mr. Scott who joined us being the overseer in charge. We could find no trace of the blacks, and decided to follow up the Native Creek for some distance. At last, just as the morning was breaking, we saw a number of camp fires on the banks of the creek, near where Woolbrook now stands. Our party got together, and we determined to attack the black-fellows at once. We got our firearms ready, and galloped up in a line towards their camp; we fired off a few shots as we approached them. When they saw us they commenced yelling, and shaking their spears at us, in a threatening manner; but this only lasted a few moments. When we got near their camp they soon made off, leaving nearly all the spoil they had stolen from the Messrs. Yuille behind them.⁴¹⁶

The stealing of Wadawurrung tools and weapons by colonists was a common practice. Colonists spoke openly about plundering Aboriginal villages of their goods and selling them in Melbourne, collecting curios for their own display or sending them back to collectors in England. The hall in John Steiglitz's homestead at 'Ballanee' were reputedly 'covered with Aboriginal weapons' whilst George Russell was importuned in 1839 for Wadawurrung tools and weapons by a relative in England thus: 'Dear George, When you ransack the Native Dens could you not secure for us some of their spears, baskets, &c.?- they are rarities here. We have not an article of native manufacture.'⁴¹⁷ The Russells most likely obliged this request as later that month William Russell reported that in response to the Wadawurrung raiding their sheep

George and one of the stock keepers went out next day on horseback and put them all to flight, about an hundred in number; they took all their spears and other weapons from them, and also a number of the women's bags, in which they had stowed away a quantity of sheep heads nicely singed.⁴¹⁸



Eugene von Guerard, 1854-1858, "Volume 01: Sketchbook XXII. No. 4 Australian. Australia, Apr. 1854-Dec. 1857, 1858, State Library of New South Wales, Reference Code 824690 f. 67. [Aboriginal Shield & spear] Seidls farm.

Captain Tregurtha, a squatter at Geelong was adamant that an attempted attack on his brother, when they were ashore at Geelong in September 1836, was an act of 'native treachery' and that the motive for the attempted killing was – simply a biscuit.⁴¹⁹ Tregurtha and many squatters like him seemed impervious to other possible motives that the Wadawurrung might have to attack the British squatters who were brazenly inflicting havoc upon the Wadawurrung.

It was not safe to travel unarmed and alone in the bush at this period, as the following incident will shew. One fine afternoon in September 1836 I went ashore at Geelong with my brother, a lad of seventeen. On landing, several natives were on the beach, and the youngster gave them some buscuits, and afterwards placed the remainder in his pea-jacket pocket. I had plunged into the bush with my gun, a double barreled one, about half an hour, when he followed with the intention of joining me. After proceeding along the shore about a mile, he was startled by the report of my gun very close, when turning short round he saw a native, waddy in hand, almost ready to fall on him. He called to me, and I answered, when the fellow disappeared as if by magic: had I not fired, in another minute he would have murdered him for the biscuit. About this period several Europeans fell victims to native treachery...⁴²⁰

George Russell explained that he and his heavily armed party were aware they were forcibly usurping a large population of Wadawurrung of their country.

We saw that this locality appeared to be favourite camping-ground of the natives. However, we were not disturbed during the night, and did not meet with a single native during all the time of our journey. We always slept with a loaded gun or pistol, or both, close by our sides. A great number of black fellows' mia-mias were about here, which was the reason why the creek got the name of the Native Hut Creek.⁴²¹

David Wilson, a squatter near present day Ballan, in a private letter to his brother in August 1840 foretold the murderous attitude he and his neighbors held towards the Wadawurrung after suffering two attacks on their flocks 'within the last six weeks by the blacks'. Wilson recorded how 'we have all united to defend to the utmost our properties [underlined by Wilson] and woe behold the blasted race when they are caught injuring us...they will have it dearly paid back to them without any mistake.'⁴²²

The memories of these attacks, predominantly on the squatters' flocks, were remembered into the twentieth century. Recollections of workers such as Henry Hannington a bullock-team driver between Melbourne and Ballarat in 1844 typifies the exaggerated accounts touted by the colonists about the ferocity of the Wadawurrung which were published in the late 19th and early 20th century.

We had several visits from the black lubras [Wadawurrung women]. The black fellows seldom came with them. We all had to carry firearms, as the blacks were treacherous, and were spearing hut keepers and others every day...⁴²³

There are no known official reports of attacks on the colonists in the Ballarat district of this description after 1838. Similarly, in a Ballarat Fine Art Gallery catalogue published in 1924 is a curious annotation of a 'Portrait of Mr John Winter' which relates several violent attacks by the Wadawurrung on the Bonshaw sheep station, near present day Ballarat which were reputed to have occurred in the early 1840s.

In those days the aborigines camped around the homestead in hundreds, and not content with killing the stock, they sometimes murdered those in charge. On two occasions the sons of Mr Winter were speared, and the continuous frights caused by their frequent raids eventuated in the premature death of Mrs Winter...⁴²⁴

No records exist which remotely support these collective social memories of a Ballarat frontier awash with blood.⁴²⁵ Similarly writers in the Geelong district reminisced in 1907 that the Wadawurrung were 'numerous and hostile' and 'were addicted to killing both sheep and cattle'.⁴²⁶ S.V Stead, the son of a pastoralist on the Moorabool River recollected the Wadawurrung to be a 'fierce and warlike crowd round about the Moorabool River and District generally'.⁴²⁷ Conversely, there are collective social memories of massacres of Aboriginal people that are yet to be borne out by official historical records – but equally deeply embedded in some community's oral histories. A local historian in the Mt Egerton district exclaimed that when preparing historical data for a 'brief historical account of gold mining at Mount Egerton with biographical references to some residents' he was

astonished to have corroborated in three different and completely unrelated sources; something which I had heard in passing many years previously – namely, that on a sheep run some miles to the south of Mt. Egerton, it had been the practice in the very early days to give the aboriginals poisoned flour to reduce their numbers. Of course this was not an isolated instance as many of the early squatters resorted to this diabolical practice, the odd thing was the fact that this knowledge had been handed down through three generations in 4 different families.⁴²⁸

In the 'History of Torquay' by J.A Baines written originally in the 1930s and supplemented by notes in 1977, there is an account of a murder in the 1860s of a shepherd by Wadawurrung people – and a description of a supposed reprisal attack on the local Wadawurrung clan.

It appears that in the sixties of last century the local blacks were responsible for the murder of a shepherd aged 18, who was tending sheep for his employer, a Germantown predecessor of Andrew White, as occupier of Crown lands at Spring Creek under grazing licence (This is Mr Wilson's version from Mr. Underwood, of Connewarre.) The youth was usually on friendly terms with the dusky nomads, but on this occasion they coveted, in vain, a gun that he valued and refused to give up; whereupon, awaiting a favourable opportunity, they buried their spears in his back. A search party found his body under wattle boughs and brushwood on the flat above the site of the corduroy ford (later Gottlieb's Bridge). An armed body of whites traced the blacks and pursued them past Airey's Inlet where the remnant took to the sea and were wiped out.⁴²⁹

The colonists' fear of attacks by the Wadawurrung around what is now the city of Geelong culminated in some of the colonists erecting a ship's bell up a tree on a prominent hill, (now known as the suburb of Bell Post Hill) in about 1837. The bell was to be rung when attacks by the Wadawurrung on the squatters' runs occurred and alert other colonists to the impending danger yet the bell was never used for the purpose intended 'as the natives never attacked the homestead, or anyone near enough to hear the bell'.⁴³⁰ Stead further recounted how

The blacks of this period were very troublesome. A woman alone never knew the moment a tribe of these would stalk right in where she was, yabbering plentifully, give her to understand they wanted something for the inner man. Our mother's most frequent visitors were the Barrabool blacks, a fiercesome stalwart tribe they were. One day on the occasion of one of their visits they did more than yabbering to indicate food. They had simply swarmed through the place before mother knew and thinking they might do the baby in the cradle harm, she went and removed it, and in doing so was horrified to see them running off with the little girl that was playing by the door. Mother fled screaming with me in her arms to where father was in the habit of tethering a mare. And as luck had it father was there having just returned from shooting pigeons. He hastily threw the coils of the tethering rope over his arm, and mounting this bare-backed beast, set after the flying blacks. With the start they had got there would have been remote chance of anyone overtaking them on foot, with no chance of regaining the child if they had done so. When they became aware of a man galloping after them with a gun, with much cunning and great fierceness they threw the child away. There seems little doubt that as time did not allow them to destroy it in any other way, they sought its destruction in this brutal pitch. The bleeding from the nose was very profuse and nothing seemed to stop it, and for a time it looked as though the intention of the blacks would prevail. It was through this and cases like it, that caused a post with a bell attached to be placed on a hill near Geelong and rung to summon aid when the wild men committed any depredations. The place became known as Bell Post Hill.⁴³¹

In the Corio district, the Hopes' family tradition relates that the Wadawurrung burnt their camp and supplies. Andrew Thomson occupied what is now the city of Geelong and established a station at Indented Head. He claimed in a letter written to Governor La Trobe that just three squatters, including himself, had the whole Western district to themselves for eighteen months owing to others 'being all afraid of blacks'.⁴³² Anne Drysdale, a squatter near Geelong affirms the general perception of the colonists fearing the Aboriginal people of the Western District when she noted in July 1840 that there had been 'a number of gentlemen meeting with Mr. Thomson about what to do about the Natives murdering shepherds'. Drysdale further noted in her diary that 'There has been a number of murders by the blacks of late, and government certainly ought to do something for the protection of the white population'.⁴³³

The letter that Thomson and a 'number of gentlemen' drafted to La Trobe in July 1840 stated the 'increasing aggression of the Aboriginal population ... have excited the deepest

indignation and alarm throughout the community.⁴³⁴ William Von Steiglitz, a pastoralist on the Werribee Plains in 1836, also considered the Wadawurrung to be 'very dangerous' on account of the fact that 'they had attacked an overseer at Dr Thomson's on the Barrabool Hills with a tomahawk. Steiglitz recognised and greatly feared the Wadawurrung's advantage over the colonists in terms of weapon technology and their ability to remain undetected. Steiglitz observed of the Wadawurrung 'They have the power of becoming invisible even in grass not thirty centimetres in height' and on another occasion acknowledged that he stole their weapons whenever possible as the Wadawurrung's 'dangerous club [leanguil] was much surer than my little pistol'. Steiglitz recounted that he always had 'a gun and pistols ready', as the Wadawurrung were 'getting very troublesome' and as mentioned earlier, he cooperated with a neighbour, Franks, to make 'blue pills' to use on the Wadawurrung.⁴³⁵

The Inglises, squatters also at present day Ballan, did not resort to the violent schemes of Steiglitz and his neighbour. In response to 'some insult [offered] to a hut-keeper's wife' all the 'European force of the station turned out with tin kettles, pistols, sticks and other instruments of noise and defense or offence - a great noise and demonstration were made to terrify the natives and thus that trouble was got over.'⁴³⁶ Colonists in the Port Phillip district almost uniformly described themselves as carrying or having easy access to pistols. Kirkland described how when setting out from Geelong into the bush 'Most of the gentlemen had either pistols at their sides or a gun in their hands'. This is an important point as pistols could be used for killing or defending personal life – but they were not considered useful for hunting or essential for general sheep station duties. A brace of pistols in a colonist's belt was so common they were associated with wearing the latest fashion item. Upon seeing her brother after a long absence, his adopting the colonial fashion took Katherine Kirkland aback.

I scarcely recognised him, he was such a strange figure, he had allowed his beard to grow to a great length; he wore very rough-looking clothes, and a broad black leather belt round his waist, with a brace of pistols stuck in it, I afterwards found out that the settlers pride themselves in dressing and looking as rough as possible.⁴³⁷

Kirkland later revealed that women also owned pistols to intimidate the Wadawurrung.

We had seen, two days before, seven wild natives run past our hut at a little distance, all naked, which gave us a great fright; I thought Mary was going into a fit. I got my pistol, which I had hanging in my room, loaded; Mary then went for hers, and we walked up and down before the hut for about an hour.⁴³⁸

Later in her reminiscences about life on the frontier, Kirkland related a story about a neighbor who threatened an Aboriginal guide with the 'three barrelled pistol in a leather belt which she wore about her waist'.⁴³⁹

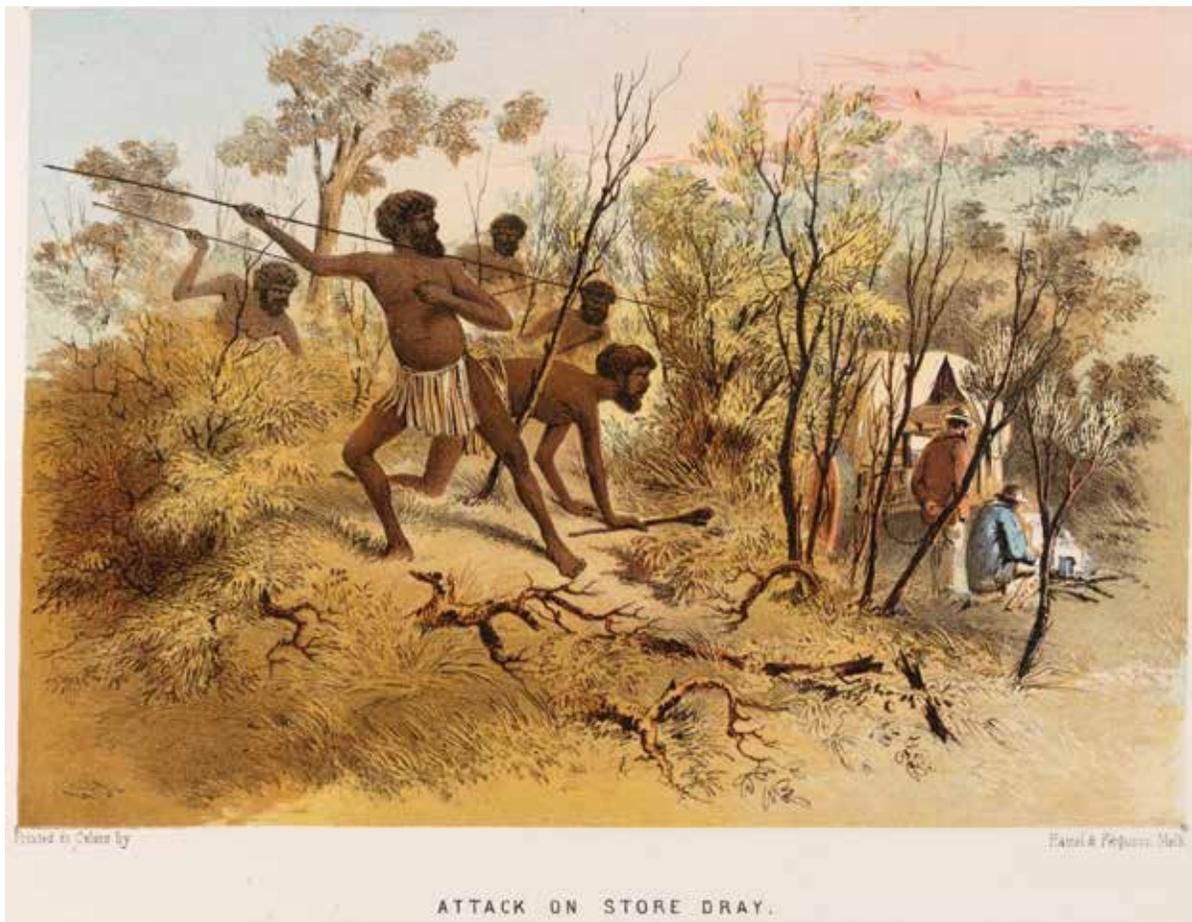
Mrs Gibson's courage was well tried She had occasion to go a journey on horseback, and not knowing the road, she took a native with her as guide. When

they were at some distance from home, the man wanted her to dismount, and indeed tried to pull her off her horse. He did not know she had a pistol with her; but she pulled out one and presented it at him, telling him that unless he walked on before the horse...she would shoot him.⁴⁴⁰

Charles Griffith related how he was always wore a brace of pistols when travelling in the bush with the Wadawurrung. Likewise Griffith did not shy away from revealing the reason why he and others armed themselves with pistols - at all times.

Two of the natives undertook to show me show me "other one water" [Werribee River]. They brought their tomahawks for the purpose of killing opossums as they said so for fear of accidents I stuck a brace of pistols into my belt - This I also did for the purpose of making them think that I constantly carried arms. Indeed since they have been here I have generally carried a pistol in my belt - more with the idea however of giving them that notion - than with any idea that I shall be called on to use them.⁴⁴¹

His journal provides a frank insight into the colonial perspective of the legal and moral right that the British perceived was theirs to invade Aboriginal Australia. He describes how he had a 'very warm argument on the subject of the treatment of the natives and of the injustice of Englishmen coming out and depriving them of their country...'⁴⁴² Like many of his contemporaries, he was adamant that the Kulin, including the Wadawurrung, had 'by their lacks [leaving the land uncultivated from a British perspective] they have forfeited their original right' to legal title over the land.⁴⁴³ Griffith espoused the view that any treaty with the Aboriginal people was a 'disgraceful juggle-got up to stop the mouths of the old women of both sexes in England' and that 'it was never intended that a few miserable savages were to have this fine country'.⁴⁴⁴ Griffith and others erroneously thought the 'best' solution was for the Aboriginal people of Australia to 'flee from the white man - as if he were fleeing from the plague'. Yet paradoxically many squatters, including Griffith also held the view that it was necessary to 'treat them with justice and even with tenderness as far as lies within our power to mitigate the evils consequent upon their position'.⁴⁴⁵



ST Gill, c. 1864, *Attack on Store Dray*, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-139536310.

The dread of the Wadawurrung was also very real in the minds of prospective squatters such as the Scotts who stole Wadawurrung land at Buninyong. The Scotts were advised prior to leaving Van Diemens Land to go no further north than the Great Dividing Range because the ‘blacks were fierce North of the range.’⁴⁴⁶ Public officials such as Robert Hoddle, one of the first surveyors in the Port Phillip District wrote in July 1837 of his general distrust of the Kulin people and his preparedness to shoot and ask questions later – if confronted.

I am obliged to go armed here, the Shepherds carry a firelock [gun]. The Blacks are not to be trusted. I do not allow any of them about my Tents. If they come after dark, they must expect some leaden Pills. I think I must have been crazy to have brought my single-barrelled gun in lieu of a double one.⁴⁴⁷

Also in July, 1837, G.F. Read noted in his journal (SLV Ms. 8912) that he was at Point Henry, and that a ‘native’ named ‘Borodoaonook’ arrived that day guiding one of Darke’s men on his way home from Austin’s. Three days later Read was at Learmonth’s station on the Barwon River, and noted that a group of Wadawurrung warriors had recently been to Austin’s station armed with spears and had alarmed his men.⁴⁴⁸ George Russell was not circumspect about the deep-seated suspicions he had about the Wadawurrung. Russell also noted that the Wadawurrung had a mirror like unease of the colonisers.

A party of natives were camped in the neighbourhood of Mr. Aitken's tents, and we got two of them to go with us for the purpose of taking us by the nearest and best route. When descending the east side of Arthur's Seat, one of the natives called my attention to a dead branch near the top of a tall tree; the branch was decayed, and hollow in the centre. I could see nothing; but from the excited way in which they talked and gesticulated, I fired a shot at the hole in the end of the branch. The natives gave a shout, and seemed much pleased at the effect of the shot; and one of them started up the tree, and getting out to the end of the branch he got hold of an animal of some kind which we thought was an opossum. But after a good deal of struggling & pulling, he threw down a large iguana, nearly four feet in length. The other black fellow got hold of it, killed it with his waddy. Before laying themselves down to sleep, one of them asked us, in broken English, if we would shoot them during the night if they went to sleep. We assured them as well as we could that we would not injure them in any way, and they began singing one of their monotonous songs, and were soon fast asleep. Mr. Clarke and I watched by turns during the night, with our guns loaded, as we were not very sure how these black fellows would conduct themselves; but they showed no hostility towards us. After they had slept about two or three hours they woke up and stified their fire, and roasted a portion of the dead iguana and made a good meal of it, and after another song went to sleep again. They did this two or three times during the night, so that there was not very much of the iguana left in the morning... Considerable apprehension existed at the beginning of the winter with regard to the native population. Some people thought that the natives would combine and make a general attack on the settlers to drive them from the country.⁴⁴⁹

Similarly suspicious about the Wadawurrung, Peter Costello, a hut keeper working near Mt Emu in 1839 reiterated several times in his reminiscences how 'numerous and dangerous' the Wadawurrung were. Costello tried to disguise his fear of the Wadawurrung from a clan that visited his hut dressed in war paint heavily armed with spears but it became apparent he was unable to mask his fear.

The old [Wadawurrung] man said to me: "You big one frightened the other night with blackfellow?" "No" I replied, "White man never frightened when he got plenty of bung" (meaning gun) but the old fellow seemed to think I was frightened, which indeed I was, and they must have seen it although I had endeavoured to hide it from them.⁴⁵⁰

It is evident that 'Mary', a servant of Katherine and Kenneth Kirkland, at their pastoral lease at Trawalla in 1837, experienced the same apprehension.

My servant Mary [in Geelong] was very much afraid of the natives. She would scarcely move out of the hut, and was always crying and wishing herself at home. She said she was determined to make her husband send her home with the first money he made. She wondered why I did not think as she did. She would take comfort from no one, and was quite sure she would be killed by the wild natives when she got up the country.⁴⁵¹

The dread of cannibalism, according to James Graham, a Melbourne resident in July 1839, was the overarching fear amongst the colonialists. Graham claimed that:

Some settlers find it almost impossible to procure shepherds or stockmen to go with them in these parts, as they are terrified of the idea of being eaten, and naturally so. To hear them talk you would suppose that they did not care about being killed but the being eaten was what they dreaded.⁴⁵²

The fear of cannibalism was fueled by false reports in the colonial press. Alfred Clarke recalled that he had received news (later proved to be false) from Port Phillip in February 1836 'bringing the distressing intelligence that the natives had risen on the whites, and had murdered and devoured five women.'⁴⁵³ The racial conflict between colonists and the Wadawurrung that is well-documented intensified in 1837 as squatters spread out from Geelong in a northerly and westerly direction. In June 1837, William Yuille's station, Murgheballoak, was attacked by a large group of Wadawurrung. The station was deserted for a time until a party of six squatters as noted earlier set off, attacked the Wadawurrung people responsible and regained control of most of the goods seized.⁴⁵⁴ In December of the same year, a formidable party of purportedly two hundred Wadawurrung attacked the Clyde Company's property on the Leigh River managed by George Russell. Two Wadawurrung warriors were reported shot dead in the attack. Fyans thought that the clans involved in the attack were an 'evil and lawless set and not belonging to this part of the country. They come down twice or thrice yearly from the interior, committing great depredations, carrying off everything which they can plunder from the settlers.'⁴⁵⁵ Fyans also considered that the Wadawurrung who had committed the attack on Russell's station were the same people who had 'murdered Messrs Gellibrand and Hesse.'⁴⁵⁶ On 4 April 1838, Terrence McMannis, a shepherd at one of Thomas and Somerville Learmonth's stations (near present day Mt Mercer) was killed, it was thought by blows to the head with a leanguil (a defensive and offensive club). Nannymoon, a Wadawurrung man who had spent some time at McMannis' hut was suspected of having killed McMannis. Henry Hangen, a bullock driver in the employ of the Learmonth's stated that McMannis had told him of his fear of the Wadawurrung.

Terrence McMannis told me he was much alarmed at the natives, and particularly Nannymoon, that on Friday before he wanted to take his pistols, and had attempted to do so. McMannis also told me that Nannymoon said to him, 'The blacks are coming down to kill you.' McMannis was in a great dread of Nannymoon, and said to me, what can I do if he gets hold of me? I know the leanguil [Wadawurnmg club], which Nannymoon had, I can swear to it.⁴⁵⁷

Learmonth claimed that he was further troubled by Wadawurrung attacks upon his station and was troubled by sheep theft and minor pilfering:

On two occasions our men were attacked, but they resisted successfully and their assailants retired. Frequently small numbers of sheep were missing, but beyond this, and the stealing of small things when allowed to come near a station, the natives never injured us.⁴⁵⁸

John Sweeny, a labourer with the Derwent Company station on the Leigh River, deposed that on the 9th of June, two of Learmonth's men visited the station and recognized Willemeluk, one of about 14 Wadawurrung camping there, as having played a part in the murder of McMannis. Upon recognition, Willemeluk fled to the Leigh River and jumped in, and stayed there for about one hour and a half. Owing to the coldness of the water he died of hypothermia.⁴⁵⁹

A month after Learmonth's hut-keeper had been murdered a party of forty Wadawurrung armed with 'spears and three guns' came to the station of John Aitken and threatened Aitken. After a stand-off between the two groups, Aitken, who knew the main protagonists, was able to take the guns off the group and no violence occurred.⁴⁶⁰ The following day, the same party of about 50 Wadawurrung men, women and children visited Samuel Jackson's station. The party was well known to Jackson and his shepherds and had 'been in the habit of visiting' the station. A few days later, they set their dogs on Jackson's sheep, speared three or four, and scattered the remainder. It is very probable that the amicable relationship Jackson and his servants enjoyed with the Wadawurrung prior to the attack saved Jackson's servant's life and a good many sheep from being destroyed.

The shepherd returned to the station with part of his flock, and informed me that the natives had come to him whilst he was feeding his sheep. They were in considerable numbers. Four or five came up to him and began talking to him, asked him for food, and he gave them his own dinner, which he had taken out with him. Whilst this was going on, the other natives went down upon the flock shouting and setting their dogs upon the sheep. They speared three or four in his sight and drove the remainder away...

About an hour after the sheep were driven away, two blacks came back and told the shepherd they would show him where the sheep were. He went with them and they took him to the remainder of the flock... The shepherd told me that one of the men who detained him attempted to strike him upon the head, which on observing, he held out his hand to shake hands with the blacks, and one of the others interfered to prevent his being struck.⁴⁶¹

Historian Ian Clark has chronicled how during the period April - July 1838, numerous attacks on sheep runs occurred in the Geelong and Ballarat districts that were known or suspected to be by the Wadawurrung.⁴⁶² The pattern of the attacks by the Wadawurrung bears some resemblance to the pattern of attack adopted by the Aboriginal people of the Sydney region in an earlier period of the frontier wars. Gapps study of the conflict in the early colony of New South Wales (1788-1817) reveals how frequently the Aboriginal nations in Sydney and district used classic guerilla styled tactics of making friendly overtures to colonists, creating a distraction and then attack. A further corollary between Gapps study and the history of conflict in Wadawurrung country is the similar response by Aboriginal peoples to British firearms and the presence of heavily armed British colonists. The Wadawurrung (and the Aboriginal people of Sydney) very quickly worked out both the effects of firearms and how to use them. In addition, they both expressed much fear and generally fled when confronted by colonists carrying guns – particularly in the early period of colonization.

Some of the incidents chronicled in the colonial records on Wadawurrung country during 1838 include Andrew Brown, resident on the Barwon River, had four ewes and four lambs driven away on the 24 of May by the Wadawurrung. Two lambs were later found dead. On the 29th of May, David Fisher visited his station on the Leigh River, to discover 50 Wadawurrung were about the river killing 16 lambs. Frederick Dewing, a squatter on the Barwon River, reported that he found his missing mare with five spear wounds. During the month of July the Geelong Police Office received several depositions concerning the Wadawurrung at Learmonth's 'Boninyong' [Buninyong] station. Joseph Sheir, a shepherd at 'Boninyong' reported that '30 Aborigines drove his flock away. In recovering his sheep, he managed to capture one of the Aborigines'. Sheir, like his co-worker Ware, stated that he 'understood the Aborigines' language' and that they were repeatedly telling him 'to go or they would kill him'. The Wadawurrung reputedly fled when fellow employees arrived with guns. John Harris, also at 'Boninyong' testified that the captured Wadawurrung warrior (Nannymoon) was brought to the head station but after a short time he had set fire to the hut where he was imprisoned, and he was then placed outside where he was chained and locked. Again, he escaped and ran to the river, still with the chain attached to him, and went into a deep water hole, where he drowned. James Bligh, a shepherd stated that a number of Wadawurrung came to his flock and attempted to drive them away on two occasions. Fyans was told that they then proceeded to rob Anderson's hut. James Neiler, another shepherd at the station, reported that four Wadawurrung came to his flock of sheep offering him some possum skins. He asked them to leave, which they did, only to return ten minutes later and attempt to steal a sheep. Neiler asked them to leave threatening to shoot them if they did not. Later, after he had fed the sheep, they returned and threw a boomerang at him, which struck him on the cheek.⁴⁶³

The motives for attacks on the colonists' sheep was often purported by the colonists – and sometimes the Wadawurrung - to derive from the fact that Aboriginal staple foods were becoming scarce as a result of the white man's stock eating out the indigenous vegetable foods. It was widely known that the attacks on the sheep flocks of the squatters lead to murderous reprisal attacks on Aboriginal people. On 6 February 1840, James Dredge, the Assistant Protector responsible for the Goulburn District of the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, was told by several Nattarak balug, the Daungwurrung clan belonging to the Coliban and Upper Campaspe Rivers that three Barrabul [Wadawurrung] had been shot by some soldiers for stealing sheep.⁴⁶⁴ The surveyor, Robert Hoddle, remarked that 'As their hunting grounds are taken possession of, their subsistence driven away to make room for our flocks and herds, and their lands sold... it can scarcely be wondered at, that urged by the calls of hunger; they attack the flocks of the solitary settler'.⁴⁶⁵ Edward Parker, the Assistant Aboriginal Protector in the Loddon District, bordering on Wadawurrung country, affirmed Hoddle's view in a letter to GA Robinson, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, in March 1839.

I beg also to report for your information that all the settlers whom I met with on the journey were of the opinion that the Aborigines were necessarily greatly distressed for food owing to the destruction of the 'murnong', a tuberous - rooted plant formerly covering the plains of this country, but now entirely cropped off by the sheep and cattle. They expressed their earnest hope that the government would make suitable arrangements for supplying the Natives with food, as it was only under the pressure of hunger that they were ever disposed to meddle with the flocks.⁴⁶⁶

On other occasions where Wadawurrung clans attacked the colonist's sheep or the squatters and their workers it was clear there was intent of revenge. Three Wadawurrung men, Warrawarie, Mooring and Mangel expressed their indignation to Kenneth Clarke about a neighbouring squatter (Aitken) who had seized their guns which the Police Magistrate, William Lonsdale, had authorized them to carry, and vowed to spear Aitken's sheep as retribution for Aitken's supposed churlishness.

They produced a written order with handwriting of Captain Lonsdale authorising the black Warriewarie to carry a musket. I gave the musket and powder and shot to Warriewarie...The blacks told me that Mr Aitken had taken two guns from them and they would by and bye spear his sheep. Mooring and Mangel said so.⁴⁶⁷

In May 1838 George Langhorne, the Superintendent of the Government Mission at Melbourne, also elicited from some Wadawurrung men that they had deliberately upset a squatter's herd of sheep as a result of being offended by a shepherd.

I was informed by the Police Magistrate that these men were suspected of having been engaged in killing sheep at one or two sheep stations on their way home. On making enquiry of them respecting these charges, they assured us that having been ill-treated by a shepherd they had suffered their dogs to worry the sheep, but denied having threatened injury to the man or to his master.⁴⁶⁸

Other colonists too noted how the Kulin at Port Phillip deliberately sought to disrupt the invaders economy when they felt impugned in any way. Robert Murray wrote of how the cattle in the colony

bear an instinctive aversion to the presence of the natives, from whom they will flee, if at liberty to do so and the sight of one is sufficient to throw a bullock team into the most admired disorder. Aware of this, the cunning natives will enter the run of a settler against whom they bear a grudge, and, by crossing and recrossing the pastures, will harass his cattle so much, as not only to prevent them from grazing quietly but frequently to cause their dispersion among the herds of his neighbours. Let the settler interfere while they are engaged in this pastime, and his remonstrances will be met with defiance...⁴⁶⁹

An analysis of the level of frontier violence in Victoria by historian Beverley Blaskett revealed that in general Victorian Aboriginal people dealt with white people in a legal fashion differently than how they dispensed justice amongst themselves.⁴⁷⁰ William Thomas related one incident that clearly showed the feelings of a Kulin person towards a drunken white man who had insulted the Kulin man by stealing eels that he had caught – and assaulting him in an unprovoked manner. The Kulin man pursued the white man and

Regained his eels when the white man struck him and kicked him several times, the black justly aggrieved put down his eels and said “you too much hit me, now me fight you” and encouraged by some white people near the swamp where they were fishing a regular fist fight was commenced which terminated in the white man being awfully beaten...⁴⁷¹

A deep and intense animosity towards colonists by the Kulin people of Port Phillip also arose due to the occupation of their land. The refusal of colonists to enter into a reciprocal relationship and share the sheep that wandered on their estates and ate out the Wadawurrung’s staple food, the yam daisy or murnong, angered them greatly. John Coppock, the superintendent of a squatting run near Mt Macedon, stated that when he and his men attempted to recover a large number of sheep taken by a large party of unidentified clans-people, they were angrily taunted and defied. Although this incident probably may not have involved Wadawurrung warriors, it seems probable the angst-ridden feelings of the dispossessed were universal.

In the first instance they threw up their hands and dared us to come on some said ‘Come on you white buggers’. I distinctly heard these words. They had, in a manner, fortified themselves behind fallen trees and sheets of bark which they had set up on end.⁴⁷²

This defiant approach towards the colonists may have been the same group of Kulin people in the Mt Macedon area who informed ES Parker in September 1840 that they fully intended on fighting a guerilla warfare with the colonists in order to expel them from their country.

The tribes were greatly irritated by the violent measures taken to exclude them from Melbourne, as well as by the treatment they receive from many of the settlers. I have been plainly told that the natives would “by and bye” take to the mountains, and try to drive the “white fellows” from their country.⁴⁷³

Judging by George Russell’s estimates the threat of being ejected forcibly by the Kulin nation was real. Russell’s opinion was

Had the natives combined together at this time [1836], they could easily have massacred the whole of the European population; but fortunately for the whites the native tribes were generally at variance the one with the other, and sometimes made fierce attacks upon the tribe with which they were on unfriendly terms.⁴⁷⁴

Foster Fyans, the newly appointed Police Magistrate averred that the majority of ‘bloodshed and murder’ perpetuated on colonists by blacks was caused in ‘great measure’ by the colonists ‘intimacy’ with and detaining of Aboriginal women by ‘the lower class of Europeans’.⁴⁷⁵ Before the arrival of Magisterial authority at Port Phillip Gellibrand recorded in December 1835 that

when he arrived at the 'Settlement', what is now Melbourne, he found about one hundred and fifty Wadawurrung people demanding redress, through Buckley, for an 'act of aggression... committed upon one of the[ir] women.' According to the aggrieved husband, two shepherds had abducted the Wadawurrung woman, tied her up in a shepherd's hut and then 'abused her person'.⁴⁷⁶ Fawkner, like Fyans, was aware of the fact that the detainment and sexual abuse of Aboriginal women was the catalyst for great inter-racial strife. Some colonists such as Fawkner and Gellibrand were seemingly aware of the potential for inter-racial violence that the sexual abuse of Aboriginal women by colonists presented to the fledgling townships. Fawkner made several entries in his journal about the colonist's well-intentioned yet feeble efforts to bring the perpetrator to justice.

Mr Gellibrand examined two men on the charge of violating a native woman...

Lent Mich Maloney to Mr Ferguson either to keep him altogether and pay half his expenses down or return him in one week this was to enable him to bring down his men for examination on a charge of violating a native woman...

Attended to see if the Native woman recognised Saunders [Ferguson's employee] as her violator; Buckley interpreted and declared she charged Saunders with the crime. Ferguson at first refused to send him up [back to Launceston] but after consented.⁴⁷⁷

Squatters in their private correspondence freely acknowledged that their economic prosperity was heavily dependent on the behavior of their workers towards the Aboriginal people they had displaced. Correspondence between squatters and their relations back in Britain is peppered with an unease engendered by their lack of control over the 'settler's servants conduct with the natives'. Squatting families such as the Russells who had usurped Wadawurrung lands are exemplars of this disquiet. In September 1838, family letters affirm that the Colonial Government should be enacting laws to ensure frontier violence was abated. 'As long as the natives remain peaceable and the servants sober, I have no doubt that your prosperity will be permanent; but I am afraid that unless some steps be taken to secure these objects, you cannot long calculate upon either'.⁴⁷⁸ In the same month, the theme is repeated – but this time explicitly flagging both the 'settlers and their servants conduct' towards the Wadawurrung as the catalyst for much if not all frontier violence.

I was glad to hear that the natives were continuing so quiet. I hope that the settlers and their servants will conduct themselves in such a way to render permanent this happy state of things; for I am satisfied that their behavior has more to do with the peaceable deportment of the native population than many are disposed to admit.⁴⁷⁹

William Kyle, a squatter near Melbourne noted in his reminiscences that the majority of colonial workers in Victoria were a 'bad set' who compounded the frontier violence which had been precipitated by the stealing of Aboriginal lands by the squatters and the Government.

Most of the servants were ex-convicts, or ticket-of-leave men, old hands from Tasmania, where the blacks had been very troublesome and their treatment by the whites inhuman. These men, on coming to Victoria, treated the Victorian blacks badly.⁴⁸⁰

George Russell recalled events that occurred in 1837-8 which led to the premeditated killing of two Wadawurrung men.

THE NATIVE PROBLEM...during the early summer of 1837-8 a large party of them came down the valley of the Leigh from the Mount Mercer and Buninyong districts. They made an attack on the Clyde Company's lower station, which was situated near to where Major Berthon's house now stands. Two men were there at the time, a shepherd and a hutkeeper. The blacks threw spears at the men, and threw fire-sticks at the hut for the purpose of setting fire to the thatch. The men became frightened, and left the hut. This appeared to be all the natives wanted. They immediately rushed into the hut and began to tie up the bedding, carrying the flour and other rations outside. The men, on seeing this, mustered up courage and came back to the hut. When they got within shot they fired upon the natives, who did not make any resistance, but ran off, leaving things behind them that they had intended to carry away. Two of the natives were shot dead, and a third one was wounded. The wounded man was carried away; but they left the other two behind. I reported this case to the police magistrate, Captain Fyans, [who] took the depositions of the men and reported the case to Government. He afterwards visited the station; but nothing further was done in the matter.⁴⁸¹

A lengthy letter in the *Geelong Advertiser* relating several incidents that occurred on the Barwon River near Geelong in 1845 highlights the animosity towards the Wadawurrung that prevailed in the Geelong district amongst some of the colonists.

Sir, I avail myself of the medium of your journal to give publicity to the following hasty statements of a series of violent, unprovoked and malicious outrages recently committed on an out-farm belonging to me upon the Moorabool... On Sunday, the 19th. Inst., five or six blacks crossed over a dead tree from Mr Airey's side of the Moorabool to a hut belonging to Dennis Brazzle (who is at the present time up-country) where his wife, within a week of her [expected] confinement, and two children resided. The hut is about a mile and a half from Mr. Airey's and two miles from the Fyans Ford Huts. Mrs. Brazzle had previously counted eighteen blacks (men, women & children) on the other side, but [only] five or six crossed the river. She was alarmed at seeing them come over and told them, "Mr. Dennys no let black-fellow come into the crop", of which they took no notice, but asked her to give them a damper. She said (which was really the fact) that she 'Had no damper' - they replied, "White loubra plenty sulky and plenty greedy" and after searching the hut and finding no damper, they retired. When they first came in, she asked the name of one of

them, and one of the other blacks replied, "Picaninni Buckley", which, however appears was not the name of the person she addressed, who [only] answered, "you plenty cunning, me plenty cunning too".

The bold and ferocious bearing of the men alarmed the woman very much, but she was still further frightened as dusk approached (thinking they had retired) to perceive the heads of several blacks concealed along the banks of the river within 200 yards of the hut; she therefore crept softly out of the hut with her two children and came to my house and described the circumstances to me. No actual violence having been attempted by the natives, I ridiculed the woman's fears, told her that the men saw she was alarmed and were amused at her fear; but in order to reassure her, I took three men with me back to her hut, with the intention of directing the blacks to quit the place if I found them camping within the paddock. Upon arrival, the men went with me round the river, and finding no fires or any appearance of blacks, I abused the poor woman for her foolish fears and the trouble she had occasioned me, left a watch-dog in her hut, and very much against her inclination, took the men back with me.

The next day, I sent a boy with flour and tea to the hut and went to Geelong myself, where I was soon followed by the boy who had been sent to inform me that the blacks had attacked the hut at sunrise, forcing the door and had taken away all the meat (the only provision the woman had), turned over everything, even the bedding. Upon this intelligence, I applied for the assistance of two of the Mounted Police, who were readily placed under my direction, and we rode off immediately to the Moorabool. We found the woman in a state of the greatest agitation and dread. The blacks, it appeared, had, after forcing the door, repeated their demands for damper, which she had not to give them, and she insisted on them leaving the hut. There were five men in all with two guns. Two old men and three younger ones four of whom the woman can positively identify. One of them at length took her oldest boy (about 2 and a half yrs old) up by his arm and others seized his legs and they began to yabber amongst themselves in a manner that she could not understand, but, thinking her son was in danger, she lost all thought of self and, taking up a shovelful of hot coals she threw it among them upon which one of the younger men (since ascertained to be called Big Jack) pointed his gun at her; one of the older men however spoke to him and, taking the gun out of his hands went outside and discharged it into the air.

A short time after, the men left, taking away her meat. Upon learning all these particulars and obtaining a description of the men, I started with the troopers to the camp of the blacks at Ashby, after having directed the woman to quit the hut and take her children to Fyans Ford. The Barrabool Tribe pretended ignorance of the matter and they appeared so sincere and kept well to the same story, that the troopers thought it better not to apprehend the men who appeared to answer the description given, but to obtain a promise that they would all be in camp the next morning when I would bring the woman to identify them.

Mrs. Brazzle was taken round to each of their miams, but declared that none of the men who had been to her hut were among those that she saw. ...The next day we returned by Hope's and Learmonth's and on arriving at the former, discovered the hut, with a great many of the poor people's clothes and tools reduced to ashes. The blacks fired the hut towards sundown on Wednesday...

Probably if I had captured them, some informality in their capture would have been urged – and heaven knows what would have been the result had my shots accidentally struck one of the cunning scoundrels. But they know we dare not protect ourselves and the evil will increase until the Europeans will be driven at all hazards to retaliate. My crops in the bend of the Moorabool have cost me putting in 48 pounds but I am certain that the blacks will fire them when ripe as I am that they have reduced the poor people's hut to ashes: and yet what protection have I against these wandering beings; twenty of them might lie in the creek and defy my search.⁴⁸²

Fear of Wadawurrung attacks persisted in the white's minds. Henry Boyle, a traveler, recounted in 1890 the caution he had received about the Wadawurrung in 1849. Boyle wrote:

Leaving Buninyong, we travelled towards the forest, some thirty miles distant, and on our route we passed many black camps, being very careful to follow Mr Jamieson's (of Buninyong) advice:- "Do not let a blackfellow follow you; but always keep him ahead of you." They were then very treacherous, and would often split a white skull open with a tomahawk without any apparent provocation.⁴⁸³

A dread or fear also existed towards the Wadawurrung in relation to their power to use fire to effectively destroy the colonist's properties and economic livelihoods. George Russell as noted earlier recounted how during the early summer of 1837-8 'a large party of them came down the valley of the Leigh from the Mount Mercer and Buninyong districts...and threw fire-sticks at the hut for the purpose of setting fire to the thatch'.⁴⁸⁴ A.C. Cameron in a letter to George Russell in February 1848 noted with great apprehension: 'We have had no rain lately. The grass being so very dry I have to be constantly on the watch for fear the Blacks should set fire to it. Mr McPherson has had about 1,000 sheep burned; the whole flock of nearly 1,700 are more or less injured'.⁴⁸⁵ Similarly, Robert Hamilton, a squatter at Mt Emu recalled that in 1838 'the Aborigines were rather troublesome...as the season was very dry they set fire to the grass and burned a large extent of the country'. This so frightened his neighbour's (Yuille and his partner Anderson) workers that they decided to remove their sheep from the area until the grass grew again.⁴⁸⁶

It is much more difficult to ascertain what view the Wadawurrung people had of the colonisers who usurped their estates, but the few Wadawurrung voices that have survived in the historical records suggests that they waxed and waned in their summation as well. A group of predominantly Borrumbeet bulluc clans people at Baille's station, south of present day Trawalla, expressed their severe indignation to Robinson about their exclusion from some squatter's stations and entreated Robinson

...to go round to all the people who were unkind to them and drove [them] from their country and now would not permit them near their stations and begged of me not to let the white man shoot them and for me to be 'plenty sulky, and talk a big one'⁴⁸⁷

In 1838 Lake Burrumbeet was particularly shallow, and the Wadawurrung told Katherine Kirkland at Trawalla that the lake was drying up because the white men had driven the water away.⁴⁸⁸ The Wadawurrung also responded angrily when supplies given to them were deemed inadequate and unfairly distributed. A large party of Wadawurrung people gathered at Geelong in March 1838 to receive goods from the government that they expected as a kind of recompense for the colonists' sheep eating their staple foods. Fyans was subsequently castigated for not providing all the Wadawurrung who had gathered with equal provisions. Fyans feared the Wadawurrung were so disgusted with the inadequate supply that they continued to talk badly of him throughout the region. A year later Fyans was solicited again for supplies by the Wadawurrung people around Geelong, who made it clear to Fyans they were not asking or begging for supplies, but anticipated that the Government would liberally provide for them. Fyans attempted to stress this finer point to his superiors in Sydney: 'I do myself the honour to inform you, the tribe immediately at Geelong *expect* some gifts from me.'⁴⁸⁹

Charles Griffith, like many of his contemporaries noted the disdain with which the Wadawurrung considered it when they perceived condescension. 'They seem an intelligent and cheerful race most of them can speak a little English and if you try to over explain a thing to them they say "borack bungalally" that is I am no fool.'⁴⁹⁰ Occasionally the colonists were privy to the local clan's philosophy on issues such as land tenure, dispossession and the rationale for their various accommodative responses towards the white colonisers. As mentioned earlier, Murordoruke, a Wadawurrung clan head, told Addis, the Crown Lands Commissioner that the reason why he volunteered to assist the colonists to search for the murderer of Franks and his shepherd was that 'it would end in the destruction of the whole tribe if the aggressors were not punished.'⁴⁹¹ Robinson was informed about a conversation between Titgomurnin, alias 'Big One Billy', a clan elder at the Urquhart's station in central Victoria, and 'Jaga Jaga', alias Glendinning a squatter, that it was 'not wise for blacks to kill whites'. Not because of fear of violent retribution but because the colonists would consequently exclude the aggressors from enjoying the white's material culture.

In a conversation which I had with 'Big One Billy', regarding the blacks who killed Wills' hutkeeper, he observed they were very foolish, that they would never eat any more damper or mutton or stop any more at any station. They would only have to eat opossum and lie in the bush like wild dogs.⁴⁹²

Similarly, William Thomas was in attendance at a large gathering of Kulin people in August 1840 when Kollorlok, an eminent Ngrungeeta and esteemed orator addressed them about the white man stealing their country and their hopes to have some lands set aside for them. There is sadly much 'lost in translation' aspect to Thomas's transcription of the speech, which is in his own version of shorthand. Subsequently we have a fragmented interpretation of the import of it, but it is clear that in 'their fury' the Kulin drank deeply of the cup of grief about 'the loss of

their country' – and that they shared fervent visions of a swathe of Melbourne becoming their preserve or 'Black Fellow Melbourne'.

The Blacks were not so well pleased or pacified [after hearing news that 'the Blacks were all dispersed from Melbourne'], as I thought - some were very impudent and said why white fellows pillmerlarly [steal] our Country – no good that. I tried to allay their fury... Old Kollorlok makes a noble and powerful speech... so fluent that he would not let another put a word in edgeways. The purport of his speech was... Blackfellows by and by have a Pickanniny Melbourne [soon they would have a small reserve in Melbourne], No white fellows Melbourne Black fellow Melbourne. Bulganna [cattle] no white mans Black Mans, Potatoes no white mans, black mans, this was all alluding to the Station about to be formed, and he concluded by saying, White fellows come to black fellows Melbourne, only Marminarta [Father?] bob Jimmy [?], bad Davy [?], say Yangally Yangally [Go Away!], Black Police turn them away, the concluding part of Kollorlok's speech had a wonderful effect, all through the encampment Ah Ah Ah, which in general and in this case meant yes.⁴⁹³

Thomas received the same anger and chastisement on many occasions. He noted that they 'do not scruple to tell me they consider me a spy'.

One told me of all his good services to the white people in past days, when few white men here, when first come, how that he and Port Phillip Blacks kept Barrabool Blacks from killing all white men [referring to proposed attack on small white community near Melbourne in 1835], and that he get Black fellows that kill first white people. Now many White people came and turn Black fellows away. Why White man Pilmularly ground [steal Country] and no let good white fellows give poor poor Black fellows bread.

A short time later Thomas was remonstrated with again.

They tell me again of their past services to white man... It was Big Benbow [Boon Wurrung Elder], he said when Mr Franks 1st white man was killed [near Werribee in 1836] and Port Phillip Blacks plenty pull away [went] after Barrabool Blacks "and that he boo [shout or frighten] at Barrabool Black fellows and (he was lamost crying) me Boo my Lubras [Wife] Mother...⁴⁹⁴

The Kulin's indignation overflowed when Thomas sought to get the Kulin to see things from the 'White man's' legal perspective.

I again tell them that [when] they make willums [Aboriginal houses] on White mans ground, and cut down trees and cut off bark, make White Man Sulky [angry or displeased]. They say no White man's ground [land] Black man's.⁴⁹⁵

There was also a great degree of dismay at, and contempt for colonists in general. When George Haydon was trekking through Gippsland in 1844, one of his (unidentified) Boon Wurrung guides showed Haydon, to his intense surprise, white tracks and a white campsite that Haydon had not discerned. Haydon recorded the disdainful comments of his guide:

Now white man very clever, no mistake, make him house, and flour, and tea, and sugar, and tobacco, and clothes, but white fellow no find out when another white man walk along a road - I believe sometimes white man very stupid.⁴⁹⁶

Likewise, three Tonedidjerer Bulluks Clans men heaped scorn on the Chief Protector's servants who had lost their way near BurrumbEEP, exclaiming: "White fellow too much stupid, no tell him [they cannot find the] road".⁴⁹⁷

Historians Clark and Cahir surmise that the commonly held belief that white people were resuscitated clans people and Aboriginal people when dead would come back to life, as white people would have had significant importance on how the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip perceived colonists – and subsequently the measure of violence meted out to white colonists.⁴⁹⁸ For instance, the longstanding belief by Wadawurrung clanspeople in the Exford district (Brisbane Ranges, near Werribee) that their recently deceased Ngrungeeta ('Tom Bull') would shortly return as a white man may have ensured the resident squatter's safety.

When John Bull died he was buried in a paddock near the creek and the natives erected a fence around the grave and placed thereon offerings of tea, sugar, tobacco, soap and a towel. They believed that 'when he jump up he be white feller and need a wash'. The other members of the tribe were all eventually buried on the property.⁴⁹⁹

Colonists who were identified by Wadawurrung (or neighbouring tribes) as clan members who had died and reincarnated as white people, were often cared for by their newly adopted clan with great tenderness and care, as if they were children who required their juvenile behaviour to be overlooked.⁵⁰⁰ GT Lloyd, a colonist in the Geelong district listened as a group of grieving Wadawurrung women in 1853 bitterly lamenting the destruction of their community reconciled the deaths of their people by their belief in the transmigration of their dead into living white people.

Having worked themselves into a fit of passionate and excited grief, weeping, shaking their heads, and holding up their hands in bitter sorrow, they exclaimed, in wild and frenzied tones, "Coolie! coolie! coolie! where are our coolies [men / husbands] now? Where are our fathers – mothers – brothers - and sisters? Dead! All gone! dead!" Then in broken English, they said "Neber [never] mind, Mitter Looyed [Mister Lloyd], tir, by-'n'- by, all dem [sometime soon all them] blackfella come back whitefella, like it you"⁵⁰¹

So Wary and Vigilant

Clearly violent Wadawurrung resistance to the British was not universal. There is some evidence that strongly indicates that the intensity of the Wadawurrungs' violent resistance differed markedly from one clan to another. Withers reported that William Yuille 'had settled originally on the Barwon, near Inverleigh, but finding the natives troublesome they retired to Ballarat'.⁵⁰² A considerable number of Wadawurrung sought to vocally defy the white interlopers such as a Burrumbeet balug Wadawurrung woman who shouted at Yuille "Wendouree!" (meaning: 'be off with you') upon being asked what was the name of the swamp she was sitting beside.⁵⁰³ Charles Sievwright, the Assistant Aboriginal Protector in the Geelong district (1839-1849) also recorded another method by which the Wadawurrung displayed their resolute defiance towards the white colonisers.

...with the more experienced stockmen, a tone of absolute authority and tyranny is assumed towards, (and submitted to by) the Aborigines; altho' in many instances I have detected thro' the sullen deportment and in the otherwise imperturbable features of the Natives, the quick and intelligent glance, to each other, which while it bespoke their outraged feelings, strongly indicated their contempt, and defiance of the oppressor.⁵⁰⁴

Reverend Orton, travelling through western Wadawurrung and neighbouring estates discovered the reason for the Wadawurrung to be so secretive and avoiding the invaders was due to squatters 'especially in the remoter parts of the district' who violently disallowed the Wadawurrung any access to their lands.

These shepherds have firearms committed to them, and I fear they abuse the confidence which is placed in them by acts of wanton cruelty towards the natives. The consequence is that the natives in turn maintain a vigilant watch and seclude themselves as much as possible from Whites so that it is extremely difficult to fall in with them.⁵⁰⁵

Many writers observed that the Wadawurrung actively avoided the colonists. Orton attempted on many occasions to open up friendly intercourse with the Wadawurrung and their western neighbours on his journey through the bush but 'so wary and vigilant were they that before we got up to their huts they had disappeared'.⁵⁰⁶ In September 1837 Thomas Learmonth and five other squatters travelled to Mt Elephant and returned via the mouth of the Woody Yalloak Creek. The party of colonists 'came upon a large tribe of [Wadawurrung] natives' whom they suspected of having plundered William Rickett's station [a squatter on the Barwon River] and in a similar way to Orton discovered it difficult to meet and communicate freely. After an uneasy night encircled by 'the savages' Learmonth as noted earlier reported that they had found an effective fishing weir that had been built by the Wadawurrung complete with impressive conical nets. The colonists, having no fresh food with them, took some of the Wadawurrung produce and finally managed to coax some Wadawurrung men to approach them.

Near our encampment we found a fishing weir of the natives, in which were small conical nets of good workmanship. Nearly a bushel of delicious little fish like white-bait was in the nets, part of which we took, and faithfully remunerated the owners by giving provisions in return to a couple of men whom we induced to approach us.⁵⁰⁷

Dr Andrew Thomson, on his first explorations of Wadawurrung territory did not encounter significant numbers of Wadawurrung people and suspected that they were actively avoiding contact with the white people who thieved their possessions and violently affronted them.

I was very much surprised to find so few natives, and thought they were keeping out of the way. During our first visit to Buninyong, we did not see one, and on our first journey to the west, when we discovered Colac and Korangamite [sic], we saw about twenty at Pirron Yalloak, who fled on seeing us.⁵⁰⁸

After travelling from Geelong to Portland in 1839, Fyans confirmed Orton's observation that either the Aboriginal unwillingness to make contact with the colonists was attributable to first hand violent encounters with colonists or the colonists' violent reputation had preceded them.

On our journey we met but few natives, only one party would come near us, at first they were wild. Mr Smythe, though conversant in the language, could not understand them, only two would come near us, but upwards of 20 followed us for miles to all appearance in extreme wonder. Others we met threw their dillies, hatchets, spears and all, even their firesticks away and fled...The natives are numerous and to all appearance in great agitation on our appearance, which to me fully proves of bad acts committed on them. Many we endeavoured to close on to gain some information. We never could by any means coax them, they appear to have no dependence on us.⁵⁰⁹

Five months later, in November 1839, the Government Surveyor, Charles Tyers, on a similar journey to Fyans, experienced a mirror image response by the Aboriginal clans he encountered as Fyans had.

...the natives on our appearance made off with all their speed, although I held up a green bough in token of friendship... from their conduct today, I should imagine they should rather avoid than seek us... Near the swamps to the southward of Mt Napier, we saw several natives who slowly retired before us and seemed to have no wish to communicate.⁵¹⁰

The Aboriginal Protectors' journals also provide confirmation that the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip sought to isolate themselves from colonists not just at times when they felt threatened. In September 1839, a notice in the Government Gazette decreed that squatters found giving firearms to Aborigines would have their squatting licenses taken from them. In April 1840, La

Trobe and Lonsdale sought to restrict further the use of firearms by the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip by instructing the Police and the Aboriginal Protectors to take any guns that were in their possession. A large number of (500) Kulin including (100) Barrabool clans people in Melbourne who were obviously vexed, harangued William Thomas, the Assistant Protector in the Western Port district, about the taking away of their guns. Thomas attempted to appease them by saying

only sulky with guns, their cry was what for white mans, guns big one hungry black fellow by and by - no kangaroo - white man take away black fellows country now gun, by and by all dead poor black fellow. The blacks were very insolent for the rest of the day, would not let white man be near them, yangally, yangally [no good], bloody white man...⁵¹¹

More than a year later, in September 1841, Thomas noted in his diary that the same displeasure with colonists still burned brightly:

the blacks this morning very dissatisfied; and talk much about no good white man, take away country no good bush, all white man sit down, gago [go away] kangaroo, black fellows come to Melbourne and white man sulky, no good that, no blackfellows sulky when few white men here...⁵¹²

In the memoirs and reminiscences of the colonists recorded in the early 20th century it is often noted that the Wadawurrung killed the colonist's sheep or cattle - and the resulting killing of Wadawurrung people is occasionally noted. For instance in *The Walsh papers, memoirs of the early settlement of western Victoria and, in particular, Ballan Shire, 1830-1875* the killing of a Wadawurrung man in a 'fight' and a retributive 'attack' is placed on record.

Mr Cantwell heard that prior to his arrival in the district the blacks killed some sheep on the Bolwarrah run, and when followed and overtaken a fight took place in which one of the natives was killed. To revenge his death the other members of the tribe attacked the homestead but were beaten off.

In the late 1840s, the first hand colonist's reports of the Wadawurrung assume a much more benign tone - rarely alluding to the frontier battles and killings that had existed between the colonisers and the Wadawurrung just a decade earlier. Townsfolk such as Samuel Haslett in Geelong recorded their very brief encounters with the Wadawurrung and enlivened second hand accounts of what they had heard about Aboriginal people's beliefs.

Feb 22 1849 - 3 native women employed by the house went to chop wood - ugly creatures followed by a train of dogs or dingoes. The young females have some sense of natural modesty we evinced by their attempts to keep their bosoms covered by their scanty dress. Tobacco is their ruling passion! Have heard strange accounts of the natives considering white people, their relations and thinking that by eating a dead body they do honour to the deceased!

Mar 1849- Natives go into mourning for a relative by sprinkling white dust (or flour) on their faces.

Geelong Aug 1849- Had several conversations asking for bread and offering to sell dingoes for 'bacco' or 'three money' holding up three fingers as illustration...The Native Aboriginies came into Geelong in numbers every day. They wander about seeking alms or amusing themselves until evening and then return to their places of shelter or mia mias. These are called the 'town Gangs' and take up their abode in the nearest enclosed bushland. They wear blankets and opossum skin wraps – women generally small and ugly – men comparatively fine, straight and muscular and as active as antelopes.

Aug 27th 1849 - saw 5 native men who had got a bottle of spirits which had made them very noisy and merry-all talking in a strange gabble, all moving towards their shelter. One would stop, move backwards, jump upwards with his arms stretched above his head, then stoop down then move backwards-this being their way of giving vent to their exuberant spirits. In all their merriment I could discern nothing which I could name laughter. The dogs of the natives do not bark furiously at the white people, but the dogs of the whites always bark furiously at the natives and their dogs. The fear and awe with which the natives regard the Europeans is evidently shared by their animals.⁵¹³

Nothing but Fear Had Any Effect on Them

For approximately the first two years of the colonist's invasion (1835-1837) it is clear the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip outnumbered the colonists and could have subdued the numerically small parties of colonists. Moreover, in the outlying areas, away from the townships of Geelong and Melbourne, the Wadawurrung maintained their numerical superiority probably until the early to mid 1840s. Most contemporary sources such as Steiglitz, Kirkland, Costello and the Aboriginal Protectors all attested to the numerical superiority of the Wadawurrung over the colonists in the initial period of occupation. The Reverend Thomas Hastie stationed at Buninyong stressed how 'when he first came to Buninyong [c.1839] the natives were "comparatively numerous."⁵¹⁴ Estimates of the Wadawurrung population at the onset of the pastoral invasion by colonists fluctuate widely. William Thomas regularly reported on the large numbers of 'Bonnyong [Buninyong] Blacks' arriving in Melbourne. In November 1844, he reported that '186 in number' camped at Moonee Ponds. Thomas Learmonth thought there were about three hundred Wadawurrung people within a 100-kilometre radius of Mt Buninyong when he first arrived in the region in 1838.⁵¹⁵ The Reverend Orton however considered there to be over a thousand Aboriginal people within a 100 kilometre radius of Melbourne in 1836 and Robinson was told in 1839 to expect a contingent of 500 Wadawurrung warriors to arrive in Melbourne.⁵¹⁶ The members of the Port Phillip Association who initially occupied the Wadawurrung estates did not concern themselves with considering the demographics of the Aboriginal people at Port Phillip but, as demonstrated earlier, were certainly united in their economic interest to avoid a 'Black War' with Aboriginal people in Port Phillip that had plagued their investments in Tasmania.

Ian Clark's comprehensive survey of documented massacre sites in Wadawurrung country (using the colonist's historical records only) revealed that seven Wadawurrung people on four separate occasions were violently killed by colonists between October 1836 and 1847. Clark and other historians caution that this figure must be treated guardedly as the colonists were aware of the illegality of murdering Aboriginal people under British law, as evidenced by the absconding of witnesses and alleged perpetrators. Robinson and the other protectors also reported the burning of incriminating evidence and the reluctance of some colonists to speak openly on the matter fearing they would be hanged.⁵¹⁷

Wadawurrung people, however, often expressed their fears of the colonists to the Aboriginal Protectors, squatters who they may have trusted and occasionally, also to squatter's workers.⁵¹⁸ P.E Costello, a shepherd at Mt Emu, and a co-worker were visited by a party of Wadawurrung who pleaded with the shepherds to testify on the Wadawurrungs' behalf to avert them all being killed.

That night we were surprised to hear a black fellow, who could speak broken English, call out: "Are you asleep white fellow?" My mate called out: "No what is the matter?" The aboriginal replied: "Oh big one frightened along with black fellow". My mate says: "What for frightened?" The aboriginal replied: "Oh too much bungally yabber along with lubra". Bungally means stupid, yabber talk. "Bye and bye" says the black in his pigeon English, "a large number of horsemen coming from the station to kill all the blackfellows", but added he "when they come you tell them we were good blackfellows and harmed nobody".⁵¹⁹

Squatters' workers were widely considered brutal in their treatment of the Aboriginal people at Port Phillip. William Kyle, a squatter near Melbourne, thought that as a rule 'the early settlers treated the blacks kindly, although some of the "old hands" thought little of cruelly ill-treating them'.⁵²⁰ The Reverend Joseph Orton also witnessed acts of 'unjustifiable offensive violence' meted out to the Wadawurrung by 'men on the stations who seem to have taken a wanton delight in hunting the natives as they would do kangaroos'.⁵²¹

The murder in October 1836 of Woolmudgin (or Curacoine), the clan head of the Wadawurrung balug, by a shepherd confirms the assessment of some bush workers being openly genocidal in attitude to the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Curacoine was identified by Frederick Taylor, a squatter near Geelong, as having made an attempt on the life of Captain James Flitt (or Flett) three months earlier. Taylor had Curacoine tied to a tree whilst he sought Captain Flitt to identify him. One of Taylor's shepherds, John Whitehead, murdered Curacoine, dumped the Wadawurrung man's body into the Barwon River and expressed no compunction about the deed. Taylor questioned his servant 'Good God, John, have you knotted the man? He replied, 'that is nothing to you, I wish there were more of them'.⁵²² It was not solely the shepherds and hut keepers however who exhibited a callous and violent predisposition towards the Wadawurrung. Fyans pointed out to the Colonial Secretary in January 1838 that some of the squatters were defying his magisterial powers and flagrantly touting the law by employing a shepherd known to have murdered the Wadawurrung man, Curacoine.

This is the same Mr Taylor [overseer for Fisher] who was concerned in the most inhuman murder of a native, who was tied to a tree and shot by one of his men within twenty yards of his house... the murderer returned in their employ on Indented Head, 'I suppose for the purpose of preventing any native from visiting the place', which was the chief part of the country for their hunting and fishing, and in fact their great support.⁵²³

The Captain Flitt mentioned above in reference to the detention of Curacoine, had previously been struck by a tomahawk whilst coming out of his tent in July 1836 and a party of squatters had gone in 'pursuit of the native'. Steiglitz, as mentioned earlier, was a member of the party seeking the Wadawurrung attacker, and had been asked by Flitt [or Flett] to obtain 'the head of the black' that had struck him.⁵²⁴ David Wilson also exhibited a homicidal attitude towards the Wadawurrung after one of his huts was plundered by a group of unspecified Wadawurrungs in June 1840.

They [Wadawurrung] robbed (the hut keeper) of all they could carry away useful to them as well as muskets, pistols and co. I do not know what blame was attributable to the hut keeper but if he had done his duty some of them would or should have been shot...Nothing will do I am afraid but to shoot a good many of them.⁵²⁵

Wilson, continued in this vein, writing to his brother in Glasgow how he hankered for the Government to engage in a 'fair fight with them' rather than pursuing pacifist schemes, noting angrily in a letter:

The Blacks are still very troublesome and have committed several injuries since I last wrote, an attempt is now being made to get several of the tribe to coalesce and form a kind of village and try to convince them to cultivate land...incapable of ever succeeding.⁵²⁶

Some high ranking Government officials privately also agreed with Steiglitz's approach – albeit in euphemistic language. H.F Gisborne, the Police Magistrate of Port Phillip in September 1839, conceded in a cavalier and bloodthirsty manner in a letter to his family that:

I suppose soon we shall have to fire some blank cartridge at the blacks. They are very troublesome towards the westward, but I think that half my army [the newly formed Border Police], which amounts to in all to a baker's dozen, will be able to keep 'em quiet.⁵²⁷

News of the appalling treatment meted out to the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip by the colonials was communicated to Britain's other colonies. Katherine Turton, writing from India in 1839 to her fellow colonist friend who had taken land on Wadawurrung country near Lethbridge quipped

I was very sorry [to hear] from him [her brother in Tasmania] that the Natives of Port Phillip are ill treated by the Government Officers & likely to produce much evil both to them & the Settlers. I was in hopes they would have endeavoured to conciliate the poor natives, & not have been the aggressors in the first instance.⁵²⁸

The Port Phillip colonists in general had a callous and nihilist attitude towards Aboriginal people and were quick to categorise them as brute creatures. John Gow, a preacher at Smythesdale and Scarsdale wrote in 1839 of how he saw for the first time the 'Aborigines or black natives'. His impression was not a positive one, writing that

they are miserably filthy- little or nothing interesting about them- they are in general exceedingly ugly and many of them have a fierce & wicked look – but, poor creatures it is the duty of the white population to be kind to them. Their dress is a cloak of kangaroo or opossum skins – or a blanket; a fillet(?) round their heads with a feather sometimes stuck in it. Sometimes they put pipe clay or chalk about their eyes – here you see one with our old shirt and trousers on without shoes or hat – another with woman's shawl about his shoulders and straw hat and ludicrous figures they often are.⁵²⁹

A prevailing attitude of Aboriginal society being characterized by ordained decay and death is evident in the results of a Debating Society where 'Relief from worry and idleness was sought' by educated men and women of Port Phillip in the 1840s. The debates were discussions decided by voting on topics. A diarist recorded the results of the topic titled

'Is uncivilized man benefited by his intercourse with civilized man?' – No (by all but one vote, after a debate that lasted three evenings). 'What is the probable destination of the aborigines of New Holland – civilization or extermination?' Answer, 'by a large majority' – 'extermination.'⁵³⁰

The process of dispossession of the Wadawurrung involved many actions however, that were not limited to acts of physical violence that resulted in deaths. There has been a tendency by historians to write of the act of dispossession in discourses portraying major bloodshed as the sole means by which colonists attempted to dispossess Aboriginal clans.⁵³¹ It is in recent times that historians have recognised and debated how colonists adopted a variety of means to intimidate and ill-treat Aboriginal clans that were intended to destroy the clan's land tenure. Historian Ian Clark wrote of how the process of dispossession of Aboriginal clans involved many actions that deserve identification and discussion.⁵³² Clark has set out a framework of a number of methods by which the colonists dispossessed the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip that have often escaped the attention of historians. Clark identified mechanisms used by the colonists that are:

...acts of violence that have a spatial dimension designed to limit movement. This was often achieved by establishing impediments that restricted mobility, or by deliberately profaning aspects of Aboriginal tenure in such a way that it would have

obvious spatial repercussions for affected clans-people. Rather than being seen as a checklist of atrocities, the disaggregation of the violence that accompanied European invasion should be seen as a characterization of the ways in which dispossession was achieved.⁵³³

Denying Access to Traditional Food Resources

Ethno botanists such as Beth Gott have established the integral role of Aboriginal vegetable plants in the dynamics of spatial dislocation in Aboriginal Victoria. One impediment that especially restricted Wadawurrung mobility and inexorably altered the Wadawurrung's traditional living patterns, perhaps more than any other factor, was the diminution of their staple food resource, murnong or yam daisy. The dramatic decline of important vegetable foods such as murnong due to the onset of sheep grazing was a major contributor to the high mortality amongst the Wadawurrung and Victorian Aboriginal people in general. Murnong (various spellings) has edible tuberous roots and was once a vitally important source of food, particularly in southeastern Australia.

There are some clues to suggest that western-styled agricultural practices were part of the Aboriginal ecological knowledge base in Victoria. Scattered entries in the records of early colonist's records such as William Todd, who noted the seeming familiarity and ease with which Wadawurrung women near present day Geelong were 'breaking up a piece of ground to sow wheat'.⁵³⁴ Similarly, Charles Sievwright, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Western district of Victoria reported in 1842 that Aboriginal women and children collected 'roots, opossum, etc' in the morning and in the afternoon used these very same skills in agricultural works at Mt Rouse where with their digging sticks they pulverised the newly ploughed land – much more effectively than 'cross ploughing'.⁵³⁵

The many records that clearly demonstrate systemic use of murnong and specialised agricultural tool manufacture point to an Indigenous knowledge of agricultural practices including: opportunistic and incidental use of plant food; systematic and intensive plant use; plant food management, or husbandry; cultivation of wild species and cultivation of domesticated species. Close observers of Aboriginal management of the environment such as GA Robinson noted on many occasions as he travelled through Victoria, including Wadawurrung country, the presence of specialised tools, large purpose built community areas, ovens and cooking procedures that were related specifically to murnong.⁵³⁶ The frequent reports noting the ubiquity of murnong in the Wadawurrung and neighbouring Kulin landscape from the Aboriginal Protector GA Robinson attest to the abundance of murnong and its importance as a staple food source. On several occasions, Robinson encountered parties of Wadawurrung women and children in central Victoria who each 'carried long sticks, 8 feet long, with which they dig up roots...' He was encouraged to 'Eat murnong with the native [Wadawurrung] women at Learmonth's sheep station'. Captain Hepburn, a squatter in the Hepburn Springs region also told Robinson he saw

30 women on the plains at the time, digging murnong whilst the men went into the forest to hunt kangaroos, opossums etc. which are abundant. We saw the remains of from 30 to 40 screens or shelters of boughs where the natives had been. Also several of the native ovens or fireplaces where they baked their murnong. Some 10feet in diameter [four metres].⁵³⁷

One French writer in Australia described how 'Indigenous people consume vast quantities of dandelion and clover; women bringing home bundles on their heads like farmers going to feed cattle'.⁵³⁸ The dandelion that Reclus observed may be a reference to the flower of the yam daisy closely resembling the flower of the dandelion. The great care and expertise used by Aboriginal women in manufacturing their specialised tools that were used in the harvesting and arguably the cultivation of murnong is briefly noted upon by Robinson whilst travelling through central Victoria in 1840. Whilst unfortunately brief and incomplete it does provide us with some notion of the expert and complex tool making knowledge associated with this vegetable that was apparent to other observers across much of Victoria:

Wallenduc, the name of the lava stone used by the native women for sharpening their murnong stick. I saw one of them at work preparing the murnong stick. This they do by first chopping with tommyhawk or other sharp instrument the stick, giving to it a chisel [sic] edge. They harden it in the fire and give it the finishing touch with the lava stones.

Lar, iron stone. They use these iron stones for making or building their mine, or ovens for baking their murnong. The Waverongs [presumably Woiwurrung] call murnong parm.⁵³⁹

Macpherson, a colonial writer, observed the prevalence of oven mounds in which staple plant foods such as murnong were cooked was still evident in 1884 across central Victoria and the Geelong district. McPherson further noted some oven mounds in the Meredith district (between Ballarat and Geelong) encircled by 'stone rings', some of the stone alignments 'formed by 150 stones'.⁵⁴⁰ It seems evident that the murnong fields were also communal camping and cooking sites – and ceremonial sites.

It is also possible that specialised burning techniques were utilised in the harvesting of murnong. Robinson's journal entries describe presumably Djabwurrung (neighbouring country immediately to the west of Wadawurrung country) women, firing the land and then harvesting murnong during his journey through the western plains of Victoria in July 1841. Robinson observed 'Today the native women were spread over the plain as far as I could see them, collecting pannin, murnong... They burn the grass, the better to see these roots'.⁵⁴¹ Ethno-botanist Beth Gott is inclined towards the view that the burning and harvesting procedure observed by Robinson is closely associated with what Rhys Jones dubbed 'fire stick farming', whereby the fire would 'clear away any dead vegetation, leaving open ground, fertilised by ash, eminently suitable for growth'.⁵⁴² It is noteworthy that Robinson was made aware of the intense fear that squatters had about Aboriginal people purposefully firing the land prior to collecting the murnong tubers – and that Aboriginal people were regularly excluded from their estates on account of this.

Wadawurrung people quickly highlighted to colonists the importance of Aboriginal vegetable foods such as murnong from a spiritual, cultural, political and economic perspective in the midst of frontier rupture. Biocultural knowledge mapping via geographical placenames associated with important plant foods such as murnong was sometimes conveyed to squatters. These place names clearly memorialize Aboriginal occupation and some evidence of permanent settlement. One squatter noted

Carrung-e Murnong [near the township of Birregurra in south-western Victoria] is a native name meaning house of yams. The yam grew well in this parish and consequently yam refuse was plentiful in the ashes and ovens around which the natives built their camps.⁵⁴³

Other Wadawurrung examples include the township of Myrniong in central Victoria which is considered to be a derivation of the Wadawurrung word for murnong or yam daisy (*Microseris scapigiera*) and possibly the sheep grazing station 'Mooramong' in central Victoria.⁵⁴⁴ Reverend Tuckfield, a missionary who ministered to the Wadawurrung recorded a woman's name 'Korine-murnong-gorok which was given her from the circumstances of being born in the place at a time when the murnong was bitter.'⁵⁴⁵ The significance of murnong to many southern Victorian Aboriginal people is illustrated by its inclusion in creation stories such as one Aboriginal account of how Port Phillip came to be. Anthropologist Aldo Massola recorded this account: 'Port Phillip was once a dry land and the Kulin were in the habit of hunting kangaroos and emus there. One day the men were away hunting and the women had gone off collecting roots and yams...'⁵⁴⁶ Creation beliefs in the western district of Victoria relayed to the 19th century ethnographer James Dawson also indicate that root vegetables such as the yam or murnong may have had held some spiritual significance in parts of Victoria as they formed an integral part of a Genesis-styled belief whereby: 'the good spirit, Pirnmeheel, is a gigantic man, living above the clouds; and as he is of a kindly disposition, and harms no one...His voice, the thunder is listened to with great pleasure, as it does good to man and beast, by bringing rain, and making grass and roots grow for their benefit.'⁵⁴⁷

What is certain is that the large numbers of livestock the colonists brought with them very quickly denuded the Wadawurrung estates of murnong and other valuable plant food resources and prompted the Wadawurrung's traditional travelling and living patterns to change radically in response to the increasing difficulty they experienced obtaining their traditional staple foods. Squatters such as the Learmonths who usurped over 100,000 acres of predominantly Wadawurrung land had a policy of actively excluding the Wadawurrung from their stations. Learmonth admitted he 'issued orders, which were enforced, that the natives should on no pretext be harboured about any station.'⁵⁴⁸ The rapidly diminishing volume of murnong that could be harvested by the Wadawurrung due to their prohibition from some stations, combined with the absence of the murnong from the landscape due to the colonists' livestock, greatly accentuated the spatial dispossession of the Wadawurrung. Squatters such as Charles Griffith remarked upon the 'greediness' of their stock for Wadawurrung staple foods such as murnong.

There are besides numerous herbs which horses, cattle and sheep eat with great greediness, one in particular which is known by the native name of murnong which has a tuberous root which supplies food to the Aborigines in the spring.⁵⁴⁹

Historians have long discussed the degree to which colonisation deprived the country of bush foods and the subsequent impacts upon Aboriginal people who depended on those economic resources. Some historians contending that with the withholding of access to land from Aboriginal women (who were the principal harvesters of the vegetable foods), a paradox had occurred whereby 'within a decade the Europeans had become the resource from which they had to harvest.'⁵⁵⁰ Certainly many historians writing about central and western Victorian Aboriginal people's encounters with colonizers are at pains to note the immediate deleterious effect that the usurping of murnong grounds had on Aboriginal lifestyles.⁵⁵¹

Compounding the issue is the fact that colonial observers disagreed about the degree to which colonisation caused murnong species decline. Most long-term occupiers of Aboriginal lands were adamant that the decline was critical. William Thomas, an Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Western Port District (1839-1850) and later Guardian of Aborigines in Victoria (1850-1867) was convinced from firsthand accounts that access to murnong had critically declined due to the grazing of over a million sheep in Victoria by 1845. Thomas was advised on more than one occasion by Victorian Aboriginal people of the plight they faced in their search for what had previously been a staple food source. Thomas reported on one occasion of an 'up-country black', who was probably referring to murnong remonstrating with Thomas that 'the bush big one hungry, no bellyful like it in Melbourne.'⁵⁵² On another occasion an unidentified Aboriginal man clearly attributed the demise of vegetables such as murnong to the overgrazing of sheep on their ancestral estates, complaining bitterly that 'no murnong, no yam at Port Phillip, too much by one white man bullock and sheep, all gone murnong.'⁵⁵³

The Wadawurrung shared this view and noted bitterly that murnong had become very rare in the Geelong and Ballarat district. The Chief Protector of Aborigines, GA Robinson recorded on February 10, 1840 that a group of Wadawurrung people, less than two years after the occupation of land in the Ballarat district, lamented the loss of their staple food to McLeod, a squatter near Buninyong in central Victoria. The Wadawurrung stated to McLeod that 'there were no murnong about Geelong. It was like Port Phillip all gone the Bulgana [cattle] and sheep eat it all.'⁵⁵⁴ Colonists such as A. Batey confirmed this by noting that 'On arriving in 1846 [Sunbury] and thereafter Myrnong digging was unknown to us, for the all sufficient reason that livestock seemingly had eaten out that form of vegetation.'⁵⁵⁵ Reporting of the effects that the absence of murnong had on the social fabric and frontier relations was also prominent in the other Protector's' correspondence. ES Parker, the Assistant Protector to the Aborigines in the Loddon District (immediately to the north of Wadawurrung country) reported on several occasions almost a year earlier (16 March 1839 and 20 June 1839) that

...all the settlers whom I met with on the journey were of the opinion that the Aborigines were necessarily greatly distressed for food, owing to the destruction of the “murnong”, a tuberous-rooted plant formerly covering the plains of this country, but now entirely cropped off by the sheep and cattle. They expressed their earnest hope that the government would make suitable arrangements for supplying the Natives with food, as it was only under the pressure of hunger that they were disposed to meddle with flocks.⁵⁵⁶

Even though William Thomas had some reason to disagree with his colleagues and the observations of many squatters on the topic of whether the murnong species had been decimated, Thomas clearly shared Parker and Robinson's views. Thomas, like others, saw that there was a bloody relationship between the lack of access Aboriginal people had to murnong and the attacks on squatters stations with the resultant violent retributions upon Aboriginal people by the whites. Thomas wrote to his superior, GA Robinson imploring him to act on this matter, and mirroring Parker's observations:

...the poor Natives cannot find it [murnong], thus they are reduced to the greatest extremity at this period of the year...it is only at this season of the year that outrages occur in this district an evident proof while they can get a sufficiency they will be harmless but the cravings of nature drives them to excess, tho' I deplore the outrages they have committed, cannot help commiserating their misfortunes.⁵⁵⁷

Robinson also was not ignorant of the correlation between the importance of murnong as a staple Aboriginal food in much of Port Phillip (Victoria), and inter-racial violence and the rapacious stealing of Aboriginal lands by squatters. In January 1840, Robinson travelled to central Victoria (adjoining Wadawurrung country) where he inspected Waterloo Plains where several squatters men had 'shot a great many blacks [Dja Dja Wurrung] down' after several raids by the Dja Dja Wurrung on the squatters huts and sheep had occurred.⁵⁵⁸ Robinson noted the absence of Aboriginal people, how beautiful the country was and the 'numerous places where the natives had encamped and where they had their fires or ovens of stones thus [Robinson supplied a drawing], to bake their emu and murnong which is abundant, also [sic] fish'.⁵⁵⁹ Several days later, James Munro, one of the squatters whom Robinson suspected of having been complicit in the massacre, said to Robinson:

“there were millions of murnong or yam, all over the plain”, and that kangaroos and emus were also abundant but this was only eighteen months ago; now there are none seen. The sheep drive them away. Yet this is a proof that the natives have been deprived of a large portion of their support and subsistence.⁵⁶⁰

Several days later Robinson recorded a conversation with Hutton, another squatter from the same district, who said 'that the blacks in winter were starving' yet echoed Munro's claims that the plains and country about them abounded with murnong and emus and kangaroos.⁵⁶¹ Hutton, according to Robinson, was far more emphatic about land tenure and Aboriginal people than Munro. On the subject of resource and land-use, Hutton was

said to have avowed for his to be 'terror; to keep the natives in subjection by fear, and to punish them wholesale, that is, by tribes or communities. If a member of a tribe offend, destroy the whole. He believed they must be exterminated'.⁵⁶²

Other squatters appeared to have utilized the plight of Aboriginal people's need for their staple food by encouraging local clans people to prostitute their women seemingly in exchange for allowing unfettered access to murnong. Near Bacchus Marsh in central Victoria Robinson saw large family groups of Wadawurrung carrying their murnong digging sticks, and were drifting from station to station 'clamorous for food'. Robinson further noted 'many native huts about Cadden's station. These natives [Wadawurrung] are enticed about the huts by the men for the sake of the women. Said the natives were quiet enough, all they wanted was noorong [murnong]'.⁵⁶³

It was not solely the Wadawurrung's staple vegetable foods that significantly diminished when the squatters usurped all of their country. An extract from the diary of a squatter in the early 1850s describing the transformation of the flora in the Ballarat district also testifies to the dearth of fauna indigenous to the district, and the injurious effects on the Wadawurrung's principal protein food sources, which occurred after the squatters, and later the miners took the land.

Ballarat was a pleasant landscape. There were three permanent waterholes, one at the foot of Brown Hill, one at the junction of Gong Gong and Yarrowee Creeks, and the third where the Coliseum stood... The hill now called Sturt Street was very steep and covered with flowering wattles and sturdy gums. The whole of the plateau, above what is now Lydiard Street was a spread of rich grass, studded sparsely with timber. There were plenty of blacks camping around the swamp and by a little creek which ran down, near where the Unicorn Hotel stands. Hundreds of kangaroos and emus fed on the grassy plateau.⁵⁶⁴

Horse Whippings and Charging on Horseback

It is apparent colonists quickly made use of mounted horses as a way of protecting themselves in the bush from attacks by Aboriginal people and also as a means of achieving spatial dislocation of the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Fawcner recorded using horses to intimidate the 'Barrabool and Goulburn' clans people in December 1835 after being threatened with imminent attack: 'Charles and me mounted 2 of my horses and went out in search of the Blacks, each carrying one Pistol and a Sword, came upon them quite unawares and put them into great fear'.⁵⁶⁵ Police Magistrate William Lonsdale was also familiar with the effect mounted horses had on the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. In response to attacks on sheep stations by unidentified Wadawurrung clans-people near Mt Macedon in June 1838, Lonsdale sent a 'party of the Mounted Police to show themselves thereabouts for a short time in order to inspire confidence and to alarm the blacks'.⁵⁶⁶ Burchett, a squatter exploring land near Wardy Yallock River in 1839 recounted an experience he had with some Wadawurrung people of the Wardy Yallock balug clan whereby it became apparent that the presence of colonists on horseback terrified the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip.

I was nearly out of sight [of his companions] when I heard a loud 'halloo' upon galloping back I discovered a party of eight to ten natives in a very threatenmg manner and with hostile jabbering making direct for the cart. My riding up stopped them immediately. I had, prior to this, hardly believed the statement that a man on horseback always intimidates them, but it is true, and a horse proves the best protection to a party of whites in the bush.⁵⁶⁷

Whilst Burchett and Fawkner exploited the Wadawurrung's fear of colonists on horseback to afford themselves protection in the bush, other squatters used this fear to interrupt the traditional landholders' tenure. James Unett, a squatter at Anakie, described how he intentionally sought to disrupt the local clan's tenure on their land he had chosen for his squatting run. Unett chose to intimidate the Wadawurrung clan by exploiting their fear of horses as a means of expelling the Wadawurrung from their land. He wrote in 1840

We have had a great many of the blacks about us today, men, women and children; they are rather troublesome, so I was obliged to drive them off with the stock whip on horseback, nothing frightens them so much as a horse.⁵⁶⁸

Sufficient accounts of colonists armed with a stock whip on horseback intimidating Wadawurrung were provided to the Protectors (and in many squatters' letters and journals) to conclude that this was thought a potent method of effecting a disruption of Wadawurrung spatial tenure. George Hobler at Bacchus Marsh clearly noted his denigrating and openly hostile attitude towards the Wadawurrung

The dirty blacks have a camp about a quarter of a mile down the river and last evening they let their fire spread on the grass and upon my going to see the cause of the smoke I had some difficulty in making the lazy wretches get up and beat out the fire with boughs. I had to make a feint of riding over one idle brute laying on his back before he would move and then he only rolled under old Charley's feet till he saw I tried to make the horse tread upon him. After the slight exertion of putting out the fire the rascals came around asking for flour and tobacco. I was glad to learn that Clark, the carrier, annoyed by the burning of the grass near his cottage, had given them a few cuts with his stockwhip in the evening and so started them from their camps.⁵⁶⁹

Steiglitz contended that he charged with his horse at a Wadawurrung warrior as 'nothing but fear had any effect on them.'⁵⁷⁰ Adeney noted that 'Aborigines will often run at the sight of a stock keeper, who used to a wild adventurous life, become as wild as the cattle they ride after and often dash in among these naked wanderers flogging them with their long heavy whips at the least symptom of ill wit! and often with no provocation whatever.'⁵⁷¹ Robinson wrote that it was

common occurrence but a short time since for those people, i.e., the natives, to be coerced and chased by horsemen from their homes and their native fires. At that time squatters would openly avow their sentiments on this head, boasting that they never allowed an Aborigine to appear on their run, for the instant they were seen mounted stockmen were sent with bullock whips to drive them away...⁵⁷²

Violating Aboriginal Skeletal Remains

The violation of Aboriginal skeletal remains was another way that some colonists intimidated Wadawurrung people. The practice of abusing Aboriginal skeletons, especially skulls, was used to intentionally to cow and ward off Wadawurrung and other clans people from their clan estates. Robinson observed in April 1839 that a number of hut keepers, situated on Wadawurrung land or adjoining Kulin estates, mounted Aboriginal skulls to the front of their huts as a macabre portent for local clans-people. 'Several of the huts some of which [were] occupied by respectable settlers had a skull in front of their [huts]: Allan's was one, also Learmonth's another.'⁵⁷³ Robinson further noted that 'Allan placed over his hut door a black man's skull for the purpose of intimidating the blacks'. According to Learmonth's hut keeper the Wadawurrung skull on show at his hut belonged to an old woman he had found dead in her *mia mia* beside a nearby creek. Sievwright also concluded as Robinson had that the presence of skulls at two of the sixteen stations he visited in 1839 was intended to menace the local clans-people into believing that they would suffer a similar fate if they attempted to venture near the station. This practice disturbed Sievwright and Robinson as they were convinced it would highly offend the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Both Protectors sought to formulate policy on the subject of 'respecting Aboriginal funeral customs' in July 1839 but the Protectors were largely powerless, as they did not have a sufficient constabulary of Mounted Police to add teeth to their magisterial authority over the squatters. Sievwright lamented to Robinson after the 'death of an old Barrabool' about the need to enforce colonists to respect Aboriginal mortuary customs. Robinson agreed with Sievwright and ordered his assistant to take all precautions not to 'interfere with Aboriginal funeral customs.'⁵⁷⁴ William Adeney witnessed a shepherd in the Geelong district using the skull of an Aboriginal woman as a 'shaving box' and confirmed that the practice of abusing Wadawurrung skeletal remains by colonists was intentional and moreover that it engendered a great deal of apprehension upon the local Wadawurrung clans people.

Talking to a young man this morning, I heard of a curious mode of making shift in the bush. Returning home one day with his flock he found a black woman's skull and carried it to the hut keeper who immediately said it was the best thing in the world for a shaving box. So taking a saw he cut part of it away and for a shaving box the remainder was kept during his sojourn there. At first he felt some compunction, but after a short time this wore off and he no more expected that retributive justice would cause him to cut himself, as was the case at first. This is but a small specimen of bush manners and the dread which managers of the stock keepers inspire in these poor wandering tribes is extreme.⁵⁷⁵

Sexual Abuse of Aboriginal Women

It was common knowledge, as noted by Fyans earlier in this chapter, that the prostitution of Aboriginal women was often a cause of bloody conflict between colonists and the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. The Colonial Government stipulated, in their instructions to the Crown Commissioner, the importance of preventing white men from sexually abusing Aboriginal women.

The duties of the commissioners of Crown Land, in respect to the Aborigines, will be to cultivate at all times an amicable intercourse with them... and particularly to prevent any interference on the part of white men with their women.

Robinson related the case of Agnew, a white hut keeper in the employ of Urquhart (squatting near Ballarat) who had been beaten badly by Borrinegonnoworrer, a Wadawurrung man for mistreating his wife Cannibumim, after failing to comply with the law of reciprocity that had been mutually agreed upon.

This man Agnew, an old soldier, had engaged the services of a black woman from her husband for three days. At the expiration of that period he was to give her a blanket and her husband a blanket. He kept her two days, beat and ill-used her, and then turned her away without giving her anything. When the husband was informed of it he was incensed and vowed revenge...The man was found by the shepherd beaten most severely. He told his story to the overseer- a parcel of lies - which was reported to the government.⁵⁷⁶

Robinson was pained to observe how incidents of this nature often resulted in squatters forbidding local clans access to their runs and thus added considerably to the degree of land tenure disruption. At many stations Robinson noted that the traditional movements of the Wadawurrung had probably been discontinued which was in part due to the prevalence of white pastoral workers' efforts to keep the Wadawurrung women nearby in a state of sexual servitude.

Mr Bachus Jnr [Bacchus] said there was some natives a short time since at his station. They did him no harm. They remain first with one settler and then another. .. Saw many native huts about Cabden's station [Green Hills]. These natives are enticed about the huts by the men for the sake of the women.⁵⁷⁷

Government officials, the Aboriginal Protectors and squatters also witnessed the ruinous effect that sexually transmitted diseases from this sexploitation had on the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Robinson and the other Protectors frequently observed the incidence of venereal disease amongst the Wadawurrung and the other Aboriginal people of Port Phillip, noting that their affliction physically prevented them from performing their traditional roles and relegated them to the status of beggars.

Came to Campbell and Dr Wilson's station where we met a party of native women and children, 16 in number, who had left Gray's in the morning. They had been round to the different stations asking for food. They are part of the Geelong tribe...Some of them were suffering very severely from syphilus [syphilis]. They were clamorous for food.⁵⁷⁸

Benjamin Hurst, the Wesleyan Missionary situated at Buntingdale near present day Birregurra, attempted to convince the Colonial Government of the seriousness of the problem. Hurst also tried to demonstrate how the prevalence of prostitution of the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip, occasioned by all classes of white people, significantly compounded the degree of destruction upon them in many guises. He surmised that the incidence of venereal disease amongst the Wadawurrung and neighbouring tribes was endemic and had subsequently increased the mortality rate exponentially. In addition Hurst pointed out the birth rate amongst the Wadawurrung and other tribes in the region was considerably less due to 'the fact that the half cast[e] children are destroyed almost as soon as they are born.'⁵⁷⁹

I would not easily come to conclusions upon a point upon which my countrymen are so deeply and disgracefully concerned but I have for my guidance in forming an opinion - first the statements of the natives as to who the persons are that are accustomed to descend to this abominable practice- secondly the almost universal prevalence among them of a loathsome disease, which brings many of them to an untimely end - thirdly - the testimony of medical men, as to the extent to which the same disease prevails among Europeans...there is every reason (excepting only absolute proof) to believe that the prostitution of the Native women is not confined to the lower order of Europeans.⁵⁸⁰

Robinson and others also became aware that Aboriginal women occasionally suffered the extra indignity of being beaten badly by their own clans' people after being abducted and sexually abused by white men. One Wadawurrung woman who had been abducted and sexually abused by some colonists in Melbourne sought refuge with Robinson, as she feared some of her people would beat her. As noted earlier Robinson wrote a memo 'enquire into the case of the abduction of two Aboriginal females by the whites. It seems that the girl was a Wartawarong and was afraid of some of the people beating her.'⁵⁸¹

Destruction of Domestic Dingoes & Dogs

The importance of domesticated dingoes and dogs to the Wadawurrung was very evident to squatters and others. One of the earliest and most descriptive historical accounts by an observer of Wadawurrung associations with dingoes is that provided by William Buckley. Buckley, an escaped convict as noted previously lived with the Wadawurrung people on the Bellarine Peninsula, for over three decades (1803-1835). Buckley witnessed how undomesticated or wild dingoes were considered a superior food source whilst the domesticated dingo was a valuable hunting companion:

After staying on this hunting ground for some months, I know not how long, we started again for a new locality, our supplies of game beginning to fall short in consequence of our continued hunting. Having arrived at a place good for this purpose, as they thought, we pitched, or rather erected our bark tents, having killed two immense large wild dogs on our way. The limbs of these animals they broke, and flinging them on the fire, they kept them there until the hair was singed, they then took out the entrails, and roasted the bodies between heated stones, covering them over with sheets of bark and earth. After this process, which lasted two hours, they were ready for eating, and were considered a dish fit for an Exquisite. They handed me a leg of one, as the best part, but I could not fancy it; and on my smelling it, and turning up my nose, they were much amused, laughing away at a great rate. No doubt, they thought my having died and been made white had strangely altered my taste in such matters. As for themselves, they set to work with great zest, making all the time motions to me to fall too also. At length, I exchanged my portion with a neighbour, who gave me for my dog's leg a fine piece of kangaroo, my friend laughing very much at the idea of having the best of the bargain... The natives consider the wild dogs, and kangaroo rats, great luxuries. They take the former whilst young, and tame them for hunting.⁵⁸²

Charles Griffith, near Bacchus Marsh from 1841 until 1863, affirmed the importance of dingoes in Wadawurrung hunting of large mammals and made specific note of Wadawurrung agency in the selective breeding process of dingoes with European hunting hounds *by* Aboriginal people.

However their most common mode of hunting kangaroo and emu is with dogs. They had domesticated the dog when the country was first discovered, and now that they have crossed the breed with the kangaroo dog, many of them are in possession of animals quite fit for the work: the kangaroo dog himself is a greyhound with a dash of the mastiff, to give him weight, size, and courage. Some few of them have muskets, but this, until lately, was contrary to law.⁵⁸³

John Batman noted on his exploratory survey of Wadawurrung land near Little River in June 1835 that he saw many domesticated dingoes (commonly called dogs by the colonists) accompanying the family group he met with. The first recorded killing of a Wadawurrung dingo by colonists was also by John Batmans' party in June 1835 who, for no apparent reason, fired upon and killed a domesticated dingo near present day Little River. Batman's party at Indented Head discovered as noted earlier that they had little difficulty placating the local Wadawurrung clans partly by providing them with English hunting dogs. The Reverend Orton also remarked on the fondness that the Wadawurrung had for their dogs.

The natives are particularly fond of their dogs which the women are required to carry about from place to place especially when the dogs are young and unable to take the long journeys which are sometimes taken by the natives. It is very common to see a dog or two and a child on the back of a female in a kind of bag and their heads just peeping out.⁵⁸⁴

Colonists however generally viewed the dingo and the domesticated dogs of the Wadawurrung as a danger to their livestock and consequently destroyed dogs that posed a threat without any compunction. A correspondent in the *Geelong Advertiser* railed against the

growing evil in allowing aboriginal natives to breed and carry about with them whole packs of dogs which are of no use to themselves but may ultimately become a pest to the settlers. The settled parts of Van Diemen's Land are now comparatively free from dogs, and we cannot see that there would be any more difficulty in abating the nuisance here. If the black sympathizing philanthropists of England had anything to say in this matter they would no doubt loudly exclaim against destroying the property of the unoffending innocent blacks. Such tender-hearted creatures would no doubt be wonderfully edified at the sight of a black lubra suckling a pup at her breast while her own emaciated offspring was squalling at her back. Yet such a sight we have seen openly in the streets of Corio.⁵⁸⁵

Squatters such as Katherine Kirkland commonly reported how they hunted down large numbers of dingoes on a frequent basis.

Besides the occasional frights of this kind from natives, with whom it was no easy matter to be on good terms, we were at times troubled with wild dogs, which proved a very serious annoyance. for, if let alone, they would make no small havoc with the live stock. They seldom escaped...the shepherds generally get five shillings from their master for every wild dog they kill.⁵⁸⁶

Within the ethnographic literature, it is not difficult to locate instances where the killing of domesticated dingoes and dogs was the cause of considerable anguish for Wadawurrung clans' people and other Aboriginal people of Port Phillip because of the dingoes' cultural significance and its usefulness in hunting, including 'running down kangaroos'.⁵⁸⁷ In 1836, Fawcner expressed surprise at the amount of grief displayed by his Wadawurrung and Boon Wurrung workers after he had shot a dog that had injured his horses: 'Before starting I shot one of my dogs...the blacks seemed so sorry and appeared to grieve over the poor dog'.⁵⁸⁸ Similarly, Samuel Rawson, a squatter south east of Melbourne, told of how he had shot some of the Boon Wurrung's dogs for the killing of his poultry and noted in his diary the calamitous effect this had on the dogs' Aboriginal owners.

They buried the dead bodies of their four legged companions with great ceremony, wrapping them in blankets and sheets of bark & lighting fires by their graves after which they decamped & moved up the river.⁵⁸⁹

William Thomas, Assistant Protector of the Aborigines in the Western Port District remarked that Victorian Aboriginal people performed mortuary ceremonies for their dogs, and affirmed Rawson's observation: 'The Blacks have various kinds of Ngar-gees (or Corroberry's) including a ceremony in burying their dogs'.

It was not long before colonists used the neediness and obvious deep affection that the Wadawurrung and other Aboriginal people of Port Phillip had for domesticated dingoes and dogs as a vivid means to demonstrate their hegemony over Wadawurrung land, control their movements and to deliberately disrupt their traditional ways of living.⁵⁹⁰ Reverend Orton, a Wesleyan missionary at Buntingdale, was of the conviction that the repeated killing of Aboriginal dogs was done in one instance by some station hands to force the local clan away from the station. The Missionary reported the station hands acknowledged that 'animosity might have existed in the blacks on account of their dogs having been killed.'⁵⁹¹ William Thomas' journal contains a good many references to Kulin people's great resentment with how the colonial government attempted to prevent Aboriginal people's dogs from entering Melbourne and Geelong. The ire of the Kulin reached flashpoint in November 1844 when a party of over 180 Buninyong people assembled in Melbourne with hundreds of other visiting Kulin people for 'corroborees followed by a game of ball' [marngrook]. Thomas recounted after visiting their encampment that there was much 'altercation among the Blacks about their dogs'. The next morning Thomas was

Early at their encampment Blacks very wrath [sic] at their Dogs being prohibited [from] Melbourne, & the Black Police say "if white Police Kill Blacks Dogs, that Black Police will kill White mans Dogs." I endeavor to reason with them, the poor Dogs all tied up look queer creatures, and some Lubras [colonial Aboriginal vernacular for women] in a passion cut their cords & took them into Melbourne, I tell the Blacks if they are killed they are not to blame me... then they say "you go then tell them White fellow not to kill Dogs."⁵⁹²

Two days later the Kulin's fury had not abated and they remonstrated with Thomas.

Very early at the Encampment, the Blacks have another rangle about the Dogs, and say that Butchers all about [Melbourne] say where Blackfellows dogs [?], me give them meat. After a little more storming some take them [to Melbourne] but most are left behind...in the afternoon several Blacks returned who had taken their dogs, and were rather abusive saying "that it was me that wanted to kill their Dogs and to starve them that [police] Constables not sulky [angry]."⁵⁹³

On another occasion William Thomas, described in May 1845 how 'When the Aborigines' dogs were banned from Melbourne, the Aborigines stayed away'. Thomas further noted three days later: 'At the time of banishment, there were over 900 dogs among the 614 people camped at Melbourne, and of this great number of dogs, the shooting of 5 dogs persuaded all the Aborigines to leave.'⁵⁹⁴ As late as 1849 squatters and their workers candidly noted their preferred way of spatially dislocating Wadawurrung people from their country. Hobler, a squatter on Wadawurrung land noted that 'a band of Aborigines encamped on the river allow[ed] their dogs [to] hurt Frank's cattle and scatter them in all directions: accordingly Frank took a gun and soon shot seven of their dogs which will make them keep their distance for some time to come'. The provocative act of deliberately killing Wadawurrung dogs was still being practiced in the 1850s according to Charles Lydiard who claimed it was not uncommon for white landholders to commit 'cases of aggression, such as poisoning and shooting of their dogs.'⁵⁹⁵

CHAPTER NINE: MISSIONARIES

The Wadawurrung encountered three distinct missionary activities in the early to mid 19th century. The first, often described as the Government Mission (1836-39), a public endeavour overseen by a catechist, George Langhorne, located on the banks of the Yarra River, in present day Prahran. The second was the Wesleyan Mission (1837-49) that operated firstly at Geelong, and then at Buntingdale, near present day Birregurra. Chiefly the Reverends Francis Tuckfield and Benjamin Hurst administered it. The Wadawurrung also came upon independent catechists and ministers of various Christian denominations.

The idea of establishing a mission for the Port Phillip Aborigines was considered by Governor Bourke in the same period that Batman and the Port Phillip Association began planning their operations at Port Phillip. When Bourke learnt in 1835 that squatters were crossing from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) to Port Phillip and claimed to have a treaty (commonly known as Batman's Treaty) with the Aborigines, he pressed for the establishment of areas of permanent British settlement there, arguing that much evil might be averted by the early introduction of official control. Meanwhile, to protect crown rights, he as noted earlier issued a proclamation declaring that the agreement (Batman's treaty) with the Aborigines was void and the squatters were intruders (not on Aboriginal land - but Crown land). The Colonial Office acceded to Bourke's request and gave him wide discretion in the form of government to be established.⁵⁹⁶ In 1835 Bourke requested Mr. Justice Burton of the NSW Supreme Court to provide a critique of Bourke's plans regarding the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Bourke's scheme of reserving land for 'black villages' and appointing missionaries to live with and oversee the Port Phillip Aboriginal people won the enthusiastic support of Burton. Moreover, Burton considered the concept of 'black villages' should be adopted for every township surveyed.⁵⁹⁷ A catechist, the Reverend George Langhorne, was appointed by Bourke in 1836 to operate an official mission at Port Phillip and was instructed in December the same year that he was to work in conjunction with William Lonsdale, the Chief Civil Magistrate.

The primary objectives of the mission were firstly to civilize and secondly to Christianise the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. The Government missionary's role was to encourage the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip to refrain from living in the bush, to settle in villages and adopt an English worker lifestyle and to afford them protection from colonists. Langhorne was informed that under no circumstances was he to use restraint upon the Aboriginal people and that 'It is by persuasion alone that you should endeavour to affect your purposes.'⁵⁹⁸ The Colonial Secretary's memorandum gave clear instructions for the Chief Magistrate, Captain Lonsdale, and Reverend Langhorne.

It will be one of your [Lonsdale] most important duties to protect the aboriginal natives of the District from any manner of wrong...his [Langhorne] principal object will be to induce them to fix themselves around him on a spot suited for the establishment of a native village...The great object will be gradually to wean the

blacks from their wandering habits...But every effort should be made to induce a preference for those pursuits which lead within the pale of civilization.⁵⁹⁹

Colonial authorities and missionaries used the terms 'Christianity' and 'civilization' interchangeably in the nineteenth century. Historian John Harris points out that although:

The precise nature of the relationship between the gospel and civilisation - that is, Europeanisation - was debated, there were no missionaries in this early period and very few in later periods who did not believe that there was a connection and that the connection was important...The process of civilizing involved both teaching the skills which would enable the people to fit into European society, and convincing them to give up their own culture.⁶⁰⁰

The Government Mission had two main aims: the conversion of the Port Phillip Aboriginal people to Christianity and the introduction of European 'civilization'. Bourke's instructions to Langhorne typified the view that civilization had to precede Christianity and that the Aboriginal people had to be made ready for the gospel. Bourke's views were consistent with the current theological thinking on the subject in Australia. Harris points out that it was not just in Australia that this attitude prevailed.

When Lord Stanley [Prime Minister of England] lamented the failure of the early missions, he described their work as 'the civilisation and protection of these people'. When the Lutheran missionary, William Schmidt, listed the missionary failures he described them as failures to civilise. This view was true of missionary endeavour throughout the world.⁶⁰¹

Moreover, to Langhorne and many other missionaries who followed him, the Aboriginal people of Australia were under the Biblical curse of Ham, and in a state of degeneration.⁶⁰² Therefore it was reasoned that a rejection of traditional lifestyles was as important as the rejection of traditional Aboriginal religion. The ethnocentrism and what is arguably a theological sleight of hand inherent in the missionaries' paradigms had severe repercussions on how they perceived their success at ministering to the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. For instance, the assimilation of Christianity into Aboriginal ritual such as the 'singing of hymns at their corroborees' was reported on many occasions but was not considered to be an indication that Christianity had been significantly accepted, as the Aborigines remained 'uncivilised'.⁶⁰³

The Government Mission in Melbourne experienced an immediate illusion of success as gifts, kindness and food attracted many of the Kulin people, including some Wadawurrung clans, to the mission located near the Yarra River, already a traditional meeting place for the Kulin people in the region. The recipients of these gifts were expected to respond by adopting a British-like settled life. The Wadawurrung, according to Langhorne's reminiscences, did not often frequent the government station stating that the 'Watowrongs [Wadawurrung] inhabited the Geelong district... I had only intercourse with them occasionally when they made their visits two or three times a year to the black station at Prahran [Government Mission

Station]'. For a short time William Buckley, the ex-convict who had spent 32 years living with a Wadawurrung clan on the Bellarine Peninsula, was transferred to Langhorne's supervision in 1836 to act as an interpreter and conciliator between the colonists and the Kulin but this proved to be unsatisfactory. Langhorne observed 'I was placed on the Yarra with a tribe who identified Buckley as one with a tribe with whom they were constantly at war... Buckley was fearful that he should be murdered if he remained with me.'⁶⁰⁴ In the first Mission report of December 1837, Langhorne observed no Wadawurrung people but it is likely that an unidentified 'hostile tribe' described in the February 1838 report is a Wadawurrung family group as the Wadawurrung were known to be at enmity with the Woiwurrung.

We have had a great number of blacks with us during the whole of this month whom we kept employed as well as we were able, and having occasion to enclose with a fence a playground for the children, they were employed in this work as [and] also in fencing the garden. These blacks were of two tribes who are generally in a state of hostility with each other. Of the tribe who most frequent the Mission Station we have two families Who may be said to be resident. The other blacks have within the last few days left for their respected districts.⁶⁰⁵

A month later the theft of some potatoes from a neighbouring cattle station by some Woiwurrung men and the subsequent capture of the perpetrators, Tullamarine and Jin Jin, was the catalyst for a mass exodus from the Mission for several months, leaving only a group of Wadawurrung warriors.

[The Woiwurrung] blacks who had been with us in considerable numbers had retreated beyond the mountains, with the exception of about 30 [Wadawurrung] individuals who had left on a war expedition against the blacks of a district where it is supposed Mr Gellibrand and Mr Hesse were barbarously murdered...The [Woiwunung] blacks still continue in the remote parts of their districts, where they say they will remain until I go to inform them there are no soldiers in pursuit and that the innocent may return with safety.⁶⁰⁶

Langhorne was wary of the Wadawurrung, considering them to be indifferent to working for rations and more numerous than the Woiwurnmg.

The blacks made their appearance in considerable numbers in the settlement. They consisted of the two tribes, the Waworong [Woiwurrung] and the Watowrong [Wadawurrung]. The blacks [Wadawurrung] have visited my station occasionally but they scorn the idea of performing labour to be rewarded with coarse flour or a few potatoes, and nothing will satisfy them but 'white money' [goldcoins not copper] to buy bread for themselves.⁶⁰⁷

He also considered the Wadawurrung to be 'Fiercer and more warlike in their habits than the Wawarongs [Woiwurrung]' with whom he had frequent contact.⁵⁰⁸

With regard to those at Geelong who have little communication with our blacks [Woiwurrung] except for wars, their language being very different, it is to be hoped that the establishment of the Mission [at Buntingdale] amongst them will put a stop to the outrages, which, though often grossly exaggerated, are sufficiently distressing in themselves.⁶⁰⁹

The Government Mission limped along with ever-dwindling attendance numbers until its closure in April 1839. The reasons why the Government Mission to the Aborigines of Port Phillip proved to be a failure, according to Langhorne, was its proximity to the 'Baneful temptations of the town [Melbourne]'.⁶¹⁰ Langhorne lamented the dissolute conduct of the colonists and 'considered that unless there was almost complete isolation for such an institution it could not succeed, as the contaminating influence arising from close proximity to the settlement must necessarily ruin any effort'.⁶¹¹ It also became evident to Langhorne that his orders to 'civilize the natives' by providing them with rations, goods and clothes on a similar scale to convict servants assisting in survey work, were being undermined by the poor quality and insufficient quantity of goods he was provided with to issue. The desire for material possessions was seen by many, including Langhorne, to be the only path to work and therefore to civilisation and thence Christianity. It was felt that once the Aboriginal people acquired a taste for the enjoyments and security of Europeanized life they would shed their life of what was considered 'barbaric depravity'. One squatter, Charles Griffith, gave his reasons for thinking the Wadawurrung were not enticed by the prospect of being 'civilized'.

They do not court a life of labour - that of our shepherds and hut keepers, our splitters and bullock drivers appears to them one of unmeaning toil - and they would by no means consent to exchange their free, unhoused condition for the monotonous drudgery of such a dreary existence.⁶¹²

The Reverend William Waterfield, an Independent minister observed in May 1838 that the Aboriginal children at Langhorne's school did not consider that the Mission school inspired either:

This [Mr Langhorne's station] was a station especially for the natives and I heard some of the boys repeat the alphabet, but they seemed more bent upon play than learning.⁶¹³

Langhorne reported in February 1839 that the Aboriginal people who had frequented the Government Mission did not do so any longer on account of being able to obtain paid work from white townsfolk and that they received better remuneration for their work than at the Government Mission. Langhorne subsequently reported the Mission Station was deserted because the 'blacks could obtain better pay in the settlement' and that they 'frequently reproached' Langhorne for his small quantities of coarse flour.⁶¹⁴

The blacks might earn a comfortable subsistence in the town, were it only constantly working here are now employed in Melbourne, having attached themselves to individuals there from whom they obtain money in part payment for their services. On this account they generally refuse to labour here, ...frequently reproaching me that they could obtain from the white men at the 'Big Miam Miam' (as they named the town) plenty of white bread, when I gave them only coarse flour and that in small quantities.⁶¹⁵

The Wadawurrung also spoke of Foster Fyans, the Police Magistrate disparagingly, as Langhorne had been previously, for not providing adequately for all of them. A large number of Wadawurrung castigated Fyans for not fulfilling their reciprocal trade responsibilities.⁶¹⁶ It is apparent that the Wadawurrung were intensely indignant about British possessiveness. Moreover, they perceived the colonial government as renegeing on the principles of reciprocity - so they effectively boycotted the Mission.

When I issued the last of the things, only reserving a few blankets, and because I had not an ample sufficiency for all, to the number of I suppose about two hundred [Wadawurrung], there was much disgust. They left my place making use of many bad expressions and comparing me with Mr Langhorne. Since this occurrence I regret to say they have continued a strain of abuse on me through the country. I find when they come in any large number, if all are not equally supplied that it creates general disgust.⁶¹⁷

The Aboriginal people of Port Phillip were also adamant that Langhorne's steadfast refusal to supply firearms was reason for them to abandon the Mission.

With regard to the blacks having firearms in their possession, I have ever discouraged it in every way, and it has frequently been mentioned by the blacks as a reason for their not frequenting the Mission Station that I constantly refused them firearms, whereas the black police were so armed and the other natives could obtain muskets from the settlers whenever they required them. In fact such is their passion for shooting that any person might command the attendance of a number of blacks for months together whenever he choose that they should accompany him merely by supplying them with guns and ammunition.⁶¹⁸

When Langhorne resigned in April 1839 the Colonial Government did not appoint another superintendent and the Mission's building and stores came under the control of the Aboriginal Protectorate System, but private missionaries who initially established themselves at Geelong maintained a missionary presence at Port Phillip until 1848.

A number of Ministers from various denominations intermittently concerned themselves with the plight of the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Men such as the Wesleyan Missionary, Reverend Reed, visited the village of Melbourne briefly in July 1836. The

Wesleyan Minister was reputed to have preached the very first sermon at Indented Head. Fawkner recounted how Reed immediately set out into the bush with Buckley to interpret in order to converse with the Wadawurrung. Fawkner was very pessimistic about Reed's efforts to Christianize the Wadawurrung and wrote with more than a hint of cynicism about Reed's misinformed scheme.

Mr Reid [Reed] took boat this morning and went on board the *Caledonia* although he had declared he meant to stop a month here; He went in the bush with the Blacks on Tuesday to stop 10 nights, but got tired and retd [returned] on Saturday night, he soon cooled in his enthusiasm of converting the natives.⁶¹⁹

Joseph Gellibrand, a member of the Port Phillip Association, took a more optimistic view of Reed's endeavours than Fawkner. Gellibrand wrote to Governor Arthur of the friendly feelings being 'imbibed' by the Aborigines of Port Phillip towards the colonists and his high hopes for their conversion to Christianity.

I am firmly impressed with the opinion that the foundation may be laid at Port Phillip for spreading the truths of Christianity through the whole of continent of New Holland, and I am happy to know that I am not singular in this opinion, for Mr Reed of Launceston, who has recently visited Port Phillip, went alone, and unarmed, with a large body of natives up the country, and was with them several days and nights. His intercourse with the natives was highly gratifying to him and when he left them the women and children parted from him with tears.⁶²⁰

Reverend Waterfield also involved himself with the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Waterfield spent many 'evenings conversing about the natives' with his congregation, made some effort to learn the Woiwurrung language, attended several corroborees and attempted in July 1838 to establish a 'temperance hotel for the natives' in Melbourne.⁶²¹ He also noted the large amount of what he thought was internal conflict occurring around Melbourne in 1839.

... as soon as we got a sight of the native encampment we found them just rushing to the onset, the Port Phillip tribe and the Jacka Jacka tribe against the Barrabool [Wadawurrung], who had just arrived. It commenced by letting fly a shower of boomerangs. There was a good deal of sparring, and after the interference of the Protectors and others it was stopped. The women were the most infuriated. At night there was a double corroboree. It was altogether a singular sight to witness their war movements. When will the time come that these natives will lay aside their war implements and become civilized? Went up on the hill [Emerald Hill] tonight to see a corroboree. There were two. The breaking up of the last was caused by a spear being thrown into the midst. We all moved off as quickly as possible. It was supposed to be thrown by one of the Barrabool tribe.⁶²²

James Backhouse, a Quaker missionary visiting Melbourne, observed sometime later in 1843 that it was 'lamentable to see how little [Christian] principle has been exhibited either by the British Government, or by its European subjects in their conduct towards the defenceless Aborigines'.⁶²³ The work of private missionaries specifically among the Wadawurrung had its beginnings in the Wesleyan Missionary Society who supported missionary operations in many newly colonized parts of the world. In Australia, their minister in charge of operations was the Reverend Joseph Orton. Orton was of the opinion that a fixed rather than an itinerant mission station was the most practicable manner to 'protect the natives from the destructive influences of white occupation'. He visited Port Phillip in April 1836 to obtain information about the possibility of establishing missionary operations at Port Phillip specifically for the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Orton was very positive about the prospects of a Mission at Port Phillip, and like Reed, immediately spent time in the bush with a large group of unidentified Wadawurrung, using Buckley as his interpreter.⁶²⁴ Orton reported that the Port Phillip Aborigines numbered about 1000 within sixty miles of the settlement [Melbourne] and recorded how the 'larger proportion' of his congregation at first Christian service in Melbourne 'consisted of natives, about 50 in number, who sat very quietly during the time of service and seemed particularly interested by the singing'.⁶²⁵ Based on his expedition to Port Phillip Orton proceeded to petition the Wesleyan Missionary Society in London and the Colonial Governors in Australia for a missionary operation to begin at Port Phillip. From his Christian evangelical perspective, and from an inadequate appreciation of their epistemology (belief systems), Orton felt that the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip in general were 'most degraded heathens... far below the brute creation', standing in urgent need of Christianization.

It will be readily conceived that a people thus deeply degraded are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. On religion, the mind seems to be a rude chaos, destitute of the power of conception, presenting an awfully distressing voidance of thought and capacity to dwell upon and comprehend the simplest truths thereof.⁶²⁶

Anthropologist Tony Swain points out how views such as Orton's comfortably fitted the entrenched British and European notions of Aboriginal people being in the lower order of humanity and subsequently the Aborigine's beliefs and practices were deemed unworthy of the word 'religion'.⁶²⁷ Orton's very short time in the bush with the Wadawurrung provided him with some insight into their land tenure and their attraction to Melbourne. Orton's journal also shows his concern for the welfare of the Wadawurrung. He condemned the practice of some of the squatters of destroying Aboriginal weapons, he advocated the establishment of large reserves exclusively for their use, and he repeatedly insisted that the Wadawurrung had the same right to kill sheep, as the white men had to shoot kangaroos.⁶²⁸ He also noted their 'wanderings' were within very strictly defined boundaries.

During my stay I spent a portion of almost every evening with them in the bush surrounding the settlement [Melbourne], where they had encamped. They associate in tribes and are in constant habit of wandering...though in their wandering they generally confine themselves to certain limits, beyond which they seldom stray. Indeed they appear to be under very strong fearful apprehensions if by any circumstances they are induced to pass their respective

line of territory: several proofs of which we have in the course of our travelling, in cases of natives whom we persuaded to accompany us, but upon their approach to the boundary of a foreign tribe they either openly avowed their determination to leave us, or otherwise slunk away unperceived.⁶²⁹

Orton's vision of the missionary operation was greatly influenced by his sojourns in the bush with the Wadawurrung and neighbouring Kulin people of Melbourne as he now regarded the feasibility of missionaries 'itinerating' with them as not only plausible but 'desirable'. He envisaged three men of pious character working and living with the Aborigines and aimed to employ one of the missionaries to form a homestead near the township of Geelong that would enable instruction and agricultural pursuits to be encouraged. Orton also thought that 'one or more of the missionaries [should] occasionally wander with the natives.' This he said would

afford them favourable opportunities for obtaining information as to their language, habits, and manners, imparting instruction during their wandering, gaining their confidence and inducing them to settle near to the Mission station.⁶³⁰

Lieutenant-Governor Arthur [of Van Diemens Land] and Governor Bourke [of New South Wales] warmly supported Orton's views. Orton obtained Governor Arthur's assurance that he would personally solicit support for Orton's plan from the British Government.⁶³¹ In May 1838 the new Governor of NSW, Sir George Gipps, approved of a mission being established in the neighbourhood of Geelong and gave the Wesleyan Mission assurances of land and financial aid provided that the Mission was established 'at a convenient distance' from the Government Mission in Melbourne.⁶³² Gipps also placed Foster Fyans, the Police Magistrate at Geelong, under the 'general superintendence' of the Wesleyan Missionaries and added that Fyans was to 'afford you (Orton) every facility in his power'.⁶³³ Fyans in his reply letter to the Colonial Secretary appears to be dismayed by the lack of consultation he had received about the Wesleyan operations at Geelong and expresses severe reservations about the Wadawurrung being compliant with the objectives of the Mission.

...the present [letter] is the first letter, which I have received on the subject of a mission establishment, I am therefore unacquainted with His Excellency's wishes. I shall feel happy to render my aid and exertions to any establishment His Excellency proposes. But I fear it will be a difficult undertaking to domesticate the natives of this part of the Colony, and as to restraint, or any kind of work, they will not submit. Since my arrival here many have been about the place, some of them young boys, and though they receive encouragement to remain, they leave and join their tribes...⁶³⁴

Reverends Francis Tuckfield and Benjamin Hurst were the two missionaries appointed by the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Tuckfield was first to arrive at Geelong on 23 July 1838 and was immediately struck by the importance of establishing the mission at a considerable distance away from Geelong due to the colonists in Geelong being perceived

as 'ungodly', 'heathen' and so depraved that they would be a stumbling block to the 'diffusion of Christianity'.⁶³⁵ Tuckfield concluded, as Orton had two years previously, that the Wadawurrung were 'remarkably docile' and yet it would be extremely difficult to keep the Wadawurrung from 'their wandering habits'. One of the major differences in approach between Langhorne and Tuckfield was Tuckfield's insistence that the teaching of the gospel had to precede attempts to civilize the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip.

All merely civilising schemes have hitherto failed and if ever we [are to] benefit the Aborigines of Australia I am quite convinced it must be done by bringing the gospel to exert its full and glorious influence upon them.⁶³⁶

Tuckfield was also of the opinion that food in the bush in the vicinity of Geelong was so scarce that the Wadawurrung would not stay at the mission for any length of time and hence the task of maintaining the mission would by necessity be of a 'large scale'.

They must at first be fed on Mission grounds... If this is not the case, we shall not be able to keep them from their wandering habits. The food in the bush is so scarce that they are obliged to wander, so that if they are with us today and are not fed they may be twenty or thirty miles from us tomorrow. We have had one young man with us ever since we have been here, and can do with him just as we please... I think this would be the case with the greater part of them, particularly the young if they were regularly supplied with food and a little clothes.⁶³⁷

Within six months, Tuckfield claimed to have a reasonable command of the Wadawurrung language after initial difficulty: 'I have however got at so much of their language as will enable me to talk with freedom on almost any common subject'.⁶³⁸ Some evidence of Tuckfield's acquisition of the Wadawurrung language can be gleaned by this small sample of Wadawurrung vocabulary recorded by Tuckfield.

Berng-kanng, a plant found on banks of rivers. The roots supplied the natives with food at all seasons of the year

Boi-u-rok, a small shrub, yellow flowers. The leaves are eaten by the emu.

Bol kom-bop-ba, a small green plant with leaf like a turnip. When eaten, it acts as an emetic.

Bo-rom-bo-rom, a small plant sometimes used by the natives for covering their houses

Bor-om bor-om, yellow flowers

Bo-young-karl, a plant that bears a purple flower; the root, something like a parsnip, was eaten by the natives when food was very scarce.

Bor-wor, a kind of watercress

Gnar[a]moduk, a plant with very tough long roots, which the natives plait into belts and wear around their heads

Kar-on, a kind of shrub

Kar-up-kar-up, a small purple flower of which the quail are fond.

Kor-or-word-wort, a very small plant with yellow flowers

Kol-ler, a long grass which was plaited for belts

Mir-ark, native geranium

Mo-ro-yok, a bramble

Mul-a-tar-i-wel, a plant growing about a foot high, and bearing yellow flowers. The name literally signifies, "the shadow of a turkey."

Namber Nar-it, a native mint

New-lem-e-ja, a small plant with yellow flowers

Pim-bit, daisy

Pol-an-go, a long green plant that grows in the beds of rivers. The stalk is round, the leaf flat and narrow; it bears very handsome clusters of green fruit, about 9 inches in length. The roots are edible.

Tark, a reed

Tar-a-ka-do, a very beautiful bushy shrub that grows near rivers, and bears clusters of white flowers

War-war-ok, a rush used by the natives for making baskets

Wer-an-a Warg, a common salad plant.

Wong-a-lok, a shrub, growing about 3 feet high, and, like the boiurok, found in great abundance on the banks of rivers.

Leang e drun mean, ornament made of teeth and worn on forehead

Tark-korn, string of reeds for the neck⁶³⁹

Orton noted that Tuckfield had succeeded in acquiring competency in the Wadawurrung language and commented that it was apparent the Wadawurrung favourably received Tuckfield by April 1839: 'Mr Tuckfield appears much beloved by them. He has already such a knowledge of their language that they say he is a 'black fellow jump up white fellow.'⁶⁴⁰ With his relative fluency in the Wadawurrung language and an 'acquaintance with their manners and customs' Tuckfield sought to use Wadawurrung tenets as a means by which he could plant Christian precepts into theirs, with mixed results.

How to convey spiritual instructions to the mind at present I am almost at a loss to know. This difficulty arises from the paucity of words that there appear to be in their language. I have at times endeavoured to take advantage of some of their superstitions and incantations to convey the more correct and important truths of the Gospel to their minds. When I have taken their own notions as a medium to convey instructions, some have appeared to receive what had been said with credit, while others have expressed their surprise at my attempting to correct their errors and destroy [their] notions which they had received by traditions from their Fathers.⁶⁴¹

In a bid to 'convey the more correct and important truths of the Gospel' to the Wadawurrung, Tuckfield also set out to deliberately undermine the influence and authority of native doctors, the '*Wererup*' or medicine men. Tuckfield wrote of his amazement in finding that in each tribe there was a *Wererup* who claimed they could fly 'contrary to the general established laws of Nature'. Furthermore, he related how a *Wererup* had confirmed to the tribe that there was a Heaven, and that he had been there.⁶⁴² The Missionaries were aware of the enormous influence the *Wererup* had:

He is, they say, perfectly acquainted with almost all diseases and their cures, and in the case of death if he can be brought on the spot in a short time after the spirit leaves the body, he can bring the individual alive again. This he does by flying after the spirit and bringing it back.⁶⁴³

Tuckfield sought to discredit the *Wererup* by laying down an Old Testament inspired challenge to the *Wererup* to heal Tuckfield's eye condition by performing the feat of flying: 'I said to him I heard that he could fly. Was it not necessary that he should take wing and fly away in order that my eyes might be cured?' When the challenge was not taken up Tuckfield appealed to Wadawurrung clan member's sense of reasoning and deduction in an attempt to ridicule the *Wererup*'s inability to resuscitate their deceased fathers and mothers. Tuckfield considered he had had a modicum of success in this endeavour, as 'Others of them appeared dissatisfied with their own notions on the system of performing cures and raising the dead'.⁶⁴⁴

Tuckfield's correspondence in January 1840 oscillates from despair to being emboldened. He noted that 'Reverend Hurst gave a sermon in the presence of about 90 natives' and that though the Wadawurrung were 'ignorant of the language' they were 'breathless [in their] attentiveness'. Further, Tuckfield took every opportunity of 'talking to them' and encouraging them to 'giving up their wandering habits'. Tuckfield, unlike many of his contemporaries, was convinced that the Wadawurrung possessed a spiritual capacity. In his letter to his superiors in England, he claimed that the Wadawurrung congregation made 'such enquiries as serve to show that they possess sufficient intellect and power of mind to be quite capable of understanding of what they hear'.⁶⁴⁵ In the township of Geelong, the missionaries' efforts to gain Wadawurrung converts to Christianity were to prove to be a slow and at times frustrating task. The Reverend Waterfield also wrote of his frustrations in conveying the doctrines of Christianity to the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip in the midst of a nefarious white population. In July 1838 he lamented:

I tried today to convey to one of the natives (Agrinoul) an idea of where the good and bad go to when they die, &c. I long to be able to do some good among the poor blacks... Today many of the poor natives were made drunk by the brutal whites.⁶⁴⁶

Tuckfield occasionally allowed his dissatisfaction with the mission to the Wadawurrung to become apparent in his diary: 'I long for the period to arrive when I shall be able more fully to make known the love of God to man but surely the day of small and feeble things must not be despised'.⁶⁴⁷ One of Tuckfield's problems was the intermittent contact he had with distant Wadawurrung clans. Robinson reported in August 1841 when he was amongst Wadawurrung clans that 'some had been to Tuckfield and some to Parker and Sievwright'.⁶⁴⁸ However, Tuckfield was able to relate to his superiors in London that his efforts were not in vain and that some Wadawurrung people did not reject the religious instruction they had received.

Yet they are not destitute of the powers of conception; there does not appear to be any want of capacity... The short time I have been among them I have had many striking proofs of the truth of these remarks... one of the chiefs called at my residence to know if it were time to go to church. I asked him was he going. He said yes, but many of the whites were not. I then asked how it was that he knew the white men were not. He said he had just called on some of them [whites] and they told him it was no good to go to hear the Gospel preached - the black then said if they did not go, the Great Being who lived above would be angry with them, and when they did die, He would send their spirits where there is a great deal of fire.⁶⁴⁹

Orton, now back in Van Diemens Land, also shared with the Wesleyan Missionary Society that the efforts of his brethren were bearing fruit.

The natives were in a state of total darkness as to the existence of a Supreme Being, their moral responsibility etc., etc., now many of those who have been in the habit of associating with the missionaries begin to comprehend some of the great principles of religion, and in the course of conversation answer questions on many important points in a remarkably acute and encouraging manner... Not only do they know the return of the seventh day, but some of them have an idea of the sacredness of the day.⁶⁵⁰

Hurst and Tuckfield, along with two unidentified squatters friendly to their cause, reconnoitred the Wadawurrung estates around Indented Head and Colijon land to the west of Geelong in an exhaustive search for a 'location central to as many tribes as possible' to situate their mission operations.⁶⁵¹ The two missionaries selected a site on the south side of the Barwon River about 60 kilometres from Geelong, near present day Birregurra that was duly approved by Orton. The choice of a site on the boundary of three tribes had serious repercussions for the mission's future and plagued the missionary's attempts to achieve their 'great and specific' objective:

...the religious instruction and salvation of those who may be by the gracious providence of God placed under your care. All other matters are to be viewed as secondary and subordinate to this principal point.⁶⁵²

Governor Gipps also conferred his tacit approval to the mission being situated at Buntingdale, near present day Birregurra, with the proviso that the Surveyor General and the Police Magistrate of Geelong had no objection to the selection.⁶⁵³ Fyans, the Police Magistrate of Geelong, was an avid supporter of the Wesleyan Missionaries and their bid to acquire 16 sections of land at Buntingdale. There was no doubt in Fyans' opinion that if the Colonial Government supported the Wesleyan application, the Mission would be successful. Moreover, Fyans highlighted the benefits the Government and the community would accrue if the Wadawurrung were not 'idling' about Geelong and Melbourne.

They [Tuckfield and Hurst] are worthy and excellent persons with every intention to do well, and if good is to be done by the natives they are the people to do it... Mr Tuckfield almost perfectly understands the language and I believe is almost the only person about here who does. Their crops are nearly all in the ground, and I really think they are likely to have a hundred natives next year working on the ground. Now is this not better than encouraging large groups of them about the towns.⁶⁵⁴

However, Surveyor-General, S.A Perry's view differed from Fyan's markedly on the issue of how much land should be allotted to the Buntingdale mission, arguing that the appropriation of 16 sections of land for an Aboriginal mission would place 'obstacles to the

general improvement of the country'.⁶⁵⁵ Swayed by Perry's views on the amount of land to be authorised for the use of the mission Governor Gipps advised La Trobe of his decision to restrict the Wesleyan Mission to one section (640 acres) a decision which rankled Fyans.⁶⁵⁶

I fear the present news of reducing them to one section will induce them to give up all claims and return. I am sorry for it, as I feel that they are so bent on doing good...Were they squatters they could keep the ground for a few pounds yearly - and surely their object when no outlay or yearly expense attaches to Government, ought to be worthy of notice.⁶⁵⁷

The net effect of 'the dilatory measures of Government' in only approving one section of land was also crucial in the missionaries' minds as it became extremely difficult to curb the destructive interactions between the 'depraved hutkeepers' and the Wadawurrung women due to the close proximity of the white man's sheep runs.

The number of the natives in this district is decreasing. This arises principally from their connection with the lower orders of white people. Several have died of disease, the result of promiscuous intercourse with the shepherds and hutkeepers.⁶⁵⁸

Inter-tribal conflict also loomed large in the future of the Buntingdale Mission. The first signs of internecine (or internal) conflict at Buntingdale occurred in December 1839 when Tuckfield observed the Wadawurrung 'seem determined to drive the Dant-Gurt [neighbouring people] off the station'. He sensed that the reason for the animosity was due to political rivalry and them 'getting jealous of each other' over the food resources and the land.⁶⁵⁹

Detachments of four tribes have been with us at the same time... These have been seasons of great anxiety to us, for it was with the utmost difficulty we could keep them from going to war with each other... Two of the tribes have been striving for the mastery. One of them say that our Mission Station is within their boundary and therefore they ought to have most attention, and the other tribe [Wadawurrung] say that they will drive them off by force of arms.⁶⁶⁰

In a report to La Trobe in May 1840, Hurst also reiterated the severe difficulties the missionaries were encountering at Buntingdale that primarily arose from the location of the mission being in close proximity to four tribes who were at enmity with each other.

We are surrounded by four distinct tribes, all of whom occasionally visit us, but we have not succeeded in bringing them to associate peaceably for any length of time. Contentions of former periods are not forgotten and it is our painful duty to report that these in one or two instances have led to war and bloodshed. Particularly as ours is the only mission establishment in the District, we do not see our way clear to confine our labours to one tribe.⁶⁶¹

Local squatters soon became aware of the internecine battles that took place near to or on the Buntingdale mission and took it as an opportunity to ridicule and scorn the efforts of the Mission. In a letter to the Geelong Advertiser in June 1842, John Bromfield described the 'affray' that had taken place near his station.

A FIGHT BETWEEN THE BLACKS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE GEELONG ADVERTISER.

SIR.- I have to state to you the particulars of an affray which took place last Tuesday night, the 31st instant, the particulars of which are as follow:- "On the evening above-mentioned, two parties of aborigines encountered each other within a mile and half of my station, part of the Barrabool Hill natives and part of the Mount Rouse tribe, which immediately gave battle, but were defeated with the loss of three men and two unfortunate young females. On the Wednesday morning the few natives immediately belonging to my neighbourhood arrived bearing this intelligence, evidently in a great state of excitement, and dreadfully afraid to return to their encampment without the protection of myself and servants, who were to be well armed. Directly after breakfast, I started, accompanied by the natives to within a short distance of their huts, where they all remained, and I proceeded forward myself, and on reaching the spot found their report to be perfectly correct. Such a disgusting scene can scarcely be imagined, the whole encampment deluged with blood, first lay the body of a middle aged man named Codjajah, speared through the breast in many places, his bowels taken off them, and a few pieces cut out of his thigh. The next was that of a woman speared in many places, quite dead. A short distance from her stood a young lubra with two spears through the belly, the whole of her intestines hanging to the ground – she was perfectly sensible – it would have been a charity to have shot her then, but she departed this life in the evening. Besides these three, within a short distance of the huts lay the bodies of two more men, known by the names of Jim and Big-one Tom, they were partly eaten, the fat being taken by their Christian brethren. These are the civilised aborigines who have been well instructed by our assistant protectors, and certainly have profited no little by the time and expense that have been lavished upon them. Such are the particulars of this affair, by the insertion of which, you will much oblige.⁶⁶²

The missionaries' obsession with *settling* the Wadawurrung was a huge obstacle to the spiritual success for which they yearned. Though Tuckfield tried an itinerating ministry for some time, he found it very difficult and concluded it was irreconcilable to proclaim the gospel independently of a settled British-style village way of life. Both Tuckfield and Hurst became frustrated and perplexed that the Wadawurrung did not immediately recognise the blessings of settled life and complained that the Wadawurrung would disappear without warning.⁶⁶³ Chief Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson, on his first expedition to the Geelong District in March 1840 also became aware of the problems the

Wesleyan Missionaries were experiencing at the Buntingdale Mission. Robinson stated he was 'kindly received by the resident missionaries, Messrs. Tuckfield and Skevington. Mr Hurst was absent, and so were the natives.'⁶⁶⁴

Robinson agreed with Hurst that the three tribes resident in the Mission's district ('Colijans, Jarcoorts and Wodourous [Wadawurrung]') were preventing the Mission from accomplishing its task. Robinson observed as Hurst had that, 'Their existing feuds prevent sociality, and are the occasion of deadly strife.' Robinson also shared Hurst's view that internecine strife was not the predominant obstacle. The tribal difficulties at Buntingdale, Robinson concluded were 'of minor consideration compared to the great moral evil arising from the nefariously disposed of white population.' Robinson had many encounters with sheep and cattle station workers, at times overseers, and run holders who openly abused the Aboriginal people and perceived the Protectors and Missionaries as annoying meddlers and buffoons. One encounter particularly distressed Robinson as it became obvious two pre-pubescent Gulidjan (neighboring country to the west of Wadawurrung) girls had been given the name 'Fuck-e-moll' by colonists and that they were being prostituted by colonial workers.⁶⁶⁵ Robinson also lamented that there was encouragement from the colonists for the Kulin (including the Wadawurrung) in their legal conflicts with one another especially when large numbers of Kulin gathered for legal and ceremonial business. Robinson relates too that the missionaries and Protectors (acting as proxy missionaries) were consistently subjected to ridicule from the colonial community when they attempted to mitigate violent conflicts as well as Kulin senior men and women who were exercising important legal business. Elders, whose job it was to adjudicate in legal proceedings perceived him as an interfering fool and wished for him to desist from prying into their legal and ceremonial matters.

Thursday 11 April 1839

The whites seemed afraid to come near them [Kulin combatants embroiled in a conflict with one another] and kept at a distance from danger. I could have wished that some constables had been present...Under the circumstances I was resolved to do all I could and went among the combatants calling upon them to desist and threatening them with gaol. The lower order of whites were taking every opportunity to incite them to the commission of outrage. One man said to me, 'Are you going to drive the poor creatures away here Mr Robinson as you did in VDL [Van Diemen's Land]?' Whilst myself and assistants were engaged with the men a large party of women had met and were in sharp conflict about 300 yards distant in a southwest direction from where the men were fighting. The attention of the spectators were called off to this cabal and hastened to the scene of action. A large party of whites were looking on but none attempted to prevent the poor creatures from doing mischief. Reverend Mr Grills said afterwards that he saw one woman get three strokes on the head before she could ward off the blow. They were fighting with long sticks seven feet in length 1½ inches thick.

When I reached the spot I rushed in among them without hesitation and laid hold of their weapons and calling on them to desist, pushing them away and after a little exertion succeeded. One woman shewed me her chin, the top of which was knocked off. She was greatly excited. The bystanders seemed pleased with the mischief the poor creatures were doing to each other. After pacifying and separating the women I hastened to where the men were engaged. They had it appeared exchanged spears during my short absence and were in a state of great excitement brandishing their spears and making a great show of war attitudes but the principle part of their proceeding was colloquial. They, the natives, called and entreated me to get out of the way and let them fight. I said they should not. Big Jaggy Jaggy [eminent *Ngurungeeta*] was very pert and told me to go away. I said I would not. He said buggah my eyes, but I was aware he did not understand what he was saying. Captain Bacc[h]us assisted me in some degree. Some of the whites said I was exposing myself to danger, it would not do to think of it...

After some considerable parley the combatants withdrew. Where I shook hands with all the parties and they acknowledged that fight all gone by and by plenty at corrobbery many very interesting and affectionate scenes occurred during these occasions when the Wartowerongs [Wadawurrung] came in some of the opposite party came to different individuals and embraced each other in the most affectionate manner. They had been at one time intimate friends or were related by marriage but the custom of their respective tribes now for a short time disavoured them until the wrongs inflicted on their people or nation had been redressed. When these parties met they mutually embraced each other. In the evening I attended their corrobberies, two parties were corrobbering at the same time a large party of ruffians were on the ground but behaved in an orderly manner. A vast difference to what it was when I arrived first. The encamping ground presented a well lit appearance, no less than 75 fires were counted by me and I have no doubt but 100 fires or more were burning. There could not be less than 500 natives in the camp...⁶⁶⁶

The earliest colonists of Geelong and districts within Wadawurrung territory were, as indicated earlier, generally not in opposition to the missionaries' ideals but there were certainly educated voices that were unsympathetic to the Wesleyan's cause and saw the Wesleyans' efforts as counter-productive to the benefit of 'civilized society'. An anonymous letter writer in 1846 vouched that even if the 'successes of Mr Tuckfield at Buntingdale' were universally followed there would be no permanent benefit as in a few short years the Wadawurrung would 'vanish from the face of the earth'. Subsequently, the writer considered 'all measures taken with a view to the eventual civilization of future generations [of the Wadawurrung] are founded upon delusion'. Moreover, it seems certain that the writer considered the Wadawurrung did not require the attention of the community nor was there the need to rue their loss.

We have already expressed an opinion, which under the expectation of receiving obloquy of pseudo-philanthropists, we unhesitatingly repeat, that the perpetuation of the race of Aborigines *is not to be desired* [correspondent's emphasis]. That they are an inferior race of beings it is in vain to deny; and it is no more desirable that any inferior race should be perpetuated, than that the transmission of a hereditary disease, such as scrofula or Insanity should be encouraged. In the case of the Aborigines the process of their extinction is scarcely to be regretted.⁶⁶⁷

Robert Von Steiglitz, a wealthy squatter who seized Wadawurrung land in the Ballan district appeared to have shared these views on the Wadawurrung. Steiglitz wrote on numerous occasions with fervor about how he considered the Wadawurrung 'abominable' and of the futility of improving their condition - and how they were 'unworthy of life'.

Woe behold the blasted race...An attempt is now being made to get several of the tribe to coalesce and form a kind of village and try to evince them to cultivate land incapable of ever succeeding; soon a regular affair will settle the business and clear our part of the country of these regular cannibals... they are a race not fit to live, and I believe quite irreclaimable... their extermination would much improve the Colony...nothing will ever improve them...Nothing will do I am afraid but to shoot a good many...A more useless detestable race of beings approximating to humans I never encountered being hated and shunned by everyone who knows anything about them.⁶⁶⁸

Fyans (the Police Commissioner), though previously a staunch ally of the Wesleyan missionaries, reported to La Trobe in 1842 that he perceived the efforts of the missionaries to have been to no avail and that the resources and energy devoted to them would be better expended on needy colonists.

In the vast tracts of country attached to the use of the Protector and Mission Establishments I believe but very few natives remain for a constancy. In my tours through the District I frequently meet a few small tribes, some provided with blankets and clothes, which I constantly find laying through the country rolling in the ground; this I conceive to be a great waste of property...I conceive might in charity be better bestowed on the poor of our own nation...their condition is just the same as ever has been during my nine year residence in the Colonies: no improvement in morals, and totally void of decency.⁶⁶⁹

Fyans continued in this strain bewailing the fact that the Wadawurrung had steadfastly refused to reject their traditions and adopt totally the coloniser's. Fyans concludes his recommendations by suggesting a measly form of charity be given to the Wadawurrung as a means to conciliate them.

I have known many endeavours to domesticate the native which have succeeded partially. Mr. Fisher, a resident of Geelong, has had a native for four years. He is now a fine lad of about 14 years of age. His constant solicitations have induced me to take him through the district on my next tour. Notwithstanding great care has been taken with this youth, his inclinations bend to his natural life; he absents himself of late, living in a wild manner in a state of nudity and filth with others...Bon Jon was with the Police for 10 months, well fed and clad. He grew tired of the place, threw his clothes away, and deliberately committed a crime. I have known numerous endeavours to domesticate them, but it is not to be done for a constancy...I conceive the best and surest mode to benefit the natives and turn them to advantage would be to issue a portion of flour

during cold season, to be distributed to the respectable settlers and to be issued by them to the tribes about them. This plan, I am confident, would succeed and renew a good feeling between the settler and the native. I conceive the maintenance of the very few aborigines in this district would amount to a very little; until this is done the natives will be idling and lounging in the towns, where they live by begging.⁶⁷⁰

The missionary Benjamin Hurst also clearly considered the problems the Wesleyan mission faced to be insurmountable as early as 1839 and was unequivocal that unless Governor La Trobe took immediate steps to ameliorate the situation the Wadawurrung would 'in a very few years be entirely extinct'.⁶⁷¹ The establishment of Mission stations' within the territorial limits of each tribe' Hurst felt was of utmost importance as the different language speaking groups were invariably involved in settling old disputes with each other and subsequently negated the efforts of the missionaries. La Trobe did not act on Hurst's proposal though the same sentiment was expressed a year earlier by Langhorne in his final report on the Government Mission.

In endeavouring to extend the sphere of my labours to the neighbouring tribes, and to enable the Watouring [Wadawurrung], Torongolong [Daungwurrung / Taungurung], Nillamgourn [Djajawurrung] and other blacks to participate in the benefits of the Mission Station, I found that the constant petty contentions and strife in which these tribes are continually embroiled one with another frustrated every attempt to bring them together in peace even occasionally.⁶⁷²

Moreover Robinson noted in August 1841 that the 'Woudoros [Wadawurrung] as a nation are the most powerful and influential race of Aborigines in the Western District' and thought the Wadawurrung had declined attending the Buntingdale Mission because of 'it being out of their district'.⁶⁷³ In December 1841, Hurst reiterated to La Trobe the spectre of the Wadawurrung's imminent demise if affirmative action was not taken to severely curtail the amount of contact the Wadawurrung had with colonists. Hurst made a number of suggestions that the Colonial Government could employ. La Trobe dutifully relayed this theme to the Colonial Secretary, and effectively did nothing to action the missionaries' strategies.

The Missionaries proceed to state that they at times almost despair of ultimate success: not so much from the difficulties interposed in their way by the wandering habits of the tribes, their quarrels, their cannibalism or degradation, as from the rapid decrease in their numbers, principally in consequence of their connexion with the Europeans, reasons for which they detail and they urge that if the Aboriginal race is to be preserved, and the money and the labor, devoted to their civil and religious improvement, to be made permanent blessings to them, they must be cut off by some means or other from all intercourse with Europeans, except those who are placed among them for their benefit.

Mr Hurst concluded that it appears to be necessary that some very stringent measures should be adopted to prevent if possible the settlers and their servants from encouraging them about their stations, particularly the females.⁶⁷⁴

The Wesleyan missionaries, in a desperate bid to stem the violence between the Wadawurrung and the neighbouring Gulidjan attempted to forbid the Wadawurrung from visiting the Gulidjan at Lake Colac. In December 1844, the Wadawurrung approached William Thomas, the Assistant Proector of Aborigines, and requested Thomas' safe passage to travel to Lake Colac. Thomas noted the Wadawurrung's obvious annoyance with being denied permission to visit the Gulidjan and their threat to eschew the Mission.

The Barrabool tribe lodge great complaints against the worthy missionaries there, because the missionaries will not let them go to see the Lake Colac blacks, and want letters from me for that purpose. If no let them go to see Lake Colac kooling molocko all black fellows leave Mr Tuckfield and no more sit down there.⁶⁷⁵

In 1845 James Dredge, a Methodist missionary and formerly the Assistant Protector responsible for the Goulburn District, argued that suitable provision for the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip had not been forthcoming and what had been provided for them by the British Government was 'grossly misdirected or abortively inefficient'. Dredge bitterly lamented the scarcity of Christian morals in the British government and their subjects who 'oppressed' the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip.⁶⁷⁶ The factors that led to the closure of the Wesleyan mission in 1848 were foretold in 1839. Orton noted that the largest impediment to the Wesleyan missions' success was not the 'migratory habits of the natives' but the 'evil' actions of the government 'fast disposing of their lands'.

An Act has been passed by the local Legislature, commonly called the 'Squatters Act', under which settlers may establish themselves in any part of the extensive territory of New South Wales, and no reserve whatever of land is made for the provision of the natives, neither in securing them to them sufficient portions of their own land as hunting ground, nor otherwise providing for their necessities.

The result of which is that the natives who remain in the neighbourhood of the settled districts become pilfering - starving - obtrusive mendicants... Thus as enterprising settlers extend themselves, under the sanction of Government, the great object of missionary enterprise will be defeated unless some measure be speedily adopted by the Government to prevent the evil. It certainly must become a great national question; to regulate over-extending colonization, and to make suitable provision for the aboriginal nations.⁶⁷⁷

The Kulin, including the Wadawurrung were also fully cognisant of the fact they had been dispossessed and that the colonist's occupation of their land amounted to theft. Edward Parker, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Loddon district reported in 1842 that an unidentified clan head 'complained in his anger that the white fellows had stolen their country...'.⁶⁷⁸ A Wadawurrung man also lamented to Tuckfield that the squatters had taken all of their estates: "Will you now select for us also a portion of land? My country all gone. The white men have stolen it".⁶⁷⁹ Hurst and Tuckfield considered that the closure of Buntingdale was a pragmatic decision, based upon the 'rapid diminution of the Aboriginal population' mainly due to: fatal diseases introduced by licentious Europeans, (who)

committed the most fearful ravages, and brought multitudes to a premature grave. Added to this was the effectual interference with the natural source of supply and increase.⁶⁸⁰

One historian described the missionary societies' efforts as 'limited interest, modest undertakings, ungenerous financing and early withdrawal.'⁶⁸¹ There is no doubt the missionaries at Port Phillip did not achieve the rapid conversions that had occurred on some Pacific islands and indeed the missionaries themselves considered the mission with a great deal of forlornness. In 1858, Robert Young of the Wesleyan deputation in Australia examined the reasons for the failure of the Wesleyan mission and recorded the missionaries' own reflections upon this failure. Young takes some solace from the fact that without the missionaries' presence the Wadawurrung would have suffered materially and physically appreciably more than they did.

...These are the causes of the almost total failure of our mission. I say almost total failure, as I cannot admit that our labours were altogether in vain. As far as the main object of our labour was concerned, I am ready to allow that we were not successful: and yet as far as our influence over, and intercourse with, the natives tended, by Divine blessing, to promote their physical and social welfare, and frequently prevented collision both amongst themselves and with Europeans, we have the satisfaction of knowing that some good resulted from our toil; and assuredly our record is on high, and our witness is with God.⁶⁸²

It was the despondency of the missionaries that Lord Stanley, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, found most depressing when writing in 1842:

The statements respecting the Missions furnished not by their opponents nor even by indifferent parties, but by the missionaries themselves, are I am sorry to say as discouraging as it is possible to be...The Wesleyan missionaries at Port Phillip... acknowledge... 'that a feeling of despair sometimes takes possession of our minds and weighs down our spirits.'⁶⁸³

However, Harris points out that in this era there were a number of salient factors at play that precluded the missionaries from believing Aboriginal people actually desired to be converted. Harris argues that there was a long line of missionaries in Australia who failed to nurture and recognise the Christian faith of their own converts: 'The missionaries to the Aborigines often so entangled the gospel with European culture that the missionaries were unwilling to see spiritual development'. Moreover, Harris argues missionaries commonly demanded to see total, absolute changes of lifestyle as evidence of conversion, which meant 'denying all Aboriginality and becoming European.'⁶⁸⁴ Harris cites Gunther, a missionary at Wellington NSW, 1837-1843 as a clear example of how the missionaries' beliefs and consequent actions frustrated that very purpose towards which they believed themselves to be working. A prime example of the cruelly high standard Gunther required is given in the story of Fred, which Harris pieced together from his journal.

...Once when sick, he [Fred] sought prayer. Gunther did not believe him until Fred repeated his request. Gunther then questioned him first. Did he believe in Christ? 'Yes'. Did he think he was good enough for heaven? 'Yes'. Did he know what a sinner was? 'A wicked native,' Fred replied. Then when asked about repentance, he repeated the general confession. Ten days later Fred asked to be baptized, to which Gunther replied '...when you believe in Jesus Christ'. He replied 'I long believe in him'. Gunther wrote 'I endeavoured to show Fred that he did not firmly believe as yet, that he was too wicked still'. Gunther felt that his judgement was correct when Fred said he was returning briefly to the bush to obtain a wife.⁶⁸⁵

Whilst there is little evidence to suggest that Tuckfield, Hurst or Langhorne had similar standards as Gunther, there is evidence to suggest that some of the Kulin people of Port Phillip accommodated Christianity to a more significant extent than the missionaries, protectors or some historians realised. Tuckfield wrote on one occasion that 'a native boy stood up and before all assembled, uttered a prayer to the Great Spirit that he "might open the door of His house, that all who were there present might enter in and remain with Him for ever"'.⁶⁸⁶ William Thomas, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Western Port district reported on numerous occasions that the Boon Wurrung, Wadawurrung and the Woiwurrung were seriously willing to consider Christian beliefs and to press him for answers. Thomas wrote in February 1841: 'tho [though] there has not been in my experience any permanent or evidential religious impressions upon any under my charge, yet they have on several occasions made inquiries if what I said was true'.⁶⁸⁷ In 1844 Thomas again reported on the ruminating and questioning of Christian beliefs he received from an unidentified man who reasoned on the basis of the colonists' behavior that some of what Thomas spoke about could not be true. Thomas wrote: 'he believed there was a God but did not believe there was a hell or else they [whites] would be afraid of going there'.⁶⁸⁸ Thomas found it impossible to dissuade Aborigines from holding corroborees on Sundays, presumably because they believed that performance of these ceremonies was more fitting and sacred when carried out on Sundays. Charles Lockhart noted another aspect of the assimilation of white doctrine into Aboriginal ritual, and reported that Aborigines at the Goulburn station sang Christian hymns at their corroborees. A similar example of the fusion of the two religions involved many Kulin people (including Wadawurrung) occurred in 1843. Thomas wrote that a large group met and held a corroboree for several days without intermission, from 21 December until 29 December. Thomas said he could not 'prevent them from performing on the Sabbath of the 24th; the principal Men assuring me that it was not like their Corrobories but like our Sunday, the purport was to unite and make Black fellows friends'.⁶⁸⁹ Thomas and others were unaware or not prepared to admit any form of syncretism or eclecticism on the part of Kulin peoples as a possible expression of Aboriginal spiritual fusion. An undated frieze reputed to depict the Lord's Prayer and painted by an unidentified, possibly Wadawurrung artist, and evidences the extent to which Christianity was arguably accommodated and accepted by some Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. An unidentified bullocky driver near Buntingdale who recounted in his reminiscences being admonished by an Aboriginal youth also provides some circumstantial evidence that the Wadawurrung accepted some Christian precepts. The white bullocky driver was cautioned: 'he'd go to hell' for swearing. Harris also points out that the missionaries often expected instant conversions and that the real effect of

missions such as Buntingdale are not known until many years later. William Ridley, a Presbyterian missionary, recorded his observations (c.1860) of the mission at Wellington, NSW, twenty years after the mission had closed and been deemed unsuccessful.

Because Mr Watson's scholars did not settle down in a body and organise a society on the European model, many colonists pronounced the Wellington Vale Mission 'a failure'. But I found, at a great distance from that spot, some of the good effects of the instruction received there several years before. And there are not wanting decisive evidences that the labours of Mr Watson and Mr Gunther were 'not in vain in the Lord'. Within the last two or three weeks the *Sydney Morning Herald* contained in the obituary, a short notice of an Aboriginal woman who had been brought up under their instruction, who died 'in full assurance of heaven through faith...'⁶⁹⁰

Ridley's observations that the missionaries' witness of the Christian faith at Wellington may have been more successful than they knew was perhaps true of the missionaries at Port Phillip as well. In 1863, fourteen years after the closure of Buntingdale, the Kulin community (including Wadawurrung) at Coranderrk, near Melbourne, were observed to be devout Christians who 'all attend prayers twice every day and keep the Sabbath better than many of the Europeans'.

Historians have argued that the Mission did not accomplish any known 'thorough convictions of the truths of the Gospel' and therefore the Mission was a 'magnificent failure'.⁶⁹¹ However, it would seem, judging from anecdotal evidence and conventional sources, that the missionaries' efforts to inculcate Christian instructions and notions to the Wadawurrung were not as totally bereft of success as historians have purported them to be.

The response of the Wadawurrung to the presence of missionaries included incorporating some elements of Christianity into their culture, utilising the missions as a refuge and establishing a demand for equality in the distribution of white goods. The missionaries were able to impart some precepts of Christianity in the face of an overwhelmingly secular frontier society and to provide a nexus for involvement with station and town life amongst the colonists. In retrospect it seems that the inaction of the British and Colonial Governments to implement fully the entreaties from the Wadawurrung and the recommendations made by the Wesleyan missionaries, Police Magistrate, NSW Supreme Court judge, Assistant Protector of Aborigines and prominent squatters ensured the Mission was destined for closure. Sievwright for instance proposed in September 1839 'a system should be introduced to each tribe, upon their own ground, by which all conflicting interests, and hostile contentions, could be avoided...'⁶⁹² It is also apparent that the Government and missionaries' own precepts of how to identify success led ultimately to decrying their own endeavours a failure. By 1840 sheep runs had already hemmed in the Buntingdale Mission and one neighbouring squatter on Wadawurrung land, John Wedge, considered conciliation between the squatters and the Wadawurrung was dependent on being in the commercial 'interests of the settlers'. Wedge proposed a rather radical plan in 1839-40, which suggested land grants to squatters, be commensurate with the number of Aboriginal

people at Port Phillip they were able to 'reclaim and domesticate'.⁶⁹³ A Protectorate system was however favoured to Wedge's proposal as it was already in operation.

The extraordinary difficulties that the missionaries encountered as a result of the colonial population's lack of compunction to invading Wadawurrung land and for inflicting destruction upon Wadawurrung people was compounded by the missionaries' very inadequate understanding of Aboriginal epistemology and customary laws. These formidable barriers significantly stymied the well-intentioned but fundamentally flawed Aboriginal policies developed largely in London and Sydney. The quickly changing circumstances of the short tenured, under-resourced programmes proved to be insurmountable obstacles to any long-term improvements for the physical needs of the Wadawurrung.

CHAPTER 10

THE ABORIGINAL PROTECTORATE

The Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate was an experimental initiative of the Imperial government in London at the instigation of Lord Glenelg. It was designed primarily to protect the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip District of New South Wales (now known as Victoria) from frontier violence. In 1834, one year before Batman's party at Indented Heads had assumed ownership of Wadawurrung lands, the British Government circularized the administrators of each colony, instructing them to take action to protect the rights of native populations in the face of reports of serious problems with the 'natives of New Holland [Australia]'. George Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemens Land (now Tasmania), replied suggesting that the bitter and costly experiences of racial conflict on that island could be used to good account at the new settlement (Portland Bay District of the colony of New South Wales). Arthur, seemingly angry at his own impotence in the face of the horrors inflicted on the Aboriginal people of Tasmania, wrote that it was a 'fatal error in the first settlement of Van Diemens Land that a treaty was not entered into with the natives'.⁶⁹⁴ Arthur implied that a treaty should be made with the natives of New Holland and proposed to send a 'small military party, under an officer in whom I could depend, as a protector to the natives'.⁶⁹⁵ Shortly afterwards, he proposed to the Colonial Office that George Augustus Robinson, the well-known 'conciliator' of the Van Diemens Land Aborigines should be appointed, armed with considerable legal powers. The role of the British House of Commons Select Committee, which inquired into the condition of Aboriginal people, not just in Australia, but also in all of Britain's colonies and the efforts of the Aboriginal Protection Society, were the catalysts that prompted the British Government into action. It is possible that a memorandum addressed to Governor Bourke in June 1837 and signed by 45 squatters from the Geelong District was also one of the spurs. The petitioners emphasised to Bourke that they considered they had acted with great restraint in reply to the (predominantly) Wadawurrung's attacks on their stations and flocks but they feared inter-racial violence would escalate if the government did not take prompt action.

Hitherto the forbearance of our overseers and servants has been deserving of all praise, to such an extent indeed as evidently to have strengthened an impression which is from some cause unhappily entertained by the natives that they may act thus with impunity...Already actual aggressions of the most determined character have been made at some of our stations, the inevitable consequence of which we painfully anticipate but are powerless to prevent.⁶⁹⁶

The squatters sought protection not only for themselves but also claimed that they were petitioning on behalf of the Wadawurrung: 'we are constrained to appeal to you for protection both for the natives and ourselves, most earnestly entreating Your Excellency to

adopt such measures as may in your judgement seem best calculated to avert any painful collision.⁶⁹⁷ The Government responded in July 1837 by establishing a scheme for a Chief Protector and a number of Assistant Protectors. Robinson was appointed Chief Protector and four Assistant Protectors were duly appointed in December 1837: Charles Sievwright, Edward Parker, William Thomas and James Dredge. In February 1838, the Assistant Protectors had their general duties outlined by the British Government:

It will be your duty generally to watch over the rights and interests of the natives and to endeavour to gain their respect and confidence. You will, as far as you are able by your personal exertions and influence, protect them from any encroachments on their property and from acts of cruelty, oppression or injustice. This is the general object of your appointment.⁶⁹⁸

On arrival at Port Phillip in January 1839, the Assistant Protectors began a protracted wrangle with the Governor. They expected to be regular missionaries with stations, comfortable homes, servants, and supplies to draw upon to enable them to keep the Port Phillip Aborigines by them. The machinations of bureaucracy were slow however and Governor Gipps appeared to have no intention to fund the protectorate system any further than what he was obliged to by his superiors in London. Dredge wrote despairingly from a tent on the banks of the Yarra of the dreadful consequences that the Government's lack of decisiveness caused. In March 1839, he reflected caustically on a year of inaction:

As yet nothing effectual has been accomplished further than our arrival at the neighbourhood of the field of action. A tardy Government, slow in the adoption of its plans - and niggardly in carrying them into effect - still slumbers over the interests of the blacks; and as yet, its future intentions can scarcely be guessed at. While the government sleeps, however and we lie upon our oars, the wronged and poor black fellows remain unredressed.⁶⁹⁹

In the same month Robinson finally instructed the Assistant Protectors to 'take the field forthwith' and after organizing their affairs and being instructed which district they had been assigned, Sievwright found his way to Geelong, Parker to the Mt Macedon District, Dredge to the Goulburn and Thomas to Western Port. The districts of the Protectorate that this study is primarily concerned with are Sievwright's Geelong or Western District and Parker's Mount Macedon or NorthWestern District. The Western District embraced from Indented Head to the South Australian border in the south; and in the north by a line running from Melbourne to Myrniong; thence to Mount Cole and the South Australian border. Sievwright initially established a protectorate depot on the banks of the Barwon within Wadawurrung balug clan estates near Geelong in June 1839, utilizing a hut provided by the Police Magistrate, Foster Fyans. Parker's North-Western District was bounded on the south by the Western District and on the east by Yarerewait or Mt Macedon and subsequently regularly met the northern clans of the Wadawurrung.⁷⁰⁰ The Assistant Protectors were ordered to take a census of all the Aboriginal inhabitants of their respective districts, the names and geographical locations of all the tribes, differences of language, customs, political relations between tribes and other useful information that would help provide data for future Protectorate plans.⁷⁰¹

There was great consternation from all the Assistant Protectors partly due to the frustration felt about the lack of provision made for their families by the Government and their role as itinerant magistrates. The journals of all the Assistant Protectors reveal dismay at what they perceived to be a lack of political will on the Government's part to establish the Protectorate system on a firm footing. Dredge was aghast at being ordered to take to the field and there 'being no provision of family nor baggage' and 'no house provided by the Government'.⁷⁰² Equally, Parker is incredulous that he was furnished with one bullock to carry three months provisions through mountainous country and requested the 'mistake' to be rectified. The Colonial Government's reply was an emphatic 'No mistake'.⁷⁰³

Perhaps the largest communication hurdle between Robinson and his subordinates was the issue of whether the Assistant Protectors were to travel or stay in a central location. From the outset, it is evident that Robinson envisaged the Assistant Protectors would achieve the best results by travelling with the Port Phillip tribes, protecting them from violence and helping to oversee agreements between Aboriginal workers and benevolent squatters. Initially Robinson's opinion was that 'well-disposed settlers' were not competitors for the attendance of the Port Phillip natives but variable augmentations to the system.⁷⁰⁴ Whilst Robinson saw the function of the Assistant Protectors as that of travelling missionaries cum magistrates, Parker viewed his role as providing a fixed establishment in a central position for establishing a self-sufficient farmlet that would attract the local clans to him. Sievwright, showing a degree of incisiveness, recommended a portion of land be set aside 'in the centre of the District of the Wa-dow row or Barrabool Tribe [Wadawurrung]... as a reserve for this tribe'. Other tribes, in Sievwright's opinion should be excluded, as it would not be 'prudent to induce other tribes of strange habits, customs and speaking a totally different language, to unite with those whom they have hitherto been hostile'.⁷⁰⁵ In 1842, Robinson re-oriented his thoughts on this matter and assumed a philosophy that bore a resemblance to Parker's. Consequently, he 'discouraged the idea of inducing the natives to enter into the service of settlers; principally on account of the vicious character of many of the older class of servants employed on the stations'.⁷⁰⁶

Inter-racial relations around the immediate vicinity of Geelong deteriorated through the late 1830s. A number of squatters and newspaper reports that perceived Sievwright to be lax about his duties did not help this. According to a report in the *Port Phillip Patriot*, Sievwright 'preferred sitting at his ease on the police bench to migrating through the wilds of the bush'. David Wilsons, a squatter on the Upper Werribee River was initially optimistic that the appointment of the Protectors would curb the Wadawurrung's incursions on his flocks: 'he (Siewwright) will be useful I hope in keeping the natives from us'.⁷⁰⁷ However, he quickly became of the opinion that Sievwright was not fulfilling his duties by protecting the squatters from attacks on their flocks and their station by the Wadawurrung:

The blacks have been very annoying to us having attacked our stations two times within the last six months and succeeded in carrying away guns, pistols, clothing, bedding and provisions. Our people gave them chase but they succeeded in getting away. This is all owing to the disgraceful manner we have been treated by the Governor of New South Wales and the Protectors of the Blacks, a parcel of regular humbugs; in fact, we are left totally unprotected.⁷⁰⁸

Other squatters in the Geelong district also clearly felt the Protectorate system was abrogating its responsibilities towards the squatters that they thought the Protectors were also meant to represent. David Fisher, on the banks of the Barrabool River and Hugh Blackney, near Buninyong reported in May and August 1839 that resident clans of Wadawurrung had been repeatedly harassing their men and flocks. Fisher reported that:

In the three different attacks I have lost 85 ewes, and as to lambs I cannot say the numbers. There are five of my men now here - they have left my place. The men refuse to go back; they say they have no protection, and are not allowed to protect themselves - are in daily dread of their lives.⁷⁰⁹

Hugh Blackney was adamant that the perpetrators could be identified and if the Protectors did not act to curb the offending clan's spate of theft that he would be forced to leave the district.

My shepherd can swear to two of the natives. There are seven natives belonging to the tribe, they have been living with me at my place for about a fortnight, and fed and treated as my own men. They are the guilty persons of robbing my property. The tribe now have four double-barrel guns, two muskets and I understand many more. If the natives continue to destroy my property, I must vacate my property.⁷¹⁰

An editorial in the *Geelong Advertiser* also took issue with Sievwright, purporting that he had 'a license ex officio to commit any absurdity or iniquity in that department' and further accused him of protecting 'the black bushrangers.'⁷¹¹ Sievwright also became unpopular with the Police Magistrate (and later Crown Commissioner of Crown Lands), Foster Fyans. Fyans blamed the Protectorate System for the negative change in interracial relations that had occurred since the Protectorate's inception.

Until the arrival of these Gentlemen and Missionaries I seldom visited a station without witnessing the employment of Aborigines for different purposes on the Establishments and many have been reported to me as extremely useful and trustworthy, for the past two years this practice I regret to say has been discontinued, the settlers being unwilling to bring himself in contact with the Protector or Missionary. Since their arrival I also remark that the character of the Natives has changed with a continued scene of open theft on the Settlers.⁷¹²

Fyans also felt 'great anxiety' about issuing warrants on Aboriginals without Sievwright being present, presumably due to a previous falling out between the two men about Sievwright's use of magisterial power.⁷¹³ By August 1839, Fyans strongly recommended to La Trobe that in the interests of peace and good government La Trobe should dismiss Sievwright. La Trobe was also highly critical of Sievwright, initially for his reluctance to 'move from Geelong.'⁷¹⁴ In 1842, La Trobe seemed very dissatisfied with Sievwright's performance and sums him up thus 'I cannot but consider him a complete failure. The demeanour of the Protector towards settlers is more one of defiance than of conciliation.'⁷¹⁵ Governor Gipps would appear to have had a poor impression of the Protectorate System from its inception. Gipps' opinion in the early 1840s was that the Protectors had inflamed inter-racial tensions:

The course pursued by the Protectors has been, as far as I am able to form a judgement of it, one from the beginning of feeble action and pulling complaint. With power in their hands to command the respect of the Settlers they have failed to make themselves respected and I greatly fear that their measures have tended to increase rather than allay the irritation, which has long existed between the two races.⁷¹⁶

A lengthy report in the *Geelong Advertiser* in February 1841 highlighted the legal plight of Mumbowran, a Wadawurrung man and the antagonism the local press had towards the Aboriginal Protectorate in general and in Sievwright, in particular.

MUMBOWRAN, THE ABORIGINE. This poor wretch has now been seventeen days in the watchhouse at Corio, without any formal charge having been brought against him. During the greater part, if not the whole of this time, he has been in irons, and, it is said, fed on bread and water; he is kept in a cell separate from the other untried prisoners, thus having solitary confinement added to his other miseries. This has been a most atrocious affair throughout. He has been protected with a vengeance. The pitiful cries of the poor wretch often disturb the neighbourhood. Where are the Chief Protector and his Assistant? The latter, we are aware, visited the prisoner once; we know not what passed, except that the black roared with agony; and relapsed into his first fit of terror, from which he was then recovering. He is one of the best-looking aborigines we have seen, young, well-formed, neat limbed, and of great strength; his behaviour has been such as even to draw pity from the constables; when he raves about his "pickaninny Mara" (his child, a few months old) his tears are quite touching, and hardened must he be who would be ashamed to sympathise with him. In the absence of any official examination, it is difficult to arrive at the truth of the affair which has led to his imprisonment. The following particulars may, we think, be depended upon:—A wild black fellow (Mumbowran belongs to the Barrarbool tribe, who consider themselves civilised, and look upon the others as barbarians!) —a wild black fellow was guilty of attempting to murder a shepherd near Lake Colac. The Barrarbool tribe took the law into their own hands, and wreaked their vengeance upon the guilty black; the affair was conducted in a deliberate manner, according to their notions of law and justice; and he was put to death by a party of natives, who showered their spears upon him simultaneously. So far from supposing that he had been guilty of an illegal act, Mumbowran afterwards boasted that he threw the last spear. The manner in which he was taken is sufficient to stamp disgrace upon the Protectorate; the white perfidy of the Protector is rarely equaled in the annals of black treachery. Mumbowran was rewarded, and 'gammoned' to carry a parcel to the watchhouse, where he was entrapped. Should this account be substantiated, and we have every reason to believe that it will, we have no hesitation in giving our opinion that the conduct of the blacks was not only blameless, but praiseworthy. Though ignorant of European law, they outraged none of its maxims; if they did not go through its forms, they at least acted according to its spirit. They are now punished for protecting the whites—a crime they will take care not to be guilty of again. Again, we urge upon the

Protectors and the local authorities, (and if the appeal be unavailing, upon the Government), the propriety of bringing this case to an immediate settlement. The laws relating to the blacks are sufficiently bad, without being aggravated by gross maladministration.⁷¹⁷

Mumbowan's imprisonment incensed the Wadawurrung. According to a local historian

After 45 days in the watch-house the prisoner was escorted by soldiers and police to a cutter for transfer to Melbourne. The departure of the vessel was made amid angry protests by a crowd of aborigines of the Barrabool tribe. There was a belief that Mumbowna was taken away from Geelong because the police feared that an organised attempt would be made to rescue him. However, the effort to get him away to custody in Melbourne failed. When the cutter was approaching Melbourne Mumbowna obtained permission to go on deck. To enable him to do so his manacled hands were released. Suddenly he stepped over the side, and he was not seen again.⁷¹⁸

The perception of Sievwright and the Aboriginal protectorate system in general by the white community (and by some historians) was generally one of ineffective and unpopular.⁷¹⁹ William Russell writing to his relatives in Scotland in 1839 is typical of many squatter's attitudes towards the Aboriginal Protectorate.

I never saw any of the natives, excepting a few of what they call the civilized ones in the neighbourhood of the townships of Melbourne and Geelong; they are occasionally troublesome to those who are up in the interior, sometimes robbing their huts of flour &c., and carrying off a few of their sheep from the folds at night. They have also committed several murders, but the settlers do not seem to dread them much, as they seldom attack people in an open straightforward manner but rather try to catch them on the sly. There are protectors who receive a salary for looking after the rights of the blacks; but they are much blamed by the settlers for putting wrong notions into their heads, such as persuading them that the white people durst not kill them for any offence which they may commit, which makes them a great deal more daring than they otherwise would be. These guardians never go amongst the natives to instruct them in any way whatever, but if they hear of any mischief being done them by the settlers in the protection of property they are sure to raise a hue and cry.⁷²⁰

David Wilson on the upper Werribee in April 1839 echoed William Russell's grievance bitterly complaining that the Wadawurrung 'are becoming very impertinent and frequently most troublesome from the injudicious levity almost on all occasions shewn [sic] to them by the Government [Aboriginal Protectors] making them suppose they may injure the whites with impunity'.⁷²¹ In March 1840, a public meeting at Geelong vented its anger towards the Border Police and Sievwright. Sievwright came under scrutiny and was found wanting in his capacity as Assistant Aboriginal Protector as he was perceived to be pro-Aboriginal.

[Sievwright's] presence has rather encouraged the native tribes in their aggressions, while he has not, so far as the memorialists are able to discover rendered them any service... nor do memorialists conceive his procedure in any degree fitted to improve the conditions of those for whose benefit he is understood to be stationed here.⁷²²

However much a number of squatters felt vulnerable and thought Sievwright ineffective, it also seems apparent that an indeterminate number of Wadawurrung people and other neighbouring language groups seemed assured of protection, and possibly acted provocatively on occasion to colonists because of this assurance. Sievwright apprehended Burdymueradae on a charge of assaulting his wife Labawadmeen and claimed to have been successful in curbing the Wadawurrung practice of 'waddying' their wives.

Upon the 24th Instant I received a note from Mr. Roadknight stating that an aboriginal Black had assaulted one of the native women and had endangered her life. I immediately proceeded to his station (about 8 miles distant and accompanied by the native charged with the offence who had just arrived at my tents) and there found the woman still insensible from the severe wound upon the back of the head, having taken the accompanying depositions of the two servants, who had witnessed the transaction. I told the native I was very angry with him for having done so and if the lubra should die he would be hanged. He stated that of late she had been unfaithful to him, and that he had warned her, that next time he had to complain of such conduct he would waddie (sic) her. Upon my return to the tribe I called the males together and stated that I would not allow of such proceedings – and, as I had previously told them so, I would on (sic) the morning punish Burdy-mur-ro-doc. He replied “very well, you may plenty waddie me.” I told him no but that he must be confined. To this he at once agreed and next day walked with me to where the stocks were, sat quietly down and allowed himself to be secured. Before leaving him I told him I would return at sunset and release him. He begged I would in the meantime go to his lubra and tell her not to be frightened. Nearly four hours had elapsed when to my surprise he walked quietly to my tent and said “he was very tired of being the stocks and was very hungry – he had plenty broken the chain and come away.” While he was in the stocks I took all the natives who were with me to look at him (from the distance), told them why he was there, and that I would not allow any more waddies to be used to (sic) the lubras. They perfectly understood what I meant, and since that time I have had five cases of domestic quarrel referred to me and arranged without the waddies.

(Signed) Chas. Wightman Seiwright

30 October, 1839.⁷²³

A number of squatters such as Charles Wedge claimed that the Wadawurrung were 'troublesome' and had committed a variety of crimes towards the colonists, claiming immunity to do so by threatening the offended party that if he attempted any retaliation the Protectors would hang them.⁷²⁴ Wilson felt incensed that the Aboriginal Protectors were pitting the Wadawurrung against the squatters: '... the fools of protectors have informed them that we dare not meddle with them or if we did we would be hanged.'⁷²⁵ Fyans himself had been threatened in a similar vein.

Where detected in these acts of theft and outrage, and spoken to by the European, they will deliberately tell him that "if he touches them Mr. (mentioning one of the Protector's names) will hang him". This language has been thoroughly instilled into them, a Native having held out the same threat to myself.⁷²⁶

Siewwright was occasionally perceived by the Aboriginal people under his jurisdiction as an arbitrator. In November 1839 a Gulidjan clan head walked the considerable distance from Lake Colac to Geelong to inform Siewwright, not the Missionaries at Buntingdale, of a massacre of many (15-25) Gulidjan people by colonists beyond Lake Corangamite.⁷²⁷ A series of disparaging letters was levelled at Siewwright, by Robinson and La Trobe for not immediately investigating the reported massacre as corroborating evidence from the missionaries at Buntingdale was also available which added veracity to the report.⁷²⁸ Siewwright finally left Geelong to investigate the matter on 19 December 1839, due, he claimed to not having the facilities earlier to travel to the area. He subsequently made a detailed investigation but feared that if he did not travel independently of the squatters he would compromise the integrity of his magisterial inquiries.⁷²⁹ Depositions from Siewwright at the Geelong Court Register for 1839 reveal that Siewwright was very well known to some Wadawurrung clan members and pursued two separate matters within the same week.⁷³⁰ The first incident concerned shepherds taking Wadawurrung women into their huts:

Many complaints have been made to me by the natives that the two prisoners William Edwards and John Cooke have taken their women and brought them to their hut... six natives came to me under great excitement saying that their women were again in the hut with the prisoners, and that the natives on demanding them were told by the prisoners that the women were gone to Corio. The natives stated unless the women were returned to them they would fire the hut and spear the men...I came over immediately...I ordered the natives to search the hut, where from under their bed they dragged three of their women.⁷³¹

Siewwright was successful in securing a conviction against the two shepherds and they subsequently received fifty lashes each. Over the next three days Siewwright tried unsuccessfully to prosecute a shepherd in the employ of the Derwent Company for the assault of a Wadawurrung man, Bundymendoc, who came to Siewwright and complained of being struck because he had made a mess on a hut floor with wood shavings. Siewwright made it very clear to the Court and later in a private letter to the shepherd's employer,

David Fisher, that 'it was with difficulty that I kept the natives from revenging the outrage'. In his letter to Fisher, Sievwright also made a thinly veiled threat by reminding him that the occupiers of Crown Lands were responsible for the conduct of their servants in regards to harbouring native women. Sievwright intimated he could 'direct the Commissioner not to recommend the renewal' of Fisher's pastoral licence.⁷³²

This was not altogether an idle threat from Sievwright as both Robinson and La Trobe considered the option of withholding squatting licenses 'from parties who show such a disregard in human life'. La Trobe reiterated this fact to the Colonial Secretary and gave the notion his utmost support in principle. La Trobe wrote of the Aboriginal Protector's plan to withhold squatters' licences: 'in this I perfectly agree' – but failed to act.⁷³³ It is also probable the Wadawurrung were on amicable terms with Sievwright due to their involvement as 'Native Police'. Beginning in October 1839 five Wadawurrung balug clansmen, who belonged to the Barrabool Hills near Geelong were involved in a scheme whereby Assistant Protectors appointed local clans people to be 'Protector's Police'. Sievwright appointed five Wadawurrung men, including Billeyang, a clan head, after seeking the clan's consent.

This letter will be personally delivered to you by Belliyang - the Chief of the Barrabool tribe, who with the others named in the margin, are anxious to ascertain when they are likely to be appointed as Police, they are trustworthy and intelligent, and have been selected by me (with the consent of the tribe) to undertake these duties.⁷³⁴

La Trobe hoped the appointment of (Wadawurrung) Native Policemen: Doregobel, Winerderd, Din-in dual, Wool-lee, and Billy-gong would 'facilitate' Sievwright's operations and enable him to gain 'influence among the tribes'.⁷³⁵ He reported in November 1839 that although he found the men 'useful, active and intelligent' in the Wadawurrung area, they were of limited value because of their reluctance to move outside of their language and cultural boundary.⁷³⁶

I have obtained from them information, regarding the conduct of others of the tribe, which I otherwise never would have learnt - also much correct information regarding the conduct of the squatters and their servants. I have employed them to bring to my tents by compulsion, several of the young Native women, who preferred being constantly in the township of Geelong.⁷³⁷

However, the scheme was short lived and in June 1840 it lapsed in Sievwright's Geelong district largely, Sievwright thought, because he refused to allow the Native Constables access to firearms.⁷³⁸

Siewwright reported that much of his time during 1840 had been spent in investigating reported clashes in the western part of his district and stressed the fact that his district was the largest, most recently occupied by white squatters, the one in which the Aboriginal people were 'least domesticated' and where the two races were in a state of mutual defiance.⁷³⁹ In

December 1840, Sievwright moved his operations from the Barwon River to Killiambeet, near Lake Terang, an area well outside Wadawurrung territory. Sievwright was accompanied by five heavily armed Wadawurrung warriors on his journey and described the country around Killiambeet as 'covered with kangaroo instead of sheep, and undisturbed by the white men, like their [Wadawurrung] own country long ago'.⁷⁴⁰ In June 1841, Sievwright reported the Woodealoke gundidj, a Wadawurrung clan whose estates bordered on the Wardy Yallock Creek had arrived at Killiambeet to settle a dispute but there is little evidence of any further Wadawurrung involvement at Keliambheet or, later in February 1842, on the reserve selected by Robinson at Mt Rouse.⁷⁴¹ Earlier, in January 1840, Robinson had set out on a journey that took him through the Wadawurrung's northern estates that by this time had all been usurped by sheep station runs. Robinson's journals of his sojourns are extremely valuable, as they constitute the only detailed accounts that have survived of the early contact period, concerned with the inter-racial relations between squatters and Wadawurrung clans at a macro level of the wider Ballarat-Geelong region. Robinson relied heavily on multi-lingual Aboriginal guides and he took great pains to learn the languages of the Aboriginal people he travelled amongst. Subsequently Robinson elicited a considerable amount of information from Wadawurrung or allied Kulin informants rather than relying merely on the white colonialists' perspectives.

As demonstrated previously, Robinson discerned that states of inter-racial affinity waxed and waned with great regularity. The frontier was a fluid arena that consisted of an assemblage of British entrepreneurs and their servants bent on stealing Wadawurrung lands - and Aboriginal clans and family groups who steadfastly contested this invasion. Kiddle in her study of pastoralism in the Port Phillip District noted that the white squatters were a non-homogenous cultural group that hailed from widely divergent socio-economic groupings.⁷⁴² Whilst some generalisations about the colonists at Port Phillip can be made, there was also a considerable amount of cosmopolitanism about the 'English' squatters that precludes historians from making sweeping generalisations about the white occupiers. Withers, a Ballarat historian contended that the 'many of the Australian squatters... were men of liberal education and broad and generous culture whilst 'Others were vulgar boors, whose only genius lay in adding flock to flock, run to run, and swelling annually the balance at their bankers'.⁷⁴³ Similarly, the Protectors also noted the distinctiveness of Aboriginal nations and clans and the variance of their customs and cultural traits from one language area to another and even from one dialect to another.

Robinson's journal clearly reveals the prevalence of squatters and their workers responding positively to individual Wadawurrung clan members' overtures for crosscultural dialogue. Robinson also encountered to a lesser degree an acceptance of some colonists to accommodate larger Wadawurrung family groups and occasionally constellations of resident clans onto the colonists' sheep station runs. In late January 1840, Robinson visited numerous sheep and cattle stations as he travelled west from the Mt Macedon district into the Ballarat district. At a dairy station near Mt Aitken, Robinson noted the appearance of Wadawurrung and Woiwurrung people and indicated the attitude of some settlers was not very discriminating: 'They were the Barrabul and Melbourne blacks, but had not troubled him. He knew them. They had never troubled him... The squatters make no difference between good and bad blacks'.⁷⁴⁴ At Gray's on the upper reaches of the Werribee River, Robinson was told 'there was a quiet tribe that visited the settlers and belonged to the district. Said he had no trouble nor had they, he believed

given trouble'. Likewise Captain Bacchus, who had taken Wadawurrung lands at present day Bacchus Marsh, and his men 'spoke very well of the natives' and Robinson also noted a family group of the 'Geelong tribe' had 'remained and camped for the night at Cowies' after having stayed at 'various stations' including 'Campbell and Dr Wilson's station'. The McLeods related a similar tale and employed a Wadawurrung family on their run. This accommodative stance was not entirely universal (the Wadawurrung informed Robinson that Steiglitz tells them to "be off"), but on most stations Robinson noted a varying degree of inter-racial amity which was usually only marred by an encounter with 'strange blacks'. Many squatters had had genuine working relationships with individual clan members that had soured after a spate of thefts or an ugly encounter with foreign clans people. Charles Ayrey, a pastoralist at Lal Lal informed Robinson that he used to allow the Wadawurrung people around his station but 'the blacks took some sheep from them once. At one time he used to have them there. He lost a flock a sheep on one occasion and he got the blacks with torches and they went out in the night with them and found the sheep. But, he said, he rewarded them but subsequently they used to cut the tether ropes of the horses. And then he told them to keep away'.⁷⁴⁵ McCleod also related to Robinson a story about a time when 'some strange blacks intended robbing from a sheepfold of his'. Similarly, the accommodative stance taken by Wadawurrung clans-people towards the colonists was often profoundly tainted by other colonists' actions, including the kidnapping of children that had occurred in the region.

Mr McCloud said he was out one time round L. Corang [Lake Corangamite] looking for land when after riding over for several hours they disturbed a large body of natives. And that night they expected to be attacked by them. They however saw they were prepared and let them alone. In the morning two of the men came and made great enquiries about a native boy that had been taken away by Dr Clerk and a party some time previous. They told them the 'boy was well taken care of', but this did not satisfy them. They were clamorous to have him returned.⁷⁴⁶

Robinson discerned noticeable disparities in inter-racial relationships from station to station amongst the squatters and the Wadawurrung, and noted the rapidity in which the situation could change. At several stations near present day Coghill's Creek, it was reported to Robinson 'they had not been disturbed by the natives'. Pettit, a neighbour of Coghill and Birch said to Robinson that he had lost some stock to the Wadawurrung clans' attacks on his herd but considered it a minimal loss. Moreover, it seems probable that Pettitt allowed the local Wadawurrung family group to continue to live at the back of his hut: 'Pettitt says he lost twenty pounds [Sterling] worth by the natives in 3 years and this all when he first arrived at the station. Saw an old native oven at the back of Pettitt's hut'. On the neighbouring station that belonged to the Learmonths there was an averred policy of excluding the local clans from the station. Robinson also suspected that Learmonth's shepherds intentionally raised false reports of Wadawurrung thefts 'either to get more wages or to cancel their agreements, or for the cruel purpose of getting sanctions to commit aggressions upon the natives'.⁷⁴⁷ Robinson later reiterated to the *Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines* in 1845 that frontier relationships depended on 'the disposition of the person in charge, whether friendly or otherwise, towards the natives'.⁷⁴⁸

Upon Robinson's return to Melbourne, he often recorded the presence of Wadawurrung people in Melbourne: 'A large body of Aborigines, between one and two hundred called at my office, consisting of the Barrabool [Wadawurrung], Tarnghoowrong, Waverong and Boonnerwrong tribes'. In their correspondence the Chief Protector and his Assistants noted their frequent involvement in trying to placate the melees that erupted between the different language groups that gathered in Melbourne. These internecine battles, in the main important legal proceedings, were a constant drain on the Protectors' (and Missionaries) energies as it not only placed the Protectors in an invidious legal, political and social position but often also constituted a life threatening one.⁷⁴⁹ The first 'altercation between the tribes' recorded by William Thomas occurred in March 1839, a little after a month of Thomas taking up his position as Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Western Port District. Over three hundred Kulin people arrived to participate in the legal conflict.

This combat was between the Yarra and Western Port United [presumably Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung] on the one hand, and the Barrabools and Mt Macedon Blacks [Wadawurrung] on the other...they fought desperately...6 were wounded of the Port Phillip, 3 men, 3 women, and 1 of the Barrabools male. 10 muskets were taken away and lodged in the Police Office principally from the Port Phillip Blacks who had more opportunity in getting firearms than the other tribes.⁷⁵⁰

William Kyle, a pastoralist near Melbourne watched a battle in 1844 and described 'Yarra Yarra, Goulbum River, and Plenty River tribes being allies against tribes [3 clans of the Wadawurrung] from Lal Lal, Barrabool and Corio'. Kyle viewed the 'preliminary war dances, angry discussions and wrestling matches' that occurred for 'about a week prior' to the fight and then hurriedly moved out of their way when the fight began in earnest owing to his 'position [in a tree] being a dangerous one for a non-combatant'. Kyle was convinced that the presence of Thomas, the Assistant Protector of the Western Port District, and 'his black troopers' was instrumental in preventing a larger number of the warriors from being killed on the battlefield.

For a short time, the Lal Lal tribes and their allies [Wadawurrung] seemed to prevail, then the tide ebbed, and their opponents forced them over the hill, and almost surrounded them, the western tribes suffering severely. A good few on both sides were severely wounded. One wounded warrior drew a spear clean through his thigh, and leaning against a tree, hurled it back at the foe... When the hand-to-hand conflict was in progress, a diversion was made by the sudden arrival of the Protector of Aborigines, Mr Thomas, and two black troopers, whose coming soon brought peace to the scene. Feeling quite safe with the Protector, I rode up and saw the wounded and killed. The number killed was about eight, and some were desperately wounded. The timely arrival of Mr Thomas and his black troopers, well-disciplined and reliable men, undoubtedly prevented further slaughter.⁷⁵¹

In 1844, Thomas also attempted to intervene in an intra-clan fight, probably a legal dispute, at North Melbourne. Thomas reported that he saw 'a tribe of Barrabool arrive with the professed object of settling their disputes with the Bunnyong [Buninyong] tribe... After being together

about an hour a fight took place.⁷⁵² In his deposition, Thomas hinted at the legal and moral difficulties he faced in his role as Protector when a 'Bunnyong [Buninyong]' man, Iworenuk, died at Thomas' hut because of a spear wound inflicted during the fight. Thomas briefly described the intranecine legal feud held in present day North Melbourne.

Whilst at the native encampment on the north of Melbourne I saw a tribe of Barrabools arrive with the professed object of settling their disputes with the Bunninyong tribe [both Wadawurrung] then at the aforesaid encampment – after being together about an hour a fight took place the usual missiles being made use of. I did what I could to check the excitement but before I could succeed a missile called a wonguim that appeared to be thrown promiscuously inflicted a wound on the thighs of one of the Bunninyong tribe named Iworenuk in consequence of which wound, the said Iworenuk died at my residence on the 18th instance. The said Iworenuk had every care paid to him, but in consequence of a journey 25 miles in which he ... making profuse bleeding ... which rapidly exhausted him. I cannot discover the perpetrator of the act not have I any means of detecting him. I believe there was no particular malice or willful intent against the deceased individually.⁷⁵³

Robinson was also clearly troubled by the legal and moral dilemma of a Protector's role in settling internecine disputes. Robinson's journal for July-December 1839 indicates relationships between the Wadawurrung and the Woiwurrung reached flashpoint apparently due to the murder of Berrone, a 'Barrabul black' by two Woiwurrung men, Bullertal and Horntun. Because of this murder, there was a great deal of fear by the Woiwurrung who told Robinson the 'Barrabals were coming to spear them'. A spate of seesawing entries appeared in Robinson's journal that demonstrate Robinson was clearly aware of the on-going violent feud that was being enacted within his geographical jurisdiction.

Another party of Waverong [Woiwurrung] blacks arrived today; there were nine men all armed with muskets... party of Boonerong and Waverong had set off on a war expedition against the Wartowerongs [Wadawurrung]... [Waverong] natives much alarmed lest the Wartowerong natives should come and kill them... death of old George [Waverong] was in consequence of the 4 barrabool blacks...natives busy preparing for their fight with Wartowerong...Reports [by Parker and Thomas] about the large body of natives [Wadawurrung] on their way from Geelong to the township [of Melbourne], said to be 500.⁷⁵⁴

Frequent entries also appear in William Thomas' journals during the early 1840s in connection with the Wadawurrung's involvement in settling legal disputes in a number of locations near what is now the Melbourne Cemetery and Royal Park. Historian Marguerita Stephens analysis of these events is that they were judicial tournaments. On some occasions, the Wadawurrung were legal witnesses to the judicial proceedings and on other occasions were active participants in the settling of legal clashes. One of the combative disputes, which William Thomas directly entangled himself in, involved the imprisonment of two Kulin men Poleorong (Billy Lonsdale) and Worrador (D'Villiers). These two young men had been accused of the murder of a Loddon River youth late in 1843. Stephens has noted

how the evidence, in terms of British law, was circumstantial - they had been in the vicinity when the youth was killed. Thomas, in his role as magistrate, issued a warrant and the two were subsequently arrested, held in custody in Melbourne Jail and later 'liberated' because there were no witnesses. Stephens's further highlights how despite their effective acquittal under British law, the two men were held accountable by a very large gathering of Kulin who assembled in Melbourne for a lengthy process of Aboriginal justice.

The clans arrived in Melbourne in mid-December 1843 and remained in and around the town until February 1844. The first to arrive were people from Mt Macedon, led by the powerful and majestic 'flying doctor'⁷⁵⁵ Malcolm of the Mount Macedon clan, who came with 'others' from the North west, including the Buninyong people, together as many as 95 in number, also identified by Thomas as 'Bungerring & Malcolm's party'. The six men wounded in the legal melee that ensued did not include any Buninyongs, which Stephens argues may suggest they had come as witnesses, rather than combatants themselves in this dispute.⁷⁵⁶

Six months later, in August 1844 the Buninyong people appear again in Thomas' journal. Again, they came in connection with the settlement of an inter-clan dispute, this time over marriage arrangements. Thomas' journal about such events clearly indicate that the Kulin were weary of Thomas' ploys and pleas for their judicial affairs to be settled in a non-combative manner. Thomas noted that he was 'regularly deceived by them' again by being lured away to a distant encampment on the other side of Melbourne, so that the kin of the parties to the marriage dispute could 'have an unmolested general fight'.⁷⁵⁷ Thomas later told the wife in question that if she left her husband again, he would have her imprisoned for a month. In December the same year Thomas was warned of the impending arrival in Melbourne of the Barrabool [Geelong] tribe, and, in anticipation, he found Buninyong people busy sharpening their weapons. Thomas wrote with some alacrity that 'the War Cry [of the Barrabool] is heard at a Distance, renewed every half hour or so as they approached Melbourne. Thomas described how they came in military formation, 'as tho' they were going to slay a nation' says Thomas, 'led by 'King William their Chief", '& seat themselves W[est] of the Bonnyong [Buninyong people] all Daub'd' [all painted]'. After some preliminary, ritualised challenges, the judicial combat began, while non-combatant clans looked on as witnesses and adjudicators. Thomas describes how 'King William' of the Barrabool, or Geelong people,

advanced forward spear in hand naked & stated that charges had been made against his Blacks of Killing 2 of the Bonnyongs [Buninyongs] and stealing their [Women;] that his blacks were not afraid of them & had come down in the presence of Yarra & Goulbourn Blks [Blacks] and was ready to have the accusers spears thrown at them.⁷⁵⁸

Thomas unsuccessfully 'tried to quell the fight' and as noted earlier Thomas wrote a letter to the Chief Protector (GA Robinson) reporting that he had failed to interrupt the proceedings and a Buninyong warrior, Iwoweruk, aged about 22 years, was seriously wounded in the thigh and subsequently died.

In December 1844, Thomas embroiled himself in an internecine killing of an Aboriginal from the far north-west discovered dead 'on the Keilor road'. Police believed that the senior man, Ninggollobin, (from Bacchus Marsh) was the perpetrator, and, despite Ninggollobin's pleas of innocence, he was charged with the murder and imprisoned. His clans' people averred that the perpetrator was 'Woorndella' of the Buninyong tribe. Thomas believed in Ninggollobin's innocence, because the spear that had killed the man at Keilor was not his. Thomas had been made aware that every spear carried the individual mark of the man who made it and to use another man's spear to do murder would bring great shame and loss of honour.

The accusation that young Woorndella of the Buninyong tribe was the murderer, sparked fear amongst those Buninyongs who had remained in the Melbourne encampment to nurse a young man wounded in a judicial combat a week earlier. In trepidation, they now carried the wounded warrior some 5 miles to the safety of William Thomas' own farm just off modern day Bell Street in Preston. The camp at Thomas' farm in mid-December 1844 consisted of about 70 people: Buninyongs and some of Malcolm's Mount Macedon people. However, the hasty upheaval caused the wound of the wounded man to reopen, and despite Thomas' wife Susannah attending to him, he died at Thomas' residence. The Buninyongs quickly tied the body of the young man in customary mortuary fashion and buried him at Thomas' farm. Thomas read the burial service and the 'Buninyongs and Malcolms' conducted their own ceremonies, before decamping from Melbourne.⁷⁵⁹

In 1846, Thomas wrote of his discomforture when drawn again into tampering with Aboriginal matters of law. On this occasion Thomas wrote to Robinson expressing his reluctance to interfere in a dispute that was escalating about the legal status of two Barrabool (Wadawurrung) wives 'Tooturrook and Muthermurrum who had been promised – in accordance with custom and agreement – to Native Policemen and had joined them of their own accord'. Thomas was aware that customary practice dictated that when husbands died or in this case were no longer present due to being 'Transported' (as a convict to a colonial prison) that 'wives were given to another' – usually a relative.⁷⁶⁰

The Protectors were also hampered in their attempts to quell internecine conflicts between the different language groups that met in Melbourne that were deliberately encouraged by colonists. Robinson reported in April 1839 that the 'Barrabool blacks were in the township (of Melbourne)' and were encouraged by the colonists to fight the Woiwurrung.⁷⁶¹ On July 1 1839 Robinson was incensed when he received an unidentified report that William Roadknight, a prominent pastoralist, gave 'Melbourne natives muskets to kill Barrabool blacks'.⁷⁶² In mid-July, Thomas reported that seven armed Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung warriors, probably the same party that Roadknight had provided guns to, had left Melbourne for Geelong. By the time Sievwright located them, their numbers had apparently doubled. Sievwright followed them to Station Peak and Corio, but failed to persuade them to give up their arms. Sievwright discerned the Woiwurrung's visit to Corio was 'not an amicable one'.⁷⁶³ A week later, at Mt Macedon, Parker came across an armed Woiwurrung man who told Parker that he and other armed Woiwurrung men had been employed by squatters near Geelong 'to shoot a number of the Manimet tribe [a reference to the term 'mainmait' which meant strange people that they had no affinity with] in the vicinity of Lake Colac'.⁷⁶⁴

The colonial Government in Sydney was tardy in response to the concerns expressed by Robinson and Fyans, and finally in August 1840, proclaimed the Act to prohibit Aborigines from possessing firearms.⁷⁶⁵ It is interesting to note, especially given the large numbers of guns that Kulin people were known to have, that few internecine killings or killings of colonists by guns are known to have occurred in the wider Melbourne-Geelong region. It seems clear that the use of guns for customary punishment or warfare was not favoured.⁷⁶⁶

The congregating of large numbers of Kulin in the townships of Geelong and Melbourne was thought by La Trobe to constitute a health risk for both the colonists and the Kulin and he subsequently ordered the townships of Geelong and Melbourne to be off limits to the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip.⁷⁶⁷ Robinson and Thomas were adamant that the ban was not only untenable, but also grossly unfair. La Trobe banning the Wadawurrung from Geelong also embroiled Sievwright in terse communications with La Trobe in 1840 about what Sievwright perceived to be an 'arbitrary' and 'unwarrantable' order. La Trobe relented and ruled 'that a few individuals who could be trusted' would be allowed to work in Geelong, but only with Sievwright's sanction. Sievwright continued to castigate La Trobe, and argued that La Trobe's order banning the Wadawurrung people from Geelong amounted to 'oppression' and 'injustice'.⁷⁶⁸ Kulin people including Wadawurrung also expressed their indignation to William Thomas on this matter. The Kulin's insistence on their right to remain in Melbourne is described in the following extract from William Thomas's journal:

Thursday 15 September 1840: From Sun rise to Sun Set spent in Arguing, reasoning & persuading the Natives - They declare that they will not remove [from Melbourne]...they had camped on private property in the vicinity of Melbourne and persist in going to Melbourne...I again tell them that they make Willums [houses] on White Mans ground, and cut down Trees & cut off Bark, Make White Man Sulky [angry] - they say no White Mans ground Black Mans.⁷⁶⁹

Of a more pressing nature for the Protectors however was the declining health of the Wadawurrung that was evident to all who came into contact with them. Dr Jonathan Clerke, a surgeon employed by the Aboriginal Protectorate wrote to Sievwright in August 1839 deploring the health of the Wadawurrung people around Geelong and implored Sievwright to act decisively on this matter with some urgency.

I have been frequently called on, since my arrival in this Colony, to visit many of these poor creatures labouring under venereal and inflammatory affection. The former of these diseases rage to a great extent amongst them, proving fatal to some, and leaves others totally unable to provide for themselves...For me to enter into further particulars respecting the natives, I deem unnecessary, as being yourself a resident and surrounded by them, you must be aware of the urgent necessity of representing their deplorable state to Government, and entreating that proper means might be speedily adopted to ameliorate their sufferings.⁷⁷⁰

Dr Cousins the Colonial Surgeon voiced the same alarm several months earlier – as had Sievwright at Geelong. Cousins noted the severity of illness among Aboriginal people over the

previous 18 months had reached a nadir. The Colonial Surgeon deplored the Aboriginal health situation and warned of the imminent disaster if nothing was done to check the situation. He had 'never visited them in such a diseased and wretched state of want and disease that 5 or 6 had already died and 5 or 6 more is at the verge of death and unless something is done to relieve their wants, their speedy extinction must soon take place.'⁷⁷¹

The Aboriginal Protectors and all public servants who had dealings with the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip flagged the issue of Aboriginal health, especially venereal diseases to the Colonial Government. Sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea are believed to have been unknown to Australia's Aboriginal people prior to colonization but quickly became endemic in both colonial and Aboriginal communities. Robinson and Parker noted whilst on a survey of the Loddon Valley District that the incidence of venereal disease was prevalent among Dja Dja Wurrung, Daungwummung and a section of Burrumbeet Bulluk clan of the Wadawurrung tribe. Parker was able to secure the appointment of a surgeon to the station but minimal acceptance of Western medicine and sporadic attendance at Parker's station by the resident clans in the area resulted in sexually transmitted diseases taking a huge toll on the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. Fyans had written to the Colonial Secretary as early as June 1838 of his knowledge on the subject of venereal disease amongst the Aboriginal population at Port Phillip, stating that 'as far as I can learn, three years ago, venereal disease was unknown here. I regret to say the native population are now in the most deplorable state with it and also a number of the lower class of Europeans.'⁷⁷² The Colonial Government chose to postpone any action on Fyans' emphatic request to enact an alteration to the Crown Lands Act, which would disqualify a squatter from occupying his lease if any white men were found to be co-habiting with Aboriginal women on a leased property. Fyans concludes his letter to the Colonial Secretary by asserting; 'if it [alteration to the Act] could be made stronger, it would be all the better.'⁷⁷³ The Governor's minute to Fyans' request for a stronger warning to squatters was to advise that 'I am only waiting on a favourable moment to publish a new and more comprehensive Notice on this subject.'⁷⁷⁴ The comprehensive medical supplies and surgeons requested by the Protectors and Missionaries were not actioned, nor the alteration to the 'Squatters Act' that Fyans had urgently called for. It is apparent that the Colonial Government was more responsive to the numerous complaints of outrages by Aboriginal people in Sievwright's District than comprehensively addressing the issues that directly affected the health of Aboriginal people of Port Phillip.

In 1840, squatters in the Geelong and Portland Bay District 'craving protection' gave notice of a meeting of the 'settlers in the District of Geelong...for the purpose of considering the means of remedying the evils arising from the aggressions of the Aborigines.' 'Within the last few weeks,' commented the *Gazette*

three daring murders have been perpetrated in the Geelong district and three others attempted...The Geelong district has hitherto been increasing in the number and wealth of its settlers, and no doubt would continue to advance were it to receive protection and encouragement to the extent of one half its desert; but it is with pain we have to record, that there are at present only two mounted policemen for the protection of the entire district, while six is all that has been ever promised. No wonder then that the settlers are discontented-no wonder if, when Government

will not grant it, they will seek protection where it is only but most certainly to be found - within themselves. This being once commenced, open hostility will be declared between the blacks and the whites, not only of that but every other district of the colony, and God only knows where it may end.⁷⁷⁵

Privately many colonists communicated a similar story to their relatives. George Russell wrote:

Much dissatisfaction prevails amongst the settlers at present by the appointment of five persons by the Home Government for the purpose of protecting the Natives; they are called Native protectors, and on the slightest rumor, even by the natives themselves, of any disturbance arising between them and the settlers they make strict investigations into the matter, and on very slight evidence commit parties to take their trial at the Supreme Court in Sydney, being Justices of the Peace: so much is this the case that one or two individuals about whom some reports were circulated have left the colony rather than incur the trouble and annoyance of an investigation by these people, although nothing has transpired to prove that they had violated the laws. There was a Hut keeper murdered a few weeks ago by the natives, at a distant station in this district; but no attempt has been made to bring the offenders to justice. Meetings of the Settlers are taking place for the purpose of petitioning Government against the existing state of things.⁷⁷⁶

La Trobe, after receiving a petition by squatters in the Geelong district, wrote a letter in reply:

The feeling of abhorrence which one act of savage retaliation or cruelty on your part will arouse must weaken if not altogether obliterate every other in the minds of most men; and I regret that I have before me a statement, in a form which I dare not discredit, showing that such acts are perpetrated among you. It reveals a nightly attack upon a small number of natives by a party of white inhabitants in your district, and the murder of no fewer than three defenceless aboriginal women and a child in their sleeping places, and this at the very time your memorial was in the act of signature, and in the immediate vicinity of the station of two of the parties who have signed it. Will not the commission of such crimes call down the wrath of God and do more to check the prosperity of your district and to ruin your prospects than all the difficulties and losses under which you labour? I call upon you, as your first duty to yourselves and to your adopted country, to come forward in aid of the authorities to clear up the obscurity with which this deed is yet involved, and, purging yourselves and your servants from all to repose until the murderers are declared, and your district relieved from the stain of harbouring them within its boundaries.⁷⁷⁷

La Trobe's reply, meant to silence the squatter's and bring them to their senses that they themselves were the original perpetrators of horrendous frontier violence also belies the fact that he probably feared a repeat of the 'Black War', a war between colonists and Aboriginal people in Van Diemens Land. Exasperated by Sievwright's perceived inaction, he ordered Robinson to visit the Geelong and Portland Bay region to establish communications with the Aboriginal

people of those districts. La Trobe wrote in October 1840: 'I have almost despaired of the desired result being obtained by the labours of the Assistant Protectors.'⁷⁷⁸ Robinson's first entry in his report to La Trobe in 1841 states that he 'reached Corio, the chief rendezvous of the Wodouros [Wadawurrung], a powerful and influential race of aborigines'. Robinson claimed that he was 'known to this people' and they occupied an 'extensive country' and were numerous. Robinson's earlier sojourns through Wadawurrung clan estates (January - March 1840) and his numerous interactions with various Wadawurrung clans in Melbourne would certainly have made him familiar with a great number of Wadawurrung people. In August 1841, Robinson, after spending three months in the Western District entered the northern Wadawurrung clans-estates and interviewed squatters and any Wadawurrung informants he could make contact with. At Campbell's station Robinson was told how a large party of Wadawurrung fighting men had passed by his station on their way to a neighbouring station and Campbell had heard later that they had killed a man at a neighbors (Wills') station. Wills' supervisor reportedly knew 'these natives at Corio or Barrable District' and said 'they were good and bad'. Robinson dryly noted in brackets 'of course'.

Robinson reported an amicable relationship at Black and Steele's station who said the 'blacks never injured them' evidenced by Robinson observing '13 natives' residing at Black and Steele's and that Wadawurrung women were collecting murnong near the squatters' station.⁷⁷⁹ McReady's, Urquhart's, Gibb's, Linton's, Wright's, Montgomerie's and Andersons, all squatters who had taken Wadawurrung lands as their own upheld similar genial relationships according to his Borumbeet Bulluc Wadawurrung informants. It was evident to Robinson however that inter-racial relations varied markedly between one station and the next on this journey just as it had done on his earlier trip, a year and a half previously. The unique cross-cultural relationship between Baillie (sometimes spelt Bayley by Robinson) and the local clans, as discussed previously was juxtaposed, Robinson observed, by the openly antagonistic nature of some of Baillie's neighbours.

Mr Youill [Yuille] said the blacks reported that two native men and one woman were shot by some settlers. They said that a hut keeper had a native woman and in return he gave the natives a sheep. The hut keeper then shut the door and went to the home station and told his master that the natives had taken sheep. Two gentlemen came and the hut keeper took them to the native camp and shewed [showed] them the bones. The gentleman said never mind, and told the natives to come and they would give them damper. They went into the hut and gave the natives damper and then another piece and then took out the pistols and shot two native men and a woman.⁷⁸⁰



Campbell, Archibald. c.1847, *AB Yuilles Station, Ballarat*, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-147155346. In the background of the illustration, the artist has depicted a group of Wadawurrung people in very close proximity to the Yuille's house and family.

Robinson heard numerous accounts from squatters that convinced him the response from Wadawurrung family groups or individuals to the squatters was closely correlated to the squatters' response to the Wadawurrung. Tulloh, a neighbor of Baillie who admitted to burning the Wadawurrung's huts without qualms told Robinson of how 'four blacks met him on the road between Urquhart's and Baillie's and lifted their spears at him' whilst Baillie Jnr reported that 'he had met a young [Wadawurrung] man who had showed him the way' through the bush.⁷⁸¹ The Wadawurrung acutely reminded Robinson of how precarious the Wadawurrung clans' lives were in the squatting environment where some squatters obviously held an openly hostile attitude towards them.

They wished me to go round to all the people who were unkind to them and drove [them] from their country and now would not permit them near their stations, and begged of me not to let the white man shoot them. I of course promised to do all in my power and took a farewell of these unfortunate people. Their situation is to be deeply commiserated.⁷⁸²

Parker too was aware of how his station *Lanneebarramul* at Franklinford was certainly the only area where the Aboriginal people in his district were free to remain without fear of expulsion. Parker had initially established his protectorate's operations at Yerrip Hills on Jackson's Creek, near Sunbury, then at Neeriman on the Loddon River at what is now Baringhup, in the Mt Macedon area, between 1839 and June 1841. William Thomas,

Assistant Protector in the Western Port district believed that the Mt Macedon district was Wadawurrung land and always referred to the tribe in the Mt Macedon district as 'Mt Macedons' or 'Wattowrongs'.⁷⁸³ Parker also stated in 1840 that 'the Witowrong or Widowra [Wadawurrung] tribe, and a portion of the Waverong tribe, inhabited the Mt Macedon District'.⁷⁸⁴ Parker reported that the station at Mt Macedon was frequently attended by Wadawurrung (Witowrong) clans' people evidenced by the Wadawurrung constituting 50% of the Aboriginal people he encountered during the first three months of 1840 and over a quarter in September the same year.⁷⁸⁵ Parker also noted in 1841 that the 'Jajowrong [Dja Dja Wurrung] is on terms of amity with the...Witowrong or 'Widowra' [Wadawurrung] tribe on the south' and also observed that 'a few individuals' of the Wadawurrung Burrumbeet bulluk clan had been adopted by a Dja Dja Wurrung clan.⁷⁸⁶ Moreover, sixty-two 'Witowrongs' featured in his January 1843 census.⁷⁸⁷ It was apparent however that some of the Wadawurrung clans within Parker's jurisdiction and in close geographical proximity to the Protectorate station did not frequent the station. Parker observed that the Wadawurrung Marpeanbulluk and Marinbulluk, or 'Konong-willam sections [clans]' had not visited the Loddon station but instead appeared 'to confine themselves mostly to the country south of Mt Macedon and Buninyong'.⁷⁸⁸ It is evident that some Wadawurrung clans such as the Burrumbeet balug were closely associated with the Loddon station whilst other clans may have shunned the Loddon station possibly because of traditional avoidance. Certainly, the Loddon Station was characterised by internecine fighting just as the Wesleyan Mission at Buntingdale had been. The intra and intertribal feuds, which ensued at the Loddon Protectorate (Larrnebarramul), resulted in Parker observing it was not practicable for the tribes to coalesce together. Parker wrote in February 1842 that on the whole 'great cordiality appears to exist between the different tribes' here referring to the Dja Dja Wurrung and the 'Witouro [Wadawurrung] natives of the Tooloorabulluk and Borumbeet bulluk sections', but observed that some of the Dja Dja Wurrung boys 'were very fearful of venturing out of sight of the homestead'. Parker added that the reason they offered 'was their fear that the Borumbeet people would kill them in revenge for some feud between the tribes "a long time ago"'.⁷⁸⁹

By mid 1842, it could no longer be denied that one of the Protectorate system's objectives with regard to the Wadawurrung was patently not being fulfilled. Robinson had noted in March 1842 that he had seen 'a large group of natives at Geelong South near Dr Thomson's...A few others at Indented Head, others in the bush. No Barrabals at mission station', thus flagging the inability of the Protectors to coalesce and Christianise the Wadawurrung. In July 1842, La Trobe informed the Colonial Secretary that 'attempts to make the natives settle down and conform in any degree to regular habits has signally failed'.⁷⁹⁰ In reply to continual calls by critics for the closure of the Protectorate system, a Select Committee was set up in 1845 to consider the situation of the Port Phillip Aborigines. By 1845, Parker's and Thomas' at Merri Creek were the only Protectorate stations that the Wadawurrung utilised, as Mt Rouse was located in territory outside their traditional boundaries. In his evidence Parker admitted that most Aborigines avoided Protectorate stations except in an emergency. Nevertheless, he felt that the Aboriginal population in the Loddon District, including the northern clans of the Wadawurrung, had been conciliated and induced to live in peace with the squatters. Generally, however, the evidence to the Committee was highly critical of the Protectorate. Thomas reported that he had not observed they had the least 'desire to conform to civilized habits'. Furthermore, he stated that the 'blacks

from various parts, and whether from Geelong, the Goulburn, or Loddon stations I have found them the same people as they were six years back; they can talk more English, but in filth, dress and countenance are the same...'.⁷⁹¹ The attendance at the Loddon protectorate continued to decline and when Robinson visited in March 1848, he found no Aboriginal people in attendance. In 1849, another Select Committee recommended the abolition of the system and no hasty replacement of it. Much good, it was felt, would be gained by concentrating on the religious and educational needs of the colonists in the interior, which would in turn benefit the Aboriginal people. The Protectorate system was closed on December 31 1849.

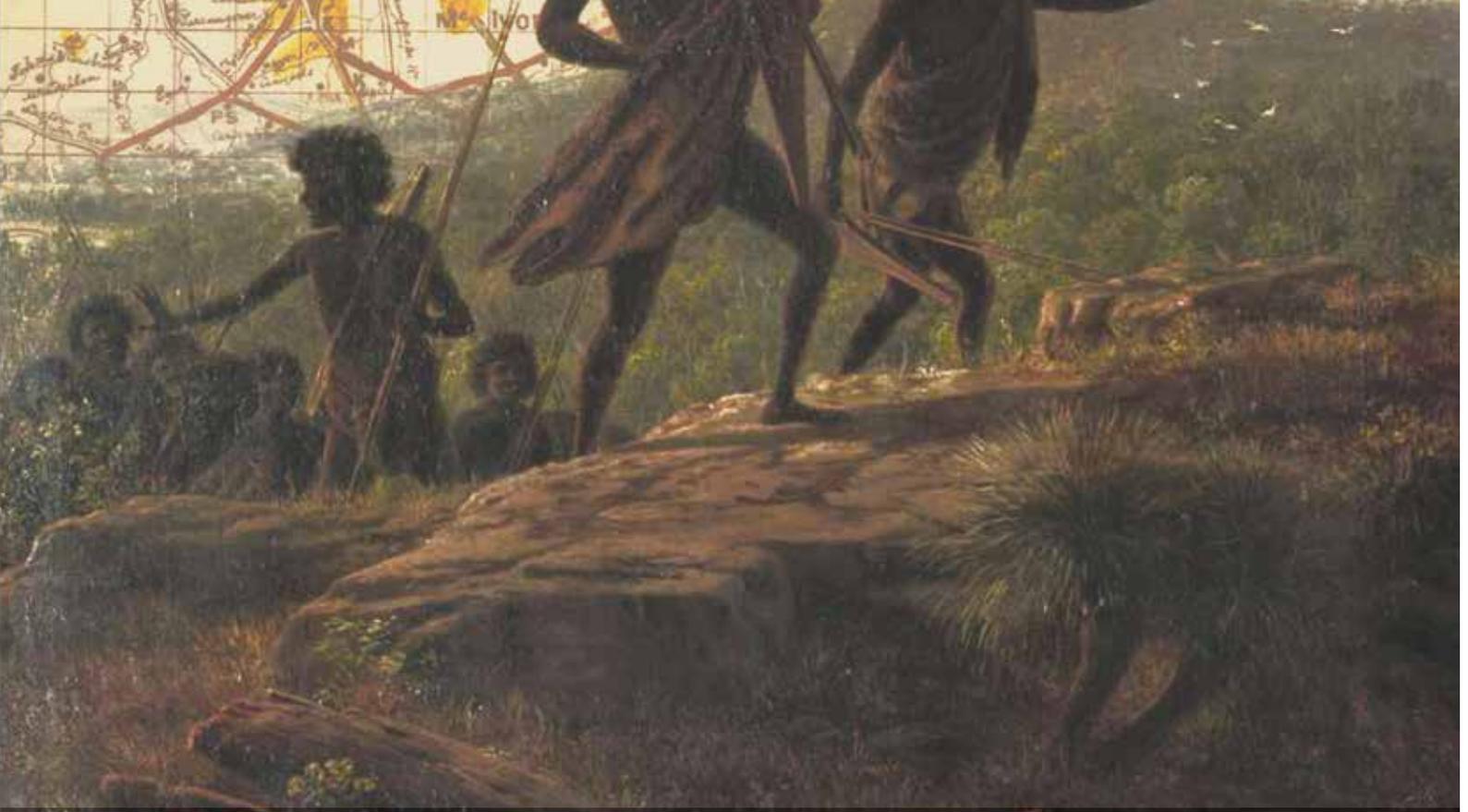
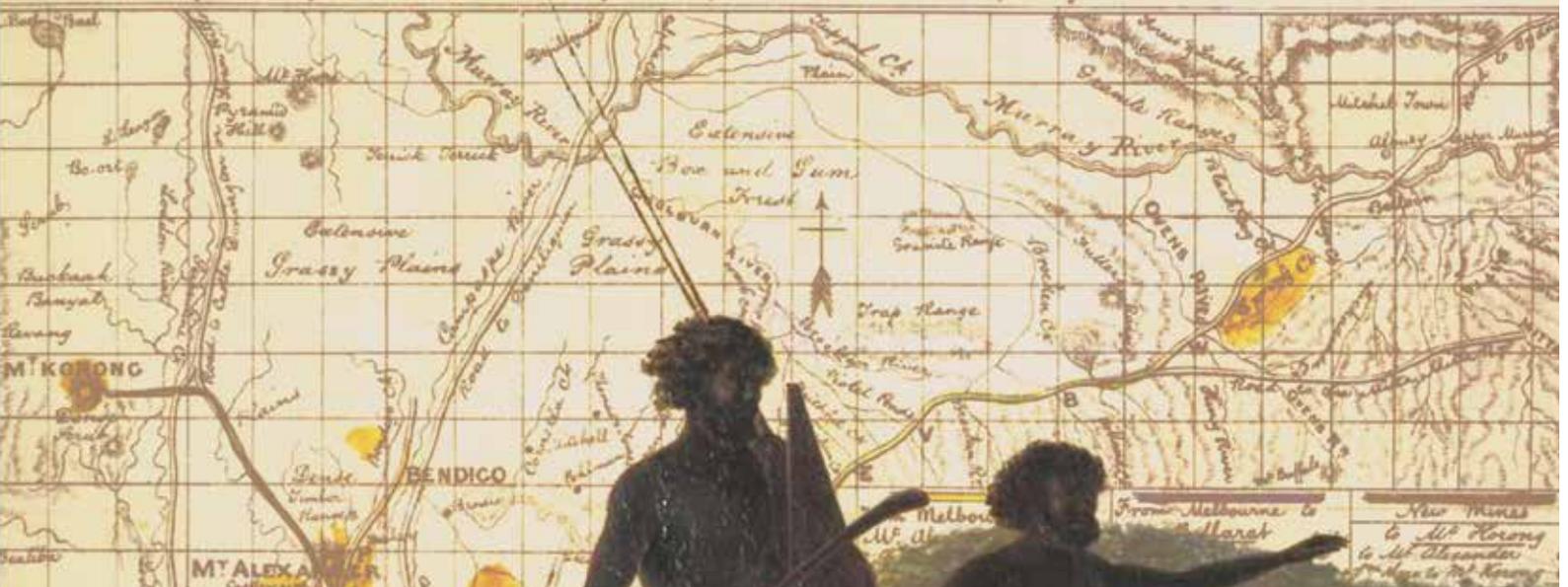
The attempts of Protectors to 'protect and settle' the Wadawurrung were shown to be untenable in light of the polarity between the well-intentioned policies of Colonial administrators, and the insatiable greed for control of the land and its resources by the white community at Port Phillip. The very concept of 'protection' was approached from very different angles. The accommodative responses by the Wadawurrung to the Protectors were without uniformity due to the ephemeral and superficial nature of government and missionary policies and the rapidly changing physical and political nature of the frontier. The responses of the Wadawurrung to the presence of the Protectors included the escalation of internecine conflict, the enlistment of young men into the Native Police, the playing off the Protectors against the squatters and the demand for redress for the injustices meted out to them by colonists.

The efforts of the Government officials had some very small degree of success in their endeavours to stand in the gap for the Wadawurrung, notwithstanding the enormous hurdles placed in their path by social, economic and political machinations in a frontier community characterized by unbridled greed for Wadawurrung lands. Protectors were in some circumstances able to intercede between Wadawurrung and Woiwurrung, between Wadawurrung and colonists, and to mediate or limit violent interactions. The Protectors were also able to act as cultural intermediaries in some intra Kulin disputes. The good intentions of British policies were inevitably shattered however by a failure of the Colonial Governments to commit adequate land and resources and to implement policy and legislation effectively. The escalation of conflict and increasingly urgent tenor of communication regarding the protection from conflict floundered in conflicting demands and unreal expectations. Ultimately, the colonists' unchecked pursuit of land, increased stock numbers - and capital prevailed. In a span of fifteen years (1835-1850) the British colonials - predominately the graziers characterized by their racial notions of superiority, unbridled greed and preparedness to use a variety of tactics in their determined conquest of Victorian Aboriginal (including Wadawurrung) lands were the effective spearhead of the British invasion. The paternalistic intentions of British policies aimed at protecting Aboriginal people from the worst excesses of the colonials were ineffectual primarily due to the failure of the Colonial Governments to recognize Aboriginal land tenure, commit adequate land and resources and to implement policy and legislation effectively. The escalation of conflict and increasingly urgent tenor of communication regarding their protection from inter-racial conflict floundered in conflicting demands and unreal expectations. Ultimately, the British and Colonial Governments acquiesced and even countenanced the unchecked territorial and economic greed of their citizens. By 1850, the British colonisers had usurped all Wadawurrung country and no granting of land or entitlement to recompense from the Colonial Government existed. The Wadawurrung had become outsiders on their own land.

The Third Invasion: The Gold Seekers

MAP OF THE ROADS TO ALL GOLD MINES IN VICTORIA

*Showing the Cross Roads from one Mine to another, with indications of various Stations.
Divided into Squares of ten Miles, to easily calculate the distance of any New Mines when discovered*



Chapter 11: The Wadawurrung and the Rush for Gold

The 1849 New South Wales Legislative Council Select Committee appointed to assess the Aboriginal Protectorate system which had commenced a decade earlier heard from a large body of respondents (squatters and officials, but not Aboriginal people) who also gave their suggestions on how to 'better the conditions of Aboriginal people in Victoria.'⁷⁹² The Legislative Council, based on almost all the respondents believing that the Protectorate had been a failure, recommended the abolition of the Aboriginal Protectorate and regretted that it could suggest no other coherent policy with which to replace it. A large number of suggestions were made to the Select Committee including removing Aboriginal people by sea to 'different districts away from their accustomed haunts', separating Aboriginal children from the adults and 'placing them in seminaries for their education', and the establishment of Police Benches who would distribute supplies for Aboriginal people via squatters in the various districts.⁷⁹³

One of the few concrete steps taken by the NSW Colonial Government was to retain William Thomas, previously the Assistant Protector for the Western Port District (1839-1849), and bestow upon him the title of 'Guardian of Aborigines'. Thomas, however, concentrated his energies on the two language groups (Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung) in the environs of Melbourne and had very little physical presence on Wadawurrung country. In every other district the Commissioners of Crown Lands were to act as 'Guardians' sometimes termed 'correspondents' or 'protectors', and to look after the temporal wants of other Aboriginal people in other districts. Thomas was instructed in 1850 to submit suggestions about reserves 'in places known to still be frequented by the aborigines'. Thomas replied that large reserves would be useless as their numbers were fast diminishing, their propensity to reside in the one place was non-existent and their speedy extinction was inevitable. Reserves of 640 acres for each tribe were all that he could recommend.⁷⁹⁴ Shortly afterwards, in July 1852, William Thomas reported to the Victorian Government that due to alcohol abuse the Melbourne and Barrabool [Wadawurrung] tribes had been brought to an awful and dangerous state of degradation, and he considered their speedy extinction inevitable.⁷⁹⁵ Thomas highly recommended a community of Aboriginal people in Victoria be instituted made up of Aboriginal children who had been removed from their families in order to avert the extinction of the Aboriginal race. Thomas knew his proposals would be viewed as 'unfeeling' but considered it would be a 'deed of mercy'.⁷⁹⁶ The Victorian Government did not implement Thomas's proposals, making no legislative provisions for the legal removal of Aboriginal children from their families or any attempt to establish large reserves for Aboriginal people.

The 1850s have generally been described as a decade wherein Aboriginal people were overlooked by the new Victorian Government (separation from New South Wales occurred in 1850). Some writers such as EJ Foxcroft almost a century later, considered that 'Euthanasia in fact, has been the aim of native policy in Victoria after 1850...The policy adopted between 1850 and 1860 was, as can be seen [paltry sums were afforded towards the reserves and the care of Aboriginal people], a half hearted one.'⁷⁹⁷ Others such as historians Ian Clark and Michael Christie thought that 'This decade may be characterized as one of Government neglect of the

Aborigines.⁷⁹⁸ Some letters to the newspapers in this period certainly thought the colonial government was neglectful and called for the Government to ameliorate their condition (by forced separation) and emphatically lambasted the Government for its sluggardly pace of action and tightfistedness.

No energetic movement at all adequate to the emergency has been attempted. We may perhaps give the Government credit for a certain amount of sincerity; but it has always been satisfied with half measures and meager efforts; and whilst some would affirm that it has been prodigal in its recent expenditure, it has been parsimonious towards the poor aborigines...Even the few persons who are now more immediately identified with the natives, have to complain of the little encouragement they receive from Government...fully cognizant of its powerful obligations – yes, powerful obligations – to those from the usurpation of whose golden soil, there has been reaped such a glorious and abundant harvest.⁷⁹⁹

By the time that gold was 'officially discovered' in 1851 the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate as noted had been disbanded (1838-1850), Victorian Aboriginal people had been dispossessed of their land by squatters and bloody frontier conflict had become relatively rare. Many Aboriginal people now sought (or forced) to adapt to the Colonial hegemony by adopting conciliatory attitudes towards the colonists in a bid to remain on their ancestral estates.⁸⁰⁰ The gold rush ushered in a prolonged and intense fluid class and status situation not just for the immigrant colonists but for Aboriginal people as well. In addition the historical records clearly demonstrate that the gold rush period ushered in an era whereby former strict linguistic and cultural boundaries between Aboriginal language groups were significantly relaxed.

It soon became clear that gold was literally strewn across the central highlands of Victoria and the rush to the diggings began in earnest. The goldrushes were not uniform or ordered events that can be categorized easily. Commentators at the time of the rushes testify to the higgledy-piggledy nature of people's movements. Streams of people from socially and racially diverse backgrounds sojourned from one goldfield or gully to another, with the search for the precious metal being the only tangible glue in their communal make-up. The only predisposition to shifting to one location or another (and this was a frequent occurrence) was a more favourable report of gold being found. In this extraordinary epoch, which witnessed 300,000 wandering nomads (including immigrant Indigenous people) from across the globe, converge upon the auriferous regions of Victoria, commentary about Aboriginal people became, for a time, almost solely focused on perceptions of Aboriginal peoples' responses to the work of finding gold.



Thomas Ham, 1854, *New Diggings Ballarat, Victoria, 1854*, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-153536202>.

The artist has depicted a group of Wadawurrung in close proximity to the 'new' Ballarat gold field.

Many historical records attest to Aboriginal people's fundamental and diverse contribution to the goldrush. Both writers and artists of the gold rush period noted the presence of Wadawurrung people on and off the goldfields. Long-time resident of Ballarat, William Little, contended that Wadawurrung clans people traded gold to shepherds prior to the commencement of the gold rush in 1851: 'When erst the shepherds saw the virgin gold A lying shimmering on fair Nature's breast, And how the ignorant aborigines For trifles gave the precious ore away.'⁸⁰¹ John Dunlop, one of the earliest miners on the Ballarat diggings (August 1851) replied to the 1853 Select Committee's question: 'When you arrived [in Ballarat] you are sure there was no one there?' Dunlop replied, 'No; there was no sign of any one, only a few huts belonging to the natives'⁸⁰² Miner George Sutherland affirmed Dunlop's account: when recalling the beginnings of Ballarat as a goldfield he conceded that the miners had infringed on a Wadawurrung landscape.

This was Poverty Flat, about three quarters of a mile from the spot now occupied by Ballarat; and the hut erected by Dunlop may therefore be considered as the first miner's residence in Ballarat. But, solitary as the place was, they soon found on examination that theirs were not the only habitations erected in this region. Several natives' huts were visible in various places.⁸⁰³

Eugene Von Guerard, a German artist on the goldfields of Ballarat completed a number of works depicting Wadawurrung people in the Geelong and Ballarat districts and wrote in March 1854 of his sadness at seeing how they 'are demoralized by the white man's influence.'⁸⁰⁴ In a letter dated 30 July 1854, Edwin Price, a first hand witness at Eureka, wrote of his encounters with a Wadawurrung 'encampment' who had that day 'made a great slaughter among the wild cats [possums?].'⁸⁰⁵



Eugen von Guerard, 1854, *Geelong 30th May 1854 in Title Sketches of New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria*, State Library of New South Wales, Number DL PXX 39 Ink and watercolour.

Many writers of goldfields history have incorrectly deemed the experience of mining to be a foreign and incomprehensible spectacle for Aboriginal people, yet quarrying for ochre, greenstone, kaolin, and in some regions, crystals, was a cultural practice in existence for thousands of years. Records also exist of extensive quarrying and commercial styled transactions for quarried stone being carried out by Kulin people (a confederacy of Aboriginal nations including and neighboring to the Wadawurrung) prior to and after British colonization. WE Stanbridge, a squatter in the Daylesford district wrote of Temamet Javolich, a Dja Dja Wurrung clan head, was 'no less than commercial traveler for the sale of suitable stone for axeheads. His blood relationship with numerous tribes gave him access, and he visited the councils of the tribes [Kulin] arranging barter...his stone quarry was on the Charlotte Plains.' In late 1854, naturalist William Blandowski reported that the Woiwurrung (neighbours to the immediate east of the Wadawurrung) quarries of over one hundred acres in a range of hills three miles east of Lancefield present an appearance somewhat similar to that of a deserted goldfield and convey a faithful idea of the great determination displayed by the aborigines prior to the intrusion of the white races.

Other evidence that Aboriginal people practiced mining and at the very least had a knowledge of gold's existence comes from a report in *Dickers Mining Journal* of 1864. The writer described how non-Indigenous miners in Buninyong had unearthed an Aboriginal mining tool many hundreds of metres below the surface, which was similar in all regards to mining tools used by Indigenous people in the Americas. Whilst there is no evidence that Aboriginal people attached any great economic or spiritual significance to gold prior to the British invasion of their lands, it seems certain that they generally knew about gold. One historian noted how 'They likely dug it up amongst the yams on Yam Holes Hill – today a part of Beaufort town.'⁸⁰⁶ There are instances of gold nuggets being found associated with old Aboriginal sites, well away from auriferous reefs in central Victoria. There are also many inferences to Aboriginal miners in Victorian goldfields maps. For example the names of some gullies, leads or mines are believed to be named after their Aboriginal discoverers or at least attributed to Aboriginal people because of their proximity or some fact connected with them. 'Native Youth Lead' and 'Blackfellows Lead' on Wadawurrung country are names suggestive of an Aboriginal association with the sites. In the Avoca area, it is probable that the Dja Dja Wurrung (the Wadawurrung's neighbours immediately to their north) generally knew of the existence of gold. Indeed in their language, the district's name of 'Kara Kara' signified gold and 'karrap', their name for quartz.⁸⁰⁷ There is also some Aboriginal oral history evidence that gold came to be considered as a precious stone in the Aboriginal economy. There exist two versions of a legend about the formation of Mount Elephant that links its creation with that of Mount Buninyong. The first and older version was published in 1861, and the second and more recent version in 1962 is associated with gold.

William Stanbridge, a squatter on Dja Dja Wurrung Country to the north of Wadawurrung country writing about the 'tribes in the neighbourhood of Fiery Creek', so presumably Wadawurrung and Djabwurrung, stated in 1861:

One of the legends that these tribes are fond of relating is that Tyrrinallum (Mount Elephant) and Bouningyoung (two volcanic hills about thirty miles apart) were formerly black men, that they quarrelled and fought, the former being armed with a leewil and the latter with a hand spear, and after a prolonged contest Tyrrinallum thrust his spear in Bouningyoung's side, the cause of the present hollow in the side of the hill, which so infuriated him that he dealt the other a tremendous blow, burying the point of the leewil in his head, which made the present large crater and knocked him to the spot where he now stands.⁸⁰⁸

Anthropologist Aldo Massola obtained the second version during a visit to Lake Tyers Aboriginal station in the early 1960s. His source was an elderly woman, Mrs Annie Alberts, who was from Lake Condah.

Mount Elephant and Mount Buninyong were once men. Mount Elephant was in possession of a stone axe. Buninyong offered him some gold for it. Having agreed they met at what is now Pitfield Diggings for the exchange. Some time later Buninyong reconsidered, and desired his gold back. Elephant refused. Buninyong sent him a fighting message, and the challenge was accepted. They met at Pitfield Diggings. Elephant buried his spear in Buninyong's side, and the hole can be seen

to this day. Elephant received a deadly blow on the head from Buninyong's stone axe. The gaping hole on Elephant's head can also be seen to this day. The two men, mortally wounded, retired in opposite directions; their bodies, turned into mountains, can be seen today at the spots where they died.⁸⁰⁹

PROSPECTING AND MINING FOR GOLD

Edward Hargraves is synonymous with being the first discoverer of payable gold in Australia but there have been consistent reports that others preceded him yet did not receive the recognition. John Calvert, aided by unidentified Aboriginal guides, claimed that with the consistent assistance of his Aboriginal companions he had found gold in New South Wales several years before Hargraves.

[He got] good results by 'simple crushing and rough washing – with the assistance of his native labourers – Naturally the finder did his best to keep his discovery secret and was for years successful in doing so, having no white allies and treating his black fellows so well as to secure their silence about his searches for the 'medicine earth'.. All had gone well so long as he had contented himself with falling back on black labour.⁸¹⁰

The discovery, but not the acknowledgement in history texts, of new goldfields by Aboriginal people has become a recurrent theme in Victorian and Australian gold history. This inattention by goldfields historians is remarkable considering the score of primary documents, which testify to the very active participatory role Aboriginal people assumed in the gold mining period. Joseph Parker, (the son of Assistant Protector of Aborigines) for example claimed that: "The first gold in the district [central highlands of Victoria] was discovered in 1849 by an aboriginal boy in picking up what he supposed to be a stone to throw at a wounded parrot, but it turned out to be a nugget of gold! A European shepherd secured it and kept it secret for two years."⁸¹¹ Similarly, a gold field discovery by an unidentified Aboriginal in 1852 was attributed to an Aboriginal prospector as this news report bears out.

REPORTED DISCOVERY OF ANOTHER GOLD FIELD.--We have received information that a great rush is now taking place from the Caledonian Diggings to a spot in the Blue Mountains [Victoria], about fifteen miles beyond Simmonds's Station, on the right bank of the Yarra, and about thirty-five miles from Melbourne. About three years ago an aboriginal showed a specimen, which he described to have been picked up away in the Blue Mountains; but the party to whom he showed it, after making great efforts to discover the spot, had to return disappointed. However, during the last few weeks parties have been out that way prospecting, and from the fact of their having sent to the above station for quantities of provisions, and from the people at the station having observed numerous parties wending their way in the direction of the Blue Mountains, suspicions were aroused. On the strength of the surmise, as above stated, great numbers have already started on the route, so that it will not be long before we may expect further information.⁸¹²

Firsthand observations in newspapers and other sources reveal the discovery of a number of diggings by Wadawurrung people who maintained their land tenure association with the district through and beyond the 1850s. Paul Gootch, a miner at Ballarat recorded in 1852 how an unidentified Aboriginal but presumably Wadawurrung person discovered the rich Eureka Diggings at Ballarat.

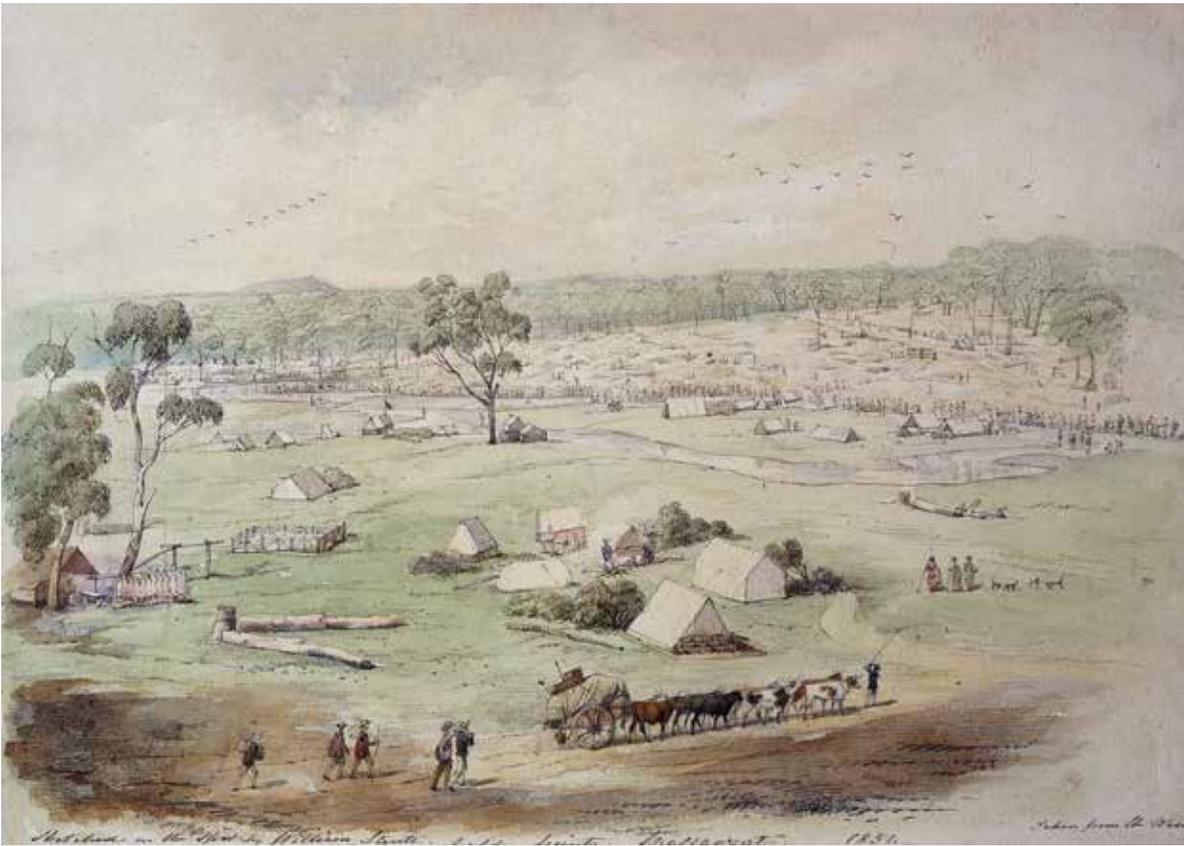
The way in which the Eureka diggings were discovered was on the occasion of my sending out a blackfellow to search for a horse who picked up a nugget on the surface. Afterwards I sent out a party to explore who proved that gold was really to be found in abundance.⁸¹³

A plethora of 'how to' books was spawned by the discovery of gold. Writers conveyed to prospective gold diggers the merits and pitfalls of various Australian goldfields and advised what to take with you into the bush. Many goldfield promoters discussed the 'Native population' of Australia, and some wrote enthusiastically about the advantages of hiring Aboriginal guides. The merits of employing Aboriginal guides by prospecting parties obviously continued into the 1870s as this *Ballarat Courier* report reveals.

The hope of finding gold in the Cape Otway Ranges has induced a party of men (the *Standard* announces) to start from Warrnambool on a prospecting expedition to that region. The prospectors are five in number, consisting of James Rowan, D. Heughey, H. Fearon, Robert Howard, and Peter (an aboriginal), and they seem sanguine of success. They started on Wednesday last, with two months provisions. Gold has been found in small quantities by previous prospectors to the west of the Gellibrand, and the country is gradually becoming more accessible.⁸¹⁴

An Aboriginal guide's role in both the squatting and goldrush periods encompassed determining the most direct and easily traversable route (often along traditional pathways) and locating food, medicine and water in order to sustain their non-Aboriginal companions. The guides also assisted in fording rivers safely, preparing temporary shelters, acting as diplomats and interpreters, negotiating passage through the country of resident clans met on the line of march and locating waterholes for horses and other stock. Most importantly for a gold miner their role also included locating new gold fields. Historian Henry Reynold's examination of the northern Australia mining districts revealed a similar scenario to what occurred in Victoria, adding that

Frontier prospectors were often accompanied by and dependent upon, Aboriginal assistants in the same way as explorers and pioneer squatters had been before them. Their bushcraft, tracking ability and skill at finding water were all invaluable assets in the interior of the continent and could be directed at seeking evidence of mineralization in the same way that they were used to find good pastoral land and easy tracks across unknown country.⁸¹⁵



William Strutt, *View of the celebrated Golden Point, Ballarat, 1851*, Pencil and watercolour. Copyright Parliament of Victoria. Reproduced with the Permission of the Victorian Parliamentary Library. Note the group of Wadawurrung people present on the Ballarat goldfield - to the right of the bullock team

It is almost certain that in the early period of gold mining non-Aboriginal prospectors were at times following the trading routes / song-lines of Aboriginal people in the same way that the earlier frontier explorers and squatters had. It is also likely that as in the squatting period, in attempting to 'stay on one's country', a number of Wadawurrung people attached themselves to groups of miners and at times led them to rich gold bearing sites just as many rich squatting runs had been opened up initially by Wadawurrung guides. By way of example one miner related a tale to the *Ballarat Courier* that attributed the discovery of gold at present day Black Hill (in Ballarat) squarely to an unidentified Wadawurrung guide's knowledge.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BLACK HILL LEAD

TO THE EDITOR OF THE COURIER

I will here inform you how I came to look for gold. I lived in Geelong, and from information I received from an aboriginal [in 1851] respecting the precious metal, I felt inclined to go and have a look. I informed a friend of mine in Geelong, Mr John Jackson, of what I had heard, and he proposed that his brother-in law should accompany me and my colored informant, which was agreed to. The morning we started, our dark -informant was arrested in Geelong -for murder. Captain

Fyan: allowed me to obtain all information I could from him, and I got another blackfellow to take us to the spot. At this time there was only myself and Lindsay, and the blackfellow. We were looking about for some days, when we discovered an ant-bed besmeared with mica, having quite a silvery hue. We went to work, and dug a deep bole with a piece of wood pointed, and a dish, and obtained lots of coarse mica. I was sent off in haste to Geelong to have it tested. After I left my mate Lindsay started off with another lot of mica. He wished to be first with the news. I need not tell you how we got on.⁸¹⁶

Similarly, miners such as Charles Ferguson, mining at Linton (south of Ballarat) met a large number of the 'Wardy yallock' (Wadawurrung) in 1851. Ferguson further acknowledged the integral role that an unidentified Wadawurrung man had played in their quest for gold – and the unofficial discovery of the Ararat goldfield.

There was one black fellow of this tribe ['Wardy yallock'] who told me he knew where there was plenty of gold, about sixty miles away, and offered to take me or Walter there. We made arrangements to go with him and take one other person also...They were gone about two weeks. They got gold, but the boys said it was the last place ever made and they would not stop there if they could make a pound weight of gold a day. The same place, but a short time after, turned out to be a good gold district and a great quartz region, known as the Ararat diggings.⁸¹⁷

It is certainly plausible that some Wadawurrung guides in the goldrush period were perhaps finding their niche in the new dominant economic culture, others for exotic goods, adventure and friendship/kinship. For some Aboriginal people it was probably a mixture of all these motivations. Many miner's correspondence confided that Aboriginal people in the wider Ballarat region were actively engaging in the search for gold - independently of white miners.

One of their number [near Mt Cole] had discovered on a neighbouring hill the previous evening a valuable specimen, half quartz, half gold, weighing some seven oz's.⁸¹⁸

The same writer emphasised this was not an anomaly by adding 'it was a common practice of the aborigines to search heaps of debris near shafts that had become exposed by heavy rains.' Other miners ranging across central Victoria iterated this view such as this anonymous early historian of the Evansford goldfields.

The natives who at first were fairly numerous...learned the value of gold and they soon became searchers for the precious metal.⁸¹⁹



Unknown, c.1854, *Ballarat, Victoria*, National Library of Australia, BibID: 2673229. The presence of redcoated figures (presumably soldiers) in the background suggests that the painting is depicting what Ballarat looked like immediately after or just prior to the Eureka Rebellion. In the foreground are two Wadawurrung people in close proximity to the diggings.

Other miners echoed this general observation such as JF Hughes, a digger who wrote ‘Among those gold-seekers might have been found representatives of nearly every phase of human society... [including]... the Aboriginal.’⁸²⁰ George Rowe, directly questioned a number of Kulin women at the goldfields on their attitudes towards gold mining and manufacturing goods for monetary purposes. Their responses were on first appearances both self-effacing and pragmatic:

I went to see an encampment of natives we found them in the forest about 60 to 80 lying about some asleep others crouched before a fire wrapped up in a skin or an old blanket many of them speak English the women sitting by a fire had 3 opossums [from] which they were pulling off the fur and then singeing over fire preparing them for eating I asked why they did not kill them and sell the skins “black fellows too idle” to why don’t you dig get gold “got no tools white men work black fellows no work we plenty eat without”⁸²¹

However, in earlier letters Rowe had written several times of their digging for gold

Since I took a sketch of King Billy I have had a visit from all the tribe every day – they bring me small quantities of gold which they pick up from the surface they begin to search for it just behind our tent and go away over the hills they creep along leaning on a stick they are very keen sighted.

Moreover, there are miners’ accounts recorded in local histories that speak of Kulin gold miners who struck out successfully on their own. One humorous account reveals the envy displayed towards successful Kulin miners. Published in a short history of Maldon in 1864, it re-tells the exploits of Kulin gold miners who had struck it rich and like many miners in this period kept their winnings a secret.

Time and again a member of the tribe would drop in at a local bank to sell a parcel of gold. Knowing ones about town got to hear of this, and considerable manoeuvring

went on to win over the confidence of the seller. The blacks maybe were on a “good thing” unknown to all others. The day came when a certain slick townsman invited Jackie for a ride, and in gleeful anticipation the pair drove off into the country. The merry travellers lubricated at every pub on the way and finally arrived at Newstead. A couple more drinks, then the driver got down to business on Jackie who was thoroughly enjoying himself.

‘You a very fine fellow Jackie.’ Jackie agreed with a wide grin. ‘You sell em plenty gold?’ ‘Yes, Boss.’ ‘Now you tell me where you get the gold and I like you very much.’ Jackie unabashed and apparently not a bit stupid with liquor, immediately replied: ‘Boss, blackfellow no b_____ fool!’⁸²²

A very similar tale, but two years earlier in the same region, appeared in another local history book.

During the winter of 1862, the aborigines of the Loddon were in the habit of visiting the township frequently and disposing of gold that evidently had come from some reef. They were solicited to point out the spot from whence they took it, and they assented, but led the messengers who went with them far away from the scene of their discovery. At length they were tracked by a couple of miners from Pegleg gully, who are reported to have found a large body of natives busy knocking out stone from a reef somewhere towards that known as Fentiman’s.⁸²³

The colonial newspapers too, particularly at the peak of the alluvial gold period likewise crowded frequently about the ease with which Aboriginal people in the wider Ballarat district sought – and found gold. Sometimes singularly such as a report about an unidentified Aboriginal shepherd in March 1852 on a station at Bryant’s Creek, who ‘is said to have discovered gold embedded in the stones’⁸²⁴ or in groups such as a report titled

Aboriginal Fossickers – We noticed the other day a party of native men and women fossicking about the old holes in one of our gullies. Their keenness of sight enables them to detect particles of gold that would escape the observation of most Europeans... Though too much adverse to steady labor to dig himself for the root of all evil, and probably thinking the white fellow a fool for doing so, the black man does not disdain the yellow dust, when he can procure it for the trouble of picking it up.⁸²⁵

Given the numerous accounts of Aboriginal people’s participation in gold prospecting itself it is remarkable that they are recorded as expressing a disdain for it. Arguably, it was the needless forever toiling that they wish to refrain from; particularly given similar sentiments had been voiced in the earlier squatting period about shepherding for squatters. Charles Griffith, a squatter on Wadawurrung country for instance was one of many observers who remarked upon how Aboriginal people

do not court a life of labour – that of our shepherds and bullock drivers appears to them one of unmeaning toil – and they would by no means consent to exchange their free, unhoused condition for the monotonous drudgery of such a dreary existence.⁸²⁶

Gerald Krefft writing in the 1860s spoke too of Aboriginal people's derisive sentiments towards colonial workers and their lot in life, noting 'there are only two things which appear great fools in their eyes, namely a white man and a working bullock'. Given this disdain for the Western capitalist-worker model, the Kulin may have felt there was no need for perpetually participating in an economic activity such as gold mining. Besides they did not possess the necessary tools for a task acknowledged by all races to be a risky venture at the best of times, especially given they had no professed difficulty in procuring all their needs from the bush. Gold fields writers as others in the previous squatting period noted with a great degree of awe the capacity of Aboriginal people to thrive in an environment where the colonizers would struggle to survive. Famed goldfields writer John Sherer noted that without having witnessed the 'consummate art' of the kangaroo hunt by Aboriginal people it would be impossible to conceive of, and that their actions when hunting 'are unequalled by anything we have ever seen in the whole science of calisthenics.'⁸²⁷ Many miners' accounts equally attest to their supremacy in the bush. One such account, by Edward Tame, on Wadawurrung country, ran as follows:

They are such adepts in the use of primitive arms and implements, and unrivalled in tracking down game, also showing great skill in things concerning everyday life and food...Much cleverness is shown in discovering water and they will live for months when a white man would die of thirst. Every spring and hole containing water is known to them and when no water can be found they will support life on water obtained from the roots of certain trees, or on the dew collected on the grass and shrubs.⁸²⁸

In a similar vein, gold miner Samuel Lazarus hopelessly lost near the Ballarat diggings in 1853 recorded his experience of fortuitously meeting with a Wadawurrung man who directed him to his destination.

I walked on a considerable distance without knowing where I was going to & at length fell in with a native who luckily could speak English. He pointed out the course I ought to take & in due time I reached our tent – the shade of which after a four or five hours walk under a hot sun was very acceptable. [Ballarat diggings].



William Strutt, *Gold washing, Ballarat, 1851*, Pencil and watercolour. Copyright Parliament of Victoria. Reproduced with the Permission of the Victorian Parliamentary Library. There appears to be an Aboriginal miner (presumably Wadawurrung, standing third from the left) in William Strutt's depiction of alluvial gold mining in Ballarat.

Newspaper reports of Kulin miners taking advantage of the easy wealth gained by mining for gold continued regularly appearing in colonial newspapers in the 1860s. By way of example *The Mount Alexander Mail* reported

We noticed the other day a party of native men and women fossicking about the old holes in one of our gullies. Their keenness of sight enables them to detect particles of gold that would escape the observation of most Europeans.⁸²⁹

A selection of articles, reproduced below, spanning the years 1859-70 in Ballarat and central highlands newspapers clearly demonstrates not just a heightened aptitude for finding gold existed, but also a commercial attitude was prevalent amongst Kulin miners as well.

A party of aborigines on Wednesday sold a very handsome nugget to Messrs. Warnook Brothers; it was slightly intermixed with quartz, and weighed 7oz. 15dwt, which had been in a hole...The blackfellows were evidently in high glee at their luck.⁸³⁰

A party of aborigines had a windfall the other day near Talbot, in the shape of nuggets. Walking over the old ground in Blacksmith Gully, they picked up two

nuggets, one weighing a trifle over 1lb, and the other about 1oz. 2dwt. These nuggets had evidently been thrown up from some of the neighbouring claims by the original workers. "Possessed of so much wealth, viz., 51 pounds 14 shillings" says the [Talbot] Leader, "the party proceeded to invest themselves in black suits and bell-toppers, and having thus dressed themselves, they swaggered about Amherst, cutting such airs as to greatly amuse everyone who chanced to see them. The last time they were seen they were trying to make a bargain with Mr Harling for the purchase of a buggy, but the price being beyond their means, taking into consideration the outlay for black suits and bell toppers, they at last requested the loan of a horse and buggy to drive into Talbot, but their wish in this request it appears no one would gratify."⁸³¹

ABORIGINAL MINERS.-A fine, but somewhat rough nugget, weighing 30 oz 5 dwt, was purchased by the Bank of Victoria, Talbot, on Saturday morning from of party of aboriginals, who had found it the same morning in an old hole at the Emu, about two and a half miles from this town. The party consisted of six males, one female, and a very youthful aboriginal, and on their entrance into the bank, followed by a small-crowd of equally small boys, the manager, Mr Lane, told them to begone, not desiring such company in the bank. One of the party held up the nugget, and said "You see, blackfellow a gentleman at last," he then handed it over for sale. In the course of a subsequent conversation between Mr Long and the aboriginal, the latter stated that his party had been fossicking in several old holes at the Emu for the previous fortnight, and that they had obtained several smaller pieces, varying in weight from 1 dwt to 5 dwt each. The party appeared to be perfectly sober, notwithstanding such an unusual slice of fortune, but how long they remained in that responsible condition, possessed of so much real wealth as a fist-full of bank notes, it would be somewhat hazardous to conjecture.⁸³²

"The Aborigines of this district" says the Talbot Leader, "seem to have a peculiar faculty for picking up valuable nuggets of gold. On Thursday, the remnant of the Daisy Hill tribe, while wandering about the old holes in Blacksmiths Gully, Amherst, picked up a nugget weighing six ounces. Mr Douglas of that town, having changed their gold for notes, the party spent about half of the cash upon new clothes, and adjourned with the balance into the bush."⁸³³

"On Saturday morning," says the Maryborough Advertiser, "a party of aborigines commenced a search for gold on the heaps of pipeclay at the White Hills, near Mr Mark Drewin's store, and in a very short time they discovered pieces which they sold for 12s., 15s., and 10 pounds odd. The same party were successful some time since in the neighbourhood of Amherst and Talbot. They say, 'whitefellow dig for gold, and blackfellow pick it up.' Their eyes seem more serviceable than many men's picks and shovels."⁸³⁴

an aboriginal has dropped on a prize in the shape of a lump of gold weighing 4 lb 1 oz which he found thrown out amongst the headings at some old workings.⁸³⁵

Some Aborigines in the neighbourhood of Amherst found a nugget last week [26 August 1870] on top of the old workings. It realised between 5 pounds and 6 pounds [currency]. With this they clothed themselves comfortably, and some of the lubras adorned their swarthy necks with necklaces. They found another nugget the week before in some surface ground near Mia Mia.⁸³⁶

Other observers recorded parties of Aboriginal people in close proximity to various goldfields. William Tomlinson noted briefly in his diary

I yesterday [6 December 1853] saw five of the [Wadawurrung] natives in town [Geelong], they wore blankets over them like shawls...I saw four of them starting for the [Ballarat] diggings this afternoon.⁸³⁷

Edward Tame, as noted previously recorded how he frequently encountered Wadawurrung clanspeople in the Ballan district whilst travelling to the goldfields and added that he would sometimes meet with 'a lot of natives, of whom there seemed to be a large number about Creswick Creek [Diggings 1852-6]'.⁸³⁸ Many miners recalled how Wadawurrung people were a feature of their times on the goldfields. One miner related how

a new chum who reached Ballarat whilst the blacks were still living on the fringes of the gold field. This new arrival boasted of his athletic prowess so was challenged... took a run at a brushwood fence and landed successfully on the other side only to find himself amongst an assortment of blacks and their dogs all of whom make a great noise much to his concern and so he quickly jumped back.⁸³⁹

Wadawurrung guides and trackers

One of the most talked about and startling aspects of the Australian goldfields generally was the mixture of classes and races including Aboriginal people sometimes toiling away together with little or no regard for social divides that previously had been strictly adhered to. Goldfields historian, Weston Bates aptly coined gold the 'democratic mineral', which many digger's journals and letters corroborate. Miner, William Nawton on the Ballarat goldfields for a time observed 'You have of course every grade of character amongst the diggers – from the most courteous gentleman to the commonest black – but all seem to harmonise with each other'.⁸⁴⁰ Interestingly it was also widely acknowledged that the 'harmony' between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal miners was heavily dependent on cultivating a sense of mutual affiliation – especially when seeking to gain their bio-cultural knowledge. Writers such as Francis Lancelott advising on the Australian colonies held out advice on the desirability of hiring Aboriginal guides in general - and how to retain them in service. He maintained several rules of thumb on the matter.

Those who have had long experience in the bush are always careful to avail themselves of the services of one or two trusty black attendants...As their services are given more from goodwill than from hope of reward, it is only from attachment

to persons with whom they are well acquainted that they are ever prevailed upon to lend themselves as parties in an exploring expedition.⁸⁴¹

The usefulness of Wadawurrung guides was not limited to discovering gold, finding a particular place, locating and preparing food, procuring water and carrying supplies. Bush travelers were often the recipients of Wadawurrung bush lore that improved their quality of stay. Katherine McKay at Bolwarra during the gold rush period relayed a story about a Wadawurrung guides smoothing of the bush for her father.

Once Father told us of how, after a long waterless journey, he and his native guide came on a waterhole in an almost dry creek. Father, being very thirsty, took his pannikin to dip a draught out of the film-covered water; but the black guide restrained him warningly, and gathered a bunch of coarse grass that was growing about the creek and placed it on the surface of the water, first dexterously removing a patch of the film or scum, and slowly pressed the pannikin on the filter of dried grass until it was filled with clear water.⁸⁴²

Frederick Burchett also wrote of how Aboriginal bio-cultural knowledge was keenly utilized, noting that during floods 'we had to carry rations to outstations in a bark canoe manufactured by the blacks in a very few minutes.'⁸⁴³ This experience was mirrored by many such as George Sugden who recorded 'The men would get over [swollen rivers] in blacks dugouts [canoes] ...[the] dray ferried over by blacks'⁸⁴⁴ Wadawurrung people were also at times employed for more nefarious purposes according to Ballarat miner, Thomas Pierson, who maintained that the 'Bushrangers get them for guides.'⁸⁴⁵ On the flipside of this observation the deployment of Wadawurrung trackers was also noted in the goldfields era. In general, Aboriginal trackers received much acclaim on the goldfields of Victoria by exercising skills that were outside the ambit of most non-Aboriginal people. The abilities and knowledge they displayed made them a valuable asset and a source of wonder to a wider public. Historian Gary Presland noted that the 'expertise displayed by blacktrackers was often described as 'uncanny', 'eerie' and even 'magical' and serves as an example of the way in which Aboriginal people successfully adapted the elements of their traditional lifeways to a new world order.⁸⁴⁶ Not just on the goldfields but on the pastoral stations too their tracking expertise was considered with mystical awe and solemn respect. It was during the gold period that their skills of tracking cattle or sheep were particularly invaluable because of the dearth of non-Aboriginal workers, due to them deserting to the goldfields. Lawrence Struillby's awed reactions to blacktrackers 'wonderful power' are atypical.

The blacks began to be very useful to us, some of them at least. Some of them had powers of tracking cattle, more surely than a hound would fox or hare; though they did it all by eye. It was amusing to see the chief, after a stiff bargain, hire out a tracker to follow a stray mob of cattle or horses. You would take him to the spot where they were last seen; where he would go deliberately to work to see and measure the track. You must not hurry him... Through scrub and stream, and river and forest, and over sand or rock, he will go, till he brings you to your object, whether it is alive or dead. When he discovers dropping of the cattle, or a blade of grass cut by them,

he can tell within a few hours or miles of their whereabouts. Many a fine bullock or heifer they saved for us then; and more for myself afterwards. The kangaroo, opossum, emu, kangaroo-rat, or even the grub, they trace with equal precision. It is as if they could concentrate all their power in the sense of sight.⁸⁴⁷

However, it was the tracing of individuals or parties of people who were lost in the bush which was the premier task which trackers were predominately called upon to perform prior to and throughout the gold period. Often the blacktrackers were called in when all other efforts had failed to locate the lost person, making the task even more onerous due to the obliteration of marks by the trampling underfoot of the previous searchers. Even in these circumstances their prodigious services were warmly admired by writers such as Robert Brough Smyth who marveled at the 'the skill and intelligence of the Black tracker,' and Francis Lancelott who described the pitiful story of a 14 year old girl who had been missing in the bush for ten days before it was 'deemed indispensable' to call for their assistance, but it was too late.

They however, did their part very well. On being told where the girl was last seen to enter the scrub, they went down instantly on their hands and knees, and with their large, sooty eyes, scanned every blade of grass, fallen leaf, and twig, with as much care and delicacy as if they had been objects of infinite worth...it was tedious work for the blacks, but they seemed proud of the great consideration in which their services were held...and, as the blacks had conjectured, her dead body was found on the summit of the rock.⁸⁴⁸

The most celebrated story of their prowess involved a group of children lost for nine days in the Mallee, successfully tracked by three Victorian Aboriginal men, King Richard, Jerry or Red-cap, and Fred. It was not just the living whom the blacktrackers were employed to trace but also the dead. The finding of the remains of a lost one brought closure for the parents, family or friends.' Lancelott explained that on the goldfields and elsewhere there was 'always great satisfaction when the remains of the lost are found. Uncertainty is the most calamitous state which the mind can be thrown into. The heart is choked, and there is an unutterable anguish in the pent up and conflicting emotions of hope and fear.'⁸⁴⁹

William Thomas noted the invaluable nature of four Aboriginal people including several Wadawurrung trackers ['Pokey, Tommy and Jackey from Ballarat, Billy from upper Loddon'] called in to track the body of Patrick O'Meara, a murder victim, in December 1866.⁸⁵⁰ Several months later Thomas reveals the success of the Wadawurrung trackers in tracking the missing man and his attempt to secure their payment.

You are aware that I was applied to by Mr. Inspector Nicholson of the Detective Force in our [?] On the Subject of Blacks to track Bullarook forest – to find the Body of a Man supposed to have been Murder'd – I furnished Mr. Nicholson with every information – and recommended 3 Blacks who were acquainted with that part of Victoria – they succeeded in finding the remains – 20£ was offered reward by Colonial Secretary.⁸⁵¹

Two more instances in the Ballarat district are illustrative of the use made of Wadawurrung (and Djabwurrung) trackers in policing matters. On Christmas Eve 1866, Senior Constable James Mansfield from the Black Hills station near Ballarat was one of a party of searchers which included three presumably Wadawurrung trackers. One of the trackers, named Heath, had been leading the group down a slope when they came upon a recently fallen tree against which a fire had been set. Raking over the remains they were recovered some tell-tale pieces of evidence which resulted in a conviction, and subsequent hanging of the accused.⁸⁵² In the following year, Jemmy (or Jimmy) Millar (Djabwurrung name: Colit) and Davy Smith, a Tooloora Balug (Buninyong area) clansman of the Wadawurrung were called in to assist police stationed at Rokewood and Buninyong in their enquiries regarding the murder of Thomas Ulrick on the Woody Yaloak goldfields. The two Aboriginal trackers, Millar and Smith, proved to be instrumental in the convictions, leading the police to the guns used in the murder and also tracking the culprit's horse's movements.⁸⁵³

COMMERCE AND WORK

Miners and others also readily employed the Aboriginal skills of possum skin rug making. Whilst many 'diggers were very fond' of hunting possums and 'making beautiful rugs of them, by sewing their skins together,' it was commonly accepted that Aboriginal people were more adept in all aspects of its manufacture and that Aboriginal people were imbued with a good deal of business acumen. By way of example, Edward Tame, a miner in the 1850s recalled in his reminiscences that in his frequent travels to the goldfields of Victoria he often encountered groups of Wadawurrung people near the township of Ballan in central Victoria. He maintained that possum skin rugs form 'good articles of commerce' for them.⁸⁵⁴ AB Pierce waxed lyrical about their manufacturing skills, noting 'they are very adept in curing skins perfectly,' which are 'taken into the townships for sale.' Their renown in the manufacture of beautifully crafted possum skin rugs led many colonists to seek tutoring from Aboriginal people in the trade of possum-skin rug manufacture, a skilled trade that was recognized as extremely useful.

I learnt the art of curing skins from Gardner at least simply drying them after a fashion he had learnt from the blacks. Small wooden pegs are cut and the skin is stretched with them on the back of a tree and left a couple of days in the sun after which they are ready for use most frequently they are sewn together for rugs 50 or 60 making a covering more durable and much warmer than a blanket.⁸⁵⁵

HW Wheelwright confirmed this writer's opinion, writing in the 1850s: 'for of all the coverings in dry cold weather, an opossum-skin rug is the best, as I can well testify.' He recommended that, 'If any blacks are handy, it is best to get them to sew the skins, for a black's rug beats any other.'⁸⁵⁶ Others echoed this sentiment such as a diarist who wrote 'My days were employed in curing the skins of the possums in the native fashion (which is simply to peg them down on the ground and cover them with salt and ashes).'⁸⁵⁷ Some writers such as A Batey at Sunbury, north of Melbourne, were more effusive in their praise of the artisan skills brought to bear on the making of the rugs. He described in great detail the differing manufacturing processes of possum skin rug manufacture and considered the Aboriginal manufacture to be infinitely superior, describing how 'the aboriginals were fastidious in their choice of skins.'⁸⁵⁸

Some miners and commentators in the gold rush period elaborated on the intercultural trade in possum skin rugs more than others did. Owen Davies, a miner in the Ovens Valley merely noted in a letter that the 'natives make a great use of their skin' whilst William Howitt added that their trade and commerce was extensive, noting that 'they fish and hunt, make baskets and opossum rugs, and sell their produce to the white men.'⁸⁵⁹ Likewise, artist and miner on the central Victorian goldfields, George Rowe, wrote that the 'skins make a capital rug for sleeping under they are worth four pounds [and are] much used by the diggers being light and easily carried from one place to another.'⁸⁶⁰ The Wadawurrung too enjoyed a lucrative monopoly in the business of selling possum skins and possum skin rugs – a business network that had commenced at the onset of the squatting invasion and continued into the gold mining period. This is particularly evident from Eugene Von Guerard's documentation of an inter-cultural trading transaction in 1854. His oil painting, *Aborigines on the road to diggings* now in the Geelong Fine Art Gallery, depicts a Wadawurrung family group conducting a possum-rug business transaction with colonists on the banks of the Barwon River. What is of particular interest about Von Guerard's painting is the centrality of the Wadawurrung business people (men and women). Unlike many artists' depictions of Aboriginal people during the nineteenth century, in which they are peripheral players cast off to the background or figures relegated to the sidelines, Von Guerard has focused the activity around a confident Wadawurrung business community who are clearly directing the commerce deal. Moreover, the white 'consumer' desiring to purchase the possum rugs is painted in a subservient pose, kneeling down, whilst the Aboriginal 'manufacturer' assumes an upright, dominant demeanor. A number of commentators writing on Aboriginal society in the nineteenth century conceded that the Aboriginal people of Victoria in general possessed a good deal of business acumen and that they had moved quickly to grasp the economic opportunities presented to them by the miners flooding to the gold diggings. JF Hughes recalled that possum skin and kangaroo skin rugs were 'sold to settlers and lucky gold diggers at five pounds a-piece.'⁸⁶¹ Miner James Arnot bought a possum rug in Melbourne made of 72 skins sewn together with sinews, also for five pounds.⁸⁶² Walter Bridges, a miner at Buninyong near Ballarat in 1855, described how a local Wadawurrung clan carrying possum skin rugs approached his wife and made a request, framed within the ties of reciprocity of neighbours, for some steel needles and thread: 'So up they come yabbering good day Missie you my countary woman now. My mother had to be the spokesman the Blacks said You gottum needle Missie you gottum thread...Then the Luberes come jabbering along behind carrying the swag in nets some with pups that could not walk, others possum skin rugs the Blackfellows make.'⁸⁶³ The demand for steel sewing implements seems likely to have stemmed from the high volume of their possum skin rugs sold on the Wadawurrung goldfields.



Eugene von Guérard, *Aborigines met on the road to the diggings 1854*, oil on canvas, Courtesy Geelong Gallery, Gift of W Max Bell and Norman Belcher, 1923

The popularity of Aboriginal manufactured goods such as possum skin rugs, baskets and mats also enabled many Aboriginal people (including Wadawurrung) residing on missions and reserves in the 1860s and 1870s to gain an eagerly sought-after economic independence – using their traditional skills. According to Mr. Green, the Inspector of Aboriginal Stations there was a ready sale ‘at high prices of baskets...rugs with the skins of the opossum, kangaroo and wallaby, for each of which they get from 1 pound to 1 pound 15 shillings.’⁸⁶⁴ Green further noted in his report about the Coranderrk Mission where a number of Wadawurrung resided

In the course of one week or so they will all be living in huts instead of willams [traditional bark housing]; they have also during that time [four months] made as many rugs, which has enabled them to buy boots, hats, coats etc., and some of them has [sic] even bought horses.⁸⁶⁵

Similarly, Andrew Porteous, an ‘Honorary Correspondent for the Aborigines in the Ballarat District’ (1860-77), reported that the demand for Aboriginal manufactured goods continued to be a lucrative ‘exportation for which they were well paid by the whites’ many years after the alluvial gold rushes had petered out. In 1866 he reported on the significant degree of interest shown in local Wadawurrung manufactures.

The tribe still continue to make possum rugs, and if steady, might make a good living by it, as they generally get 20s. to 30s. for each rug, which they can make in 14 days. The women also employ themselves in making baskets and nets, which they sell to the European.⁸⁶⁶

In 1867 and again in 1872, Porteous reiterated the same theme of Wadawurrung commercial activity was prevalent.

They continue to hunt such game as can be found in the district. The opossum is plentiful, and they make rugs with the skins. They sell the opossum rugs, and sometimes offer fish for sale, with the proceeds of which they supply themselves with rations, and sometimes with clothes, such as hats, handkerchiefs, and some of them with boots...they have been traveling amongst the stations, only a few calling for rations...they still fish when fish can be got, and hunt the opossum, and make rugs of the skins. The women continue to make baskets and nets,..⁸⁶⁷

Some indication of how commercialized the Wadawurrung's possum skin trade had become can be gleaned from a satirical article which appeared in the *Ballarat Star* (1861) supposedly attributed to 'A Blackfellow' that beseeched the Colonial Government to provide market protection for the Aboriginal trade in possum skin rugs:

You write gov'nor and ask him why protection on the wallaby track looking for grubs 'mong whitefellow? You say whitefellow no make um blankets this colony, blackfellow make 'possum rug, which whitefellow ought to buy 'stead of blanket; possum rug all along same as whitefellow's blankets;- why not give blackfellow monopoly of making and selling 'em and protect real native industry.⁸⁶⁸

In the goldrush literature, the ubiquity of references to the possum skin rugs usefulness is testimony to its importance. Miner John Erskine's comment is atypical of miner's opinions about possum skin rugs utility, noting: 'the frost was severe towards the morning, making a good covering of blankets and opossum rugs necessary.'⁸⁶⁹ Some recorded its practicality in treating cases of hypothermia whilst others praised its utility in the bush, quipping 'An opossum rug laid upon the ground and a couple of blankets spread over it, makes a famous bed.'⁸⁷⁰ AA Le Souef enthusiastically remarked: 'I know nothing more delightful than camping out...wrapped in an opossum cloak or blanket, with your feet to the campfire' and similarly JS Prout, a writer and artist on the goldfields contended that 'an opossum rug leaves the comfort of a feather bed unwished for.'⁸⁷¹ A report in the *Ballarat Star* and reprinted later in the *London Times* corroborates the eagerness of colonists to obtain possum skin rugs manufactured by the Wadawurrung, as depicted by Von Guerard ten years earlier.

Mr Henry Davies, of Carngham, who is about to visit his native Snowden, in Wales, applied to Mr Porteous ['Aboriginal Correspondent' in the Ballarat District] to get an opossum rug made for him to take home to the old country, to show what the pioneers of the gold fields frequently used to sleep in. Mr Porteous at once engaged a blackfellow, who, with the assistance of his lubra, in four days turned out a beautiful article, for which they obtained 30s. Mr Hopper, struck with the appearance of the rug, ordered another, for which he also paid 30s, being £3 earned by the pair within eight days.⁸⁷²

George Henry Wathen, a visitor on the Victorian goldfields, also enthusiastically sang the praises of possessing a possum rug. Further, he acknowledged, if grudgingly, that people on the goldfields considered the possum skin rug to be undoubtedly the most highly valued intercultural trade item in Victoria: 'I was soon asleep on the ground, by the fire, under an overbowering banksia, wrapped in the warm folds of my opossum rug. For a night bivouac, there is nothing comparable to the opossum-rug; and it is perhaps the only good thing the white man has borrowed from the blacks.'⁸⁷³

The sale of possum skin rugs, baskets and artifacts to non-Aboriginal miners, as with the commodification of corroborees for non-Aboriginal audiences, had commenced from the first days of colonization in Victoria, fifteen years prior to the gold rush. This is a significant point, as discussion about Victorian Aboriginal's rapid acculturation of the supply-and-demand model of monetary commerce has received scant attention by historians and other writers.⁸⁷⁴ During the squatting period economic activity between Victorian Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people was enacted for social, political and monetary purposes. However, increasingly during the gold rush period the emphasis in inter-cultural trade focuses almost exclusively on financial gain.⁸⁷⁵ Of course for all societies, exchange, whether monetary or not, is imbued with cultural practices and values, though externally the exchange may at times appear devoid of a significant degree of symbolic function. Aboriginal peoples' 'commercial instinct' was noted by miners to be highly developed, meaning they knew the monetary value of their manufactured products and asked a good price for it, yet embedded within the straight up commercial transaction were probably the systemic values of reciprocity and kinship. Samuel Clutterbuck, a sheep station worker during both the gold mining and earlier sheep herding periods noted with some displeasure how money had clearly displaced exchange-barter in their dealings with non-Aboriginal people

The blacks took their departure, Simon [unidentified language group] promising on his next passing, to bring me a new opossum rug and one each of their different implements of war and hunting. I asked him if I should give him a fine shirt in return. He replied "Borag [meaning: No] shirt, give it plenty white money". I may here state, that the "amor muniti" [love of money?] is as strong with the aborigines as their paler faced bretheren.⁸⁷⁶

RB Smyth, a noted nineteenth century ethnologist, also considered that Victorian Aboriginal people 'barter with their neighbours; and it would seem that as regards the articles in which they deal, barter is as satisfactory to them as sale would be. They are astute in dealing with the whites, and it may be supposed they exercise reasonable forethought and care when bargaining with their neighbours.'⁸⁷⁷

George Rowe, for instance, an artist and gold miner and a contemporary of Von Guerard, commented on the ubiquity and quality of manufactures made by the Kulin and the going price for them on the goldfields.

Their dress is only a blanket or an opossum skin rug thrown over their shoulders and wrapped around them the opossum fur is beautifully soft and makes a warm covering to sleep under and is what most diggers have as it is very light a good one costs 4 pounds...



Wilbraham FE Liardet, *View of Geelong* (c. 1848), watercolour, Courtesy Geelong Gallery, Gift of the City of Greater Geelong, 2010. Note the group of Wadawurrung camping on the beach on the far right.

Another traditional skill that Aboriginal people very successfully adapted to the gold rush economy was the stripping of bark for miners. James Nisbet, in May 1853 wrote of the how useful the Wadawurrung were and how they were employed to build shelters for them.

The writer met a party of half a dozen at Ballarat, but nowhere else did he see them in the colony. They are a very harmless race, and are sometimes employed by the diggers in remote gullies to strip trees of the bark for a hut.⁸⁷⁸

At the neighboring Mt Alexander diggings a miner found the work of making a hut more efficient with the aid of an unidentified Aboriginal person, noting that they 'set to work, dug holes, cut down trees, stripped some bark off others in which, by-the-by, a black fellow helped us, and by night had our tent pretty well secured.'⁸⁷⁹ William Thomas, Guardian of Aborigines, also reported that Aboriginal people were 'industrious and profitably employed' in cutting bark and in 1861 wrote at length about Aboriginal businessmen and women brokering contracts and submitting tenders especially within the expansive building industry heavily dependent on bark.⁸⁸⁰ Some goldfield writers on Wadawurrung country such as James Montagu Smith believed Aboriginal people to be more adept at certain tasks than non-Aboriginal people and explicitly explained the rationale for either teaming up with Aboriginal people or having an Aboriginal work-mate on a prospecting party to new comers.

We again tried the hole minus two of our hands; and Dick amongst the number showed the white feather, leaving us with only nine good men and true. We repaired the race and set two aborigines at work to cut bark for us, they being so much more ready at it than Europeans.⁸⁸¹

Intercultural Relationships

Some writers in the gold rush period noted what they perceived to be the disadvantages of employing Aboriginal people. One of the major setbacks perceived by non-Aboriginal people

in employing Aboriginal people, reported by miners and others, was the customary kinship laws that emphasized reciprocity that white bosses had to comply with. In earlier times, squatters also came to recognize (in a very naïve way) that convivial workplace relations with their valuable Aboriginal workers were often dependent on how well the white bosses applied a form of social and economic reciprocity in their dealings with individual Aboriginal workers. In a very poorly nuanced way, some colonial bosses understood that they were guaranteed to have compliant and dependable Aboriginal workers – only if their ‘mob’ (wider kinship families) were provided for. J.N McLeod of the Westernport District of Victoria, for example, in his reply to the 1858 Select Committee into the condition of Aboriginal people in Victoria stated that he ‘always employed them when he could but found them expensive work people, for if you employed one you had to feed ten.’ Others often echoed McLeod’s ‘complaint’. In the diary of Thomas Booth, a miner at Buninyong in central Victoria, Booth notes that it was ‘their first law of nature that if you gave to one you have to give to all.’ John Chandler likewise reminisced about his father’s experiences with Woiwurrung people near Melbourne:

Sometimes my father would promise them some tobacco, if they would cut some wood. They would send their lubras to cut the wood and then come themselves for the tobacco, and then as soon as they were gone the lubras would come for some, for they smoke as much as the men; so he had to pay double.⁸⁸²

It was rare however in the goldrush or squatting periods that non-Aboriginal people fully understood Aboriginal customary practices especially in regards to economic and social reciprocity. The outworking of this ignorance of the importance of social/economic reciprocity can often be linked to inter-cultural violence. Miners and others were frequently blind to how reciprocity encompassed social obligations toward others within the group and to other groups. Rarely in the gold rush period did the colonials appreciate that in Wadawurrung and wider Aboriginal society each person had an identity a standing and a sense of belonging and that relatedness allowed each person to know how to act and behave toward each other person in and outside the group - even colonial outsiders. A newspaper feature from the *Talbot Leader* is a gold field’s exemplar of the Aboriginal reciprocity model whereby the best person is the one who will give everything away; the worthiest is the person who will go hungry themselves in order to feed someone else who has a legitimate claim on them. From an Aboriginal perspective, this claim has nothing to do with relative need; it is not charity; you do not give because someone is needy; you give because it is the right thing to do. It is evident that in order for Aboriginal people to make claims on the colonists they attempted to incorporate them into their own social system, a fact of which the whites were generally ignorant.

Few colonists expect gratitude from the aborigines, but that they are not always unmindful of these obligations which go to make up what is called civilization has been proved of late in this district. Our readers will remember the paragraph which appeared in our last issue, notifying that a party of aborigines had found a thirty-ounce nugget at the Emu. This gold realized about 120 pounds for them and shortly after they had patronized the draper’s shop, and provided themselves with good winter clothing, they determined to pay a visit to Clunes, where some months since a resident had been very kind to them. According to their version of the affair, he gave them money to purchase extra blankets when the weather was very cold,

and they could not forget his kindness. Accordingly, the party, to the number of nine, hired for three pounds two vehicles, on Wednesday, and proceeded in them to Clunes, for the purpose of returning to their benefactor the sum he had placed at their disposal on that occasion. Some amusement was occasioned by the sight of the party when they drove out of Talbot, the women being decked in crinolines, good warm dresses, and bonnets, and the men clothed in wearing apparel of the latest fashions; but when the motive of their errand was known, they certainly rose considerably in the estimation of the bystanders.⁸⁸³

Sometimes Wadawurrung people, disenfranchised from protection by the newly imposed British legal system, sought influential colonists who showed some understanding of their laws of reciprocity to act on their behalf and enforce colonists to desist from abusing customary sexual/social relationship protocols. At Carngham (near Ballarat), Andrew Porteous, a squatter who had considerable experience of Wadawurrung customary protocols, was petitioned by Wadawurrung men to use his rank and influence to return 'two lubras [Aboriginal women] living with two whitefellows in tents, gold diggers on Fiery Creek...'⁸⁸⁴ A similar case ended catastrophically for 'Buckley' an Aboriginal man murdered on the Mt Alexander goldfields after making persistent petitions to two white miners for two 'lubras to return from the miners' tents.'⁸⁸⁵ This poorly recorded murder is in all likelihood due to non-Aboriginal miners abusing the protocols of sexual socio-economic reciprocity and the resulting angry remonstrations for that action.

Other miners, out of feelings of modesty and timidity mixed with unfamiliarity and racism avoided the Wadawurrung people they encountered on the goldfields. The nudity and / or bizarre appearance of Aboriginal people, as interpreted by colonists in the nineteenth century, feature prominently in miners' records. Thomas Pierson, a miner at Ballarat and McIvor in central Victoria (1852-64), underpinned his fear and loathing of Aboriginal people with notions of race and ethnocentrism.

While at the diggings we saw many of the aborigineese or natives of this country, they are very Black, tall and straight – have straight hair, they are very Lazy can't be hired to work, they used to come to our and others tents everyday begging, many of them can talk English, they are very degraded, the women Lewd, and almost entirely naked – have only a scarf around their loins – some have robes made of opossum skins – they don't even make a hut to live in but bend a small tree throw some branches over it when it rains or is frost, and lay down on the ground – they are given to theft – otherwise inoffensive if not put up to be otherwise by whites, the bushrangers get them for guides and then they will murder.⁸⁸⁶

Edwin Price, also a miner at Ballarat, mirrored Pierson's observation of both their prominent appearance at the fields and his derision of Aboriginal people. His descriptions of their character and physique are festooned with racist and ethnocentric epithets, typical of many writers in the nineteenth century.

They are the Laziest, Ugliest, Dirtiest and most wretched of any race I ever saw, in height they seldom exceed five feet, wear no boots or hats and seldom anything save a blanket on them. Their complexion are as dark as the blackest Africans and ten times as revolting the only redeeming quality in them is the hair, which is very black, curly and glossy, when oiled with wild cat fat...I came across an encampment of them...each man had his Lubra (or Wife) with him to carry all his weapons and game and every pair had their separate fire, the Earth was their bed, and nothing save an old torn blanket to cover them...one old heathen was the cook...In the interior they are wild and pugnacious and cannibals.⁸⁸⁷

The prim and proper sensibilities of Ballarat miner Edward Tame were affronted by the nudity, body adornments and ritualized scarring 'on various parts of the body so as to leave ugly cicatrices, their patterns varying in different tribes.' Tame was fascinated, providing quite a deal of amateur ethnographic and anthropological data about the Aboriginal people he encountered in central Victoria from his observations and second-hand information, but was also appalled when confronted at close quarters.

In the morning following this noisy corroboree, after breakfast we were startled to see these dark skinned uncouth brethren come pouring over the hill top, down its slopes and over the creek to us. Pretty sights they were indeed, nothing on their heads and scarcely anything on their bodies, save a plentiful supply of grease and ochre of colours I cannot describe.⁸⁸⁸



Guerard, Eugen von, 1854, *Natives chasing Game or Aborigines met on the road to the diggings*, REX NAN KIVELL COLLECTION ; NK108. National Library of Australia, BibID: 1874055

Sightings of 'regular aborigines', especially women who were not dressed, from a nineteenth century western conventional point of view, were something to (literally) write home about. William Tomlinson 'fell in with' his first 'regular aborigines' in the bush, somewhere between Geelong and Ballarat in September 1853. It is interesting that he distinguishes between 'town natives' (Wadawurrung in Geelong) - he had noted previously in his correspondence who wore 'blankets over them like shawls' or were 'sometimes entirely without clothing of any kind, except an opossum rug or blanket' - and the 'regular aborigines' (Wadawurrung midway between Geelong and Ballarat) he had seen in the bush. He observed: "There were four of these huts ['mia mias'] occupied by about 20 to 25 men and women, most of them lubras or women especially "a la Adam and Eve" or in as complete a state of nudity as when they first came into the world."⁸⁸⁹

For John Chandler it was the nudity especially which elicited an added sense of fear for his personal well-being and prompted him to avoid associations with them. On a journey through the bush he encountered 'a little crowd of them, and they were all naked. I felt afraid, being alone, that they would molest me, and feeling a little modest, left the track and kept round them, making back for the track when well beyond them.'⁸⁹⁰ Like Robert Thomas, and many of his contemporaries, the absence of Western styled clothing was an anathema, made even more profound by the fact that "The women smoke as well as the men and are all remarkably fond of rum."⁸⁹¹ This perspective should be tempered however by the mores that existed amongst many of the immigrant people arriving in Victoria who held particularly strong views about race, class and gender. As an example, Thomas Woolner's scathing appraisal of the class of miners he saw at the Reid Creek Diggings demonstrates that Aboriginal people were not the only recipients of contempt: 'People are swarming to the diggings like folks go to a fair: I notice some women among them, hideous looking creatures, more frightful to my eyes than the black gins.'⁸⁹² Woolner further derided the miners' assemblage of tents as being like 'the meeting place of all the gypsies on the earth, all the men look like gypsies.' Of the mining fraternity at Kilmore, he heaped the most scorn, describing his fellow citizens as being like 'maggots wriggling over corruption.'⁸⁹³ One unidentified writer camped at Pentland Hills, near Bacchus Marsh, in central Victoria - launched an equally scathing attack on the 'ignoble nation of miners by his host who was in an ecstasy of indignation at the sordidness of the goldseekers, and sustained without intermission, a tirade of invectiveness against them. "Well positively, I begin to respect the Blacks", he exclaimed "they appear noble in comparison to the race that has come to occupy their land."⁸⁹⁴

Most goldfields documents such as diaries and letters are bereft of information on Aboriginal people, or at least contain only sketchy fragments. The majority of miners did not see their association with Aboriginal people as an opportunity for cultural exploration and enrichment, seeing the odd practical lesson in bushcraft or an exhibition of their corroborees as worthwhile but on the main they were here for the sole purpose of extracting gold and exiting. Conversely, however, some miners and visitors to the goldfields of Victoria recalled having Aboriginal people as neighbors in a sense that the squatters had rarely accepted. Like all neighbors everywhere, sometimes the noise of their 'goings on' got irritating. Miners such as Oliver Ragless offered that the nocturnal 'waddie-beating' of Aborigines camped across the creek 'are making some of us cross', but otherwise opined them good neighbors.⁸⁹⁵

Other relationships were far more utilitarian such as the experiences of Charles Eberlie, a miner on his way to the Ballarat diggings, who was humbugged by 'King Jimmy of the tribe of Emu Creek' at Skipton in 1855 for some tobacco, and so in 'order to remain on good terms with the natives we gave him all the tobacco we had.' The French miner also confessed to being too tired after a long day's travel to wait for the end of a corroboree staged for their benefit and added that he and his party had followed the conventions of other miners by 'camping at a gunshot's distance from the natives [Wadawurrung], in that way imitating the English and the Americans who did not like to feel themselves too close to the coloured people, however inoffensive they were.'⁸⁹⁶

In the oral family histories passed down by descendants of miners who had stayed in the goldfields' region, such as the Marsden family in the Cardigan-Haddon area west of Ballarat, there are vestiges of accounts of relationships, though often very paternalistic and condescending, which speak of Wadawurrung people as community identities in small goldfield towns. Small gold-towns folk watched their corroborees, knew about their springs, mortuary sites, invested time in relationships with key individuals, were at times showered with gifts but were more often 'humbugged' for money and utilitarian items such as axes, clothes and pans.

My grandfather told of aborigines in the bush on the Ridge. He told of corroborees and ...aboriginal shelters and of an area where, as a child, aboriginal bones could be found. My grandfather talked often of King Billy and of his wives. He had a spear, woomera and a shield that he said were given to his father by King Billy. I have memories of him saying that King Billy could be a nuisance because he wanted money, not just food and clothes. I remember two stories he told. The first was that King Billy had a liking for beer and that he was banned from the local pubs/shanties. He tells that when a boy his father, elder brothers and himself would often cart hay between the family farm at Cardigan and one in the Smythesdale area. King Billy would wait for them near the pub at Kopke's. He would ask money for beer, which was given to him on the condition that he bought his beer at the above pub. Apparently the lady who ran the pub had banned him but would serve him if he could get to the bar and the land lady's attempts to prevent him doing so provided amusement for the patrons...My grandfather also told of King Billy often being found asleep under bushes on and around the farm.⁸⁹⁷

Some colonists only reported the frequency of visitations from Aboriginal people. James Morgan, a miner at Ballarat, was 'often visited by Aboriginals' whilst others noted the rationale for the visits.⁸⁹⁸ Ray Willis of Buninyong relayed a story told to him that dates back to the 1860s of how the "aboriginals used to come to his mother's house on the other side of the creek towards Mt. Edgerton, for fat. They used the fat not for cooking, but to rub on their bodies to keep themselves warm in winter."⁸⁹⁹ Similarly the Hiscock family house in Buninyong (c.1850s) was paid 'frequent visits by royalty in the person of "King Billy", head of a small tribe of aborigines where they were supplied with food, which they were glad to obtain.'⁹⁰⁰ Miner Charles Foreman's solitary quip in 1861 of Wadawurrung people in the Gordon area was 'We see plenty of these, they are quite harmless.'⁹⁰¹

In contrast, other goldfield observers related a very confrontational scene, vividly illustrating both the racial tension and pronounced presence of Aboriginal people on the goldfields. In the Loddon district James Doak's salutary note about Aboriginal people was that he would lock his house to prevent Aboriginal people from stealing sugar and other household stores whilst Ned Peters on the Dunolly and district goldfields of central Victoria recorded copious entries relating to Aboriginal people on the diggings in 1855-6.⁹⁰²

We struck our tents and came to Sandy Creek [Tarnagulla]. I find there are a number of people here besides blackfellows...The natives have been very noisy all last night from drink given them by the diggers...The Blackfellows have visited this quarter again. They had a carrobine [corroboree] the other night and ever since throughout the whole of the nights are making awful noises...The natives who are knocking about the creek are very noisy during the night...the natives got some dozen sheets of bark for us...The natives were hallowing and yelling nearly all last night...We passed some natives on our way [to Newbridge].⁹⁰³

Another observer on the goldfields, Surveyor Walter Woodbury, who was surveying in the Buninyong district, wrote to his mother in June 1853 about the close quarters he kept with a clan of Wadawurrung people. It is apparent that Woodbury had observed some of their activities with some avid interest, finding aspects of their culture by degrees dexterous, repugnant and rudimentary.

We have had a tribe of the native Blacks camped near us for the last week so that we have had an excellent opportunity of seeing how they live...they construct what they call miamias, consisting of two forked sticks placed in the ground with one stick running across the top of them, they then rest large pieces of bark or branches of trees on these which gives them a shelter from the wind. They lie all around their fires at night and all the covering they wear is a possum rug or a blanket thrown around them. Their principle food is the opossum which they find out by knocking on the trees and where they find a hollow sound they cut open the tree and so catch the opossum. They also kill [indigenous] turkeys, pigeons and parrots with the boomerang which they are very expert at throwing. When they are very hungry and can get nothing else they will pick up the spiders, beetles, cockroaches and ants and eat them.⁹⁰⁴

Ned Peters and Walter Woodbury's experiences are arguably accurate approximations of what constituted most colonist's interactions and opinions of Aboriginal people on the Victorian goldfields. For those miners and mining town folk who did interact on a frequent or intermittent basis, it is probable that they enjoyed, and indeed, at times endured, a 'living together, living apart' relationship which the squatter era had been a precursor for. Historian David Goodman also contends that both the written and visual records of the 1850s contain reminders that the non-Aboriginal mining fraternity and Victorian Aboriginal people 'were often in close contact.'⁹⁰⁵



George Grant, c. 1870, *First house in Ballarat* Collection: Art Gallery of Ballarat.

In the background, the artist has depicted a large Wadawurrung encampment in close proximity to the goldfield.

Oral history corroborates Goodman's contention. Colonial family histories passed down from the mining period speak often of close relationships forged with Aboriginal identities. By way of example, Roy Comrie's family history has passed down oral memories of their relationship with Mullawallah a Wadawurrung elder commonly called King Billy or 'Mr. Mulla, as my father used to call King Billy'. According to Comrie family lore, Mr. Mulla often camped at their home on the Ballarat West Common, 'taught them many ways of their culture', visited significant sites, rode horses and sat at the family table with the Comrie family. The bond with Mr. Mulla had grown over an extended period of time and it was considered that 'King Billy was like a part of their family when they were growing up.' The Coxall family history also contains several accounts that occurred at Buninyong which demonstrate that close links between the Wadawurrung clan and the non-Aboriginal towns-folk had indisputably been forged.

One of the Aboriginal women had trouble giving birth to a baby. My grandma and other ladies of the town went up to see if they could help. They took things with them to help but it was in vain, both mother and child died. They were buried near where the tannery was situated...

In the nearby Newstead district too there are accounts such as the one recorded by Thomas Martin, a child on the diggings, which describe his family's anecdotal interactions with Dja Dja Wurrung people, he knew by name.

They were great cadgers and did well cadging old clothes etc. One big rough old fellow with bushy hair and long whiskers used to come with them...He lost his old hat at the pub and my father gave him an old Bell-topper which he wore for months. He had a girl with him about 12 years old. She used to do the begging. We gave her an old crinolin and skirt and put them on her and christened her Eliza. She thought she was a queen.

For miners such as John Chandler the 'insistent begging' of the Aboriginal people (one of the most frequently described interactions between the two cultures) was more than a mere trifle, it was a trait that defined them as a race to be wary of.

At the foot of Mt Franklin we passed a tribe of natives. There was a lot of lubras and picaninnies. We generally found it best to give them a wide berth, for they are such bold beggars that they will clean you out of all your tobacco, rum, tea and sugar, etc, and if you are alone and any way timid of them, then look out for yourself.

Aboriginal people in Victoria demonstrated a propensity to relate with and interact with the third wave of colonists – the gold seekers- who had invaded their lands. They learnt the language, speech and manners of the miners and tried to incorporate them into their cultural network through exchange, gifts, child minding, guiding, naming, invitations to cultural ceremonies and invoking of kinship rituals. There was clearly an Aboriginal expectation of being recompensed for use of land via gift-giving, concessions and acknowledgement that was not recognized by many colonial miners, leading to negative appraisals. Conversely many colonist's perspectives of Aboriginal culture, emanating from living in close quarters with each other, were construed negatively such as 'begging', 'thieving' and 'nudity'. There were however some select colonists in the goldrush communities whose initially negative appraisals of Aboriginal people changed after stereotypical racial facades had been put aside enabling them to 'distinguish the features behind the black mask that had before enveloped them.' For a minority of colonists in the gold rush period, close association with Aboriginal people provided the opportunity to learn elements of Aboriginal philosophy and culture and from this schooling grew an appreciation and respect that were unusual at the time. A number of writers in the mining period as had occurred in the squatting period, found on investigation that Aboriginal people were not as 'degraded' nor 'disgusting' as they had been promulgated to be. Elizabeth Ramsay Laye, as a representative example, considered that 'The natives are not as disgusting as they are generally represented.'⁹⁰⁶ Likewise, Hubert De Castella, a visitor to the goldfields of Victoria, 'had heard so much about their ugliness that I was amazed to find them much better than I had expected' and added with equal amazement that 'their slow, relaxed gait is not without nobility, and they put their feet down with a solemnity which reminded me of the walk of actors on stage.'⁹⁰⁷ Robert Gow conceded in his 1861 journal (after droving with a number of them for a time and forging a bush mate-ship relationship) that 'There are some fine traits in the characters of the blacks – they are not the wild tiger-like bloodthirsty savage generally supposed.'⁹⁰⁸ Visitors to the goldfields such as Oscar Comettant wrote of his surprise when he met with Aboriginal people who were 'endowed with qualities that could serve as the basic elements of a moral character of the highest order' and physically were 'more or less perfect specimens'. It is little surprise that Comettant was amazed as he had been informed prior to arriving in Australia that they were 'degenerate and bestial...more horrible than all the monkeys in the world.'⁹⁰⁹

Miners such as JM Smith (having worked alongside Wadawurrung) upon reflection deemed Aboriginal peoples' traditional way of life wiser than what he had considered at first.

They are a curious race, and are said to be very low in the scale of humanity because they live without working and with very little fighting – which in my humble opinion shows their wisdom rather than their stupidity. The European makes a slave of himself for gold – and calls it industry – and then hops off the twig before he is able to enjoy it; he fights and murders his brethren, robs them of his wealth and devastates their country – and calls it honour and glory. The aborigines wander about a fine country, view the beauties of nature as they come fresh from the hand of their Maker and in their hearts they rejoice and glorify Him...They resist all his [non-Indigenous people's] attempts to make them abandon their habitual ease and independence except when tempted by rum and tobacco, for which they will readily work. It is vain to try to fetter them to houses or towns. They have tasted freedom and prefer God's canopy to man's. And for this they are called barbarians; and for this they are despised. Pshaw! The European has much to learn, although he thinks himself so very wise.⁹¹⁰

A small number of miners such as JF Hughes had lived through both the bush frontier conflict times and the relatively quiet times of gold, and considered 'it fell to the lot of not a few who led a contemplative life and strove, Orpheus-like, to charm the wild denizens of the forest'. He had interacted with Aboriginal people in both periods and considered it a positive experience. Hughes deemed that his interactions with Aboriginal people in central Victoria had afforded him both 'amusement and instruction'. He admired and found great interest in many aspects of Kulin culture, and was keen to record for posterity some detail of place names, corroboree proceedings and chants, vocabulary, shelter constructions, cooking techniques, bush foods, hunting techniques, weapons and bush lore. Hughes, like many who interacted with Aboriginal people for lengthy periods in the bush, particularly enjoyed their narrating skills, sharp wit and joie de vivre:

They had a keen sense of humor, and it afforded them great merriment to get me to shout aloud at night some message in their own language to their comrades across the creek, the reply which reverberated through the woods causing them intense amusement. They were also excellent mimics. One of the tribe, more adventurous than his fellows, had visited the capital of the colony, and though he ordinarily spoke in broken English he could excellently imitate the language and gesture of a new chum swell he had met at an hotel, pronouncing distinctly, with an affected air, "Waiter, bring me a glass of brandy."⁹¹¹

The historical records also infrequently indicate that intimate inter-racial relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people during the gold rush period were occasionally seen to have obvious positive spin-offs for both parties. For the Aboriginal partners the benefits of such a relationship were the likelihood of remaining in one's own country, and for the colonizer it guaranteed expert local knowledge and freely available bush produce. Mossman and Bannister, two miners who wrote about their experiences on the Victorian goldfields in 1853, discussed the constraints and advantages of one such inter-racial union on an unidentified gold field.

Old Bill Cowper would dig away at the side of a mountain and chance it. Very few of the diggers would chance it as Bill did; he never seemed to move from the place where he first commenced. Perhaps it was very inconvenient for him to shift, as he had an Aboriginal woman living with him, which might be a potent reason for his always remaining at one place. Bill had evidently great faith in the mountain... he continued to always dig, digging in the side of the mountain, and washing with the assistance of the Aboriginal woman. A lad who assisted him on one occasion said that he got six hundred pounds worth and that it would keep him and his gin a long time. Bill had been about twelve years beside his hole in the mountain, when I saw him last, and he is likely to die there.

Historian Henry Reynolds concluded in his brief discussion about the companionship of Aboriginal women with northern Australian non-Indigenous miners that it 'greatly eased the hardship of life on small and isolated mineral fields where often only a handful of Europeans attempted to make a go of dubious claims.'⁹¹² It is a difficult area of research as the taboo nature of such relationships in nineteenth century Victoria and the often-associated implications of prostitution inherent in many inter-cultural relationships throw a weighty veil of silence around the topic. Colonial writers in this period such as John Lang allude to the topic of inter-racial sexual relations in a very oblique manner, stating that the 'females are called "gins" and at times are tent keepers to the out-stationed solitary white.'⁹¹³ Other writers did not mince words. Seweryn Korzelinski wrote of the ease and affordability of procuring sexual services from Aboriginal women, noting 'a stick of tobacco is sufficient to gain friendship amongst men and favours from women. It is cheap, but then the ladies do not wear lace petticoats.'⁹¹⁴ Korzelinski also related a lengthy dialogue of how when walking through the bush one day he had met an Aboriginal couple. An unidentified Aboriginal man offered

"I'll stay here and you take my lubra for a walk." Pleasant walk, I thought and said "I don't want to." He looked at me skeptically. There was an interval during which we all walked in silence. Apparently some new conception was forming in his mind. Finally he said: "You know what, give me another shilling and I'll bring you gin."

"I don't drink."

"What sort of a man are you? Drink is good."

"Just as good as a walk with your lubra", I said laughing, and turning off the road, went off to my nearby claim, never to see the couple nor my shilling again.⁹¹⁵

George Wathen in his journey through the goldfields of Victoria in 1854 commented on the immorality or 'demoralizing' nature of the Aboriginal women, ironically overlooking the immorality of the non-Indigenous men.

At Chalicum in central Victoria. There is now an encampment of the “mi mis” of the Aborigines at this station...The men are absent, but have left their loubras (women) to demoralize the whitemen employed on the station, who feed them well, and receive their recompense. The natives will sell their wives for a night for a piece of tobacco.⁹¹⁶

Likewise, miner Charles Eberle a miner on his way to the Ballarat diggings, wrote of being ‘humbugged by King Jimmy of the tribe of Emu Creek’ at a corroboree he attended at Skipton in 1855 for some tobacco, and so in ‘order to remain on good terms with the natives we gave him all the tobacco we had’. Eberlie further noted that the Wadawurrung offered him an economic and social exchange: ‘women and dogs’ in exchange for the tobacco.⁹¹⁷ The prostitution of Aboriginal women as Wathen and others saw it, was frequently made reference to but rarely described at close quarters. This makes it a difficult subject to comment with any confidence on the impoverishment or empowerment of Aboriginal women. That it occurred is undeniable but the dynamics of consent and sexual politics is beyond the scope of this book.

CORROBOREES

The ‘harmonising’ on the goldfields that many miners voiced was not merely about finding gold together. The coming together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the goldrush period records is usually by way of their attendance at corroborees. There is a considerable body of historical evidence demonstrating the gold period, was a catalyst for corroboree performances to morph, probably aided by the movement of Aboriginal people across the continent becoming more common. As an example JD Mereweather, a clergyman in 1850-3, was informed that the corroboree he witnessed in central New South Wales ‘had come from the coast of South Australia.’⁹¹⁸ Miners and others, simply awed by the innovative and successful transformations of Aboriginal corroborees during the gold period wrote prolifically of their attendance at corroborees.⁹¹⁹ A number even penned their perceived notions of corroborees into their reminiscences - to afford some savage exotica to their tale of the goldfields. Edward Tame’s ‘Reminiscences of Melbourne and Gold Diggings’ is an illustration of what his fervid imagination and a potpourri of second-hand stories, some with foundation and some without substance, has conspired into a description of a Wadawurrung corroboree – not seen.

NATIVE CORROBOREE

I will now tell you of another small adventure out in the bush. On this occasion I was late in the evening clearing out of the diggings [in the Ballarat district], so I made all possible speed to come to a suitable place in the bush for our nights camp...After supper we retired to rest as usual, but sleep was impossible, for over a hill there must have been a host of natives who were shouting and singing jabber jabber jabbering all the night. I had never heard the like before and our curiosity was very great to know what was going on, but not sufficiently so to induce us to rise and try to see. They seemed to be having a fine time and enjoying themselves thoroughly. It was what they call a Corroboree. These corroborees are almost invariably held on bright moonlight nights, when I am told they indulge in various amusements, dancing,

singing, story telling, but especially spear throwing. Smothering themselves with paint, grease and feathers (men only). These are sometimes in imitation of animal motions and habits, and often warlike and licentious. Whole tribes will often meet at these times and many ceremonies gone through with most disgusting and cruel practices, especially in connection with initiation into manhood and womanhood. One part of the ceremony often consists of colouring the boy about ten years of age with blood from head to foot, several men bleeding themselves for the purpose.⁹²⁰

In their description of corroborees they had witnessed with their own eyes, other observers, such as Edwin Middleton, emphasized the vigour, dramatics and nudity.⁹²¹ Charles Panton, a Commissioner on the goldfields appreciatively described in great detail several different corroborees performed by hundreds of Aboriginal people 'night after night' at Mangalore Station. Some miners appeared to have come upon the corroboree serendipitously whilst others were invited and egged on by Aboriginal people to view their ceremony. Usually, it would seem to signify an exchange had occurred. Samuel Clutterbuck told of being 'summoned' to see a corroboree and during a break in the festivities being asked for 'bacca' [tobacco]. Occasionally the corroboree also functioned for mining communities as a handy piece of ready-made uniquely local pageantry that could be included on the program for notable official visitors. Thus in 1867 Buninyong Council wrote to Andrew Porteous the local Guardian of Aborigines in the Ballarat District informing him

the Council has determined on getting up a grand corroboree of the Natives on the occasion [his Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to Buninyong]. I have therefore to beg that you will be pleased to secure as many of the aboriginals as possible for that purpose; every care will be taken of the Blacks whilst in the locality.⁹²²

There is evidence too of a 'touristic' framing of the corroboree by the Wadawurrung in goldfields historical records.

Some exciting events have occurred in the early periods, and perhaps none more so than the huge corroboree which took place near the old Working Miners Mine [near Sebastopol, a suburb of Ballarat] when various tribes assembled to carry out their peculiar programme. The novelty gave excitement for the older folk which was intensified as the evening progressed and the natives became drunk with the beer that had been provided for the occasion, but to the younger people it was a night of alarm, and they were soon missing. It was a wild night and some severe conflicts took place among the various tribes, who had been liberally supplied with beer, and it was some time before quiet was restored. This was the last corroboree.⁹²³

A corroboree performed by Wadawurrung clans (probably Carninje balug and Wongerrer balug) in Smythesdale amply illustrates that as access to their land and its raw materials (their economic capital) was progressively denied them by squatters and then gold miners, Wadawurrung people seized upon the opportunity to market their cultural knowledge and skills, their symbolic capital and convert it into hard currency.

A CORROBOREE – During the past few days the town of Smythesdale [central Victoria, south of Ballarat] has been infested by a numerous gang of aborigines-men, women, and children. On Tuesday and Wednesday they went about the town in quest of sixpences, tobacco &c., and announcing a grand “corroboree” to come off on Wednesday night, as it accordingly did, in the presence of a hundred spectators or more. The savages were in their war paint, and looked sufficiently frightful as they danced and shrieked round their fire. The scene of the orgie was in the wood over the creek, near the Carngham road; and the dissonant noises, vocal and instrumental, which formed part of the entertainment, were distinctly heard at the firesides in the township. The thing was kept up till an advanced hour in the morning.⁹²⁴

This event and others like it were independently organized, without joint partnership of any kind, were pre-planned, not ad hoc. It is plausible that in one sense the gold era ushered in more opportunities for the Wadawurrung to perform corroborees, as more spectators inevitably ensured more commercial return for the performers, and the application by non-Indigenous people for more performances may have led to some small degree of reliability of income. Special occasions such as Christmas Day may have been taken advantage of, judging by a diary entry by Mrs. James Madden, of corroborees in the Ballarat district in 1853 that were well attended by Aboriginal (presumably Djabwurrung and Wadawurrung) and non-Aboriginal miners.

Ballarat seemed to be on the wane and we set out for Mt Cole for timber for the homestead at St Enochs...Here we arrived on Christmas day, 1853, and were entertained by about two hundred and fifty blacks at a grand corroboree at night.⁹²⁵

A satirical and patronizing *Argus* report of an impending corroboree by Wadawurrung clans in the Geelong district indicates that the continuance of ‘welcoming to country’ ceremonies were continuing, but increasingly under the shadow of the colonizers gaze. Events such as these were probably viewed by non-Indigenous people who may have been barred from attending such events prior to the gold rush period.

FASHIONABLE ARRIVALS –His Royal Highness Ko Ko Warrion, King of Colac, arrived at the Barwon Bridge a little after ten o'clock yesterday morning, from whence His Royal Highness was escorted into town by a mottle assembly of young blades, who did everything in their power to make the King's entrance into the ancient city of Geelong a perfect jubilee. His Majesty's suite consisted of nine peers and a countess. We were given to understand by one black fellow that Geelong was honored by the royal visitors for the purpose of dancing “great corroboree” this day, in honour of our most gracious Majesty's birthday.⁹²⁶

The frequent occurrence in miners' accounts of festive corroborees testifies to the frequency that Aboriginal people held such events. Moreover it also signifies that many colonial spectators recognized the uniqueness of what they were witnessing. In memoirs and reminiscences of gold rush writers the corroboree is a piece of exotica only to be found in Australia; a unique

form of entertainment in which their descriptions were pockmarked with expressions such as 'heathenish' and 'savage'. Robert Whittle, a storekeeper at Daisy Hill and Talbot in 1857, for instance witnessed a corroboree that probably included Wadawurrung and announced

I can never forget the sound of the droning song interjected with occasional unearthly shouts and yells, from three or four hundred savage throats...the moon shining silvery and clear meanwhile through the gnarled branches of the box trees above us on this wild, weird scene of superstitious savagery.⁹²⁷

For some it was a mere diversion that hardly rated a mention such as John Chandler who was only moved to quip: 'There was a tribe of blacks come to Melton and held a corroboree, and this was the last time I saw a whole tribe together, this was in 1863. Alas! Poor things, they are all gone now.'⁹²⁸ Likewise Thomas Booth remarked only that 'The blacks often camped at what was known as the Big Dam close to the township [Buninyong] where they adorned themselves with pipe clay and held corroborees.'⁹²⁹ Family histories too are often bereft of any detail other than their occurrence in an area, such as occurs in 'The Story of the Family Called White: 1852-1982' whose sole contribution on the subject is 'There were aborigines in the Cardigan area [Ballarat region] in the early days, and stories are told of corroborees seen near Bunker's Hill.'⁹³⁰ Goldfields newspapers tended to memorialize the corroboree, and often was the subject of some commentary.⁹³¹ For example in May 1860, 'an extraordinary exhibition' was given by the Dja Dja Wurrung (the Wadawurrung's neighbours immediately to the north) at Lamplough. A corroboree in five acts was performed in the Theater Royal. One scene involved two men decorated with white chalk killing a third man, in red paint, and burying him under one of the stage's trapdoors, whereupon he reappeared from another trapdoor smothered with white chalk, having 'jumped up whitefellow'. A perplexed and naïve journalist for the *Mount Ararat and Pleasant Creek Advertiser* condemned the corroboree as 'altogether very apprehensible'.

An Aboriginal style of entrepreneurial activity was endemic throughout the goldfields. Without the aid of billposters or newspapers to promote their event, Aboriginal performers frequently put on an 'appearance' with all their accoutrements in the streets to elicit interest in their exotic difference and announce their intent to perform. An article in the *Border Post* provided a description of a corroboree witnessed at Lake Wendouree on 28 March 1857 demonstrate the considerable attraction an event like this had on a wide range of Ballarat residents. The correspondent reported

We agreed to walk out as far as the camping ground at the ever famous Swamp [now Lake Wendouree] to see the blackfellow's corroboree...Groups of well dressed Europeans, both males and females were gathered around to witness the strange forms and stranger evolutions of this singular race... On this particular instance the performer, once he had changed his dress, would go round to the visitors and make a strong appeal to each and sundry to give "black fellow a shilling." Some people were silly enough to comply with this demand...The whole scene was one which, once witnessed, is not easily to be forgotten...⁹³²

Judging from the frequency with which such events were held, the substantial turn out of paying non-Aboriginal spectators, how well organized the dance troupes were and the Western styled business acumen they displayed it seems clear that monetary considerations became an underpinning feature in the performance of corroborees for non-Aboriginal audiences particularly after the 1850s. A lengthy quote from the 'Memoirs of George Bishop – Essendon: 1908' tells of a corroboree that took place at Essendon (northern suburb of Melbourne).

I have witnessed several corroborees, between eight and fourteen, but the one before last, in 1868, saw two northern tribes from Ballarat [presumably Wadawurrung] and Bendigo [presumably Dja Dja Wurrung], coming by different routes, arriving in Essendon at the same time. As they were friendly they camped near one another and Mr. Jamieson and others asked them for their usual display and they gave a double performance – first the men and then the lubras. A very large number of the residents were present and as I have a retentive memory and have preserved my notes, I will give a description of the dance and its surroundings as they occurred.

It took place about halfway between Lincoln Road and Mount Alexander Road and on the other side of the first of two gullies, at eight p.m. on a dark night as a moon would spoil the effect. The spot chosen was where three large gum trees were close together facing east.

They placed saplings against the trees to a height of eight or ten feet and two feet apart and covered them very thickly with boughs which left a fine dark background. They had two large stacks of weed about thirty feet apart ready to light soon as they began to dance. They always dance by firelight and no moon. In those days, with the exception of a loin cloth they are stark naked.

This is supposed to be a war dance before having a tribal fight. They go to a lot of trouble to paint their bodies with red, white and yellow clay and their bodies and faces were marked and lined off in a very fantastic manner. I may say they had great objection to white women being present, so they were excluded.

The lubras provided the music for dancing time, some of them having two pieces of flat hard wood, others possum skins rolled into a ball which emitted a peculiar sound while the remainder chanted. The aborigines chanted as they sat in a large circle, each one had a spear fully eight feet long and as there were more than fully one hundred men or more on this occasion they formed an imposing array.

One of the men stood up and uttered a peculiar chant. The lubras lit the fires and beat time and all the men rose like well drilled units making all sorts of passes with their spears.

Then the chief gave a signal and they formed themselves into two lines facing each other and linked themselves together with one leg entwined with each other's and then began their weird chanting contortions of the body. They formed squares and circles all the time keeping time with their lubras and the shadows caused by the flickering flames made a fine sight.

Once more they parted and this time they formed a double circle and went through different evolutions and finished by sitting down, each one placing his spear on his partner's shoulder, a signal for rest. The fires were now replenished and the lubras began to dance, young and old and each had a green bough in her hand.

Their program was very similar but, among the number, the actions of some of the dancers, more especially the young lubras was very graceful, and as they danced they shook the bough and at the same time singing a low chant, very sweet. They all danced and wound themselves into all kinds of attitudes and finished by forming a line and holding out their hand for anything they could get.

The spectators had a good two hours enjoyment and all that was required to make these poor aborigines happy was white money, so Mr. Jamieson went round with the hat and distributed the takings among them.⁹³³

Not surprisingly Kulin people also chose to perform for non-Indigenous audiences in built goldfield venues displaying an entrepreneurial panache which stunned colonial audiences.

A most novel scene I witnessed at the Royal theatre on Thursday evening. The Ararat tribe of Aborigines [Djabwurrung] has been here for some days, and most pleasing it is to see them so far advanced in civilization. The women have their hair neatly combed and oiled and the men are dressed as Europeans. The King wears a white bell topper, of which he seems as proud as if he wore the Crown of England. An offer was made to them to appear and dance at the Royal, which offer was accepted with avidity. Upon the curtain being raised the dance commenced; and the strict time kept, together with their various steps, completely astonished the audience. After the first piece was over, one of them appeared at the footlights and announced a programme of what would be exhibited before us. In his intelligence and manners he was a pattern to hundreds I have seen of Europeans attempting to address an assemblage. One of them has gone up the country for fifty more [possibly Wadawurrung], and a grand evening's entertainment is to be given by them at the Royal on Saturday evening next.⁹³⁴

In gold mad Melbourne too the Kulin in collaboration with theatre managers performed their unique dances at the 'Queen's Theatre' to enthusiastic reviews.

The main feature in the performances at this theatre for the last two nights has been the introduction of native dances or corroborees, performed by aboriginal natives of this colony. The dances are characteristic, but are not of a kind to be described, consisting for the most part of violent muscular exertion. The “Old Man” corroboree, the “Kangaroo” corroboree, and a third dance, peculiar to the natives of this colony, are the dances selected. The house was well attended on both occasions, many new arrivals conceiving it to be a treat to witness the natural dances of the aborigines.⁹³⁵

There is evidence too of both traditional rivalries between distant language groups being relaxed and of Aboriginal people metamorphosing the traditional coming together component of corroborees to include a commercial arm to the proceedings, as evidenced by a report of a gathering at Ballarat in March 1861:

During the last few days a number of aborigines, probably about two hundred have arrived on Ballarat from Port Fairy, Mount Elephant, Mount Cole, the Hopkins, Warrnambool and the Wimmera, for the purpose as they state of seeing the towns and each other. They are accompanied by several lubras and children...During the whole of Monday they infested the principal parts of the town and levied contributions in money or otherwise on the white man. Towards evening they made preparations for a corroboree in the Copenhagen grounds and several of these interesting visitors having divested themselves of their garments proceeded to paint the greater portion of their body with a sort of whiter paint, the streaks of which were visible down the thighs and knees, and across the body in imitation of a sash. They next tied a number of small branches of a tree around their knees and ankles, and were a considerable time in getting the music to a proper pitch... Steam however was got up at last, and away they went to the intense delight of some 500 persons, who were present to witness the performance...While the dancing was going on King Wattie procured a tin can, and fulfilled the not very dignified position of tax-gatherer in-chief, but up to nine o'clock he did not appear to have been very successful in inducing the invader to acknowledge his right to impose taxes when he liked.⁹³⁶

Six months earlier, William Thomas reported he had had ‘much trouble with some Gipps Land and Geelong Blacks’ who had had meetings for three weeks and shown their determination to unite together with other Kulin people at a general assembly in Melbourne. Boon Wurrung people told Thomas that the Wadawurrung had joined with an unidentified group of Ganai Kurnai people from Gippsland and had sent several *Waygeries* (Special Envoys) ‘to invite the Goulburn Blacks to a general corroboree’ in Melbourne.

In addition to the corroboree being a vehicle for the confederating of the Victorian Aboriginal nations (extending across a significant swathe of Victoria), there is clear evidence of corroborees being staged in collaboration with colonial promoters principally as a cultural heritage tourism product for goldfields audiences. In an advertisement (20 February 1865) and subsequent news report of the ‘gala’ it appears clear that the touristic framing of the event was carefully planned

and intended to be an economic initiative which would utilize Wadawurrung peoples' heritage as a vehicle for economic self-sufficiency.

COPENHAGEN GROUNDS

Grand Corroboree by Fifty natives

THIS EVENING, MONDAY, 20th INST.,

Also, Extra Exhibition of FIREWORKS and Balloon Ascent. For the Benefit of Professor Prescott. Grandest Gala Night of the season.⁹³⁷

The aboriginal corroboree and display of fireworks at the Copenhagen grounds on Monday evening drew together a large number of persons, and the novel entertainment proved a decided success. Aboriginal habits in their most primitive style were displayed by about thirty-five natives, from various tribes around Ballarat, including about a dozen lubras, who were nearly naked and daubed over with paints of every hue in the most hideous fashion, though no doubt after approved aboriginal style. Without offering any comment upon the propriety or otherwise of the corroboree, it may be stated that it afforded amusement to the number of persons, between five and six hundred, who assembled to witness it. A plentiful supply of coloured fires added to the savage appearance of the scene, and after it was concluded some beautiful fireworks were displayed. Professor Prescott, the lessee of the grounds, purposes on a future evening to allow the natives the use of the grounds for another corroboree, they receiving the proceeds.⁹³⁸

At least one other performance, presumably by Wadawurrung people, was co-staged again two years later at the same venue in Ballarat on the 2 April 1867, receiving similar critical accolades:

A real corroboree of aboriginals took place at the Western cricket Ground last night, under the direction of Professor Prescott, who also added a display of fireworks. There was a very large assemblage of people of all grades and as we overheard one of them remark- "There was a good house, if they all paid." We rather imagine, though, that they did not all pay, there being a decided preponderance of small boys who looked as if their acrobatic agility had stood them for the want of a silver ticket, thereby getting over the fences and barriers without troubling the ticket taker. The blackfellows were well got up, and displayed their native taste for personal adornment to an extent that would almost be reckoned by themselves as the "cream of the fashion." White streaks of paint were plentifully spread round their eyes, across their shoulders and along their limbs, while a sort of modification of the kilt and phillabeg of the Gael gave an air of civilization to the entertainment, which we believe the ancient corroboree lacked. About a dozen were got up in "full dress", whilst their prompter and lot of lubras were attired as usual. The performers were provided each with a pair of sticks with which time was beaten, the lubras

assisting. A curious effect was produced by the glare of the coloured lights thrown upon the group as they went their diabolic maneuvers, which appeared to partake very much of the scenic qualities of the celebrated opera "Der Frieschutz," with a singular addition that our darkies wore leggings of gum leaves, which gave a droll look to their dancing. The affair went off to the satisfaction of the spectators, who were ready enough with applause when any rocket or roman candle of more than usual splendour broke on their vision.⁹³⁹

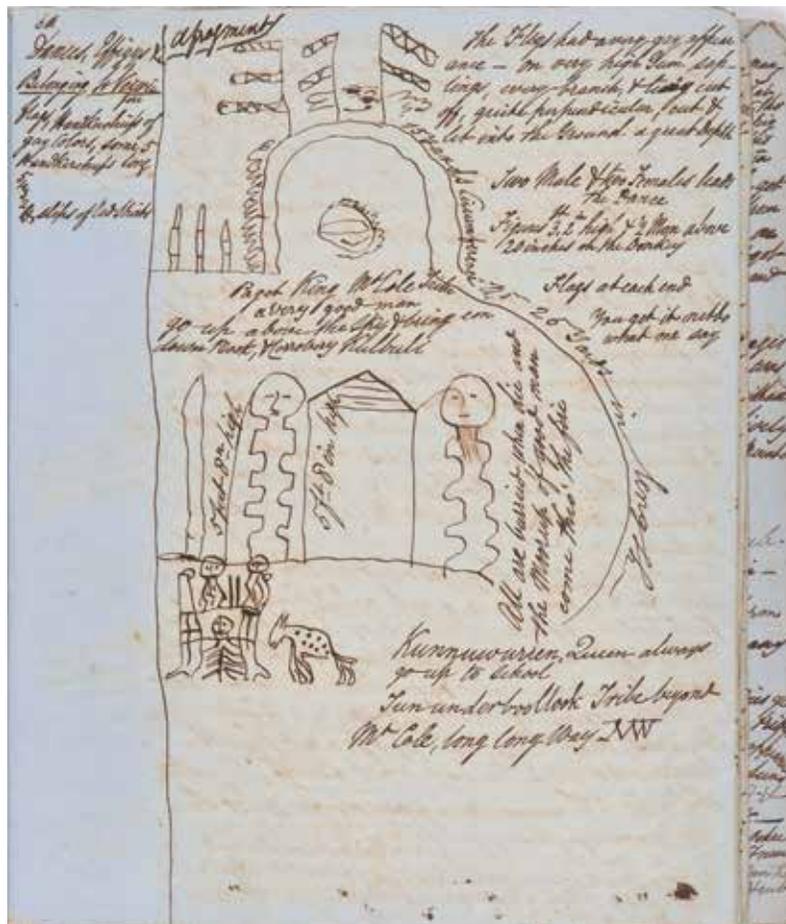
In the Minutes of the Ballarat Mechanic's Institute in February 1879 there are references to the hire of a lecture hall for an 'Aboriginal Concert' that had been held. Presumably this was an instance of non-Indigenous goldfields promoters trading on the sense of exotica which Aboriginal performances provided.⁹⁴⁰

There is much evidence however that the Kulin including the Wadawurrung continued to hold sacred corroboree ceremonies during the gold rush period that was usually strictly off limits to non-Aboriginal audiences. A decade earlier, the Kulin counselled some colonists that Aboriginal people had both secular and sacred ceremonies. William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Melbourne and Westernport districts (1839-1850) was advised by a Boon Wurrung elder that some corroborees were off limits to white people, they being explained as being too sacred and likened to 'white fellows Sunday'.⁹⁴¹ Other colonists such as John Kerr, a squatter in the Loddon district recorded that after the death of a local elder (c.1850s) that his 'presence was requested at the funeral...and though I was invited to attend the ceremonies, there was a certain degree of mystery about their proceedings which led me to infer that there were particulars which were concealed from me'.⁹⁴² Henry Burchett on the Lower Loddon diggings also was privy to a 'native funeral ceremony to which few white men are admitted...after asking permission'.⁹⁴³ William Thomas too was pressed to attend a new and sacred 'Sunday' corroboree performed by Wadawurrung and Boon Wurrung people in 1851 that would seem to contain a fusion of traditional and Christian elements.

'a new corroboree for unity among the tribes'

Tuesday 14 January 1851. Early at the [Aboriginal] Encampment find a fine young Lubra of the Leigh tribe had been most inhumanly dealt with the past night. After attending to her wound, publicly in the Encampment declare my determination to break up the Encampment, ride to Melbourne & get a Mounted Trooper for that purpose [to disperse them], they beg of me not, stating that not a black should go to Melbourne that day, & that tomorrow they would leave, having got me once more in a good humour they gave me to understand that they would fill up the day in Corroborrying. John Bull told me I should see a Sunday dance, stop with them till the afternoon, when I report to the Crown Land Commissioner for Burke to get aid should I require it tomorrow. John Bull gave me to understand that I should see a Corroborry like White Mans Sunday but was mystically silent upon it, after a time an Old Black of the Booninging [Buninyong] Tribe came up to me, shook me by the hand most heartily, he then begged me to come with him & about 200 yds [yards] off a small fire was being made & 23 men (among whom were 4 of my [Boon

Wurrung] blacks) seated they jumped up on my approach & each shook me heartily by the hand, they then shook hands with the old man, & one another their hands going up near their eyes, then down to their knees, they then set light to the fire, the old man light his pipe & majestically walked to the front of the fire, & raised up his right hand at full height with a book opened, his thumb & little finger pressing the book [wide?] while the 3 fingers sustained the back, they then commenced a simple dance with small boughs in right hand, singing & looking steadfastly at the book, the old man more like a statue kept the book at full height, I went up to him & to my astonishment found it a Bible, with his other hand he motioned me not to disturb him. I could not suppress emotion on viewing the sacred oracle held up with such marked intensesness. Moses could not have more steadfastly lifted up the Serpent in the wilderness, had it not been for the fumes from his pipe & a red cap he had on his appearance was imposing & the attitude solemn. They danced for about 3 quarters of an hour in a crescent form opposite side of the fire to the old man, at the conclusion they again shook hands. I was anxious to know how they came by the Bible, more so why they so highly extolled it, knowing that I & others had often tried to bring them seriously to consider its invaluable contents, all I could get out of the Booningong & Leigh Blacks were "that it came down from the clouds Weineie sent it down to Mount Emu Blacks." John Bull however gave me more detailed account, he stated "that the Mt Emu blacks was encamped, in the morning as usual they went out to get food, when they returned in the Evening to the Encampment they found these books, a pocket handkerchief & a stick of tobacco (3 bibles, 2 testaments & 4 prayer books) on each handkerchief was a stick of tobacco & a book, the blacks were frightened talked all night in the morning the Drs [Doctors or eminent *Ngrungeetas* / Medicine Men] considered & came to the conclusion that they had come down from the clouds. One Dr took the book to a Settler who stated that the book came down from heaven to make men good happy & love one another, shake hands like messmate all men, so the Doctors had established this dance Vienie, & were sending the dance to all parts to establish unity among all tribes.⁹⁴⁴



William Thomas, 'Dances, Effigys &c Belonging to Victoria...' in *William Thomas journal, October-November 1841, and miscellaneous notes, 1830s-1860s* State Library of New South Wales, Volume 03 Item 01. Pauline Byrt [The Thomas papers in the Mitchell Library] dates this choreographic sketch by Thomas as 1852. Note the caption "Page King Mt Cole Tribe a very good man go up above the sky and bring em down Book & Corrberry Kulbul[i?]" Stephens (2012) has noted that this drawing of a dance with flags flying and new cultural elements records a significant instance of syncretic cultural construction.

TRADE AND EXCHANGE OF FOODS

Many miners and visitors to the Wadawurrung goldfields also remarked upon the striking and unusual aspects of Aboriginal culture – including food. Surveyor Walter Woodbury who was surveying in the Buninyong district (12km south of Ballarat) wrote to his mother in June 1853 of the local Wadawurrung clan's traditional methods of procuring food.⁹⁴⁵ Katherine McKay at Bolwarra in central Victoria wrote of her childhood experiences gathering bushtuckers (native cherries and wildflower nectar) and commented that in 'earlier times than ours [we] learned from the blacks what to taste and what to leave untouched in the bush wilds'.⁹⁴⁶ An American digger at Ballarat noted too that 'as we traveled on we were reminded of the journeyings of the Israelites of old by finding the ground strewn with manna. It was white and sweet'.⁹⁴⁷ Many people on the goldfields eagerly exploited the bush food bounty that they witnessed the Aboriginal people utilizing such as John Chandler who noted 'great heaps of land mussel shells, which the natives had been getting out of the lagoons for years. We got some and boiled them in a bucket. They were very good with some salt'.⁹⁴⁸ Thomas Woolner confided that he too had 'gathered some native cherries; not bad...white gum trees are dropping their manna now, luscious morsels with the flavour of almonds'.⁹⁴⁹

Likewise a travelling Reverend was smitten by foods that he had learnt from Aboriginal people could be collected from the bush and wrote 'we picked up, as we walked along, quantities of what is called "manna," a small round substance of snowy whiteness, exuding from the branches of a species of gum-tree. The palatable sweetness of this manna is strongly in contrast with the extreme bitterness of the leaves and bark of the tree under which it is found'. John Chapple and his party at the Dja Dja Wurrung goldfields near Avoca had splendid repasts of 'stewed [native] turkey and native apples for dinner' and on another occasion '2 baskets of cockels'. One visitor to Ballarat noted the prolific amount of fauna, consumed by Wadawurrung and coloniser alike.

The country for many miles around on all sides was one vast forest, with many open glades...one bird [Bustard] now very scarce in Europe are of gigantic size and of most delicate flesh may be found in large flocks [and are] frequently shot by the natives...miniature kangaroos abound in the ferns but are fast disappearing in the face of civilization...a native cat with pointed nose resembling a ferret, opossums, eels...⁹⁵⁰

John Rochford, a surveyor on the goldfields of Victoria, spoke of an 'immense slaughter amongst the opossums, pigeons, parrots and quails which formed our Sunday dinner.'⁹⁵¹ The repertoire of bush foods consumed by non-Aboriginal miners was sizeable, including the perennial favorite duo of parrots and cockatoos (often baked into pies), kangaroo, wallaby, wombat, ant eggs, pigeon, parakeets, magpies, bandicoot, wattlebirds, quail, eels, native fish, dingo and possum. Occasionally echidna, 'jackass pie' (kookaburra) and other wild fowl were placed in the billy.⁹⁵² James Peverell, a miner at Forrest Creek secured a bandicoot and considered it not 'too bad for hungry men.' James Selby, a miner 'amused himself in the evening fishing for crayfish [yabbies]' and killed several possums which we consumed.' Travellers in Victoria such as William Howitt reported that but a little distance away from the goldfields there was ample opportunity to 'enjoy the pleasures of hunting and fishing' and also recorded being plied with bush foods by Aboriginal people.⁹⁵³ Examples of this reportage would include De Castella who observed 'It is they who provide us with ducks and fish.' On another occasion he reiterated the boon provided for them when the 'blacks came back [to the whites camp] every evening laden with duck and bustard eggs.'⁹⁵⁴ Others such as William Howitt observed that on the banks of the Campaspe River there were 'a number of natives fishing here, who had caught a good quantity of the river cod, and had learned to ask a good price for it', adding with a note of annoyance 'another consequence of the diggings.'⁹⁵⁵ A number of correspondents confirmed Howitt's observation about Aboriginal people not merely trading bush foods for trifles but actively striking up cash transactions for the goods they sold to non-Aboriginal miners and storekeepers. A correspondent in *The Argus* writing in reference to the 'Act to provide for the preservation of Native Game', who considered that if the Act should also apply 'to the blacks great good would ensue, and without any corresponding hardship to them, for they take large numbers of emus' eggs, not for food, but simply to sell.' Aboriginal people, JD Mereweather discovered, actively hawked their wares with a great sense of business acumen. Mereweather was 'asked to buy some delicate fishes, which were most artistically arranged in leaves, and bound together with osier twigs. These blacks seem an intelligent fine race, and calculate acutely the value of everything of which they have to dispose.'⁹⁵⁶

The ineptitude of many non-Indigenous miners in their quest for bush foods (such as John Chapple who 'tried night and morning for some game but could only get a teal') stifled their enthusiasm at times.⁹⁵⁷ Howitt also acknowledged with some reticence that they lacked the necessary skills possessed by Aboriginal people to bring down the game they sought.

The plains abound with wild turkeys; but they truly were wild, for a gathering of various tribes had lately been there, and they had been hunting them; and though Alfred and Lignum pursued them with unwearied artifice and diligence, they could not succeed in killing a single one. Emus are sometimes seen in considerable numbers; but they had fled before the natives. The ducks flew in flocks of thousands; but as there was no cover on the banks of the lake, they would not allow you to come within shot of them, and we were obliged to content ourselves with a teal and diver or two.⁹⁵⁸

According to Elizabeth Ramsay Laye, a resident in central Victoria, the social life of the new immigrants to Victoria often included enjoying delicious dinners of game including 'wild turkey or bustard, weighing twenty-five pounds'. She considered Aboriginal culture in an appreciative manner, choosing to remain 'not far from the native encampment, and there we learned a good deal of the natives and their habits.' Laye was also privy to Aboriginal tutelage in the hunting, preparation, cooking and tasting of possum.

We watched one of the natives climb a tall gum tree by cutting steps for himself in the trunk with his tomahawk as he went up. Chopping a hollow branch in two, he threw down an opossum which was in it to his lubra (wife), who instantly prepared and roasted it for us to taste. It was very tough, and had a disagreeable flavour...⁹⁵⁹



Unknown, ca 1850, *Natives in a Landscape, one killing a possum up a tree*, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-135517293.

Others such as Caleb Collyer in the Geelong district considered that ‘the making of damper was a test of skill and the best I have seen made and have made was made and baked by aborigines.’⁹⁶⁰ Similarly, other miners such as JM Smith in the Ballan district acknowledged the superior culinary methods Aboriginal people employed when cooking possums.

I skinned and gutted him [possum], toasted him that evening on the ashes and found him very fair feeding but rather gummy. Hunger was a good sauce and he went down slick. The aborigines do not skin them, but get some stiff clay which they carefully roll over the entire possum, then make a hole in the hot ashes and cover him up. When the clay becomes hard they break it; the skin and fur adheres to the clay and the animal comes out as clean, white and tender as a chicken, and with the above mentioned sauce, makes a good meal.⁹⁶¹

Most observers of Aboriginal culinary skills echoed De Castella’s assessment who commented that their eel cooking methods whilst ‘very ugly to look at’ produced ‘very good eating as long as one does not have too many prejudices.’⁹⁶² Samuel Mossman and Thomas Bannister thought very highly of Aboriginal cooking prowess, exclaiming that ‘The fact is, the chef de cuisine at the Mansion House might add a recipe or two worth knowing to his cookery book from these natural gourmands.’⁹⁶³

Some colonists who infringed on Wadawurrung land such as the Reverend Polehampton were not nearly so enamored by the presence of Wadawurrung people in his midst. He relayed a tale about a brief and apprehensive encounter with the Wadawurrung in Ballarat – in Eurocentric and fabricated hues.

One evening, just after sunset, I was returning to my tent, when I saw a group of dusky figures near it, making a great jabber. I approached nearer, I saw that they were black fellows, armed with spears, etc. They looked like so many hideous demons in the gloom of the forest, as the flickering light of the fire fell upon them; but I felt little alarm, as I was too poor to be robbed to any great extent, and I had no great faith in what I had heard or read about the cannibal propensities of some of their tribes; besides, any cannibal could have seen at a glance that my bones would afford but little satisfaction in the picking. They surrounded me as I came up, thrust their hideous faces close to mine, and half deafened me with their gibberish. As I went into my tent some of them followed me in. This was a little too much, so I drove them out without ceremony, just to let them see I wasn’t going to be humbugged. They at last made me understand that they wanted rum and bread, and I offered them some damper, on condition that they would go at once. They seemed grateful, and soon left me in peace; applying some term to me which I afterwards was told means “gentleman”. The real Australian blacks are little less ugly than gorillas; which, indeed, to my mind, they much more nearly resemble than white men, or the higher types of blacks. Some of the half-castes, however, are not so bad-looking. To do them justice, I missed nothing from my tent. I fully believe, from the evidence I have seen of the constructive powers (small though they be) of the Australian blacks, that they are by no means irreclaimable savages; though the few efforts that have as yet been made to civilize them have, I understand, utterly failed.⁹⁶⁴

SHELTER AND SKILLS

Kulin vocabulary (and sometimes Aboriginal vocabulary from New South Wales) such as *mia mia*, *willam*, *gunyah* (various spellings), denoting housing or shelter was commonly used in the goldrush era by colonists when referring to their own temporary huts. In doing so they were following in the practices of colonists in the earlier squatting period by squatters such as CB Hall in the Grampians-Gariwerd region who built himself a 'reed mia mia' by the banks of the Mt William Creek in 1840. Such vocabulary entered the vernacular of the day. By way of example Frances Perry, a visitor to Buangor, central Victoria, in April 1852 described the familiarity that the colonists had of the name, pronunciation and structure of traditional Kulin housing:

We took a walk amongst the wooded hills, and came upon the largest (deserted) native encampment we had ever seen. One of the Mia Mias (you know what that is by this time – the a is not sounded) was as large as an ordinary-sized circular summer-house, and actually had rude seats all round, which is quite unusual.⁹⁶⁵

The ubiquity of colonists using Kulin names for their shelter is evident in gold field maps as well. Several references such as 'women's mia mia' and 'our mia', relating to colonists camp sites appear in the 'Map Depicting the Discovery of Bendigo Goldfields.'⁹⁶⁶ In the miners correspondence too such as Henry Grays', who like many miners wrote to relatives describing the 'blacks mia mias' in some detail.⁹⁶⁷ Goldfields artist Willaim Strutt reflected on his journey to Ballarat in his autobiography how he and his companions took the cue from the local Wadawurrung method of building their lodgings – simply noting: 'we erected a mia mia for shelter.'⁹⁶⁸ Government officials as well such as Police Magistrate, Eveleigh Johns repeatedly refers to 'his mia mi' in his correspondence.⁹⁶⁹ The Government Geologist, Alfred Selwyn, also used the term with a great deal of familiarity when discussing his journey to the Dandenong fields: 'Mr. Daintree and I have had many a hard day's work in penetrating it, whilst at night like blackfellows, we built a mia mia, and rolled ourselves in our opossum rugs.'⁹⁷⁰ Many miners on Wadawurrung country concurred with Selwyn and Daintree about the suitability of constructing mia mias for short-term camps as they observed and admired Wadawurrung expertise in quickly and adeptly constructing shelters that served their stated purpose. One visitor to the goldfields explained the economic and functional rationale of copying (as best they could) Wadawurrung shelters at the Ballarat diggings:

We had determined to remain in Ballarat for a few days as we could not afford speculating in deep sinking. We could not afford to remain longer looking for employment in a place where all necessities were so terribly dear. We lived in a sort of hut built of branches and bark, not unlike the mia mia of the blacks. The weather being warm and dry it was quite a sufficient shelter.⁹⁷¹

German miner and artist on the Ballarat diggings Eugene Von Guerard, was, like many of the 300,000 miners that flocked from around the world, to try their luck on the Victorian diggings in the 1850s. His 'Journal of an Australian Gold Digger' is somewhat typical of many educated miners' writings on his experiences as a 'new chum' to colonial Australia, and in particular, the

diggings of Victoria. After a long voyage of over four months, he joined a company of fourteen men and one woman on what, by December 1853, was a well worn journey on Wadawurrung country from Geelong to the diggings at Ballarat. Like many of his fellow sojourners, Von Guerard was quickly impressed by the different countryside and ethnic potpourri that was colonial Victoria, noting three days after disembarking at Geelong: 'Our first experience of an Australian dust storm. Most horrible...Saw a number aborigines, both men and women, some clad in opossum rugs and others in European attire. Also some Chinamen. Met two Frenchmen...' ⁹⁷² On his journey in January 1853 from Geelong to the Eureka diggings at Ballarat, he wrote about and illustrated Wadawurrung shelters. Though Von Guerard had been in the Antipodes less than a fortnight, he was conversant with the Kulin name for their temporary camp shelters, writing in his journal near the village of Batesford that he passed:

three or four mia –mias, the abode of some eight or ten aborigines. In front of each burned a little fire, and some spears lay at hand. The mia-mias are made of the branches of trees in the form of half an open umbrella of large dimensions. Some were covered with the skins of animals. ⁹⁷³

His journal entry dated 24 September 1853 reveals that his memory of the Wadawurrung's 'mia-mias' had not grown dim. Von Guerard described how a great number of miners at Golden Point (Ballarat) had appropriated simplified versions of local Wadawurrung modes of shelter, similar to the ones he had seen earlier that year: 'Besides a vast number of tents, many diggers are contenting themselves with a kind of mia-mia, simply made of green branches, to sleep under at night.' ⁹⁷⁴ Miners such as JG Smith, hard up on their luck at the Ballarat district diggings with only a few shillings left to their names opted to 'live in a Mia Mia for several weeks.' ⁹⁷⁵ Travel writer, William Howitt, observed too how the gold miners at Spring Creek near Hepburn had crudely emulated the Kulin methods of building shelters. He explicitly noted the prevalence of 'simple mimies, in imitation of the mimi of the natives, that is, just a few boughs leaned against a pole, supported by a couple of forked sticks, and a quantity of gum-tree leaves for a bed.' ⁹⁷⁶

Other townspeople in Ballarat were clearly appreciative of the displays of Wadawurrung culture they regularly witnessed. Dr George Wakefield, in a letter to his father dated 1 May 1856, discussed displays of Wadawurrung weapons, corroborees and multiculturalism at Black Hill.

The population too would astonish a few, here we have representatives of all the nations of the face of the globe not the least wonderful of which is the aboriginal nation. I have frequently been present at their corroborees, and their skill in throwing the spear, boomerang etc., is wonderful. I saw the boomerang thrown yesterday. It went completely out of sight & in about 6 (seconds) descended at the feet of the thrower... ⁹⁷⁷

Many miners shared this incredulousness at the feats which Aboriginal people could make their famed boomerang perform or the unerring accuracy of their spears. Elizabeth Ramsay Laye wrote 'The feats they perform with the boomerang are most astonishing... This wonder must be seen to be believed.' Edwin Price, a miner at the Ballarat fields was agog at the Wadawurrung's ability with their 'long slender canes tipped with bone with which they can hit a penny piece 50 yards off and can drive them through a man's body'. Price also attested to the Wadawurrung's marvelous boomerang and marveled at how these weapons move at 'the speed of lightning, and if aimed true, hitting its victim with an irresistible force.' Lawrence Struilby witnessed a 'native wing a flying bird with it fully fifty yards off; and the bird had scarcely fallen to the ground, when the boomerang, in its recoil, buried itself four inches deep inside the ground near the projector.'⁹⁷⁸ Francois Journet considered 'it is quite impressive that these natives had the idea of this bizarre instrument.'⁹⁷⁹ Thomas Martin, a school child on the goldfields of Newstead in central Victoria in the 1850s, vividly recalled their hunting and fishing prowess, their eclectic fashion sense, enigmatic characters and bush foods.

The blacks were plentiful. They used to come and camp near the school at times. They used to get half our dinners... One big rough old fellow with bushy hair and long whiskers used to come with them. He was a cross fellow. We were frightened of him. He lost his old hat at the pub and my father gave him an old bell topper which he wore for a month. The men were rather lazy. They used to catch a possum and save the skins. They used to fish in the Loddon and catch some nice fish. They used to spear them and sell some of them cheap to get tobacco... The old men used to eat white wood grubs and possums flesh and bread. They would through [throw] spears at the fish in the Loddon and seldom miss. I saw a fish caught in the Loddon which weighed 53 lbs, by a man called Mr. Ball. He got a barrow and took it to the school for the children to see.⁹⁸⁰

Striking adornments, as witnessed by Eveleigh Johns in 1851, on an unidentified Victorian goldfield, also punctuated a number of goldfield records: 'Davy saw the other day at the wurlies a black woman ornamented in a manner that I never heard of before. She had kangaroo teeth driven into the flesh above the nails forming a complete set of claws.'⁹⁸¹ Frenchman C Brout also was astounded by coats made from platypus skins and necklaces 'made of reeds cut into short pieces, through which threads – also taken from kangaroos' tails – are passed. It is not rare to see necklaces that are eighty to one hundred metres long.'⁹⁸² Goldfields newspapers frequently reported on 'native oddities' or merely a clan's presence in town would occasion a news report of their goings on. The exotic attractiveness of Aboriginal people to the immigrant miners often centered on their corroborees, weapons, battles, apparel or lack of, physique, spiritual beliefs, artifacts and athletic prowess. The mere presence in town of Wadawurrung people dressed in traditional possum skin robes attending a 'Fancy Bazaar' occasioned a report in the *Ballarat Times* in 1856. Others such as William McLeish recalled a personal and tender meeting with Wadawurrung women capturing possums in the Ballarat Common on Christmas Eve 1856. As a ten-year-old, McLeish had lost his way in the bush and was desperately trying to find his way home.

I came to a densely wooded range and my ear caught the sound of chopping at no great distance from me, thinking it might be a bushman who might tell me if I was keeping the correct course for my home at Ballarat. I went in the direction of the sound but before I reached the place I heard human voices in the soft musical tones of the aboriginal tongue, and almost immediately after I saw a native woman sitting at the foot of a large white gum tree-her eyes were fixed on me with a cautious searching look and I never forgot the glow that burned in those eyes, but with a kindly look in them that reassured me I walked forward and she said something I did not understand and immediately the chopping was resumed over my head, and on looking up I saw another woman engaged in chopping a possum out of a branch. In a few minutes she had cut a hole into the top side of the limb of the tree and pulled a large opossum out of the hole – there was one quick tap with the small axe she had in her hand and the animal was thrown bleeding down to the ground- two others were lying there already and the hunter came down the tree stretching her limbs down the trunk and fixing her big toe securely into small notches she had cut to enable her to ascent the tree – in a few moments she came down about 40 feet and gathering the game and blanket up, they walked away swiftly through the forest. I saw no sign of any men or camp near at hand. I walked on but late in the afternoon. Now known as the Ballarat Common.⁹⁸³

The exoticism of the goldfields as noted earlier cut both ways. Aboriginal people moved quickly to acquire and see the wonderful contrivances and share in the plentiful goods that abounded on the diggings and the townships. The insistent claims on miners, a frequent occurrence remarked upon by many writers and social commentators on the goldfields often construed as begging, was more likely an attempt by Aboriginal people to obligate non-Aboriginal people about rightfully sharing their possessions with the people whose land they were encroaching. Wadawurrung people attempted to invoke their democratic traditions of sharing their country and resources with visitors. It is almost certain that many gold miners' accounts, such as Walter Bridges at Buninyong, of Wadawurrung peoples' insistent *begging* were not simply desperate ploys to extract food and goods from white colonizers. Aboriginal people had utilized this practice in the squatting period in an attempt to assimilate white people into their kinship network. It is difficult to discern how much of this invoking of kinship ties, as described by Bridges, had as much to do with opportunism and how much with the cultural rituals of sharing one's goods.

My mother and wife and small boy that come out from England with us was standing at the tent one day all alone, no other tents near, when they saw a mob of Native Blacks and lubras and a mob of dogs with them come across the Gully so my wife said to mother whatever will we do now? So mother said we must stand our ground and face them for there is no get away. So up they come yabbering "good day missie, you my country woman now." My mother had to be spokesman. The blacks said "You gotum needle, missie, you gotum thread, you gotum tea, you gotum sugar, you gotum bacca?" So mother had to say yes to get rid of them and had to give them all they asked for to get rid of them. That was what was called the Bunyong [Buninyong] tribe and when they left they gave their usual salute "Good bye, Missie" and thankful enough they was to see them disappear off into the bush. They could not help laughing to see the blackfellows walking in front like

a master sweep carrying nothing except a boomerang or a spear, some with an old bell topper on and shirt. Then the lubras come jabbering along behind, carrying the swag in nets; some with pups that could not walk, others possum skin rugs. The black fellows make the lubra do all the work in carrying the loads of baggage.⁹⁸⁴

There is evidence that a number of Wadawurrung people on the Victorian goldfields suffered intermittent destitution, but an overwhelming body of evidence strongly points to the motive for their soliciting in this period to be one not primarily driven by poverty alone. A poorly researched yet fundamental response by Aboriginal people in nineteenth century Victoria to the British colonizers was to incorporate non-Aboriginal people into their kinship networks and thus call to mind their right to resources that were being unjustly denied them by non-Aboriginal people (including miners). As noted in an earlier work many correspondents in the squatting period such as Foster Fyans, Police Magistrate at Geelong in the 1840s, had had opportunities to observe closely the strict adherence Wadawurrung (and Aboriginal people in general) paid to equality amongst themselves and to ritualized gift giving. Fyans, in a letter to the Colonial Secretary, attempted to explain that an incensed crowd of Wadawurrung clans people besieging Fyans's office was not imploring (begging) the Colonial government for food and blankets, they were *insisting* upon it as their right.⁹⁸⁵ A number of squatters and public servants, albeit couched in paternalistic fashion, also reported that they were informed by Aboriginal people that by virtue of their ascribed familial ties, they had moral responsibilities to provide materially for their new 'country men and women.'⁹⁸⁶ Many miners' stories and letters offer anecdotes about Aboriginal people's persistent humbugging or begging. Antoine Fauchery, a French photographer on the Wadawurrung goldfields of Ballarat wrote of the incredulity he felt when Wadawurrung people tenaciously drew him into a battle of wills which he construed as begging – but may have also been an attempt to draw him into honouring traditional kinship obligations.

Divided into nomadic tribes made up of fifteen or twenty individuals, they are seen now in the bush, now in the towns, and still more frequently on the diggings, which they visit by preference. I forgot to mention that they were as a fairly general rule clad - the men particularly- either in cast-off clothes that they picked up, or in a vast blanket of sixty possum skins joined together with rough seams, in which they are draped in the antique manner. There are always some in the group that know a little English, just enough to beg, a familiar exercise to which they devote themselves with a persistence worthy of the monks of old. I have sometimes seen black-fellows stay for a full half day at the door of a tent, patiently waiting for the gift of a piece of bread, a cup of tea or a glass of brandy, a liquor for which they would allow themselves to be cut into small pieces. I shall never forget the one that so skillfully defeated me in a relentless and obstinate battle that went on for not less than two hours. He spoke English very well, his face had in it something less hideous and more intelligent than that of his fellows, and he was carefully dressed. His costume, simple but in good taste, consisted of a hazel-coloured box-coat drawn across his bare breast, a grey beaver hat and an umbrella. He gravely wore these cast-offs of some gentleman farmer.

Fauchery's comment on the insistent begging by the Wadawurrung is not an isolated example. Gold miner, Thomas Pierson, who has given us a first-hand account of the Eureka uprising, noted that

While at the [Ballarat] diggings we saw many of the aboriganeese [sic] or natives of this country... they are very lazy can't be hired to work, they used to come to ours & other tents every day begging, many of them can talk English...some have robes made of opossum skins.⁹⁸⁷

Edward Tame likewise was anxious about their overwhelming presence on occasions, but inherently did not appear too intimidated, as the Wadawurrung's reputation on the central Victorian goldfields was not a violent one

One dusky fellow comes up to me and says "you give me bacca", then a lubra (woman) "You give me brandy", another "You give me sixpence". I reply "Me no brandy, no bacca". We were in sight of the diggings and though it was uncomfortable to have them swarming around us and to know they were none too particular about carrying off anything, we also knew we feared no physical harm, so off they went and we saw them no more. On another occasion I had rather a scare, for as I was coming home alone, sitting in the dray, I had to pass a lot of them, squatting and standing about, when one of the men pointed his gun directly at me. I did not feel very happy about it, but managed to smile at him, thinking this the best thing to do and knowing I could do precious little if he chose to fire. He smiled back again as though he could do it if he chose, but I would have much preferred that he kept his gun down.⁹⁸⁸

Certainly, there were occasional reports of Aboriginal people being hard up for food, clothing and shelter, but most of the evidence points to the fact that Aboriginal people were largely self sufficient, and when moments of poverty occurred, implored their white brethren for meaningful paid work and keep, rather than simply begging for food and money. A report in the *Grenville Advocate* (2 September 1862) and relayed in *The Argus* pointed out to its readers the unusual occurrence in Linton (Victorian central highlands) of the local Wadawurrung clan who, having a hard winter, gained employment using their traditional skills for a local aboriculturalist.

The Mount Emu tribe of aboriginals must have been pretty hard pinched for food this winter as they were never before known to be so keen to get employment from Europeans as they have shown themselves this season at Linton. A gentleman of that town...has engaged the tribe to carve him some light-wood uprights for an alcove, as the timber sheds the bark. It is intended that the carved designs will represent a serpentine coil, similar to that on the shields that the chiefs of the tribe use in times of warfare.

Miner's oral historical accounts also exist of ceremonial gifts, customary knowledge and conferral of kinship status given to local landholders by Wadawurrung people.⁹⁸⁹ The Hiscock family of Buninyong for instance learnt that their son was an *ngamadjidj* – a resuscitated Wadawurrung person who had died and come back as a white person. As discussed earlier, Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia reportedly recognised Europeans as deceased clan members who had returned to life. According to anthropologist R.H. Mathews, the belief in transmigration or reincarnation was widespread during the early years of British occupation, being 'observed in every part of Australia where investigations have been made'. In western Victoria, these resuscitated people were known as *ngamadjidj* (generally translated by linguists as 'stranger' or 'white man'). Historians Clark and Cahir have documented many instances in western Victoria of this belief and note that it persisted into the 1860s.⁹⁹⁰ Certainly in Geelong 1858 it was reported that a group of Wadawurrung who were interring an old woman 'seem to labor under the impression that after a short time she jump up 'white lubra,' and they very considerably left her the necessary apparatus to make her tea on her return to the upper world'.⁹⁹¹ Some white mining families such as the Hiscocks at Buninyong were educated about Wadawurrung beliefs on this matter.

Frequent visits by royalty in the person of "King Billy", head of a small tribe of aborigines were paid to the home of Mr. Thomas Hiscock [at Buninyong], where they were supplied with food, which they were glad to obtain. The "King" wore a brass plate with his name inscribed thereon, and their chief covering was a blanket. One old lubra named Sarah, who was much attached to Mrs. T. Hiscock, when she saw Edward Thomas about, said that he was her long-lost piccinanny, who had died. She said that he had "fallen down blackfellow and jump up white fellow."⁹⁹²

It is possible too that Aboriginal people were emulating the "hoards" of non-Indigenous beggars euphemistically known as 'sundowners' or 'travellers' who depended on squatters and small land holder's bush hospitality for shelter and sustenance. JH Kerr, a squatter on Djabwurrung Country on the Loddon River, recalled that 'On my station on the Loddon [circa 1850s], it was no unusual circumstance for twenty, or even thirty of such heterogeneous guests to arrive on one night; while the monthly average rarely fell below 130. Large stations were favoured with greater numbers, all of whom were provided with the staple fare of the Bush – tea, sugar, bread and beef.'⁹⁹³ JC Hamilton's experience of 'begging' in western Victoria would strongly suggest there was a duality to their behaviour, that is, Aboriginal people were practicing what sociologists have described as 'intelligent parasitism' because of real material needs, and at the same time pricking the memory of their white brothers and sisters of their time-honored responsibilities to share equally. Hamilton recounted with great fondness a friendship which had spanned several decades, whereby an Aboriginal man only identified as "Jacky" had adopted Hamilton, when he was a youth, into his family and explained the varying greetings he received from Jacky.

Jacky became a shepherd for my father, and we were much together. In after years [during the gold rush] if Jacky met me at a township he would come to me with a beaming face, shake hands and say, "Where is my sixpence, Mr. Hamilton?" but if he met me in the bush his salutation was, "Halloa Jim."⁹⁹⁴

The emphasis in Hamilton's experience was clearly on Jacky reminding Hamilton and maintaining kinship affinities, rather than an opportunist seizing onto an easy earner. The continuing incidence of Aboriginal people during the gold period 'claiming' tribute from non-Indigenous people of rank and position may suggest that Aboriginal people still viewed recompense for (and acknowledgement of) their land being usurped as integral, and that 'gentlemen' visitors to the goldfields were an opportunity to seek redress. The corroboree noted earlier staged by the Wadawurrung at the 'Wendouree Swamp' in March 1857 and witnessed by a *Ballaarat Times* reporter (later syndicated to the *Border News* and *London Times*) clearly demonstrates the Wadawurrung fully expected both recognition and recompense for their lands being used by miners.⁹⁹⁵

The Wadawurrung practice of seeking or expecting restitution in the form of payment from audiences for the British continuing presence on their lands - and for cultural performances persisted into the 1870s. Anecdotal accounts by non-Aboriginal residents on Wadawurrung country contend (in patronizing tones) that when Queenscliff became a summer resort in the 1860s that the Wadawurrung

used to entertain the visitors in the day by throwing their spears and boomerangs, and in the evenings by what they called a Corroborree, which was held in the reserve at the south end of Learmonth Street. The Corroborree consisted of native songs and dances. They would dress themselves up with boughs from the wattle trees placed around their arms and legs. When dancing these anklets would give out a rustling noise that was pleasing to them. They would paint all the bare parts of their body with whiting and yellow ochre, chests, arms and faces, and make a large fire. The men would stand around it and sing and dance whilst the lubras would sit around with their possum skins doubled up in a fashion that when struck with the hand it resembles a kind of drum and they kept excellent time to the other performers. Some of the gentlemen visitors would give the king of the tribe a part castoff dress suit of clothes namely a swallow tail coat and bell topper hat, and after the performers had sung and danced, the king would go around collecting with the hat, this being the only evening entertainment we had in those days. They were very liberally supported. The 'play' was usually over by 10 o'clock. The blacks then retired to their beds which consisted of a few boughs placed round the camp on the weather side, and lie all-round the fire with their feet inwards and their blankets over them.⁹⁹⁶

RESISTANCE AND DISPLACEMENT

When Aboriginal voices appear in the historical documents of the gold rush period, through the filter of non-Aboriginal writers, they are seldom ones of diffidence, especially in relation to their individual and collective rights. There are occasional accounts of miners being 'held up' by Aboriginal people on the goldfields such as Edward Tame who had a gun pointed directly at him by a group of Wadawurrung near Ballarat.⁹⁹⁷ In the face of the third wave of dispossession (pastoralism being the second and British Naval 'exploration', the first), some Aboriginal people actively sought to have land suffrage and economic independence legitimised in the eyes of the colonisers' legal framework.

Both in the pictorial and written records there are exemplars of Aboriginal resistance to unfair governmental controls on the gold fields. William Howitt, a goldfields commentator commenting about the creation of the celebrated Eureka flag, suggested that the would-be reformists 'design for a digger's flag should also represent the native black's flag as there were several.'⁹⁹⁸ Moreover, Thomas Ham's illustration of the 'Great Meeting of the miners'⁹⁹⁹ at Forest Creek, considered the harbinger of the Eureka Rebellion, depicts an Aboriginal man and possibly his son in the midst of what came to be known as the 'Red Ribbon Rebellion'. The written records reveal some more pieces of evidence linking Kulin miners with the demand for civil rights.

A group of Aboriginal diggers at Forest Creek in 1852 when asked to show their licenses replied to the mounted police that "the gold and land were theirs by right so why should they pay money to the Queen?"¹⁰⁰⁰

Wadawurrung and other Aboriginal people across Australian goldfields continued to declare their title to a suite of civil rights and on many occasions insisted upon formal acknowledgement of what was theirs by right and monetary recompense. James Madden, a miner in 1852 was met by some Wadawurrung people, one of whom 'a big fellow who proudly assumed his kingship by stepping out to threaten us if we did not leave his terrain.'¹⁰⁰¹ Newspaper reports, both in Australia and England noted the public grievances of Aboriginal people who sought acknowledgement of prior attachment to the land and at times recompense, such as 'Dicky', a Wadawurrung elder at Lal Lal, near Ballarat who complained to some miners that they had 'robbed him of Lal Lal which was his inheritance.'¹⁰⁰² Similarly, the *Courier* reported how at the sitting of a Land Board meeting held in Rokewood in November 1871

an aboriginal known by the name of Frank [presumably Mullawallah whose Anglo name was Frank Wilson] appearing before "the board and objecting to the [land] applications being entertained." He said the whole of the land belonged to him, and therefore he would not allow selectors upon it. "The board suggested that he should peg off what land he required for his own use, and they would see what they could do to secure it for him. But Frank scorned [land title] pegs and contented himself with 'majestically claiming the whole of the Rokewood country, and denouncing any and every person who attempted to encroach on his dominions.'¹⁰⁰³

The same theme was reported earlier in 1857 at Lake Wendouree, Ballarat, by Wadawurrung people lamenting, not just the loss of their land but the lack of acknowledgement

In leaving the place we stumbled on the mia-mia of King Billy...The old man seemed grieved at the revelry and debauch which on all hands surrounded him, and was evidently taking no part in the noisy performance. The princess did not imitate her father's taciturnity, but at once with all the volubility of a female tongue proclaimed that the whole district of Ballarat was at one period the patrimony of her sire.¹⁰⁰⁴

In the memoirs of residents on Wadawurrung country harking back to the gold rush era of the 1850s are frequent references not just to the Wadawurrung corroboreeing but also of their camping in the townships, fishing in local rivers and practising their customary ways of caring for country. Most of these memoirs simply refer to the Wadawurrung as 'harmless'.¹⁰⁰⁵

The records suggest that the Wadawurrung's frequent and sustained attacks on the squatters a decade earlier were rarely visited upon the miners. Gold diggers such as David McKenzie reassured new emigrants to the goldfields of Australia that 'you have nothing to fear...the aboriginal inhabitants being now perfectly harmless.'¹⁰⁰⁶ By 1852-3 all Victorian Crown Land Commissioners and the Guardian of Aborigines, William Thomas, affirmed that inter-cultural frontier violence had all but ceased by 1853. The Commissioner of Crown Lands Office at Geelong, 21 January 1852 reporting on the 'condition of the Aborigines of this District' stated:

1. That no improvement has taken place in the social or moral condition of those tribes that usually visit this District.

2. The Barrabool tribe still principally confine their wanderings to the neighbourhood of the Town of Geelong, as also the Leigh and Colac tribes; and during the past twelve months the latter tribes have mixed more frequently than before with the former one. The great facility with which they procure food, by gifts of bread and flour from the inhabitants, as also offal from the slaughter-houses, has led to this result; and what is still more to be regretted, they procure spirits from the numerous drays and travellers passing on the roads from the town.

3. Without apparently suffering in health from other causes, the several tribes named are fast lessening in number.

4. No occurrence worthy of note has taken place between the European and Aboriginal population during the last twelve months.¹⁰⁰⁷



Duke, William, 1851, *Geelong from Mr Hiatt's, Barrabool Hills 1851*, oil on canvas, Courtesy Geelong Gallery,

Gift of the family of Edward John Bechervaise, in his memory, 1943.

Thomas referring to a period in the past when squatters frequently fortified their huts by creating slits in the hut walls ('loop holes') by which they could fire their guns at Aboriginal people with impunity from their spears confidently stated frontier violence was at an end. He reported in January 1853 that 'We may congratulate ourselves that the weapons of opposition between us and our sable fellows are laid aside. Outrages on person and property have ceased, and the reaping hook has been taken up for the benefit of the settler, in lieu of the spear against him. We may safely state that loop-holes in huts are no more needed, nor armed police to keep Aborigines in awe.'¹⁰⁰⁸ Thomas continued in this vein stating:

The old Aborigines, who were jealous of the white intrusion and continually exciting the young to acts of aggression, being all dead, the weapons of warfare are now, and I trust for ever, laid aside, and the reaping hook and shears handled in their stead, so that harmony prevails through the length and breadth of Victoria on their part ; and were it not for that awful propensity they have for ardent spirits their race might be prolonged for some years yet, though their extinction is inevitable, as regards the two Melbourne tribes, having no offspring under fourteen years of age, and being notorious for their drinking propensities. Nor is this propensity confined to the Melbourne tribes ; the Aborigines generally throughout the located parts are giving way to this vice, and the present time throws destruction continually in their way. I may remark, to show the extinction of the aboriginal race generally, in the four other tribes, viz., the Barrabool, Goulburn, Loddon and Buninyong, that few infants are born among them...¹⁰⁰⁹

Social dislocation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was keenly experienced on the goldfields. The effects of alcohol on the goldfields were particularly disastrous on the Aboriginal communities reeling from the almost total dispossession of their lands by the squatters and then the 300,000 immigrant miners who swarmed onto the alluvial districts of Victoria. During the gold rush period it was almost universally proclaimed that excessive alcohol drinking was one of the chief reasons for Victorian Aboriginal demographic decline, social disturbance and cultural disruption. Aboriginal informants too, in court cases and other historical sources testified to the immense internal conflict that occurred within their communities that they attributed squarely at the feet of alcohol abuse.

In 1858 the Victorian Government Select Committee inquired into the 'present condition of the Aborigines in Victoria and of the best means of helping them.' All respondents to a circular sent out in that year noted their heavy mortality levels particularly in areas where goldfields were in close proximity. Visitors and travelers to the goldfields such as James Bonwick, were unequivocal that alcohol abuse was exclusively the reason for their demise, exclaiming: 'It is not the want of food, nor is it mere disease, that occasions the evil; the sorrow, the demon, the destroyer is Strong Drink, under whose maddening influence murders are committed, and fatal conflicts induced.'¹⁰¹⁰ The concern expressed about excessive drinking on (and off) the goldfields was not however solely aimed at Aboriginal people. Lamentations about the pervasiveness of alcohol abuse in colonial Victoria were endemic throughout the historical records. The *Argus* rallied about the 'abject submission to ardent spirits' and portrayed Victorian gold rush society as one which appeared to be 'perversely bent' on intemperance. The death of a prominent physician on the goldfields from drink (delirium tremens) moved the *Argus* to question the community's attitudes on one of the most insidious of 'our colonial vices'. The writer charged that 'Society is so familiar with it, that drunkenness has all but lost the power to shock; and cases of *delirium tremens* are of such frequent occurrence that few men regard them as appalling events – a reproach to civilization, and a brand upon our measure as a people.'¹⁰¹¹ Other writers, too, weighed in with their commentary on what they had witnessed, such as Elizabeth Ramsay-Laye who observed 'Many of the diggers have reduced themselves to mere savages from the effects of drink.'¹⁰¹² JJ Bond, a miner at Benalla, was dumbfounded by the permissiveness of alcohol in Australia.

None without experience of Australia can imagine the extent to which drinking goes on here, sufferers from delirium tremens are to be seen everyday. This township is said to equal or excel any in Australia in drunkenness and Australia is well known to be the most drunken country in the world...First thing in the morning, last at night and all day long is to drink spirits and smoke. Several deaths from drinking have occurred since my staying at Benalla indeed it seems to be the usual cause of death. It is difficult to avoid drinking it is so commonly forced on one.¹⁰¹³

There was certainly no doubt in the nineteenth century that the consumption of alcohol greatly contributed to Aboriginal deaths by reducing their resistance to disease, increasing the number of violent inter-personal encounters, reducing a sense of personal responsibility for behavior, increasing the incidence of prostitution and increasing the tendency to sleep while intoxicated and unprotected from the weather. It led to Aboriginal people seeking out sources of alcohol in camp environments where colonists were more likely to harass and intimidate them.

Excessive alcohol consumption also affected mobility, motivation to carry out traditional food gathering practices and ceremonies, and liability to mining camp accidents such as falling down shafts.¹⁰¹⁴

A representative example of this reportage appeared in the *Ballarat Star* (9 April 1861) which reported on a:

beastly and degrading exhibition [that] took place in Sturt Street, a few yards above the Rainbow Hotel. On the footpath lay a drunken lubra, and by her side were two dogs. Near her sat a second lubra with two children...As may be imagined, a considerable crowd of spectators collected, and these the semi-intoxicated lubra besought to give her money. The aborigine made an occasional blow with a long stick at some of the spectators, and exclaimed "What you want to see? She's only a little drop of brandy." The police ultimately got a hand cart, and conveyed the drunken lubra to the lock up. Persons who give these people drink should remember that the penalty for so doing is 50 pounds.¹⁰¹⁵

The Victorian goldfields and the surrounding townships were a natural magnet not just for the multitude of honest, hard-working gold seekers who, driven by the lust for gold, had left their families and communities behind, but also for the flotsam and jetsam of a colonial society built upon penal servitude. Several generations of Australian colonial society by the 1850s had either lived alongside the brutalized convict class or were closely aligned with them as family, friends or fellow workers. Compounding this Dickensian demographic in Australian society was the inherently dangerous, avaricious and precarious nature of the workplace which people flocked to unwittingly. Testimony of how 'nasty, brutish and short' life at the goldfields was as a workplace is underscored by how inured miners and other commentators became to what would now be termed horrific murders and industrial accidents. One miner expressed his dismay at the goldfields violence thus: 'Society is in an awful state at these diggings; four murders within the last month. On the night before I left the diggings a man was shot at in an adjoining tent.'¹⁰¹⁶

Archival records reveal that gold rush society in Victoria, particularly in the early alluvial period, was for many people a solitary world turned upside down - where sickness, robbery, assault and murder followed in the train of endemic alcohol abuse and a negligible presence of security. Amongst a party of diggers who had over-landed from Adelaide was Edward Snell, who described the scene that greeted them in March 1852:

Thousands upon thousands of tents extending through the gullies for about 10 miles in every direction, lots of stores distinguished by flags, and slaughter houses which might be nosed a mile off, enough to breed a fever in the place- the ground full of immense holes, many of them 30 feet deep, and the surface cut up by carts and midleg deep in dust. Ruffianly unshaved vagabonds strolling about with gallows plainly written in their countenances and the creek thronged with cradles and tin pans, and fellows washing in every direction.¹⁰¹⁷

Observers of the goldfields were aghast at how the gold diggers had transformed the bush into waste land. 'The diggers,' William Howitt observed, 'seem to have two especial propensities, those of firing guns and felling trees.' 'Every tree is felled,' he remarked of the diggings, 'every feature of Nature is annihilated'.¹⁰¹⁸ Louise Meredith considered the mining landscape to be 'more irredeemably hideous than the bleakest mining village in any English coal or iron district' whilst Thomas Woolner gloomily considered that the diggings in 1852-3 was 'what one might suppose the earth would appear after the day of judgment has emptied all the graves'.¹⁰¹⁹ Miners such as George Rowe vividly described the dismantling of the bush around them in great rapidity. Moreover, Rowe explicitly linked the wanton rape of the forest with the 'withdrawal' of Aboriginal people.

It is very astounding how rapidly the trees disappear where the diggers take up their residence...behind our tent when we first put it up to the top of [a] hill half a mile off it was a forest...in a month it was all cut down and there was not a tree to interrupt the sight of the top of the hill...so destructive are the European race, the black man falls back in the bush and decreases [and] the animals become scarce.¹⁰²⁰

JS Prout, also a miner and artist on the Victorian goldfields noted too the depletion of traditional food sources. Prout observed in 1852 that 'animals are becoming much more scarce than formerly'.¹⁰²¹ At Lake Bolac, the traditional eel harvesting practiced for thousands of years by a number of language groups including the Djabwurrung and the Wadawurrung was effectively stopped by colonial fishermen's non-sustainable practices. In August 1863, Charles Gray, the local guardian at Wickliffe, wrote to William Thomas, and informed him that

The blacks in this district have lately complained of their being prevented from catching eels at Lake Bolac by some men at Ararat – who by placing a net across the outlet of the lake where it is discharging itself – secure every fish that may be passing thereby...the blacks are not ever allowed to participate.¹⁰²²

Katherine McKay noted that near the diggings they had previously caught 'bandicoots, wattlebirds and blackfish from the creek' until 'men with guns and dogs came from the mining towns and camps, and soon the wild game was exterminated, even on the rough ranges'.¹⁰²³ Other correspondents too were not asleep to the ecological imbalance and particularly the domino-type effect this had on Aboriginal people that was occurring as a result of the coloniser's presence.

No work can be more manifestly or more imperatively the duty of the colonists of an entirely new country like this than that of providing for its aboriginal inhabitants ... The food of the aborigines retreats as the European advances...In the very names of places where the native word has been retained, is often recorded the deprivation of the black by the white man. Ballarat was a favourite camping place; the word signifies to recline on the elbow, or balla...¹⁰²⁴

The subsequent carving up of pastoral runs by selectors seriously disrupted Aboriginal peoples' ability to use traditional means to sustain themselves, a fact articulated by James Rutherford in a letter to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in May 1878: 'The aborigines look forward anxiously to the yearly supplies more so now than previously. Their sources of subsistence are thoroughly cut off by selectors taking possession of their hunting grounds.'¹⁰²⁵

The altering of traditional living patterns was a contributing factor to a community wracked by alcohol abuse and alternately neglected and controlled by Colonial governments and Christian missionaries. The records of violence and murder against Aboriginal people by colonists during the gold rush period are very extensive. As noted earlier, Abraham Abrahamsohn, a miner at Ballarat in 1853, recalled that he had caught a Wadawurrung stealing a knife and 'thoroughly beaten up' the 'big rascal'. Abrahamsohn narrowly avoided a violent revenge attack due only to the timely advice of another unidentified Aboriginal (Wadawurrung) person he had befriended. An Aboriginal by the name 'Timbo' successfully brought charges for abuse and assault against a Hugh McKenzie in 1864, but was 'brutally kicked' to death two years later.¹⁰²⁶ Similarly, an Aboriginal person by the name of Buckley was violently murdered by two miners at Mia Mia Flat in 1862. Numerous newspapers reports revealed that two white miners, Nixon and Simm, had slept with two Aboriginal women. The *Mount Alexander Mail* provided a précised account of the murder, claiming that:

An aborigine named Sampson found Buckley in a waterhole – inquest conducted "The general impression as to how the murder was committed appears to be that on Saturday night Buckley proceeded to Simm's tent to persuade the lubras to return to their encampment; that his importunities to this effect excited the wrath of Simms, who struck him several times with a piece of wood taken from his stretcher, and then pushed him outside to the waterhole. Such at all events is the substance of a statement made by an aboriginal boy who alleges that he slept the night in Simm's tent, and saw all that occurred. Of the two lubras we have not yet heard anything, nor do we know whether they will be called upon to give evidence."¹⁰²⁷

Further evidence of the callousness of the crime was brought to light later, which corroborated the evidence of Martin (the Aboriginal youth). Simms was overheard to say that: 'he did not see why the blackfellow [Buckley] should not be got out of the way as well as anyone else.'¹⁰²⁸ Due largely to the inadmissible evidence of Martin, the Aboriginal youth, the charge was commuted to manslaughter and the defendant received a two year prison sentence.¹⁰²⁹

William Thomas, who was appointed Aboriginal Guardian after the abolition of the Aboriginal Protectorate system in 1850, was also well acquainted with how Aboriginal people were liberally encouraged to drink to excess, were cruelly treated whilst intoxicated and suffered disastrous effects upon their physical and social health. It should be stressed that Thomas wrote predominately of his experiences of Aboriginal people that had gathered about the City of Melbourne - usually for a festive occasion like the races, ceremonial purposes or to carry out traditional legal procedures. Thomas was not describing Aboriginal people in their everyday pursuits when he penned:

There have been, during the past half-year, upwards of three hundred aboriginal natives at one time in these counties, from the north, north-west, and east tribes; and all except those from the east, generally speaking, appear to have become habitual drunkards, male and female, - I allude to the young, - and in consequence are with great difficulty kept from the town. When there they no longer ply with their tomahawks to cut wood for the inhabitants, but prowl about the public houses and vile avenues, where they are encouraged by the improvident gold-diggers in drinking, even to rewarding them for so doing. On various occasions they have been found so drunk as to be found lying in the highways during the night. Their thirst and propensity for ardent spirits is so great, that I have known them recently to go thirty miles to indulge their appetites. They are now brought to an awful and dangerous state of degradation, so that the speedy extinction of the Melbourne and Barrabool tribes is inevitable. Although the law is stringent upon those who supply blacks with liquor it is now craftily evaded by them.¹⁰³⁰

There were however, a noteworthy number of reports about Aboriginal habits of temperance, which rarely receive much attention by scholars. William Thomas reported with some pleasure on meeting 'Davy a fine genteel Black much more creditable and clean than white Bushmen.' Davy or Marmbarmin from the Mt Emu Tribe [Wadawurrung] was a young man who worked at shearing and harvesting at various sheep stations around the district. He provided Thomas with a damning account of the 'awful mortality through drunkenness and disease' that was afflicting his people on and off the goldfields and also how he intended on saving two Wadawurrung women from living in tents with white miners on Fiery Creek.¹⁰³¹ Goldfield newspapers correspondents such as one from the *Daylesford Mercury* recorded notable examples of abstinence. The reporter detailed how a small party of 'Aborigines of the Daisy-Hill tribe' (presumably Dja Dja Wurrung) had discovered a nugget weighing two ounces on Amherst Flat, and being

wiser than some of their generation, instead of spending the money realized by the sale of the nugget on drink, they purchased a stock of warm winter clothing, and with this on their backs they paraded the streets with the greatest possible dignity.¹⁰³²

A month later a correspondent for the *Talbot Leader* informed his readers of another discovery of a large (30 ounces) gold nugget by Aboriginal people at the Emu gold field which realized about 120 pounds cash for them. The news report, earlier referred to, goes on to mention how after purchasing warm clothing and blankets the successful party of Dja Dja Wurrung prospectors had hired two vehicles to take them to Clunes, with the purpose of fulfilling their kinship obligations to a storekeeper there. The newspaper correspondent and other observers keenly noted their abstinence from alcohol, stating:

One thing was evident, namely, that they were all quite sober; and on enquiring how this was, since aborigines are expected to get drunk the moment they obtain any money, it transpired that several attempts had been made in certain 'shanties' to induce them to drink, and that they had refused point blank to imbibe anything

stronger than ginger beer. Indeed one of the party, who appears to be head or chief of the rest, replied to one of the tempters that 'black fellow could be a gentleman as well as whitefellow,' – meaning, we presume, that he was not bound to get drunk because he had suddenly acquired a considerable sum of money. In this respect this sensible aborigine is decidedly in advance of some of the whitefellows, to whom the sudden acquisition of fortune is more often the prelude to intoxicated habits than the forerunner of staid and sober conduct.¹⁰³³

Kulin (including Wadawurrung) Elders at Coranderrk, an Aboriginal reserve established in 1863, had also created their own effective stratagems to manage excessive alcohol consumption. In April 1865 'they created their own reserve court which set punishments for drinking; a five shilling fine for the first offence, ten for the second and twenty shillings for the third, except for single men who forfeited their right to marry.'¹⁰³⁴ The colonial press however was much more prone to reporting on the troubles which excessive drinking caused.

ABORIGINES.—The natives have become a most intolerable nuisance in South Geelong and the surrounding suburbs. They manage to get drunk in town, and then proceed in bands of 5 or 6 to keep up their revelry during the night in the remote parts. Complaints have been lodged before the police magistrates, and a sharp look out will be kept by the police, to ascertain who the parties are that supply the unfortunate creatures with drink.¹⁰³⁵

The majority of the newspaper reports about the problems alcohol wrought upon the Wadawurrung people are predominately about the 'wretched' white miners who supplied the alcohol such as a report in 1855.

During a visit to the Happy Valley diggings [central Victoria] the scenes of debauchery which meet the eyes are legion and pitiful. It is not unusual to meet the Aborigines, both male and female, in such a helpless state of drunkenness as to excite sympathy for them, and a far different feeling towards the person supplying them with liquors.¹⁰³⁶

A large number of court appearances and convictions for publicans selling alcohol to Aboriginal people occurred throughout the gold period, on and off the goldfields. In Ballarat, a publican was fined in 1867 for 'illegally disposing of liquor to aboriginals'. In the same year, Mrs. Clarke was charged at the Ballarat Petty Sessions for 'disposing of liquor to aboriginals', but the charge was dismissed.¹⁰³⁷ On one occasion Sergeant Cahir the Town Police Constable in Geelong arrested a fellow police officer in 1853 for 'illegally supplying alcohol to a native.'¹⁰³⁸ AB Addis, the Commissioner of Crown Lands in the wider Geelong district also attested to the ease with which 'they procure spirits from the numerous drays and travellers passing on the roads from the town'. Addis added 'No occurrence worthy of note has taken place between the European and Aboriginal population during the last twelve months, with the exception of one native having been stabbed in an encounter with a drunken bushman...'¹⁰³⁹

Often the Wadawurrung were let off with a warning as was the case at the Eastern Court session in 1859.

DRUNKENNESS.-Four Aborigines, rejoicing in the euphonious sobriquets of Ballarat Jemmy, Jemmy Smith, Bessy, and Isabella, were charged with being drunk and disorderly on the previous evening on the 'Main Road. Sergeant Lamer said they had been supplied with drink by some parties. The Bench said if it was known who had supplied the drink they would be punished severely. Ballarat Jemmy said the two women were his wives, and he had given one of them a push to keep her quiet. They were cautioned and discharged.¹⁰⁴⁰

Antoine Fauchery, a French miner at Ballarat, noted Aboriginal people were 'Divided into nomadic tribes [clans] made up of fifteen or twenty individuals, they are seen now in the bush, now in the towns, and still more frequently on the diggings, which they visit by preference.'¹⁰⁴¹ As far as William Craig, a miner at the neighboring Djabwurrung Mt Cole goldfields, was concerned the reasons for Aboriginal people being attracted to the goldfields were for the same reasons as the non-Indigenous miners, that is to get rich from finding gold and to 'knock it down' at an inn. Craig wrote of the Djabwurrung thus: 'The new [gold mining] area was situated in the hunting grounds of the Mount Cole tribe of aborigines, who with a view of participating in the prosperity, but more especially in the hope of indulging in cheap liquor, shifted camp to our vicinity.'¹⁰⁴² The attraction of new-found wealth was so great, he wrote, that a neighbouring clan who he observed was at enmity with the resident clan shifted into the locality amongst the gold diggings.

Another [clan] was located some fifteen miles distant, and known as the Mount William clan. By a sort of bush telegraphy the latter soon learned that the Coleites [Mt Cole clan] were in clover on the new diggings, and notwithstanding the strange [strained] relations that had existed between the tribes for some years through the abduction of a lubra [woman] from the Williamites, the latter soon put in an appearance.¹⁰⁴³

The goldfields were dangerous places. Violent deaths were common as attested by an account of a 'murder of an aboriginal black [presumably Wadawurrung]' by a white miner at Ballarat in December 1852.¹⁰⁴⁴ Observers of the gold fields such as James Bonwick confirmed to his readers the invidious position Aboriginal people were sometimes exposed. Bonwick visited a storekeeper at the new diggings of Ballarat in 1852. On his way, he met a party of drunken Wadawurrung men and women, who had been treated for fun by some of the rougher diggers. The following day he came upon a 'blackfellow', lying groaning upon the turf. He lifted his ragged shirt and showed his bowels protruding through a gashed wound. Shivering with cold and groaning in pain, he told Bonwick that 'Long Tom, him do it, him drunk.'¹⁰⁴⁵ Off the goldfields were dangerous places as well as a report in *The Age* about an assault at Geelong in 1858 testified.

A barbarous assault has just been committed by an inhuman wretch, doubtless calling himself a civilised man, on a blackfellow called Jerry. It appears that a gang of seven or eight reapers on their return to town passed near the spot where the blacks had encamped. Some of the coolies asked them for some tobacco, when one of them received as a reply a blow on the head with a stick which the most

violent of the reapers carried in his hand. The lubras immediately set up a shout, whereupon one of the ruffians deliberately ran his reaping hook into the upper part of poor Jerry's thigh. A melee, ensued, and the white savages speedily took to their heels, followed by a shower of bottles, stones, and other missiles. It was fortunate for them that the blacks were not within reach of their spears, &c, or they would doubtless have paid dearly for their barbarity, as it is they have escaped with impunity.¹⁰⁴⁶

The 'voices' of the Wadawurrung can occasionally be gleaned from coronial inquiries held upon the deaths of their people. At the inquest of Jemmy, sometimes known as Jimmy Mungett, a Wadawurrung Ngrungeeta, his wife Harriet, gave some brief details about his death.

Inquest on the body of Jimmy Mungett at the Border Inn Bacchus Marsh, on 8.4.1859. Died of inflammation of the lungs – no marks of violence on the body. Harriet Mungett of the Bacchus Marsh Tribe of Aborigines "Jemmy Mungett my Cooly [husband]. Jemmy had been sick two days (She then imitated the way in which she breathed as being very difficult) No fighting No tomahawk." Hector Allan Macleod [squatter] stated deceased had been on his station about ten days with his lubra and child. None other of the natives present. Had complained of pain in head and sickness.¹⁰⁴⁷

The inquest records also inform us about the systematic movements of Wadawurrung people on their country.

Inquest upon the body of Sam an aboriginal at Carngham, 10.10.1865. Died at Mount Emu Station on 7.10 from disease of the right lung. Andrew Porteous – knew the deceased 'for the last twenty three years. He is about thirty years of age. He has been a strong healthy man until the last two years when he has complained a little of pain in his chest and then after he had been drinking very hard a month ago he was here and complaining – he left for Linton and Lucky Woman's. He returned in about a fortnight and looked better than I have seen him for a long time. He left then for Skipton and I have not heard of him until I heard of his death. He was a very quiet man and not at all quarrelsome with his tribe. He had been married but his wife died some years ago.' Thos Rob Nason MPRAC Carngham – did PM – cause of death as above.¹⁰⁴⁸

The reports of domestic violence amongst Aboriginal people were an extremely complex issue for colonial authorities before and during the gold period, which caused a great deal of legal confusion in the colonial courts. Coronial inquests in the 1850s and 1860s reveal the workings of how the theft of their lands and the subsequent cultural dislocation had resulted in some instances in domestic abuse fueled by alcohol. Several inquest reports appear below in full.

Inquest on the body of female unknown at the Stone Rises Hotel Ballarat District 22.9.1859. Died in bush around 15th instant in bush near the Stony Rises Hotel – natural causes – debility accelerated by neglect from her tribe and exposure to the wet and cold. Michael O Grady labourer at quarries opposite hotel found body when getting wood for fire. Had seen dec'd [deceased] at same spot week before when alive – she had schreeched at him but he wasn't able to understand her. 'There were a great lot of native blacks about this place and district some six or eight weeks ago'. William McConachey mason – three weeks ago four native blacks about there two men and two women – camped close to the quarries and on the spree after having sold one opossum rug – fighting one evening and left the next morning – leaving one of the women behind. Had seen her himself a fortnight ago in a mia mia. Had been beaten about the face above the left eye & cut on her head. Asked who'd been fighting with her – 'but she could not speak plain – but she did say "King Billy no good" she said she had plenty to eat and I then lighted a fire and left her' - returned two days later to find her gone. Surgeon stated some flesh possibly stripped from face after death by native cats or other animals. About fifty years of age.¹⁰⁴⁹

Inquest upon the body of George, an aboriginal, at Carngham, 23.5.1864. The deceased George, an aboriginal of the Mount Emu tribe died on the road between Smythesdale and Carngham on the 22nd day of May 1864 from disease of the heart. Andrew Porteous – a farmer and correspondent to the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines. Have known the deceased George for twenty years- 'he is the son of King William chief of the Mount Emu tribe, he is about 26 years of age. He has a wife but no family. About three weeks ago he was at my place apparently well except for a little cough. He got very drunk one day about that time and was beating his lubra. I scolded him very much for it. He left my place in company with two other aboriginals to go to a gathering near Skipton where his father was.' Not seen again until saw dead body that morning. The two other Aboriginals returned to say very bad on road near Smythesdale. They returned and said he'd got as far as Green Hills and had died. Had had pain in left shoulder and it had gone down left side. Very steady till last 18 mths when he would drink whenever he could get it. Witness James Miller 'I am of the Burn Bank tribe, a native of this colony. The deceased George married my sister. A lot of blackfellows met at Springdall at about a week ago. The deceased was there. He was not drinking. He went out with a tomahawk, he was hunting for opossum. He came back with his forehead bloody. He said he had cut himself while up a tree. Six days ago he was taken bad at the Devils Kitchen. He said he was bad on his right shoulder. Four days ago he was so bad at Scarsdale he could neither move nor eat. He was carried on two sticks to Smythesdale. I do not know any doctor saw him at Smythesdale. He wished to come on to Carngham before he die. We started with him, he died on the road about 8 o'clock yesterday morning near the Half Way House between Smythesdale and Carngham. There was no fighting at any of the corroborees – he had tea and a little flour but he could not eat.' Thomas Carter Wigg Med Practitioner – died from disease of the heart. Did PM [post mortem].¹⁰⁵⁰

The coronial inquiry reports also reveal that Wadawurrung people were insistent on staying on country – and increasingly becoming dependent on the goodwill of local farmers in the midst of the social, cultural and environmental rupture in this period.

Inquest on the body of Old Lady, an Australian native at Black Hill, Windermere on 13.12.1860. Death natural causes –severe cold. Farmer - a number of aboriginal blacks carrying something along Smythesdale Road last October on two sticks – heard afterwards was an old woman. Carried towards place where found – good description from Police of finding grave and nature of burial. Thomas Train - 3 mths ago Aboriginal black named Charley came & borrowed a pick & shovel to bury blind old woman. Charley Australian native of Burrumbeet – ‘That I am of the Burrumbeet Tribe of blacks – and I have known the deceased many years – since I was a boy. She was aged more than sixty years and we called her Old Lady. She was quite blind for some years – since the Diggings. She was one of our tribe. She was ill a good bit - more than six months with a cold in her throat. She had been at Robertson’s and Ross’s place (Farm) for some time and had a very bad cough. We carried her on two sticks a day or two before she died from Burrumbeet to this Hill. It was our usual way for carrying such people. Old Lady died here about a mile from this hut on this hill on a Wednesday morning about three months ago. It was two days after we left Burrumbeet. We buried her on same day in the hole on this Hill- where her remains have been found. It is the same hole. We buried her in the morning some hours after she died. We laid her on her right side with her feet bent up close to her body. We buried all her property with her – clothes – blankets and two knives. I can identify some of the clothes and blanket – also the two knives (now in her coffin) I went to Tom Trains for a pick and shovel the morning Old Lady died to bury her and I returned them the same day.’¹⁰⁵¹

Especially disturbing and perplexing was the occurrence of intra-clan murders, which according to William Thomas, Guardian of Aborigines in Victoria, ‘are a new feature’. A considerable number of inter se murders occurred in and around the goldfields, which received a considerable amount of attention from newspapers. Court case reportage of Wadawurrung people was usually limited to reports of alcohol abuse or of serious trials such as the case of *Peter Vs The Queen*. Peter or Mungett, a Wadawurrung man arraigned on a charge of committing a rape on a six year old girl, also tested the jurisdiction of the Queen’s Courts to try Aboriginal people. Mungett affirmed that a Court within his own tribe was the only Court he was willing to submit. Mungett claimed both his innocence and that he ought not to have to answer to the Queen’s Court as

he saith that he is a native aboriginal of Ballang, dwelling in Ballan and born out of the allegiance of our Sovereign Lady Queen Victoria, and that the said tribe is a sovereign and independent tribe, not in subjection to our said Lady the Queen; and that the said Mungett did never become subject to; or submit himself to or acknowledge allegiance to the said Queen.¹⁰⁵²

Many miners and visitors to goldfields on Wadawurrung land portrayed Wadawurrung people in both print and pictures leading a dual socio-economic mode of life. Descriptions of traditional lifestyles including food gathering techniques, ceremonial performances, caring for the land rituals, weapon displays and kinship practices were frequently observed by commentators.

Aside from the economic attraction of the goldfields the exotic pull of the goldfields and towns for Aboriginal people seems to have centered on horse races, fetes, galas and festive events such as official openings.¹⁰⁵³ William Tomlinson remarked that at the opening of the Geelong-Melbourne railway in 1853 that the procession consisted of 'Mounted troopers, police, soldiers, railway navies and Aborigines.'¹⁰⁵⁴ A decade later Andrew Porteous, Honorary Correspondent in the Ballarat District, reported that 'The Mount Emu tribe still prefer to roam about in small bands, from station to station and the various goldfields.'¹⁰⁵⁵ Eyewitnesses at the Ballarat and surrounding goldfields witnessed the Wadawurrung enjoying the celebratory atmosphere of townspeople reveling in economic prosperity. Aboriginal people caroused with them and explored the striking and the outlandish people and events on their country. They sought out miners for their amusement and 'vanity' and to witness the 'extraordinary and unfamiliar' such as photography and the galvanic battery. One gold fields correspondent recorded the first time Aboriginal people experienced electricity.

A galvanic battery was shown to a party of blacks, and one of them suffered himself to be experimented upon. He threw down the wires again however in a minute, with a shriek and a laugh which was re-echoed on all sides. Others looked at the mysterious box, but could not be persuaded to try its effects.¹⁰⁵⁶

Some comical instances of Aboriginal peoples' fondness for exotic items to 'adorn their persons with' were recorded and note was made of their great sense of humour and delight in satirizing the white miner's vanity and pompousness.

It used to be no uncommon thing to see some swarthy fellow donning a solitary article of clothing, in comical incongruity with his otherwise perfect nudity. A cravat, a hat, or a discarded crinoline, comprised in some instances the whole of the aboriginal toilet, but was nevertheless sported with great pride and exultation. A gentleman who was subject to frequent attacks of bronchitis one day missed his respirator, without he rarely travelled. After much ineffectual search, it was accidentally discovered in the possession of a black "lubra", who had attached it to her head, and had endeavoured to arrange her dark greasy locks over it in imitation of the "chignons" worn by her white sisters.¹⁰⁵⁷

Antoine Fauchery, a photographer on the Ballarat goldfields has recounted the encounter of some Wadawurrung people at the Ballarat diggings experiencing a brass pipe band of wandering musicians for the first time - highlighting the cultural exoticism of the goldfields.

It was I think, the first time music was heard on the diggings. An agreeable sensation for all, and particularly novel for the natives. Coloured men, women and

children were laughing, foaming, twisting in a general fit of epilepsy. [Only one man] kept his dignity, and neglecting the varied ensemble of the orchestra, all his attention was fixed on the trombone...it was this mechanism [of the trombone] above all that aroused the lively interest of the observer...The full extension of the instrument did not over-astonish the black man, but when he saw it drawn back by the instrumentalists hand, go up again, diminish and reduce itself to its simplest proportions he completely lost his head; he touched the brass with his black quivering hands then he came back to the Alsation, on whose person he devoted himself to the most minute researches, opening his coat, thrusting his hands everywhere, but finding nothing. Suddenly he stopped, enveloped in a fiery gaze the musician and the trombone now all of one piece, then struck his forehead and cried, 'he is swallowing it.' And he ran away, waving his arms in the air, and showing signs of the most dreadful despair.¹⁰⁵⁸

Aboriginal people enjoyed the thrill, adventure and obvious sense of supremacy and importance they attained when guiding or otherwise sharing their corpus of bush knowledge. It is likely that Aboriginal people participating in collaborative mining ventures with immigrant miners also viewed such opportunities as attractive as it entailed a sharing of their ancestral land and building vital kinship affiliations. Wadawurrung people moved quickly to acquire and see the wonderful devices and share in the plentiful goods that abounded on the diggings and the townships. Family memories of their interactions with Wadawurrung people on the fringes of the goldfields occasionally also recall the displacement of Wadawurrung people from their traditional economies and traditions by the colonists. In the Mt Egerton district the memories of the Wadawurrung presence in the landscape radically supplanted by colonials is stark.

There is a canoe tree in Ern Slocombe's paddock on the northern edge of the Little Forest, 150 yards south west of the hay shed of the Witchwood property on the west side of the lane. Another canoe tree can be seen in the garden of John Molesworth Jnr. at Ballark. Neither of these locations are very far from the Mt. Wallace swamp which before being drained since white settlement, must have been an excellent hunting ground for all manner of waterfowl.

Martin Esmond, the father of Joe, used to say that the natives used the clear hill owned by Baxters to the south west of Egerton as a site for smoke signalling. It may well have been so, for there is a clear view to the south and east and far to the north and west from the top of that hill. Martin also used to describe how the natives made bullroarers which he said, when whirled round, made a noise "like a bull hummin".¹⁰⁵⁹

More often, the colonist's family recounts recall the exotic cultural differences and the friendships that infrequently happened. The 'Coxall Family History' of their interactions with the Wadawurrung in the 1850s is somewhat typical of this family recall phenomenon.

Uncle Tom used to tell us a story of a tribe of Aborigines that used to come from Burrumbah [Burrumbeet] for their corroboree, an assembly of sacred festive, or

warlike character, every year, he was a boy of 3 years old and all the kids were frightened of them. There were 36 of them, with their own King Billy. They used to camp up on Boan Hill, but he never said exactly where they camped. Aborigines always camped near water...My Uncle Tom lent one of the aborigines a Tommy axe to cut down a few trees for a shelter, but he didn't return it, Uncle Tom was always moaning about it. The Rev. Hastie was at the [Buninyong] Presbyterian Church when King Billy presented him...a long spear and a hunting spear, also a nulla nulla, all were carved real good. They should be in a museum. Grandma used to bake bread for them and Uncle Tom said it kept them around the place.¹⁰⁶⁰

Thomas Booth could reminisce about a number of familial encounters he had had as a child with the local Wadawurrung clan which clearly demonstrate that they lived in close quarters with each other.

The Aborigines were quite numerous around Buninyong...One morning I and my sister were gathering wood in the forest when a tribe appeared. Pris my sister and I were in the midst of them and they kept pointing at her and yabbering I said to them, "Take her if you want", but Pris was also making a beeline for home which she reached looking like a drowned rat after falling in a pool in her haste to escape. The blacks were greatly amused by this, more so than I was, for when I got home there was something waiting for me and I got it...The lubras like most of their sex, often quarreled amongst themselves and I once saw two fighting with hair flying like feather of two clucky hens disputing a nest...King Jerry would sit outside his mia mia and beat his tom tom.¹⁰⁶¹

At times, the mining communities were compelled to acknowledge the fact that they had supplanted a Wadawurrung landscape. At Buninyong William Burrows 'had the opportunity of seeing the manner in which the blacks [Wadawurrung] bury their dead. One morning a little boy came up from the township, and said that he had found a dead body...of a gin in the hollow of a tree.'¹⁰⁶² Likewise William Chandler, a new visitor to the gold fields noted near the Brisbane Ranges: 'We saw some native graves here....A peculiar feeling comes over one when he sees those graves all alone in the wild bush.'¹⁰⁶³

Another factor which may explain the attraction of the Wadawurrung to some goldfields, identified by Robertson, a resident in the Piggoreet area, was that the existing gold mining area was overlaid on an existing Wadawurrung green-stone quarry which was a highly valued area for the very reasons it was esteemed by the non-Aboriginal gold miners. Moreover, the usage overlay was multiplied as it was known to be an important recreational and ceremonial area by the clans who also mined in the area. This scenario may have been repeated on many sites across Wadawurrung lands, and indeed Victoria.

Though many are still with us that can remember seeing them in groups, very little information has been stored up as to the customs of the Blacks who made this district their hunting ground. For various reasons Piggoreet was a popular camping ground. In the driest of years there was plenty of water and its accompanying animal

life. Its prolific vegetation made the marsupials plentiful hence plenty of food for the Blacks. The caves and cliffs gave good shelter from rain and sun. The exposed flints for the making of knives and hatchets must have been a great attraction, as in very few places in Victoria were they so easily exposed as in the exposed cements hereabouts. Most likely Piggoreet, because of its advantages to them, was as popular to the Blacks before the white man's advent as it has been to the said white man, by reason of its romantic scenery and happy days spent in the height of its mining life. Below Christie's Bridge, though now filled with sand, a very large waterhole, formed by a waterfall over a bar of rock just above it, was a popular camping ground for Blacks, as was also the bare hill where Mr. Thos. Jones now resides.¹⁰⁶⁴

Other miners were not so reflective about how they were infringing on a Wadawurrung landscape – and that they were despoiling the Wadawurrung lands they were combing for gold. One miner at Canadian Gully, Ballarat (3 November 1852) merely noted his displeasure at the noisy reception he received from Wadawurrung clan's people: 'Occasionally we came upon an encampment of natives, whose inharmonious yells sounded like anything but a kindly greeting to the wayfarer.'¹⁰⁶⁵ Charles Doudiet, a French gold field's artist at Ballarat in 1854 was likewise less than impressed and concluded

The Australian Blacks are justly reckoned the lowest in the grade of humanity – Wild, treacherous and incapable of civilization, they wind along the watercourses, fishing and hunting for a living. They wear no clothing whatever, when they get any food they will gorge themselves and perhaps be days without a morsel- they put up a "breakwind" with a few pieces of bark and branches and it serves them for house and shelter.¹⁰⁶⁶

German miner, Abram Abramhamsohn, set up a 'bakery on a high hill 'in July 1853 (Bakery Hill?) on the 'Jurika [Eureka] mines near Pallrad [Ballarat]' was more expansive and more caustic than most in his appraisal of a people he had had little or no contact with or contextual knowledge. In common with many miners, he wrote disparagingly of their physical features and adornment – and heavily embellished his descriptions of their 'nature' with Eurocentric and racial slurs. Collisions with Aboriginal people who were now 'outsiders' also forms a common thread in miner's narratives about their encounters with Aboriginal people, as it had done with the squatters a decade earlier. However, unlike the squatters, the miners were truly nomadic and generally did not seek relationships with the people or the land. Subsequently, for many miners the Aboriginal peoples were relegated in their correspondence to an exotic addendum to their thrilling adventures on the goldfields. In this vein Abramhamsohn colours his racial narrative about Aboriginal people with a lively but sketchy story about narrowly escaping a customary 'pay back' attack on his life on the Ballarat Eureka diggings sometime in 1853 by a Wadawurrung man he had befriended.¹⁰⁶⁷

The Aborigines. "The negroid aborigines or Papus, visited me and begged for bread. They are dirty, black, wooley-haired, with a weak thin and small body, and they go about naked and are like no other wild people. They are close to animals in

intelligence. Because they have no understanding or shame, they vegetate all day long, live off raw or slightly roasted frogs, snakes, lizards, birds, fish, carrion, roots; in short, anything that falls into their hands. Sheepsheads thrown away by the white men are their delicacy. Their many long-haired small dogs, serve them well on the hunt and as food...In the interior of the country they attack each other, in order to still their hunger pangs with human meat. From acorns, which they grind in a hollow stone, they make a kind of bread. They are tattooed, decorate their kinky black hair with moss and fish teeth, and carry their white clay pipes in their perforated nasal cartilage. Parents leave their sick children and children their sick parents lying on the ground to die of starvation, and go on unfeelingly, when it is a case of finding food. Their dead, however, they dig partly in to the ground and then burn a mound of wood over them. There is no form of government among them, nor do they know anything of God or gods, and all attempts by the missionaries to teach them some semblance of religious belief have, until now, been completely fruitless. They also fear the white man. They celebrate the full moon with nasal songs and dances that last all night and this feast, for which several hundred usually assemble, is called Karobri. The following occurrence will prove that among a few individuals of this unhappy race, the last spark of feeling has not died out. To a hungry, thin, already elderly Papu, I had several times given some of my scanty store of bread and meat and a drink. From my bottle of whiskey, so necessary in this swamp. I had even given a chain of glass beads to his young wife. I did this from an unconscious liking for the black man. Early one evening I lay under the tree wrapped in my blanket, sunk in warm thoughts of my distant dear ones and of how they, happy in their new-found wealth, would be even happier when my arms would be around them again. Suddenly I heard the quick step typical of the natives and my Papu stood in front of me. Surprised by his unexpected appearance, I jumped up. He, however, rapidly warbled some gargling words, which naturally I could not understand. When he saw me shake my head, he pointed to himself and raised his hand over his head, made a furious face, then pointed to my resting place, laid down on it and closed his eyes. Then he jumped up, grabbed my shovel and started violently to hit the spot where his head had been. Then he sank to the ground and spread out his arms and legs like a dead man. Before I could thank him, he had disappeared into the woods. I was to expect an attack from one of his people who was bigger than he, and I immediately recalled an unusually big rascal built only of bone and sinew, whom I had caught the day before stealing a knife, and had thoroughly beaten him up. I was not exactly comfortable in my isolation, and I was overcome with horror to think that when dead, I would make a meal for him and his friends, in which my Papu friend would take part without the slightest hesitation, because after all, I would have been dead. All my ability to think, helped me to concentrate on finding a means to save myself, and the following appeared to me to be the best way. I placed wood under my blanket, put my cap at one end and under it, spread my handkerchief, as if I were trying to protect my face from the mosquitos. With my loaded pistols, I placed myself forty feet away in a bush, to wait. Heaven itself, helped me to insure the success of my plan. In these tropical lands, the moon and stars usually shine much more magnificently than they do with us. However, tonight the moon was only going to rise after midnight, and thus there was only a pale glow, that did not permit objects to be recognized easily. I could hear my heart beating in my breast, as I stood there in the background in the

silence of the night, which was only occasionally broken by the monotonous call of the night swallow. A few hours may have passed, when across from me I saw a dark shape materialize from the thicket and then again move forward. My eyes almost fell out of my head, I was peering so intently, and I could make out a club brandished aloft. As soon as it was lowered, I shot off both my pistols. Sound on sound, rolled gruesomely through the primeval forest. Birds woke up with shrill cries, then all was silent again, and nothing was to be seen of the dark figure. Cowardly in open battle, the surprised murderer had fled in panic, and since I knew these boys, that was all I wanted and I now was sure that he and his gang would not return.¹⁰⁶⁸

WORKING FOR THE WHITE BOSSES

During the gold rush era, Aboriginal workers were renowned for their skills and expertise in a period when squatters found it very difficult to retain any workers as the lure of gold was too powerful. However, their esteem as skilled workers was countered by consistently being represented as poor or indifferent workers due to a raft of factors including their 'roving disposition' and as noted earlier, their cultural emphasis on relationships. It is noteworthy too that Aboriginal people's acceptance of temporary wage labor was a double edged sword, as it afforded Aboriginal people the opportunity to reside on their natal estates, yet it also afforded an additional opportunity of increasing the rate of their exploitation. Wadawurrung people such as Billy Leigh and Mullawallah formed very strong and long lasting relationships sometimes over many decades, with squatters thus enabling them to remain on their ancestral lands. Many gold rush correspondents pointed to the critical importance of acknowledging Aboriginal people's kinship system (with their own kin and with the colonists) and land attachment as being a prime motivational force for Aboriginal workers. A report from Police Magistrate for the Sale and Alberton Districts, Andrew McCrae, to the Colonial Secretary in March 1852, supplies an exemplar of colonist's acknowledgement of this factor. McCrae reported that all the Aboriginal people in his assigned district had served the 'full term of their employment' for a 'large' payment of money. Moreover, he stresses three tiers of conduct employers of Aboriginal people should abide by if they were to expect Aboriginal people to labor for them in an earnest manner. McCrae, a squatter on the Mornington Peninsula, was very familiar with the importance placed by Aboriginal people on relationships with the people they worked with, after having worked very closely with the local Boon Wurrung clan resident on the sheep station he had taken up in the 1840s.

I would beg that it may be borne in mind that the employers, the persons mainly interested in the labor of the natives, always worked in the field with them, and saw, as it was evidently their interest to see, that the blacks had their rations according to agreement, and that they were not ill-treated by their fellow-laborers the whites.

It would therefore appear, if I may be allowed to offer an opinion (which I do after a residence of twelve years in the colony, and many opportunities of studying the habits and dispositions of the Aborigines), that in favourable circumstances, such as I have brought under your notice, where the employer offers a fair remuneration, [rations, tobacco, 2 pounds, a gun worth thirty shillings, one blanket, three shirts,

one pair of trousers, a cap, and about two and sixpence worth of powder and shot] *keeps faith* [McCrae's emphasis] with the black natives and works with them, that their labor, not much if at all inferior in reaping to that of the whites, may be available.¹⁰⁶⁹

McCrae's wisdom on this matter would prove to be critical for many squatters as the official discovery of gold at Clunes in 1851 acted like a magnet for the vast majority of the population including sheep station workers who left their jobs in droves. One squatter lamented: 'With every fresh gold find matters became worse for the stockowner... In fact it became almost impossible to carry on the work of the place as more and more men went off to the diggings.'¹⁰⁷⁰ A gold rush writer chimed that 'their value, in many instances must have been incalculable at a period when nearly all white pastoral labour was suspended from the greater attraction of the goldfields.'¹⁰⁷¹

As all hands sought to join the throng finding the 'democratic metal' it offered Aboriginal people who remained on their traditional lands, especially those whose estates were not located near auriferous fields, new prospects of increased station employment, increased wages, better working conditions and an appreciably greater estimation and admiration of their skills. Writers often remarked how 'many display much intelligence, and are frequently of great use to the settlers in shepherding and washing their sheep, or assisting at harvest time.'¹⁰⁷² According to the figures submitted in 1852-3 by the Commissioners for Crown Lands on Aboriginal populations in the various districts across Victoria (including Wadawurrung country), an estimated 1,500 Aboriginal people were employed on stations and were unanimously considered to be 'of considerable service' and 'that the whole of the tribes were employed by settlers.'¹⁰⁷³ Here the writer is emphasizing that women and children were counted as valuable workers too. As in other States of Australia the livestock industry was dependent on Victorian Aboriginal women in the sheep and cattle industry to a very large degree. This point is forcefully illustrated by WN Gray, Crown Commissioner of Lands in the Portland Bay District who noted 'owing to the great scarcity of labour caused by the servants all going to the Gold Mines, there are none but natives to look after the sheep...if the men go they will leave the women to do the work.'¹⁰⁷⁴ This was a widely recorded occurrence. Workers such as CF Stowe noted 'large group of aborigines and lubras were camped, looking for work during the shearing' and James Sinclair echoed this, noting the employment of 'lubras' in sheep mustering and general rouseabout work on properties across Victoria.¹⁰⁷⁵ One 1850s observer noted how the gold discoveries 'seem to have been highly beneficial in their operation to the Australian natives' adding that many employers, who before 'despised them', were now in a position where they had need to 'invite their services, and to deal with them on equitable and liberal terms.'¹⁰⁷⁶

During the early phases of alluvial gold mining in Victoria, Aboriginal people enjoyed an importance as a labour force not seen since the first period of colonization almost twenty years prior. From across Victoria reports of their utmost importance as a work force, which enabled the squatters to continue in the face of a labor shortage, were prolific. 'It is a fact I should like to state, well known to me,' wrote former Assistant Protector of Aborigines in Victoria, Edward

Stone Parker, 'that, at the time when the country was in a state of universal excitement on the outbreak of the gold mining, there were several stations where no shepherds were left but aboriginal shepherds.'¹⁰⁷⁷

The same pattern was evident on Wadawurrung lands. Station owners and managers were effusive about the worth of their Wadawurrung workers. It is equally evident that there was a great deal of disparagement held towards Aboriginal workers due to their 'roving disposition' and their steadfast refusal to stay in the one location any longer than they saw fit to. Subsequently Wadawurrung (and in general all Aboriginal) workers were alternately over employed, under employed and unemployed according to primarily Aboriginal cultural dictates and the seasonal nature of the industry they chose to engage in. Katherine McKay recalled that at Bolwarrah Station her mother 'obtained the help of a young lubra in the work of the household'. In Geelong, one correspondent wailed about all his servants leaving for the goldfields except 'a native black [Wadawurrung] to cook, and a native boy to wait at table & c...one flock of 5,000 sheep under charge of a native black.' As noted earlier on some Clyde Company sheep stations such as Terinallum (near present day Derrinallum) the sheep stations workforce was predominately a Wadawurrung one. In some instances, the Aboriginal contingent made up fifty to seventy five percent of the number of workers. At Terrinallum 'William (aborigine), Jamie (aborigine), Little John (aborigine), Billy Downie (aborigine), Charlie (aborigine), Robin Hood and Cocky (aborigine)' feature often as key workers. Station manager's letters and reports in this period often refer to Aboriginal workers in a needy manner and imply their economic survival rested upon them. In 1851 the manager at Terrinallum conceded 'most of my [shearing] shed men are my faithfull darkies...We finished shearing yesterday'. The entries frequently acclaim the Wadawurrung worker's skills as being well above white workers in critical areas such as fighting bush fires, shearing, bullock drivers, washing sheep, guiding, tracking lost sheep and shepherding. Not surprisingly, the squatter's letters also attest to a rivalry that existed between them as to who would have the privilege of having the highly skilled Wadawurrung workers on their properties.

[F]or it is all Gold in this neighbourhood – every body totally Ignorant about wool...the shearers are doing their work moderately well, and I have to be pretty civil; the most of my shed men are my faithful darkies... William, Cocky, Jamie, Billy Downie, Charlie...I have for sometime been shepherding one flock myself, and have another to be thrown on my hands on Monday; but if two of the Blacks that have promised come tomorrow I will be able to jog on a few weeks longer without doubling the flocks...do you think you could get me any Bullock drivers for the wool? I see no chance of getting any here...I wish you would give my Blackfellows a hint if you see them about the Leigh [River]...I am washing the sheep now. I have got a lot of Blacks engaged for washing, they are doing very well as yet; I have them all under a written agreement for Six Shillings per week.

...I have just come in from a wild goose chase after a fire that sprung up at the Peak about mid-day. I went at full speed with as many of my Black troop as I could mount... Neither shearers nor any one else are making their appearance yet, and to make the matter worse Francis Ormond Esquire [neighboring sheep station owner] has engaged my blackfellows. It has made me so savage...I am washing the

sheep now. ...I have had a lot of blacks with me at [fighting] the fires...Howard lost his sheep on Saturday morning and came to acquaint me of it on Sunday, so I immediately went out with Black Jamie to look for the wethers: just as we entered the rises Jamie picked up their track, and carried it out to the place where they had camped for the night.¹⁰⁷⁸

Other squatters' reminiscences, such as William Moodie's, mirrored AC Cameron's experiences. Moodie wrote that 'We were used to seeing blacks working on the stations' and added that he 'saw a few at each station' on their journey, partially through Wadawurrung lands, from Melbourne to the Western District.¹⁰⁷⁹ A decade after the alluvial gold rushes had finished the *Ballarat Star* (1865) revealed that this trend continued by noting 'the Ballarat tribes now numbers not more than twenty-nine couples and that at the present time are out on the stations in the western district assisting in the shearing, & c.'

Wadawurrung workers (both male and female) were lauded for their skills in washing and tracking sheep, bullock drivers, shearers, fire fighters, as guides across unfamiliar country, general hands, wool pressers, scourers, rouses, carters, musterers, timber cutters and fencers. Typical of the general gratitude for the Aboriginal bush workers was F Jones' effusive praise in a letter to the Commissioner of Crown Lands in 1853. Jones wrote

It is no figure of speech to assert that wanting their services I could neither have washed my sheep nor secured my wheat crop this season, nor indeed could I have carried on the ordinary work of the station without their assistance. Two lads have shepherded 2000 sheep since the month of May last; they have certainly proved themselves more useful generally in time of need than I ever expected.¹⁰⁸⁰

AB Batey at Sunbury concurred, adding that he had heard it said 'there were some squatters who preferred blacks as stockmen' as they were 'good horsemen'.¹⁰⁸¹ Some measure by which their economic value was regarded can be seen in the wages which Aboriginal people were paid. At various stations, it was noted that Aboriginal workers were sometimes paid the same rate as non-Indigenous workers. William Thomas noted that the mode of remuneration for their labour across the counties of Bourke, Mornington and Evelyn (which included Wadawurrung country) was 'precisely as white laboring men, in money and rations'.¹⁰⁸² Similarly, John Aitken reported to the 1858-9 Select Committee into the condition of Aboriginal people 'those employed as shearers and reapers were paid in most instances, the same rate as the 'white man'.¹⁰⁸³ Samuel Mossman and Thomas Bannister, two writers who wrote a narrative of their experiences in the early 1850s, were informed by a number of squatter informants that since the 'absorption of white labour by the gold diggings they [Aboriginal people] have proved themselves useful labourers at remunerative wages as shepherds, stockmen 'and otherwise'. With a degree of incredulosity, Mossman and Bannister revealed that squatters' successes in retaining their 'most valuable' workers was due, they were told, to squatters who 'treated them just as he would treat a white man - he paid them; and thus he made it their interest to labour steadily'.¹⁰⁸⁴

NA Fenwick, Crown Commissioner of Lands in 1852, wrote of the Aboriginal bush workers with a deal of frustration 'they will work only when they choose'. This was a sentiment echoed by other Crown Land Commissioners also on Wadawurrung lands including EB Addis in the Grant District who reported their immense usefulness to farmers, squatters and others since the gold rush, but all avowed the Wadawurrung worker's reluctance to stop from their traditional economies. WN Gray, Commissioner of Crown Lands in the Portland Bay District is typical in his appraisal of Aboriginal workers. Gray noted in February 1853 that

The settlers are kind to them, and will at any time give them employment; but no dependence can be placed on their remaining for any period, as their laws make it imperative upon them to attend various meetings of tribes to go through certain ceremonies...and no persuasion or remuneration would be the means of making them remain.¹⁰⁸⁵

Some squatters, through their long associations with Aboriginal people, understood and accommodated to some degree the fact that Aboriginal people were neither dependent on colonist's material goods nor willing to forgo their Aboriginal cultural imperatives for a life of dreary servitude to a class system that subverted them to the rank of a servant. Noted anthropologist AP Elkin highlights the dichotomy in Aboriginal worker's lives and termed this type of delicate equilibrium as leading a 'double role'. Charles Tyers for instance, assented to the necessary flexibilities that Aboriginal workers required to perform in two economies, noting

Two of the Plains tribe have been in my service for several months, one as cook and waiter and the other as messenger; they made themselves generally useful and behaved remarkably well, but I have been recently obliged to accede to their request for permission to return to their tribe.¹⁰⁸⁶

Typically, though, many observers such as William Thomas, Guardian of Aborigines, reported with great despair and disbelief Aboriginal workers' (including Wadawurrung) unswerving adherence to maintaining their cultural integrity and worker independence by strongly shunning attempts to mould them into rural factory fodder.

All efforts, however, to further improve their condition, have been tried without avail. I have pressed, and the farmers and others also have urged their becoming as we are, and not merely in work and diet; but to stop in houses and open convenient places at night, comfortably clad and stretched, is what they will not hear of; the hook, axe, or brindle down, and all further of civilization for the day is over; off goes apparel, and they bask under the canopy of heaven as in their primitive wildness, evidently enjoying their freedom from encumbrance; nor do I conceive any further advancement beyond what they have obtained practicable to those in the settled districts, nor have they any desire to be meddled with further. Such is their wandering propensity that all the kindness, entreaty of persuasion cannot secure them one day beyond their determination; and they have latterly been particularly cautious how they make bargains for labour on this account.¹⁰⁸⁷

Thomas' observations were a product of his Wesleyan Missionary convictions and from long experience working and living for the Aboriginal people in his role as the Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Western Port district for almost fifteen years. His intent was not merely to inform the Colonial Secretary but also to influence future Government policy. For a decade during the 1850s, the temporary acute demand for Aboriginal labour, due to the alluvial gold rushes drawing away the colonists labour from the land, coincided with a period of relative inattention by the Government towards Aboriginal policy.

NATIVE POLICE

One of the most significant and best-documented impacts Aboriginal people had on the goldfields was through the role of the Native Police Corps. Members of the Corps were the first police on the Victorian goldfields. On duty, they accompanied the commissioners on their rounds, and like so much police work their presence alone was important, along with their readiness to intervene in the event of any disorder.¹⁰⁸⁸ One of the major benefits of the Port Phillip (Victorian) Native Police Corps, having ostensibly begun in 1837, it was explained to La Trobe was to have at the government's disposal a policing force superbly equipped at tracking criminals in the bush. As noted earlier some Wadawurrung had participated in earlier iterations of the Native Police Corps (1839). Over the following decade a small number of Wadawurrung appear in the ranks of the Native Police continuing into the gold fields era including 'Bobby from Geelong and Barney and Kurnbarwatto [Jack] members of the Barrabool tribe' who enlisted in the mid 1840s. In July 1846 at least three more Wadawurrung are known to have joined the Native Police.¹⁰⁸⁹

The official start of the gold rush in Victoria is usually given as the announcement of gold discoveries on Wadawurrung country at Buninyong near Ballarat on 8 August 1851. Prior to this, the Native Police were present at a number of locations where gold discoveries had been found. The earliest of these was their stint beginning on 5 February 1849 guarding the gold discoveries at Daisy Hill, an outstation on Dja Dja Wurrung country located 10 miles west of Deep Creek (one of the branches of the Loddon River).¹⁰⁹⁰ FA Powlett, the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the district, reported to La Trobe that he had left a party of native police at Daisy Hill Station to prevent any unauthorized occupation of Crown Lands in the neighbourhood.¹⁰⁹¹ When the major gold finds at Ballarat, Buninyong, Mt Alexander and Bendigo became public knowledge in 1851, the Native Police were the only effective policing unit Governor La Trobe had at his disposal to maintain order and represent the government on the goldfields. A fact which miner cum artist, William Strutt, confirmed from his experiences on the Ballarat diggings:

Met on our way [to Ballarat] a prisoner and a villainous squint-eyed scoundrel he looked, handcuffed and escorted by two well mounted and smart looking black troopers (of whom I have made a drawing), on the road to Melbourne. . . . fine and interesting corps of aboriginal black Troopers did their share of duty here before they were unwisely disbanded... the useful black troopers were for a time made to escort prisoners to town; these fine fellows were at first the only mounted police; and indeed performed all the police duty at the Ballarat diggings.¹⁰⁹²



William Strutt, *Native Police Escorting a Prisoner From Ballarat to Melbourne*, pen and ink and watercolour sketch c 1859, *Victoria the Golden*, sketchbook. Copyright Parliament of Victoria. Reproduced with the Permission of the Victorian Parliamentary Library.

John Chandler opined that ‘They looked enough to frighten anyone; their black faces, big white eyes, long moustache, long swords, carbines, and a pair of pistols in their holsters, was a caution to timid people.’¹⁰⁹³ William Brownhill, who found gold at Brown Hill in 1851, told James Oddie of how he was caught without a license, taken to the commissioner’s camp, and ‘guarded by eight or nine black troopers, who in their uniform and polished boots, looked as proud as possible.’¹⁰⁹⁴ Artist and miner, William Strutt had a high opinion of the Native Police. Strutt described them as

a useful set of men as could be found for special service; particularly tracking in the wild bush carrying dispatches, and they seemed to lend themselves wonderfully to military discipline, and as to their riding and capital seat, you could literally say that man and horse were one.¹⁰⁹⁵

George Sutherland, a miner at the then new goldfield of Ballarat considered them a potent force.

The Commissioners, Armstrong and Doveton, arrived, and built a small hut on the top of the hill opposite Golden Point. There was also a police officer, named Captain Dana, accompanied by a number of black troopers, ready to support the authority of the commissioners. Going around the ground, they inquisitively looked into each of the claims which were being worked by the industrious diggers.¹⁰⁹⁶

An incident on the Ballarat goldfields on 21 September 1851 illustrates their success as a force prepared to intervene in case of disorder. Commissioner Doveton and his assistant David Armstrong explained to the diggers the government's decision to introduce licensing fees, which attracted an angry response from the miners. A public meeting was held immediately, and when the first men came forward to pay the fee, they were struck and pelted by 'the mob' as Dana called them. Had it not been for the presence of the Native Police, Dana reported, 'those diggers would have been seriously injured'.¹⁰⁹⁷ Subsequently a request was made for the recall of Native Police stationed at Goulburn to be redeployed to Ballarat.¹⁰⁹⁸ Historian Michael Cannon takes the view that the overbearing methods of the Native Police 'so antagonised the diggers that a flame of rebellion was lit, culminating in the Eureka Stockade three years later'.¹⁰⁹⁹

The presence of Aboriginal policemen was condemned by some miners who were already angered with the expensive license system and the overbearing methods rumored to be used by Dana and some officials including troopers firing upon diggers.¹¹⁰⁰ Further fuel was added to the hatred towards Dana and the Native Police following an incident reported in *The Argus*.

The redoubtable Captain Dana diversified his exploits on Saturday [at Ballarat] by knocking down a young man named Thomas with the butt of his whip; the young man fell into a pit from the effect of the blow. It is gratifying to record such a gallant military exploit – a repetition of the like of which will render it a matter of necessity to place him under the surveillance of his own satanic battalion of Black Guards – a suitable troop for such a commander.¹¹⁰¹

It would appear that the number of Wadawurrung employed, as Native Police was low but several such as 'Timboo from Geelong' is listed as being in the Native Police 'going in pursuit of bushrangers' in July 1852. Later in September 1852 Timboo was sent to the Anderson Creek diggings to 'find out how many parties are working there'.¹¹⁰² Attitudes towards the Corps differed widely as evidenced by various letters to the *Argus* indicate. Yet a letter to the *Argus* editor on 26 November 1851 from an impassioned writer by the name of "Bucknlook" defended the Corps efficiency and deplored the crass miserliness of the colonial government towards them.

A great deal has been said about Christianity and civilizing, this is all talk, talk! Talk of equality of rights!...The ambiguous captain of this very warlike regiment, it will be seen, figures with 300 pounds [per year] attached to his name...whilst the efficient part of the company, namely the natives themselves have (Oh! Whisper it not in the same breath with the word justice, mercy, Christianity or equality or rights! THREE PENCE PER DAY!! Many of these blacks have as correct an idea of the component parts of a shilling, that it is composed of 12 pence as their redoubtable captain, and what must their impression be of this gross act of injustice...¹¹⁰³

Bucknalook's dire projection proved to be accurate, as by early 1852 Dana was finding it difficult to prevent the Aboriginal troopers from 'absconding' and had trouble attracting new members. Dana wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

I have now the greatest difficulty in keeping the Troopers of the Native Police from absconding from the Service...I have endeavoured to induce others to join, but I find them mostly unwilling to do so which I can only account for from the facility they now have of making money, by working for the Settlers, and also from their frequenting the Gold Workings.¹¹⁰⁴

An example of this was the sudden desertion of four troopers on Wadawurrung country at Buninyong (a mining township near Ballarat) the previous year in October 1851. In December 1851 the Victorian Legislative Council conducted a decisive meeting where the function and future prospects of the Corps were discussed. There were calls for its cessation as it was argued that they were 'utterly useless', whilst others argued it was 'absurd to employ constables whose evidence could not be heard in courts of justice'. The continuation of the Corps was secured by the support of both the Colonial Secretary and the Attorney General.

The Committee's erudite attention was directed to the impressive facts that no cases of improper conduct by the Native Police in executing a warrant had ever been reported and that in carrying out normal duties they were as reliable as white men...In conclusion the Attorney general put forward a thoroughly Australian reason for their continuation – there was no decisive reason for their disbandment at the present stage after so many years in existence.¹¹⁰⁵

By February 1852 however Captain Dana had secured the support of La Trobe to radically reform the Native Police Corps. The most important of these reforms was the decision to reduce the number of native troopers, increase the number of non-Indigenous troopers and recruit only native troopers from areas outside Melbourne or Geelong.¹¹⁰⁶ Dana was also successful in securing La Trobe's support for the Native troopers to be used for tracking and escorting rather than policing. In Dana's view the need to include Aboriginal troopers as troopers had diminished as conflict between Aboriginal people and non-Indigenes had effectually ceased. By October 1852, the Victorian Native Police Corps had finished conducting active duties in the field.

CHILD MINDING

Interestingly, in the oral history records there is a record of Wadawurrung people looking after some of the children of rebel miners during the Eureka rebellion, in caves at Black Hill. Whilst not corroborated by any written source, historical records confirm there were certainly many precedents of such an activity by Aboriginal people on and off the goldfields.¹¹⁰⁷ For instance there is a record of child minding by Wadawurrung people in the oral records of the Payne family who 'settled on the banks of the Black creek near the Yendon Road' sometime in the early goldfields period.

David Payne was a bullock driver and was often away from home for days at a time. One time when his son Joe was about 2 years old, a hunting party of natives came to Paynes asking for tea and sugar. Mrs Payne was busy – she has other small children besides Joe – she did not notice until some time after the natives had gone that Joe was missing. The poor woman was distraught but there was little she could do, having to look after the other children. Toward sundown, the natives returned with the child riding proudly on the shoulders on one of them. Angrily scolding them for taking Joe away, the mother said that her baby would be starving. “He alright missus, we give ‘im good possum” was the grinning reply. It must have been a good possum for Joe lived to be 98 years of age, alert to the end. As an old man, not many months before his death, Joe Payne recalled the last natives – 2 men and a woman – coming to his place for tucker. They camped for the night near a large log across the road from Paynes...¹¹⁰⁸

A feature of Victorian Aboriginal culture frequently commented upon in the 19th century was the ‘molly coddling’ of their children.¹¹⁰⁹ This attentiveness towards babies and young children was also reported being directed towards non-Aboriginal children.¹¹¹⁰ The loneliness and isolation of non-Aboriginal women on the goldfields was at times crippling, at times only relieved by the presence of Aboriginal women. At the Dunolly goldfield, Charles and Sarah Belcher were the recipients of visits from Dja Dja Wurrung people who gave much attention to the Belcher baby. When Charles Belcher went to Castlemaine for supplies, these Dja Dja Wurrung people took care of Sarah Belcher, cutting wood and bringing water.¹¹¹¹ The Martin family too was very fortunate in having enjoyed baby-sitting of their children on different occasions from two different language groups - the Wergaia and the Wadawurrung.

Mr. Martin was in business distributing groceries and he was away from home [Nhill] when his daughter was born. The Aboriginal women befriended Mrs. Martin and were very helpful at the time of the birth [March 1866]. They were particularly taken with the white baby and were very attentive towards her. Soon after Elizabeth was born the Martin family took up land at Lexton between the Langi Kal Kal Road and the main road to Springs. There was an Aboriginal camp near the Toll Gate and one day Mrs. Martin discovered that Elizabeth was missing. A search was begun and some time later Elizabeth was found safe and well in the Aboriginal camp sucking a possum bone.¹¹¹²

Such intimate encounters between families would inevitably involve cross-cultural dialogues that were very significant for those families. Some babysitting would have been done on a more business-styled footing, a fact intimated by Emily Skinner who had an ‘opportunity of seeing them and talking to some of the poor women “lubras” with their little piccanninies fastened on their backs’ at Longwood in central Victoria. Skinner noted that Aboriginal women were ‘living in the capacity of servants, and, I was told, made very good ones, being especially kind to children.’¹¹¹³ Other family reminiscences also recall the warm solace received by non-Indigenous women from Aboriginal people. James McCann recounted how ‘one old [Wadawurrung] lubra used to nurse me when I was a little fellow.’¹¹¹⁴ Solitary references may belie an intricate dependency some white families, especially white women separated from their husbands, forged with Aboriginal people.

THE WADAWURRUNG AND THE GOVERNMENT'S 'PROTECTION'

Increasingly in the 1850s and 1860s, there were public calls to 'provide for' the Aboriginal people of Victoria. A lengthy editorial in the *Argus* (17 March 1856) frequently punctuated with 'bitter indignation' at the Government's 'basest meanness and dishonesty in our treatment of this unhappy race', insisted upon the 'wretched pittance' allocated to Aboriginal affairs to be replaced 'for fair and even liberal treatment'. In what must have been a rather radical charge for a major metropolitan newspaper to demand of the Government, Samuel Wilson, the *Argus* editor, did not mince his words, expressing his dismay that: 'From the land taken from these people gold to the value of upwards of thirty millions of sterling has been raised. In addition to this, millions upon millions worth of produce has been taken...Of all these millions – from annual public revenue amounting to 2,792,152 pounds sterling, we are content to award 1,250 pounds.' Wilson was adamant that no expense should be spared and contended that:

We mean what we say, literally. We would feed and clothe every black in Victoria, and would do this regardless of expense. If it cost ten thousand – well! If twenty thousand – well! If a hundred thousand – still well! Were they able to strike a bargain for the land, we should gladly purchase it at hundreds of thousands of pounds. It is dishonest to withhold it, because they are ignorant and helpless. We would feed them and clothe them as long as a black was left amongst us, and when the last was gathered to that Creator of whom he at present knows so little, we should rejoice to think that at the last great day, he could not arraign us for having behaved towards him here below, like a tyrant, a coward, and a swindler.¹¹¹⁵

Increasingly, any discussion during the 1850s in relation to supplying Aboriginal people's physical and spiritual needs (for the two were usually viewed as inseparable) polarized into two camps, or viewpoints. Some writers opined that as they were dying out and their barbaric tendencies had not diminished, nothing should be done, bar providing for their immediate physical wants and recording as much as possible about this 'interesting branch of the human family' before they became extinct. Most favoured saving the youths by supporting the philanthropic works of concerned individuals, rather than Government initiatives involving capital expenditure.

Earlier in 1850 Thomas had been instructed to submit suggestions about reserves 'in places known to still be frequented by the aborigines' to which he opined that large reserves would be useless as their numbers were fast diminishing, their propensity to reside in the one place was non-existent and their speedy extinction was inevitable. Reserves of 640 acres for each tribe were all that he could recommend. Shortly afterwards, in 1852, Thomas highly recommended a community of Aboriginal people in Victoria be instituted made up of Aboriginal children who had been removed from their families in order to avert the extinction of the Aboriginal race. Thomas knew his proposals would be viewed as 'unfeeling' but considered it would be a 'deed of mercy'.¹¹¹⁶ The Victorian Government did not implement all of Thomas's proposals, making no legislative provisions for the legal removal of Aboriginal children from their families or any attempt to establish large reserves in areas where people continued to live predominately traditional lifestyles. In addition, the Government dissolved the Native Police Corps (1853)

and was not prepared to spend more than approximately 1,000 pounds per year on Aboriginal affairs. In 1856 a committee appointed by an assembly of the Church of England in Victoria to 'consider the condition of the aborigines' made similar recommendations to both Houses of Parliament. Several of the recommendations made by the Committee included the 'necessity' of separating Aboriginal people from the whites by creating a central depot for Aboriginal people. The report also emphasised the importance of separating half-caste children from their parents 'to the central establishment be specially encouraged'.¹¹¹⁷

In 1858, a Select Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria was appointed to enquire into the 'present condition of the Aborigines and the best means of alleviating their absolute wants'. A circular letter with accompanying questions was sent to people it believed could offer assistance. However, just as in the 1849 Select Committee that inquired into the efficacy of the Aboriginal Protectorate in Victoria – no Aboriginal witnesses were called. In relation to the Wadawurrung, responses were received from A. Porteous, Carngham (near Ballarat); C.W. Sherard, the Resident Warden at Ballarat; C. Shuter, the Police Magistrate, Bacchus Marsh; A. Fischen, Lal Lal; F. Ormond, Borriyallock; J.L. Currie, Wardy Yallock; D. Bunce, Botanical Gardens, Geelong; and F. Fyans, Balyang, Geelong. In general, the respondents who spoke about the Wadawurrung emphasised that the goldfields and the towns were unhealthy places for them and that the Wadawurrung population was rapidly decreasing. Many of the respondents also considered that the Wadawurrung should be disallowed from entering the townships and that land in the form of reserves should be set aside for the Wadawurrung. Many of the correspondents thought the Wadawurrung were doomed to extinction and that only very small remedial measures which would 'smooth the dying pillow' of their race were necessary. Some evidence of the depth of belief in their 'ultimate and speedy extinction' is the absence of a response from all correspondents bar one who spoke on behalf of Wadawurrung people to the committee's 13th question: 'Can you suggest any plan to the Committee by which they [Victorian Aboriginal people] could be saved from ultimate extinction?'

It is noteworthy that the majority of the correspondents were at pains to stress that the Government had not supplied any 'assistance in the form of clothing, food, or medical attendance' by the Government to the Aboriginal people of Victoria. All of the correspondents readily acknowledged that 'There is no paid medical officer for the aborigines'. A table of expenditure conveyed by the Colonial Treasurer detailed the expenditure by the Victorian Government 'on behalf of the Aborigines since 1851'. It illuminated how the Government of Victoria had expended the paltry sum of a little over 10 pounds (sterling) for 'medicines and medical attendance' on the 2,000 Aborigines of the colony of Victoria for the period 1851 to 1858.¹¹¹⁸

Sherard estimated that between Creswick, Burrumbeet, and Clunes there were about forty Aborigines comprising 10 men, 15 women, and 15 children. They were generally in good health. During the previous ten years the mortality had been very great, 'especially since the discovery of gold'. He listed intemperance and the consequences of exposure to weather as the principal causes of death. Their principal means of living was from obtaining their original food supplemented by food and clothing from settlers. He felt that if it was possible, it would be beneficial to keep the Aborigines from the different diggings. Shuter stated that there were about 29 adults and perhaps 12 children at Bacchus Marsh who, with few exceptions, were in

good health. He did not consider the mortality over the past ten years to be very remarkable, the causes of death in most instances being consumption and general decay. In 1857 a small supply of blankets, rugs, flour, tea, sugar, and tobacco was obtained from the Government at the request of Mrs. Mcleod, a resident in Bacchus Marsh, and distributed by the clerk of the bench. Their principal means of living was begging. He noted that there were some places in the district well suited for the purpose of Aboriginal reserves. Although he thought it would be beneficial to prevent the Aborigines from coming within a certain radius of towns, he preferred the option of

large aboriginal reserves [to be] established, presided over by competent persons, who, entering into their duties with spirit, would endeavor to reclaim them from their savage state. I am inclined to believe that, although the moral state of the aboriginal in this colony is low, he might with proper treatment be improved.¹¹¹⁹

The Wadawurrung, he noted visited Bacchus Marsh about once a year and they 'appear to obtain their means of living principally by begging from place to place. Occasionally they will do a day's work, for which they generally require to be paid in cash. They also obtain opossums easily, which is much used by them as an article of food'. He considered the establishment of reserves was the only way to save the Aborigines from extinction.

Fisken replied that there were 15 Aborigines belonging to the Lal Lal, Ballan, Merimu, and Baronighurk 'tribes'. They comprised nine males, five females, and one 'half-caste' male child five years of age. He considered the mortality over the previous decade had been remarkable, due largely to 'bronchitis, rheumatic pericarditis, psoriasis, and intemperance'. He could see no benefit in preventing Aborigines from entering townships.

Ormond estimated there were 40 Aboriginal people in his neighbourhood: the Mount Emu 'tribe' comprising 17; Friendly Creek, 10; Wardy Yallock, 13. With the exception of two 'half-castes' in the Mount Emu 'tribe', a girl aged 13 and a boy aged 11, everyone else was aged between 20 and 50. He stated that in the years 1853–55, a good many deaths had occurred from venereal disease and accidental deaths by fire whilst in a state of intoxication. Several had died from pulmonary consumption. According to Ormond

The Mount Emu tribe lived mostly on the charity of settlers, supplementing their living by catching fish and shooting wild fowl that they sold for money to buy rum... The aborigines in this district (Mount Emu, &c.) are quiet and have never committed any depredations against life or property. They are employed for sheep-washing, harvesting and cutting wood and were paid in money for these services.¹¹²⁰

He reflected upon how there were no Aboriginal reserves in his district although there were 'several places well suited for such a purpose' and thought the 'police could prevent the Aborigines from entering townships'.

Currie thought the 'remnants of the Emu Creek and Wardy Yallock tribes' numbered no more than between 12 to 20, aged between 20 and 40. He considered their condition was depraved and degraded. He noted that their mortality in proportion to their numbers had been very great, principally from pulmonary complaints, venereal disease, and the effects of intemperance. These people were dependent upon charity and they camped at stations and public houses. He felt it was highly desirable that these people had some kind of depot where they could obtain lodging and the common necessities of life, as he believed they frequently suffered from hunger, and in winter from cold. They were employed as stock keepers, and assisted with sheepwashing, and other services associated with shearing.

Bunce replied that he was told by Billy Gore, one of the Geelong 'tribe', that there were nine males and five females at Geelong. They were generally healthy, although over indulgent in strong drink. Bunce believed

that much might be done by settling them in a locality congenial to their former habits, allowing them to strip bark, dig for myrnong, burrow for porcupines [echidnas] and wombats, and other occupations which may be considered as a part of their nature, without the fear of legal enactments or coercion of any kind. The overseer or commandant of the community should be conversant with their habits and customs, and thoroughly understand their language. The latter qualification is of the highest importance.¹¹²¹

Fyans noted that when he arrived in the Geelong district in 1837 he was ordered to assemble all the Aboriginal population to receive gifts. Assisted by William Buckley all the Wadawurrung within 30 miles (50 kilometres) from Geelong were assembled, amounting to 297 men women and children. In 1858, Fyans considered that no more than 20 of these 297 people were alive.¹¹²²

The 1858 Select Committee's recommendations offered that reserves be formed for the various tribes on their traditional hunting ranges and be able to combine agriculture and the grazing of livestock. Concerned colonists with long associations with Wadawurrung people such as Morduant Maclean, a long term resident of Bacchus Marsh continued to petition the Government. In February 1859, Maclean informed William Thomas (the 'Guardian of Aborigines in Victoria') that he had written to the Surveyor-General recommending that an Aboriginal reserve be situated midway between Bacchus Marsh and the township of Meredith on the Moorabool River, which would be a central position for the remnants of the Moorabool and Bacchus Marsh clans.¹¹²³ William Thomas 'encouraged the application for land for the Bacchus marsh Aborigines' and continued to advise the Government about measures he thought would remediate the Aboriginal community's plight.¹¹²⁴ In July 1859, Thomas wrote to La Trobe proposing a comprehensive 'scheme of guardianship of the Aborigines in the colony of Victoria.' To supply the wants of Aboriginal people in the 'settled and intermediate districts' - which would encompass all of Wadawurrung country - he recommended that depots be established in convenient locations. Aboriginal tribes, he argued, beyond these districts should have extensive tracts of land allotted to them under the guidance of missionaries and five trustees. Thomas was emphatic that these reserves should be distant from squatters but if a squatter needed to be removed, then so be it. Thomas felt the Government should not spare any

expense. In his proposal he recommended that at Bacchus Marsh, the remnant of the Bacchus Marsh and Moorabool River clans could be unified and one depot would be sufficient. A grant of land of 3000 acres should be made in a central position between Bacchus Marsh and the Moorabool River. He assured the Government that local identities such as Mordaunt Maclean and Norman Macleod would assist. On the Barwon River, near Inverness (presumably Thomas means Inverleigh) or Lake Colac, Thomas proposed to unite the Barrabool and Leigh River clans into one depot, where local Correspondents could advise.¹¹²⁵

In May 1859, Maclean, wrote to William Thomas informing him that 'about 50 Ballarat and Mt. Emu Aborigines had assembled in Bacchus Marsh having heard that blankets and provisions were to be distributed. He noted they were very destitute and famished.'¹¹²⁶ A petition appeared in the *Argus* titled 'A pamphlet originally printed for private circulation in Geelong', entitled *A plea on behalf of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Victoria* considered the legitimate claims that a very visible dispossessed people could make upon colonists.

... firstly we are in their territory, and have taken possession of their lands; secondly we have deprived them of their former mode of subsistence; thirdly they are in a state of heathenism and ignorance; and finally they are at our very doors, we meet them in our path every day.¹¹²⁷

The recent death of a prominent Geelong Wadawurrung man (Billy Gore) was referred to, and it was asked if Billy's compatriots Harry and Wurrijack were fast following in the footsteps of Billy. The pamphlet suggested the removal of Aboriginal people from their Country based on ludicrously false premises – a presage for the future Stolen Generations legislation.

Let the whole of the blacks near the towns and in the populated districts be removed to one of the islands in the straits, with a staff of guardians or protectors and teachers. They have little or no attachment to localities now - we question if they ever had - and they would not therefore feel their removal to be a hardship on that account...No traders or others would of course be allowed to settle in or visit the island, and the blacks would be compelled to go for their meals at stated hours, and for rest at night to the establishment of their protectors, and the foundation of habits of regularity, which would be of infinite service when their mental culture came to be attempted, would be laid. The men would have no opportunities of procuring spirits, and the women would be removed from that prostitution so fearfully prevalent, so universal, in fact, amongst them.¹¹²⁸

In response to the 1858 Select Committee recommendations, the Victorian Government in June 1860 established a Central Board, the first of its kind in Australia, with a nine-point plan. Amongst these recommendations were the establishment of permanent reserves, prohibiting Aboriginals from visiting towns and goldfields, appointing of local guardians whose function was to act as honorary correspondents to the Central Board (for the Protection of Aborigines) and to supply foodstuffs, clothing and other supplies. Other recommendations included the erection of a hospital specifically for the use of Aboriginal people and a central asylum for children and young people.

William Thomas, who had been instrumental in the formulation of the recommendations, had urged that the Government should ensure that Aboriginal people were consulted widely about the choice of sites where the reserves were to be located, believing that this had been the fundamental reason for past failures. Thomas also implored that the Government should 'not on any account give way to despair but should determinedly try all the possible means that humanity could devise to arrest the decay of the race' and that it 'must make pounds, shillings and pence take second place as did the English Government in abolishing slavery. The ten thousand pounds Thomas advised would be sufficient to 'settle the aboriginal question throughout the colony of Victoria' was never realized. In the First Report of the Central Board of Aborigines in 1861 their projected expenditure estimates were 11,550 pounds but the Victorian Government effectively 'crippled' Aboriginal affairs by allocating only 5,000 pounds. The Board advised this amount was 'quite inadequate to supply the pressing physical wants of the various tribes and left no room for providing for aboriginal and half-caste children, or for training schools'. The Board thus obstructed from implementing any measures aside from very piecemeal ones, resorted to supplicating the Government to amend the Act relating to Aboriginal people, to enable the CBA 'full power to order as to their residence and maintenance; and to order, also, as to the disposal of orphan and deserted children.' The rationale for this and other measures of controlling Aboriginal peoples' lives such as 'prohibiting [them] from visiting towns and goldfields' was stated to be an attempt to 'protect them as far as possible, and to a certain extent to maintain them'. Other measures too which appeared to be more progressive, such as the call for permanent reserves to be made for them to reside upon, were in fact intended for their 'better management and control' rather than as a bestowing of freehold land for the original owners of the land.

In an appendix attached to the CBA's First Report 'settlers and others' (but no Aboriginal people), were asked to provide their opinions on 'what means would you suggest for adoption as most likely to be beneficial to the natives in your district?' The replies are almost unanimous in their support for stronger prohibition controls, greater supply of food, shelter and clothing, their forcible exclusion from the goldfields, the forcible separation of children from their community and the provision of land reserves or depots exclusively for their use (to receive handouts, cultivate crops and raise livestock). Many respondents considered that nothing could be done 'to better their condition' and opinions were divided as to the perceived usefulness of forming reserves for Aboriginal people. Of the respondents on Wadawurrung country George Armitage estimated that in the Geelong & Barrabool district there were only 20 Wadawurrung people. He wrote that they 'live chiefly by begging. We have been in the habit of supplying them with rations when we considered them really in need. There are only two or three employed as servants, and these only occasionally. They cannot be induced to stay long in one place.' JN Taylor reckoned that in the Bacchus Marsh, Ballaarat, Buninyong and Mount Emu districts there were 255 Wadawurrung people residing on country. Taylor considered that

Their moral and social condition is very low and depraved; drunkenness is very prevalent. They chiefly get their living by making opossum rugs and prostitution. The farmers give constant employment to them, and many are engaged during the wool and potatoe seasons amongst the settlers. Many would be glad to get constant employment of a light nature.¹¹²⁹

In light of the falling population levels and dire predictions of their impending extinction it was deemed sufficient in the 1860s to generally follow a negative policy of centralizing the doling out of food and shelter and to reject almost all initiatives directed at empowering Aboriginal people. Typical of this type of advice to the Government was Taylors' who suggested

the appointment of a gentleman as guardian, who is fully acquainted with their habits, and that he should reside on the reserve set apart for their use, that he should distribute food and clothing, and hold out inducements to those who would wish to engage in cultivating a portion of the reserve. If the officer appointed would take an interest in this employment, I have every hope of success, and from my knowledge of their general dispositions I feel certain many might be made useful members of society.¹¹³⁰

The Board appointed a number of Local Guardians in Wadawurrung country including Charles Mackin, Charles Read, Henry Andrews and JM Garratt at Geelong; W Dennis at Birregurra; James Young and Mordaunt Maclean at Bacchus Marsh and Andrew Porteous at Carngham. In the CBA's second report (1862) two areas of land on Wadawurrung country are listed as being reserved for 'Aboriginal purposes'. 640 acres at Moorabool and Werribee was gazetted on 26 June 1860 and 3 acres at Karngun in February 1861. It has proved impossible to locate where these reserves were and whether they were ever put to 'Aboriginal purposes'. A further one-acre area of land was gazetted at Duneed in June 1861. Local Guardian Andrew Porteous at Carngham, near Ballarat did make enquiries and applications on behalf of Wadawurrung people for a grant of land, of which no action was taken – indicating it was ignored or disallowed. Even the issue of where to locate the Mission and Government reserves for Aboriginal people was muddled by new goldfields and townships springing up in all locales of Victoria. The CBA's second report commented: 'it is not a matter for surprise that a site, which is admirably adapted to the purposes of an Aboriginal settlement today, becomes tomorrow useless and unfit, in consequence of the shifting of the white population [in search of gold]'.¹¹³¹

The CBA's fifth report in 1866 largely mirrored the two previous reports in as much as the avowed concern by the correspondents about the consumption of alcohol and the decrease in their numbers. At Geelong John Garratt's report ran as follows:

The actual number of Aboriginals belonging to the Geelong tribe is only five (5), viz. :— Jerry (king), Timboo, Jemmy, Harry, and Eliza. The latter is now, and has for some time past been in Gipps Land. Although the number is so small it is quite a general thing for a large number of blacks from Colac to visit Geelong during the summer months, to whom it is necessary to distribute clothing and rations. I regret to have to report that the thirst for intoxicating drinks is as great as ever, and the miserable remnant of a once powerful tribe is fast drinking itself to the grave. The practice of selling clothing for drink is still common notwithstanding all our efforts to prevent it, and there really seem but scanty hopes of doing any permanent good to those poor unfortunates. It will be remembered by the Board that on the death of the aboriginal female, Ellen, some months since, I caused summonses to issue against three notorious publicans, who had been constantly in the habit of supplying the blacks with drink, and I am happy to report that the result of such cases (reported to the Board at the time) has had a very salutary effect on the trade.¹¹³²

At Bacchus Marsh, the report about the Wadawurrung was more positive. Mr Young, the correspondent hints at the disrespect the Wadawurrung have for the measly quantity of meat supplied for their needs by the Government.

Respecting the condition of the blacks who visit Bacchus Marsh, Mr. Young says :- I have to inform you that in April, 1864, I distributed blankets to twenty-one Aborigines. In May and July 1865, I have distributed blankets and rations to eleven Aborigines, six, males and five females. This year I have received in stores only 15 lbs. of tobacco, and I have still a supply of flour, tea, sugar, tobacco, and blankets. None of the Aborigines have been brought up to the police office this year for drunkenness, and I have noticed only one or two cases of insobriety among them. Their general health seems good, and they are in very good spirits, and satisfied with the rations provided for them. They have assisted this year in digging potatoes, and have been paid in cash and butchers' meat; the latter, they often remind me, should be furnished by the Board, and I certainly think a little of it would, be of great service to them.¹¹³³

Increasingly throughout the 1860s there was concern expressed by some Correspondents as to their 'possible moral improvement'. Whilst it was noted that 'the general condition of the blacks is improved in the districts where stores have been sent', (yet persistent calls for medical help were knocked back by the Board), there was also a pervading opinion that 'as regards their moral condition, I can report no improvement'. John Currie for example lamented that he could think only of 'enabling them to pass the few remaining years they may have to exist with some degree of comfort' by collecting them into one locality at the 'beginning of winter, where they would be under police supervision'. He added that it would be worthwhile to 'erect a building in which they could lodge, and have a supply of warm clothing, and a regular supply of food issued to them'. He conceded that

from their improvident habits they suffer extremely during the winter months from cold, and often, it is to be feared, also from hunger. They are incapable of any employment that requires constant application. To fix, or rather attempt to fix them permanently to any particular spot would, I believe, so interfere with their natural migratory habits as to defeat the object in view, and if enforced would, I believe, prove a cruelty in place of a kindness.¹¹³⁴

Maclean at Bacchus Marsh concurred, adding

From what I have seen of the natives in this neighbourhood, I fear it is hopeless to attempt to better their condition—their existence is passed in wandering about, generally in the vicinity of public-houses. They occasionally sell a few fish, or wild fowl, and often perform a "corrobbery" for the amusement of white spectators, after which one of the party carries a hat round to receive contributions, and I believe almost every penny they collect- is expended in intoxicating liquors, which they manage to obtain through some means or other.¹¹³⁵

The intent of the CBA was as the Protectorate had been, to civilize and Christianise them, in that order of importance. The fiercely independent nature of Aboriginal people, namely their refusal to come under 'the control of the honorary correspondents', collectively work for a master and refrain from frequenting the 'towns and goldfields' was perceived as a slur on their moral character. The excessive consumption of 'ardent spirits' by Aboriginal people was viewed as the greatest obstacle to this goal, and to this end a great deal of advice was solicited from the 52 Correspondents across Victoria as to how to ameliorate the condition of these 'helpless children'. At first, draconian styled measures such as imprisoning 'the publican who sells spirits to the blacks' and 'adequate punishment inflicted on the black receiving the drink' were consistently recommended by the CBA to the Victorian Government. However, it was acknowledged by all that Aboriginal people had a 'ready sale for opossum skin rugs and native implements, with the proceeds of which they can purchase liquors without difficulty' and frequented the goldfields as gold fossickers themselves. Honorary correspondents on Wadawurrung Country such as Andrew Porteous at Carngham, near Ballarat, certainly ascribed to this view, and considered both reactive and proactive measures were necessary to stem the abuse of alcohol consumption among Wadawurrung people near the goldfields and towns:

A few of the young men are generally employed on stations, and receive a small remuneration, but all they receive, both for labor and opossum rugs, is spent on intoxicating liquors, and I fear they will not leave off this evil habit unless prohibited from visiting the goldfields and are allowed to settle on some portion of land where they would take an interest in improving it.

Porteous's concern was not isolated. The same issue arose during the Aboriginal Protectorate period (1838-1850), but reached its zenith during the gold rush. As already outlined, gold fossicking, trade in possum skin rugs, baskets, primary produce, and employment on squatter's stations after 1850 afforded Wadawurrung people a new degree of economic independence. Damaging social effects from alcohol abuse and absence of paternal control were a concern re-iterated many times by well-intentioned Correspondents and Guardians. In his June 1871 report, Porteous advocated a pass system, as he found the local Wadawurrung people could not be restricted and regulated sufficiently to keep them from their commercial activities in the goldfields and towns:

The tribe still follow their occupations of fishing, hunting and making of opossum rugs, which they barter for stores, but often for grog. It is almost impossible to keep them from visiting the towns, and yet they have no business to transact in those towns except begging for grog and making themselves liable to be arrested under the Vagrant Act. They have no hunting field nor fishing river within these towns, and if they have anything to sell let them apply to the local guardian for a pass for that day, to be within a town to be named in that pass. Most of the tribe are old and feeble and unable to do any work. The young men are able and willing to work, and some of them can do work as well as any white man, but they are like any of the white men, and would spend every shilling they earn upon grog, if they can possibly get it done.

The frustration of Honorary Correspondents such as Porteous and others to restrict Aboriginal people from frequenting the goldfields, readily obtaining money and over indulging in alcohol, combined with the Victorian Government's persistent refusals to fund Aboriginal affairs adequately for anything except food, clothes and shelter, greatly contributed to a philosophy of centralising Aboriginal people onto a few reserves. The persistent refusal by successive Victorian governments to legislate and fund Aboriginal policy in a positive pro-active manner was arguably the tipping point for Correspondents such as Porteous and others to call for dictatorial control over Aboriginal people as the only feasible means of caring for them. In the CBA's fourth report (1864) the matter of forcibly removing Aboriginal children is officially broached and it was Aboriginal children who lived in proximity to the goldfields who were primarily on the minds of the CBA to remove from their families.

On enquiry it was found that the blacks are reluctant to give up their children. They are usually very kind to their offspring, and they are jealous of any interference with them by the whites; so that, up to the present time, the Board have not removed any of the younger members; but Mr. Porteous, of Carngham, is in communication with Mr. Green respecting some of the children in his district, who can be taken away without offence to the tribe to which they belong.¹¹³⁶

The CBA made it abundantly clear that they sought much greater power to intervene in Aboriginal peoples' lives by making 'urgent solicitations for some amendment of the laws affecting the blacks'.

Already there are a great many children at Coranderrk receiving instruction, but arrangements could easily be made to provide for the education of a larger number if the Board had authority to take them away from the tribes with which they are living...Until an Act has been passed by the Parliament authorising the removal of half-caste girls and orphans against the wishes of those persons who may have assumed charge of them, the Central Board will not be able to use the means at their disposal for their education, nor to protect them from the perils which now surround them.¹¹³⁷

In the next CBA report, the same refrain was voiced.

The black and half-caste girls. These the Board are unable to protect. They cannot take them from their tribes by force, and rarely is it possible to persuade them to leave of their own accord. They hang on the outskirts of civilization, a disgrace to the colony, and a standing rebuke to those who profess to care for decency and to be offended by the constant exhibition of immorality and vice. Without the power to improve it, the Central Board has brought under their consideration constantly the sad condition of these poor children of the wilderness; and at present they know that it would be useless to urge the Government to bring in a Bill to amend the law.¹¹³⁸

The tenor of the CBA's calls for removing Aboriginal children from their kin became increasingly emphatic.

Unless the laws relating to the Aborigines are altered the Central Board will not be able to perfect their plans. They continue to supply stores and clothing; they endeavor to prevent the open sale of intoxicating liquors; they cause medical aid and medical comforts to be furnished to the sick; and they have formed a station where adult blacks and children can be educated; but still they feel that the more important work is left undone. A great number of black and half-caste children of both sexes are wandering about the country in idleness, and associating with persons who lead them into bad paths. It is these the Central Board would wish to reclaim; but under present circumstances they can do but little, and that little feebly and ill. They might do much, and do it well, if the Bill which they have prepared, or some modification of it, were made law. And it is not unreasonable to hope that Parliament, which has provided liberally for the physical wants of the blacks, will gladly take into its consideration a measure having for its object the better management of the Aborigines.¹¹³⁹

A long report by Mr. Andrew Porteous, the Honorary Correspondent of the Board at Carngham, 'respecting the condition of the Aborigines under his care' is reproduced in full to highlight the Wadawurrung's earnest efforts to equip themselves of how best to deal with the changing legal, economic and political situation they found themselves embroiled in – on their terms.

The Mount Emu tribe of Aborigines are pretty comfortable, and seem well contented with the provisions and clothing supplied by the Central Board; yet they cannot be induced to remain for any length of time in one place. Although supplied with sufficient provisions, they prefer roaming about from place to place, depending on charities, and when hard pressed they return for a supply from the Board's stores. The tribe generally roam about in small bands of from ten to twelve individuals. This may be accounted for from the tribe being composed of the remnant of four tribes, viz., Mount Emu, Mount Cole, Ballarat, and Wardyallock tribes. They occasionally meet all together but it is their custom for each tribe to travel by itself. When supplying clothing to the tribe, I have always made it a rule to brand every article, and I have not known or heard of any of the tribe selling their branded clothing. In supplying the blankets I have always supplied each aboriginal with a single blanket at one time. I think everything supplied should be branded, or half of the articles will be bartered away for a trifle.

In supplying rations, when the tribe is settled at this place, I give each of them about 4lbs. of flour twice a week, and 2 lbs. of sugar, / lb. tea, twice a week. When the tribe is leaving this place, I give each about 10 lbs. flour, ilbs. sugar, lb. tea, also two figs of tobacco. The tribe still continue to make opossum rugs, and, if steady, might make a good living by it, as they generally get 20s. to 30s.[shillings] for each rug, which they can make in about fourteen days. The women also employ themselves in making baskets and nets, which they sell to the Europeans. A few of the young

men are generally employed on stations, and receive a small remuneration; but I regret much to have to report that all they receive, both for labor and opossum rugs, is spent on intoxicating liquors, and I fear that they will not leave off this evil habit unless prohibited from visiting the gold fields, and are allowed to settle on some portion of land where they would take an interest in improving it. A number of the tribe have requested me to apply to the Government to reserve a block of land near Chepstowe for their use, where they might make a paddock, and grow wheat and potatoes, and erect permanent residences. I believe most of the tribe would remain permanently there if the land was reserved for their use; their hunting is in the neighborhood, and there is plenty of water. The young men of the tribe seem to be very anxious about it; I believe this has arisen from hearing of the comfort and happiness of the Aborigines at Coranderrk. I think the Board might take this matter seriously into consideration, as it would add considerably to the happiness of the Aborigines, and it would be little or nothing for the Government to reserve two sections for a year or two while the tribe lasted. A few more years will see them extinct.

The Board will recollect that in the early part of the present year seven youths were sent from this tribe to the Board's establishment at Coranderrk. They left Carngham at three o'clock a.m., in a spring cart, to get the first train from Ballarat; and by nine o'clock the same morning, the parents of four of the youths took the road and followed their children, and by slow but continued marches found Coranderrk, and their children comfortable and happy under the care of Mr. Green. The parents remained at Coranderrk for upwards of four months, and then returned to inform the tribe of the comfort and happiness they had witnessed in the blackfellows' township, as they called it. On bearing their story, which was very interesting, the king made up his mind to take the whole tribe, and go to see the blackfellows' township; and I have been informed that the Hopkins tribe intend to join them, and proceed to Coranderrk. Should they carry this into execution, and see the comforts they have at Coranderrk, I think Mr. Green might persuade them to leave all the youths of this tribe to be instructed; and should the aged of the tribe prefer to return to their own localities, I think the Board should endeavor to have a block of land reserved for their use, that they might be enabled to imitate the industry they had seen at Coranderrk.¹¹⁴⁰

In March 1866 William Thomas confirmed this report in his journal. He wrote of how he was visited by a 'mob of Blacks amounting to 14' at his house in Melbourne. Thomas jotted down their names and noted they were all from the 'Ballarat and Mt Emu Tribe' and that they were on their way to visit Coranderrk. The following day two more very elderly Wadawurrung people ('Old King Jonathon and his aged Lubra Borongirgerk') came to Thomas' house – also on their way to Coranderrk.¹¹⁴¹ In the CBA's Sixth Report John Green pronounced after a tour of the Colony of Victoria that 'the Aborigines are both physically and morally improved within the last ten years, especially within the last five. I therefore cannot see any reason to conclude that they will in a few years become extinct.'¹¹⁴² This assertion was very much at odds with some correspondents who prophesied as they had done in previous years that the Wadawurrung and other Victorian Aboriginal people would be extinct in a few years. The following excerpts from Correspondent's on Wadawurrung Country appeared in the CBA's Sixth Report and were widely reported in newspapers of the time.

The Aborigines in this locality are under the charge of Mr. Andrew Porteous, of Prettytower, Stockyard Hill. They number forty-two and consist of twenty-four men and eighteen women. Mr. Porteous reports that the blacks still indulge in intoxicating drinks whenever they can get them.¹¹⁴³

That the Central Board could in nine years effect a complete revolution in the habits and modes' of life of the Aborigines (contaminated as they have been by contact with the lowest class of whites—some seeking to rob them of their earnings, others striving for their own selfish ends to get the control of them) was not to be expected; but enough has been done to prove that the blacks can be made to occupy a position neither mean nor despicable—for they can be taught to labor and to expend their earnings judiciously...The Central Board have urged again and again that an Act should be passed providing for the management and protection of the Aborigines ; and they now learn with satisfaction that the Honorable J. J. Casey, the Minister of Justice, has prepared a Bill and is about to introduce it to Parliament.¹¹⁴⁴

GEELONG. Mr. Green reports that there are only two Aborigines of this tribe now alive, and they drink very hard. They are well supplied with food. He states that he saw seven blacks at this place, and they all promised to go to the station at Coranderrk.

BIRREGURRA. There are eighteen blacks belonging to this tribe, consisting of eleven males and seven females, including three half-castes and one child. Mr. Green states that he did not see any of the Aborigines at Birregurra, as they were away in the bush killing rabbits. A married couple is staying with a Mr. Murray of Colac, and they earn fifteen shillings a week. Mr. Alexander Dennis, who takes charge of the blacks here, is in favor of the present system of distributing stores to them, and states that whenever any of them are sick the doctor always attends them.

Mr. Green reports that he visited Carngham, but that he did not see any of the Aborigines. He says that the tribe numbers about sixty-six.¹¹⁴⁵

We beg to suggest that steps be taken to induce the Aborigines who some time back left Coranderrk and settled on the Alexandra goldfields to return to the station, and that an attempt be made to get the Aborigines who frequent Geelong and Mordialloc to take up their abode with their friends at this place.¹¹⁴⁶

In September, 1866, Mr. James Young, of Bacchus Marsh, reported— Since my last report, which extended to July, 1865, the largest number of blacks who have visited this district at one time was fifteen. That number remained here a fortnight; since then I have had occasional visits from two or three at a time. There has only been one case of drunkenness brought before the police bench. There has been one death, an old lubra, apparently about eighty years old. I am happy to say that

their conduct upon the whole has been good, and that, with the clothing provided for them by the Government and what they procure themselves, they seem pretty comfortable. The blacks are now supplied with rations from a store at contract price. I have no doubt that there will be a considerable saving effected by supplying them with weekly rations as required, by order on the store, instead of sending annual supplies, as formerly, from Melbourne. In conclusion, I think that the regulations adopted by the Central Board for, the supply of clothing, blankets, and rations are very satisfactory.¹¹⁴⁷

The Correspondent's reports to the CBA continued in this vein throughout the 1860s. The focal points of their commentary on the Wadawurrung remained rooted in their belief that the Wadawurrung were heading inexorably towards extinction and that a 'smoothing of the dying pillow' for the 'remant' who remained was all that was practicable. Many correspondents further considered that to force the Wadawurrung people to live at Coranderk Aboriginal Station was the only viable 'charitable' action that was available towards their race.

The Aborigines at Geelong are under the care of Messrs. J.M. Garratt and Charles Read, and in September, 1866, Mr. Garratt reported as under:- The stores are distributed periodically under the supervision of Mr. Charles Read, my colleague correspondent taking care as much as possible to induce the blacks to go out of town to consume them. Indeed, Mr. Read has supplied one of the neighboring farmers, who appears a trustworthy man, with rations for the use of the natives who camp on and around his homestead, so that they may have as little inducement as possible to visit the town at all. Ten years ago the number of the Geelong blacks was considerable, now only four males remain as a wretched remnant of a once powerful tribe. One man, Billy, died during the year, the particulars of whose death were duly reported at the time. Intoxicating drink is still their bane, and notwithstanding that every effort is made to deter publicans and others from supplying liquor, it almost invariably happens that a visit to Geelong is accompanied by a drunken bout, ending in a night in the lock-up. We are utterly at a loss to recommend any plan, the adoption of which would in any material degree lessen this evil, and, however sad it may appear to have to say it, we are forced to report our decided conviction that nothing but complete extinction awaits, not merely the Geelong tribe, but all the neighboring families of Aborigines also. We would report with very great pleasure an instance of kindness on the part of our blackfellows which proves them to be susceptible of fine and noble instincts and feelings. The case is as follows :—A child, two years old, was lost at the Little River ; diligent search was made by the neighbors in vain ; the disconsolate father applied to me for the assistance of the blacks ; they went, and for several days were diligently and intelligently engaged in the search. They were not successful, the poor child never having been found, but the father expressed to me his deep gratitude to these simple, kindhearted men for their exertions. In the matter of clothing, we would suggest that blankets and shirts of some peculiar color and texture should be used so as to prevent the possibility of sale or exchange for drink.

In September, 1867, Mr. J. M. Garratt reported as follows on the general condition of the Aborigines at Geelong:- Three blackfellows only now remain of the once numerous and powerful Barrabool tribe, viz., Jerry King Dandanook, Harry, and Billy Gore. On Christmas Day last Timboo was buried. He was the most intelligent of the survivors, having learned English in Mr. Tuckfield's school years ago. The three men now left employ their time principally in roaming about the country between here and Queenscliff and the Heads, with occasional visits to Geelong for rations and clothes, which are distributed to them as they require from the stores supplied by the Board, and which are placed under the care of Mr. Charles Read, my fellow-correspondent (Mr. Henry Andrews having left the district). I am pained to have to report that the blacks still indulge in the use of intoxicating drink to a frightful extent whenever they visit town, and all my vigilance in watching them and giving instructions to the police to lay information against publicans supplying them with drink is unavailing. During a recent visit to Melbourne they were impressed with the notion that they ought to marry, and I fully believe that, if they could be induced to reside on one of the Government establishments and wives supplied, they would be much improved in condition. They are, however, so firmly wedded to their native soil that it is most difficult to induce them to reside anywhere else. These three men are most warmly attached to myself and Mr. Read, and would do anything for any member of our families. I would strongly urge upon the Board the desirability of getting these three men removed to Mr. Green's establishment [Coranderrk], as I am certain that unless this can be done a very short time will bring them to death.¹¹⁴⁸

Andrew Porteous reporting on the northern Wadawurrung clans in the mid 1860s and early 1870s reiterated his concerns that the Wadawurrung remained susceptible to the baneful effects of alcohol but also noted the Wadawurrung's movements towards accommodating the capitalist economy whilst maintaining their traditional economy.

Mr. Andrew Porteous, honorary correspondent at Carngham, reported in October, 1866, on the condition of the Aborigines as follows :— The Mount Emu tribe still prefer to roam about in small bands from station to station and the various goldfields, returning at short intervals for a supply of the Board's stores. They still continue to hunt the opossum and make rugs, for which they find a ready sale; other game is very scarce in the district. The women also continue to make nets and baskets. About eight months ago, the chief of the tribe, with a number of others, visited Coranderrk, and stayed there a few weeks. On his return he described everything that he had seen, and he thought that the arrangements at Coranderrk were a great improvement on the former habits of the blackfellows. Some of the young men of the tribe after seeing, and I suppose practising a little of the industry at Coranderrk, when they returned, were very anxious to get a job of fencing, as they said they could do it as well as the whitefellows. I have since seen some of them at work fencing, and doing the work very well. The aged of the tribe cannot be induced to remain at work more than an hour or two at a time. I still continue to supply the Board's stores in small quantities, what will do them for a few days only; although I have not known any of them to barter away their rations, yet if they had a larger quantity in their possession at one time I believe they would give

it away for grog. There is a slight improvement towards temperance in the tribe, as a number of the greatest drunkards have died, yet some of them would still give almost anything they possess for drink. Blankets and other clothing I have always branded before giving them, and I think this should be always done, or otherwise they will part with the article that is not branded. As a proof of this, a number of the tribe on their way home from Coranderrk were supplied with blankets at Bacchus Marsh, and before they reached Carngham some of them had disposed of them. The number of the tribe at present, as entered in my book, is fifty-seven.

In a report dated 20th September, 1867, Mr. Andrew Porteous, of Carngham, writes:- The condition of the Aborigines is not much altered since my last report. The tribe at present numbers forty-seven, namely, twenty-six males and twenty-one females. They continue to hunt such game as can be found in the district. The opossum is plentiful, and they make rugs with the skins. They also fish in such lakes and creeks as fish can be found in. They sell the opossum rugs, and sometimes offer fish for sale, with the proceeds of which they supply themselves with rations, and sometimes with clothes, such as hats, handkerchiefs, and some of them with boots. The tribe are seldom all together, but travel about from station to station in bands of six or eight.

During the month of July last, it being wet and cold, a large number of the tribe camped with me, and the Board's stores were very acceptable, as the weather was such that they could not hunt. Since then they have been travelling amongst the stations, only a few calling for rations. The stores supplied by the Board are all of the best quality, and give great satisfaction to the Aborigines. I have made no change in the manner of distributing stores. Each man receives a blanket, one serge shirt, one twill shirt, and a pair of trousers, and each woman a blanket and one dress; and to prevent them disposing of any article, I invariably brand each with oil paint. When they are camped with me I supply each twice a week with a small quantity of rations, and when they leave or make a call for rations, I give each about two lbs. of flour and 3 lbs. of sugar, with a proportion of tea, and lb. of tobacco and 1 lb. of soap. I regret much that I cannot yet inform the Board that the Aborigines have taken any dislike to intoxicating liquors, as whenever they can get it they get intoxicated, yet I do not think that they crave after it so much as they used to do. Perhaps this may be accounted for from the fact that a number of the most intemperate of the tribe have died from its effects, and some of the steady ones frequently tell the others that "blackfellow soon all gone if drink much grog."

The tribe is, I believe, as comfortable as they can wish to be; as there are plenty of stores for them when they wish to call for them, and during the year there has been no expense incurred for doctors. There has been a little sickness, but a little slight medicine has generally restored them to health. I cannot conclude this report without mentioning the shrewdness of James Miller and David Smith in tracing out what was important evidence against the murderers of Mr. Burke. Having searched out the pistols buried under a log, and tracked the horses to near the spot where the murder took place, they returned home, and James Miller told me that he believed

the gold was in Searle's stable, as it had not been properly searched, and that it must be concealed in a drain that ran through the stable. This was on Friday, and I told him and David to take horses, and they could go on Monday and search the stable. Something prevented them going on Monday, and on Tuesday, when on their way, they met Mr. Hill at Smythesdale with the gold taken from the very spot where Miller supposed it to be concealed. It certainly was fortunate that they did not go on Friday to search, or the link of conviction would not have been so complete against the murderers. I have just received a letter from the Borough Council of Buninyong, requesting me to send as many Aborigines as possible to Buninyong, as they are determined to get up a grand coroboree on the arrival of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. I have replied, and pointed out the danger, and even, risk, to the Aborigines' lives to allow them to congregate near any large town. As a proof of this, last summer the Mount Emu and Hopkins tribe met at Ballarat, and gave a public coroboree, and the consequence was, that the Aborigines got so intoxicated for about a week that two of the Mount Emu tribe died shortly after returning to their district, and many others lingered in a sickly state for months. I have therefore declined to comply with the request, unless sanctioned by the Central Board, and the Board will please say whether the request may be complied with or not.¹¹⁴⁹

Throughout the later part of the 1860s and the 1870s the tone of Porteous' (and other Correspondents) reports became increasingly more paternalistic and he actively advocates for the Government to adopt more controlling measures to curb the Wadawurrung's ability to maintain their traditional lifestyles.

The Aborigines in the vicinity of Carngham are under the charge of Mr. Andrew Porteous of Pretty Tower, Stockyard Hill, and he reports, in November 1869— That the stores and clothing provided by the Board for the use of the Aborigines are quite sufficient and of good quality. Each Aborigine that has applied has been supplied with a blanket, and the men with trousers, twill and serge shirts, the women with skirts and jackets. Last year some of the Aborigines disposed of some of their clothing, notwithstanding that they were all branded. This year, before supplying any of them, I requested that each of them should produce the old blanket and show it to me. Some of them, however, were unable to do so, and others borrowed an old one to show. This year I have numbered all the clothing, as well as branded them, and kept a note, of each one's number, and told them that, unless they produce the same blanket and other clothing next year, they would get no fresh supply. This, I think, has had some effect, as none of them have, as yet, parted with their clothing. The rations I supply, as usual, to all that are staying here. I give twice a week to each adult about four pounds of flour, one pound of sugar, and two ounces of tea, one fig of tobacco, and a small piece of soap. When they are leaving or make a call, I give them about eight days' supply. I have never heard of any of them parting with rations, but I believe that they would do so if they had a large quantity in their possession.

They still hunt and. make a number of rugs with the opossum skins, which they sell at from ten to twenty shillings each, according to size. They also fish, when fish can be had, and sometimes offer fish for sale ; they still indulge in intoxicating drink when they can get it, and until some sharp measures are taken to punish the publicans and others for supplying them with drink, and also to punish them for getting drunk, I have little hope of seeing any reform amongst them, as I have already informed the Board that I think a number of the Aborigines, in every tribe, might provide everything in clothing that they require, and also keep themselves for the greater part of the year. This, I think, would tend greatly to check intoxication amongst them. I believe that all the strong, healthy men of each tribe earn as much money during shearing and harvest season as would purchase sufficient clothing and keep them half the year. This is the very money that keeps themselves and the whole tribe for weeks in intoxication, and then they apply for food and clothing from the Board. Were they compelled to provide for themselves, and punished for getting intoxicated, then we may expect to see a change, but not till then.

In June 1871 Mr. Porteous states— The number of Aborigines upon my book and receiving aid from the Board are as follows:—Seventeen men, aged from 30 to 65 years; thirteen women, aged from 35 to 65 years. The tribe still follow their occupations of fishing, hunting, and making of opossum rugs, which they barter for stores, but often for grog, a habit which they still cling to, and for which they would give everything they possess on earth, so as to obtain the cursed draught. I think what would prove a great check to their intemperate habits, if the police throughout the colony were instructed to, arrest under the Vagrant Act any Aborigine that they found within the boundary of any city, borough, or town without having a written pass from their local guardian. This would tend greatly to make them keep in the country districts, where the temptation to take grog is not half so great as it is in towns. It is almost impossible to keep them for any length of time from visiting the towns, and yet they have no business to transact in those towns except begging for grog and making themselves liable to be arrested under the Vagrant Act. They have no hunting field nor fishing river within those towns, and if they have anything to sell let them apply to their local guardian for a pass for that day, to be within a town to be named in the pass. The most of the tribe are old and feeble and unable to do any work. The young men of the tribe are able and willing to work, and some of them can do work as well as any white man ; but they are like many of the white men, and would spend every shilling they earn upon grog, if they can possibly get it done. Since I last wrote you I have to report two deaths in the tribe, namely, Mary, aged about 55 years, wife of John King; and Jerry, aged about 65 years. They are both interred in the Beaufort cemetery¹⁵⁰

The Victorian Government, commencing in 1869 enacted Acts of Parliament designed to 'provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria'. These draconian Acts enabled the strict regulation of Wadawurrung (and all Victorian Aboriginal) people's lives for much of the next century. In part, the *Act 349* stated that the Governor had the authority

(i.) For prescribing the place where any Aboriginal or any tribe of Aborigine's shall reside. (ii.) For prescribing the terms on which contracts for and on behalf of Aborigines may be made with Europeans, and upon which certificates may be granted to Aborigines who may be able and willing to earn a living by their own exertions. For apportioning amongst Aborigines the earnings of Aborigines under any contract, or where Aborigines are located on a reserve the net produce of the labor of such Aborigines. (iv.) For the distribution and expenditure of moneys granted by Parliament for the benefit of Aborigines. (v.) For the care custody and education of the children of Aborigines. (vi.) For prescribing the mode of transacting the business of and the duties generally of the Board or any local committee hereinafter mentioned and of the officers appointed hereunder.¹¹⁵¹

The Victorian Government also set out to define who would be classified as an Aboriginal – with no reference or consultation with Aboriginal communities provided for.

By the *Act 349* the following are deemed Aborigines:- “Every Aboriginal native of Australia and every Aboriginal half-caste or child of a half-caste, such half-caste or child habitually associating and living with Aborigines, shall be deemed to be an Aboriginal within the meaning of this Act; and at the hearing of any case the justice adjudicating may, in the absence of other sufficient evidence, decide on his own view and judgment whether any person with reference to whom any proceedings shall have been taken under this Act is or is not an Aboriginal.”¹¹⁵²

CONCLUSION

This book has mapped in a sense some of the Wadawurrung's roles in relation to three waves of invasion on their lands between 1800 and 1870. It has examined the accommodative and adaptive responses of Wadawurrung people to the invaders through primary and secondary sources and reveals an emerging picture, which places Wadawurrung people not on the periphery of the invader's records and histories, but often firmly ensconced in the social and economic milieu that enveloped them.

Wadawurrung people figured significantly in all three epochs (initial invasion, squatting and the gold rush). Highlighted in this book is the tremendous degree of Wadawurrung agency during the three waves of invasion.

It has been shown that mutual interest in each population's 'otherness' cannot be overstated. Subsequently, any interpretation of the wider Ballarat-Geelong history would be remiss to position Wadawurrung people out of the field of vision, as clearly Wadawurrung culture and lifestyles were an integral part of the coloniser's experience in this region who sought to acquire a sense of uniqueness, set apart from their 'old world'. How the colonisers acculturated a number of Wadawurrung cultural features is one of the more intriguing issues in this book that has received very little attention from historians, yet provides a nexus to reconciliation through the process of sharing histories.

A central tenet of this book has been that a working knowledge of the dynamics of Wadawurrung attachment and connection to land tenure and kinship affiliations is necessary for an understanding of our shared history. A careful revision of primary documents sourced from non-Aboriginal sources has revealed the importance placed by Wadawurrung people on maintaining links with their natal estates and assimilating the colonisers into a Wadawurrung cosmology. Following on from historians such as Clark and Critchett, it is possible to better see the 'living together yet living apart' nature of the colonial frontier in this region.

Many Wadawurrung people sought to find their niche in the new society imposed upon them, via predominately-economic channels, through trading in their manufactured goods, farming, and cultural performances, or in employment roles that did not compromise their cultural integrity and took advantage of their superior traditional work skills. They also sought to accommodate and manipulate the colonisers into their social structure by continuing to recognize select non-Aboriginal people as resuscitated Wadawurrung people and entreating the colonisers to practice the rudiments of Aboriginal mores. Others chose to align themselves with the colonisers as little as possible – whilst others chose to fend off the invaders using any means at their disposal.

Whatever knowledge of the invaders the Wadawurrung obtained and used to make adaptive and adoptive choices, it did not protect them from the sudden onslaught of British Imperialism and the gargantuan social and environmental repercussions.

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