CIRCA

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HOT HISTORIES

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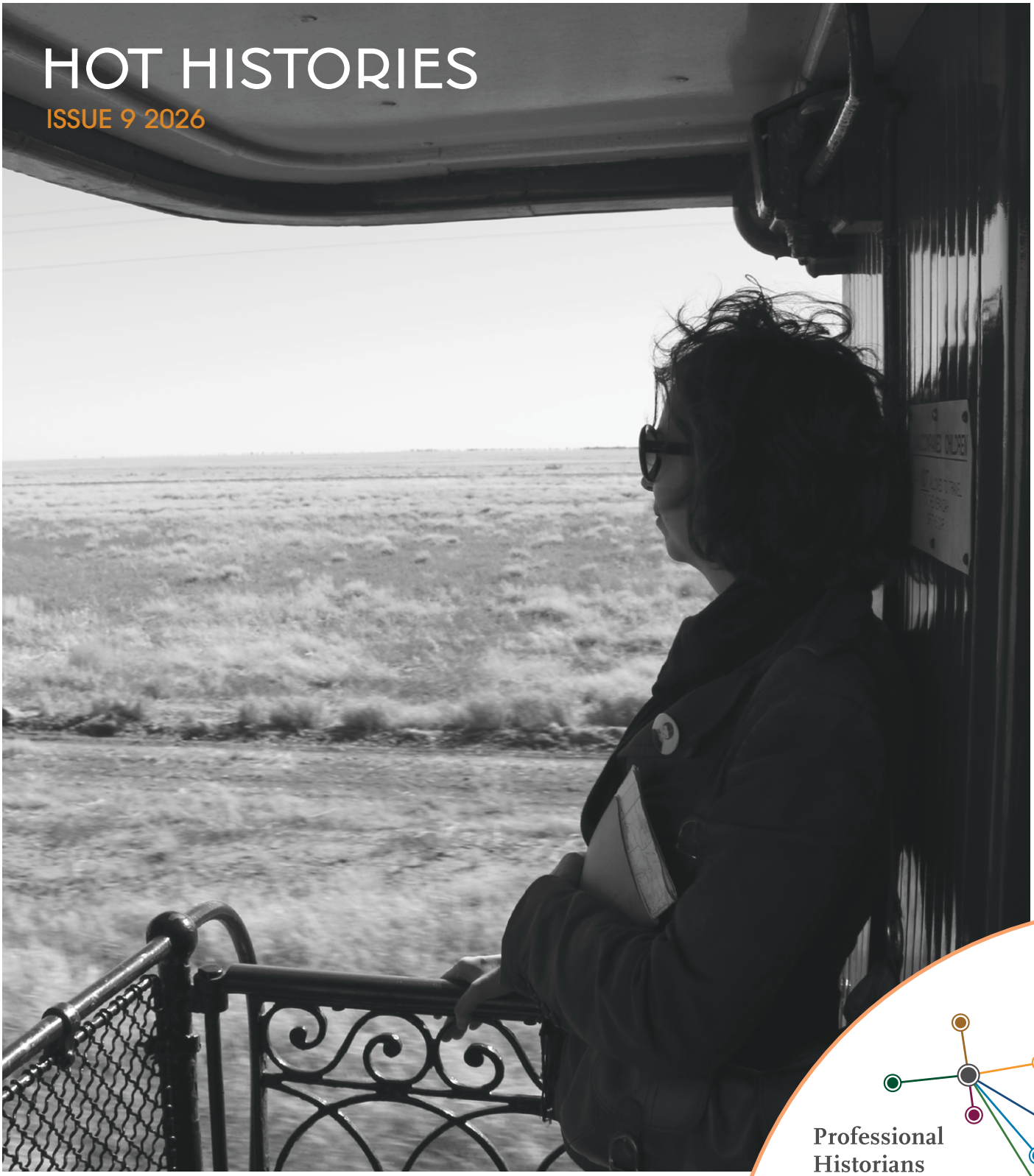

Professional Historians Australia

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We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work.

Professional Historians Australia (PHA) is the peak body that acts on behalf of its state and territory bodies. It represents more than 500 professionally accredited historians across Australia. The PHA is committed to advocating for historical perspectives in public debates about interpretations of history and the keeping of documentary, environmental and other historical records.

The PHA works on behalf of its members to encourage and maintain professional research standards and ethics by providing professional development and networking opportunities, and liaising with businesses, organisations, communities and governments who seek to work with professional historians.

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Cover image: Kimberley Meagher on the Queensland Rail commemorative train (detail), Western Queensland, photo by Jeff Hoogenboom 2017, Kimberley Meagher's collection.

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EDITORIAL

This issue of *Circa* draws primarily on presentations made at the very successful 2025 PHA conference in Darwin, aptly titled 'Hot Histories'. You can read on page 5 Eleanor Hogan's excellent summary of the conference, which overall underscored the vibrancy and talent of PHA members.

Papers are organised in two sections: longer peer-reviewed papers and shorter essays that review professional practice. In between, we offer Jacqui Newling's paper, 'Some like it hot', that formed the basis of her after-dinner speech for 'Hot Histories' at a Chinese restaurant in Darwin.

Many thanks to Christine de Matos for the work she put into peer review workshops during 2025. These were very well received and prepared the groundwork for the peer review process undertaken for this issue. Thank you also to the *Circa* Editorial Board for their assistance and guidance in preparing this issue of the journal.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to all who contributed their expertise as peer reviewers. The authors have told us how much they appreciate the feedback they received from the reviewers and during the editorial process. This is time-consuming work for everyone but it is valuable and important professional development for PHA members.

While the topics covered in this issue range from social to military history to sport and environment, they all show the value of delving deeper into the archives, and with fresh perspectives, including ones prompted by personal experience and interest. New interrogation of the records can be assisted by artificial intelligence but, as Deborah Lee-Talbot argues, only if the historian is involved in training these computer models to produce accurate digital records.

History is again a hot, disputed and manipulated topic. The profession therefore has another important role to try to reach new audiences in ways that help them navigate disinformation and appreciate how history can illuminate present truths. Several articles in both the peer review and practice sections suggest ways this can be done: through collaboration with artists, via online exhibitions and by making the records speak for themselves. Sarah Craze also exhorts us to embrace social media as a way of shedding light on historical practice. In doing so, she offers some practical tips.

The PHA book blog offers members a steady stream of book reviews. Rachel Franks, editor of the blog for the last two years, offers some reflections on what the books that have come across her desk say about current preoccupations among historians.

During her term as PHA President, Lucy Bracey drove the rejuvenation of *Circa* and then the PHA conference in Darwin. We hope this latest issue does her proud.

FRANCESCA BEDDIE, PHA NSW & ACT
& ELIZABETH OFFER, PHA VIC & TAS

CALL FOR PAPERS

Circa offers members a forum to publish work that reflects the diverse ways in which our profession engages with history and historical practice in a wide range of areas, including cultural heritage, oral history, the GLAMR sector, the media, education, commissioned and community histories and government.

The editors invite submissions that explore the issues faced by professional historians for the next issue of *Circa*, which will be published in 2028. To find out more about *Circa*, please visit the website. You can contact the editors via email with any enquiries. Submissions will be accepted up to October 2027.

Hot histories, 2025 PHA Conference review

BY ELEANOR HOGAN, PHA NT

I wish to acknowledge the Arrernte people, the traditional owners of Mparntwe/Alice Springs, on whose lands I live and work.

Richie Fejo and Sam Wells explain the history of the Welcome to Country, photograph by Sophie Couchman.

On 25 and 26 October 2025, Professional Historians Australia (PHA) gathered in Darwin to attend *Hot Histories*, its first conference above the Tropic of Capricorn. Heat wasn't only generated by the steamy north; the program featured a wide range of hot topics, from the Northen Territory (NT)'s diverse histories to truth telling to reflections on historians' practice and embracing their passion projects.

WELCOME TO LARRAKIA COUNTRY

Larrakia/Warramungu Elder, Richard Fejo, opened the conference with a warm welcome to Larrakia Country, followed by reflections on the 'defeatist movement (following the Referendum on the Voice) to delegitimise' this practice. Fejo gave an example from his own recent experience: senior government officials had turned their heads while he was welcoming people to Country at an Anzac Day commemoration.

For Fejo, a Welcome to Country is not divisive or unnecessary; any hostility in response arises from misunderstanding that a welcome is the first sign of reconciliation. This act is initiated by Traditional Owners as an agreement between hosts and visitors to be peaceful on local First Nations people's land.

Aboriginal people throughout Australia have long-established protocols and rituals for entering or passing through other's Country. Contemporary welcomes and acknowledgements draw on these protocols, recognising that specific groups of Aboriginal people owned, occupied and had ongoing responsibilities and connections to Country long before colonisation. In Darwin, Fejo and his family perform a saltwater ceremony where newcomers are taken to the sea and asked to wipe their sweat into the water so that Larrakia Country recognises them and keeps them safe.

After thanking Fejo for his welcome, Samantha Wells (President, PHA NT) turned to archival records to trace how recognition of Larrakia people's specific connection/ownership to Country was manifest in Darwin's early colonial history. As far back as 1865, John Bennett, a junior draftsmen and cartographer with the 1864–66 Northern Territory Survey Expedition, mapped and documented the boundaries of Aboriginal estate groups, using names in local Aboriginal languages for places, people and groups responsible for specific areas. In 1873, five short years after Darwin's establishment as a town, a story in its first newspaper, the *Northern Territory Times*, described what sounds like an early Welcome to Country during Boxing Day festivities:

> the main street really looked quite lively when…the Larrakeeyah…commence[d] their spear throwing, and thus open[ed] the games, which had been arranged in honour of Christmas and its festivities.

The Larrakia also welcomed visitors to Darwin by presenting special corroborees. One marking the visit of Lord Kintore (Governor of South Australia) and his wife in 1891 was so successful that the Larrakia were increasingly called upon to perform corroborees for important visitors. The development of this practice indicates both a colonial acknowledgement of Country and a welcome by Larrakia, an assertion of their rights and responsibility to dance corroborees in the changing cultural space of the town. In highlighting these precedents at a historians' conference, Wells and Fejo by challenged the notion that the welcome to Country is a modern, woke practice with no foundation in our shared history.

NORTHERN TERRITORY HISTORIES

The complexity of Aboriginal–settler relations in the Territory was a key focus of the conference's first day. NT historian Dr Matthew Stephen recounted his professional journey into the contact zones of sport and race in the Northern Territory, and how the memory of settler violence against Aboriginal people is never far from the surface in remote Aboriginal communities. Stephen emphasised the richness of Territory history and encouraged interstate researchers to consider including a northern perspective in their projects, despite the 'tyranny of distance'.

Professor Martin Thomas expanded on the theme of 'colliding worlds' in his book, *Clever Men* (2025), about the ill-fated American–Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land investigating traditional Aboriginal life. The 1948 expedition was led by the anthropologist Charles Mountford and became a clash between western scientific hubris and the traditional, land-based knowledge of Yolngu. Thomas reflected on how sound provided a powerful medium for intercultural research. Arnhem Land elders were able to translate for him surviving audio recordings, providing a richer understanding of Yolngu perspectives on the expedition.

Several papers explored the obscured histories and complex legacies of the Territory's diverse communities. Maisie Austin spoke about her research into life at Parap 118 Camp and its role as a meeting place for the Australian Half-Caste Progress Association, which successfully lobbied the government for rights and citizenship.

CDU PhD student Weida Chen documented the often-overlooked history of the Greek community and its participation in recovery efforts after the bombing of Darwin in 1942.

PHA 2025 Conference goers, photograph by Anthony Grey.

Assistant Curator Paige Taylor at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) traced the little-known lives of Evlampia Holtze and her daughter Ludmilla, the women behind botanists Maurice and Nicholas Holtze, who escaped from Russia in 1873, and their connections with archival objects at the Museum. On a lighter note, Steven Farram (PHA NT) recounted the history of an unconventional group of trailblazing pioneers – the overland cyclists who rode to Darwin from the south-eastern states, long before the roads north were sealed.

TRUTH TELLING

Truth telling about historical Aboriginal–settler relations was a key theme of several papers. In a case study investigating the disappearance of records held by the United Aborigines Mission, Karen George (PHA SA) discussed the challenges of reconnecting people with their records from missions and care institutions. These organisations often invoke privacy concerns in restricting and prohibiting people's access to records, masking a form of gatekeeping that perpetuates past protectionism. It also reveals more concern about their own risk for Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians' access to their personal history.

Skye Krichauff (PHA SA) described an interactive story mapping project, The South Australian Frontier and its Legacies, which aims to 'widen public awareness of, and dialogue about, frontier conflict as part of South Australia's colonial past'. The project employs a broader definition of frontier violence than previously used, counting incidents involving six or more people and includes rape, assault and murders. Oral history provided a significant tool for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives.

COMMEMORATION

Interrogating forms of memorialisation and monumentalism emerged as a heated subject. Public historian Stephen Gapps, one of *The Australian Wars* (2025) authors, argued that frontier brutality during 1788 to 1930 provided a training ground for the Australian military's entrance onto the international imperial stage after 1901, now enshrined in ANZAC mythology. Highlighting the powerful silence that accompanied the creation of this national myth as a smokescreen for frontier violence, Gapps asked whether the Australian Wars was still too hot for the Australian War Memorial (AWM) to handle.

How to commemorate the hotter aspects of Australian history was taken up Malcolm Traill's (PHA WA) reflections on whether Albany's plans to recognise Menang / Noongar history in commemorating its bicentenary in 2026 were cause for celebration or pause for reflection. In her paper about the Japanese Garden at Cowra, Francesca Beddie (PHA NSW & ACT) asked what gardens can tell us about peacebuilding. Cowra's history reveals how it became the 'spiritual home of Australia–Japan relations' after the Second World War. Beddie reflected on how a collection of AWM oral histories brings out the humanity on both sides of a conflict and called on historians to consider what they can more to memorialise peace.

ORDINARY PEOPLE

Other presenters explored histories of forgotten cohorts and marginal groups, and their connection with place. Libby Blamey (PHA Vic & Tas) left us 'hot under the collar' with an investigation of middle-class fear and fascination with larrikins in late 19th-century inner-city Melbourne, whose larking about was perceived to occupy too much space. Shauna Hicks OAM (PHA Qld) reflected on the plight of homeless women in colonial Queensland (1850–1900), and the high levels of female vagrancy and rough sleeping among women without a home or lawful source of income. Pauline Hastings (PHA Vic & Tas) exposed Barbie's hot pink stamp on burgeoning teen and consumption cultures. First sold in Australia in 1964, Mattel's popular pre-teen doll showed young women that 'anything was possible with a change of clothes', training them in consumerism and marking the shift from post-war thrift to late 20th-century throwaway culture.

Chasing down rabbit holes should be indulged because you never know what might be uncovered. So contended Allison Sullivan (PHA NSW & ACT), who described the idiosyncratic histories that emerged from a photo of Divine Street, Erskineville. Ordinary people are interesting. Kimberley Meagher (PHA Vic & Tas) boarded a commemorative steam train journey from Townsville to Cloncurry in 2017 to retrace family connections with a derelict former pastoral station. Sonia Jennings (PHA Vic & Tas) recounted the outer Melbourne rural community of Truganina's attempt to 'reclaim the flame' by documenting the history of its experience of a major fire in 1969.

MARITIME CONNECTIONS

Several speakers took us offshore through excursions into maritime history and photogrammetry. Jeff Hopkins-Weise (PHA NSW & ACT) navigated the history of northern Australia's last naval and military outpost at Somerset, Cape York, during 1864-67. Sue Silberberg (PHA Vic & Tas) charted the little-known history of Jewish traders in the tropics who survived being shipwrecked in the Pacific, transforming the politics and trade relations of the societies they encountered. Jared Archibald (MAGNT) and Christeen Schoepf (PHA SA) unpacked the 'object biographies' of some historical flotsam: Archibald retraced the history of 'ghost ship' HMAS Moruya from its build plate and Schoepf explored the genealogies of timber from two ships, which have since been repurposed in the mayoral chairs at Port Pirie and Glenelg council chambers.

Richard Gillespie (PHA Vic & Tas) presented further objects of interest – a collection of glass plates and film of Aboriginal rock art sites from a photogrammetry project at the Department of Surveying at the University of Melbourne in the 1970s and '80s. He described plans to digitise this collection, including consultation with Traditional Owners across Australia about the use of these images in cultural maintenance, conservation, research and education.

Panel discussion, photograph by Francesca Beddie.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Historians' personal ethics and responsibilities proved a steamy topic. Are historians little more than 'nosy creeps'? Hannah Viney (PHA Vic & Tas) asked, with an illuminating case study of a forgotten 'Dear John letter' from a 1940s divorce proceeding. What are the ethics of revealing personal material – letters, diaries and journals – not originally intended for public consumption? How should historians choose what is hidden or revealed? Drawing on examples from her family history, Jane Mills Harding (PHA Qld) teased out the 'love triangle between records, archivists and historians' and the implications of how recovering intimate personal stories from the archive can affect contemporary lives.

Some presentations explored relationships between public historians and other sectors. Claire Sandell (PHA Vic & Tas) highlighted the value of working with volunteers and councils in caring for community heritage and collections, advising against disparaging their contributions which can be 'politically hot but surprisingly effective!' Margaret Cook (PHA Qld) discussed the hot politics of historians collaborating with government policymakers in relation to La Trobe University oral history project for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, especially with bureaucracies more used to dealing with data and scientists than with historical narratives of lived experiences.

How historians might negotiate the rapidly growing use of AI was the subject of a spirited panel session with Dr Deborah Lee-Talbot (PHA Vic & Tas), Roland Leikauf (PHA NSW & ACT) and Sarah Craze (PHA Vic & Tas).

Is AI a threat to history as a discipline and the GLAM sector or can it be harnessed to enhance research activities? AI is just another phase in the history of automation, Leikauf contended, and all three panellists argued that historians are well positioned to improve the application of AI, given their analytical expertise. Issues remain for historians and cultural workers concerning the application of AI to their research and creative endeavours such as the outsourcing of their projects to third parties and appropriation of their intellectual property rights and livelihood.

The Hot Histories conference closed with Dot Wickham's (PHA Vic & Tas) reflections on her practice from her extensive career as a historian, followed by a dialogue with Christina Earling-Godbold (President PHAQ). Together, they discussed the complexities of writing personal and family histories, especially those not documented within official sources or with the potential to offend. In dealing with sensitive hot histories, they advocated that historians apply 'a strong ethical framework and a commitment to scholarly integrity, as well as a sensitivity to the wider implications of historical work' – a suitably warm touchstone with which to end the conference.

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

1 An Indigenous history of Parap Camp

BY MAISIE AUSTIN, PHD CANDIDATE AT CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this history is based and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

This article presents part of my doctoral research that aims to contribute to a public history of Parap Camp and the lives of its mainly 'part-Aboriginal' residents known as Half-castes and Coloureds, who lived there while being governed by Aboriginal Acts and policies. Living among the Half-castes were European, Chinese, Germans, Malayans and Filipinos. I offer a snapshot of life in the camp that demonstrates Parap as a 'melting pot of different nationalities' which its former residents consider to be the birthplace of multiculturalism in Darwin and possibly Australia.

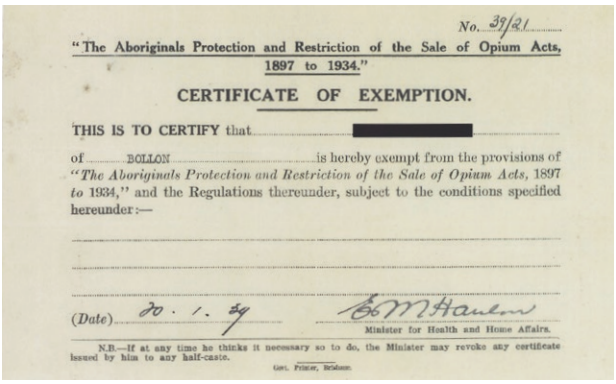
This history is centred on a place and time in post-Second World War Darwin called Parap Camp. While it is based on my own lived experience and knowledge, it includes the voices of other Parap Camp residents who have published their own stories and interviews I conducted for my PhD research, archival material from the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and Library and Archives of the Northern Territory (LANT) and other sources that document government policy towards Aboriginal people from the 1900s that influenced patterns of life in the camp.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON HALF-CASTES

The terminology 'Half-caste' will appear throughout this document without quotation marks as it is how I and other Parap Camp residents were known at that time. Governments created this offensive terminology back in 1869 in Victoria and again in 1886 in Western Australia. Other ridiculous terminologies were 'Quadroon' (a person who is only one-quarter Aboriginal) and 'Octoroon' (a person who is only one-eighth Aboriginal). I was called a Half-caste. My great-grandmother's father was a European and mother an Aboriginal, so she was a Quadroon. She was part of the Stolen Generations, removed from her family, country and culture under the government policy, and institutionalised. She married a Filipino and their daughter (my grandmother) was an Octoroon. My grandmother married a Chinese and had my mother. They all lived in Darwin before the Second World War and were evacuated to Cairns. My great-grandparents and grandmother returned to Darwin to live in Parap Camp in 1947.

My great-grandparents, photo from author's private collection.

The Parap Camp huts, image sourced from Once Around the Block – Sailing with Alana Rose: Darwin Gaol and War Museum in Darwin.



No. 39/21

"The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts, 1897 to 1934."

CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that [redacted]

of BOLLON is hereby exempt from the provisions of "*The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts*, 1897 *to* 1934," and the Regulations thereunder, subject to the conditions specified hereunder:—

(*Date*) 20. 1. 24 — Minister for Health and Home Affairs.

N.B.—If at any time he thinks it necessary so to do, the Minister may revoke any certificate issued by him to any half-caste.

Govt. Printer, Brisbane.

Example of a Certificate of Exemption, https://cherbourgmemory.org/certificate-of-exemption-january-20-1924/

Half-caste residents of Parap Camp were not as free to live their lives as others as they were governed by various government policies such as the *Northern Territory Aboriginals Act 1910*, the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1911 (Cth)* and the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1933 (Cth)*. Moreover, from the 1900s, authorities argued that everything necessary must be done to convert us into a white citizen.[1] They advocated 'breeding the colour out' by promoting marriages between part-Aboriginal women and white men, establishing reserves where mixed-descent children could be confined or placing them in government-subsidised mission homes.

There were also policies of exemption. These created a mechanism whereby state governments could declare individual Indigenous people, who were somehow judged to be worthy, 'exempt' from this legislation and therefore the controls – over children, employment, place of abode, racial status – that these sinister pieces of legislation entailed. This meant being issued with a certificate that you carried around with you to prove your status at any time and with anyone.

Exemption was introduced in the Northern Territory in 1936. Also in 1936 Dr Cecil Cook, Chief Protector of the Aborigines, decided to provide selected Half-castes with exemption certificates to enter licensed premises. The certificates were immediately labelled 'dog's licences' by the Half-caste people; the 'licences', known in other states as 'dog tags', caused dissension within the coloured community at Parap Camp.[2]

My great-grandmother applied for and received Exemption Certificates for her family in 1937. They had to carry these around with them at all times to show the authorities.

Parap 118 Military Camp included Francis Camp and Camp K9, established in the late 1930s when a major military build-up began in Darwin. The firm of Sidney Williams and Company erected rows of huts that featured steel frames and were corrugated-iron clad with ripple-iron doors at each end. Push-out shutters along their length were set alternately high and low to allow airflow. The Camp became home to thousands of Australian and Allied service men and women before and during the Second World War.[3]

After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, there was a growing realisation that an attack on Darwin was imminent. Under

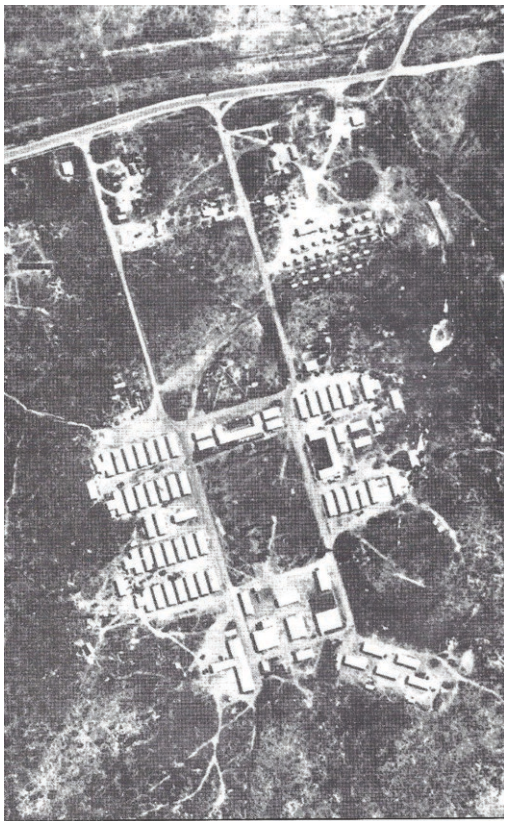
Huts at Parap Camp, photo number: PH0261/0052, Clark Collection.

instruction from Prime Minister Robert Menzies' War Cabinet, over 2,000 women and children, including my family, were evacuated from the region by air, road and sea. The final evacuation aircraft left Darwin just one day before the first Japanese air raid.[4]

Some Half-caste people recalled in articles and books written by them that they travelled to Balaclava in South Australia by cattle and Army trucks and rail where they were housed at the Balaclava Racecourse in the grandstand and the horse stables as the South Australian Premier advised that 'it was impossible to billet coloured persons with families'.[5]

On 19 February 1942 Japanese forces bombed Darwin. This would become the largest single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on Australia.[6] The 64th, and last, air raid on Darwin occurred on 12 November 1943.[7]

The military authorities were in no hurry to allow civilians back into the Northern Territory because most of the habitable buildings were still occupied by military personnel and there were no shops, medical facilities, or other services available to the civilians. It was not until December 1945 that they were permitted to return to Pine Creek and all areas south of that town while Darwin remained a restricted area until 28 February 1946. In the first months after civilians returned in 1946, the Army was obliged to provide food and other provisions to the incoming residents.[8]



Parap Camp 118, Darwin 1945, photo from author's private collection.

Parap Camp became the main residential accommodation for the evacuees who returned to Darwin, the majority of whom were 'part-Aboriginal' known as Half-castes or coloureds born from sexual relations and marriage between non-Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women.

PARAP CAMP AFTER THE WAR

In February 1947 the Northern Territory Administration purchased Parap Camp from the Army.[9] It became Darwin's largest housing area at the time, serving to cope with the housing overflow for evacuees and families returning to Darwin. It was always assumed by the authorities that it was only temporary, with a life of eight years at the maximum. However, it continued to house families until the 1960s.[10]

Some huts were divided in half and called 'hutments'. On the inside of the huts, the walls were reinforced with steel crossbars. Some of them had push-out windows with an arc mesh screen. By April 1947, there were 'then about 3,100 part-Aboriginal people living in Sidney

Williams huts at Parap Camp, some eight families to a 60' x 30' hut'.[11]

Families of other nationalities who also lived at Parap Camp included Chinese, Malayans, Filipinos, Europeans and Torres Strait Islanders. We were a 'melting pot of different nationalities' who shared customs, traditions and cultures, living in one of the most disadvantaged areas of post-war Darwin. Parap Camp was and has been referred to as a 'tin-shanty' slum. Yet among its residents, it is considered as the birthplace of multiculturalism in Australia.

DAILY LIFE

My family like most others partitioned off their own rooms using mainly masonite sheeting over timber frames or just curtaining. We had two bedrooms, a living room and our main room, the kitchen, where cooking was done over a wood-burning stove. There was no sink; dishes were washed in a large enamel container. My sisters, brothers and I were bathed in the kitchen area in the same big enamel tub. In a corner off the kitchen was a partitioned area for the adults' bathroom.

The laundry was done outside; clothes were boiled in kerosene tins. Some residents used a 44-gallon drum cut in half. Most washing was done over a fire in the open, or in a wash house or shed built out of scraps of iron. Sanitation and drainage were a source of concern from the first day huts were allotted to families. There were many breeding places for the dengue carrying mosquito. We used mosquito nets over our beds and Council workers sprayed the areas between the huts with malarial oil. Toilets were the 'flaming furies' – a 44-gallon drum sunk into the ground, the contents of which were burned on a regular basis. Families including mine were later allocated renovated huts which had an indoor bathroom, toilet and laundry.

My families' main meals consisted of stews and curries made with cabbage and either mince, bully beef, onions and potatoes – all served with rice. Perishables were kept in our 'Coolgardie' safe – a box-shaped frame with wire mesh on the sides for air circulation, and an ice box filled with block ice and covered with a hessian bag. Sometime later, we bought a kerosene refrigerator.

Staples like flour, tins of powdered milk, dripping, butter and corned beef (bully beef) came to Darwin by ship or overland. Some Parap Camp residents went 'goose shooting' and would give or sell geese to families like mine. We bought fish from another resident who had fish traps and we would sometimes go to creeks and mangroves for cockles and periwinkles. Our Malayan friends farmed pigs which we purchased to cook various pork dishes, including a Filipino dish called dinuguan. This dish was also made using turtle meat, which our Thursday Island relatives brought to Darwin on their visits. They also brought dugong and shell meat – staple Torres Strait Island foods. There were no 'dressed chickens', only boiling fowls that we had to kill and pluck ourselves. Cabbages and other vegetables were bought from the local Chinese. Our fruits were mangoes, paw paws, bananas, custard apples, coconuts, tamarinds, 'billy goat plums' (now known as Kakadu plums) and 'cheeky plums', which grew abundantly in the area.

Most of the men worked as labourers for the Council, on the wharf or for private businesses

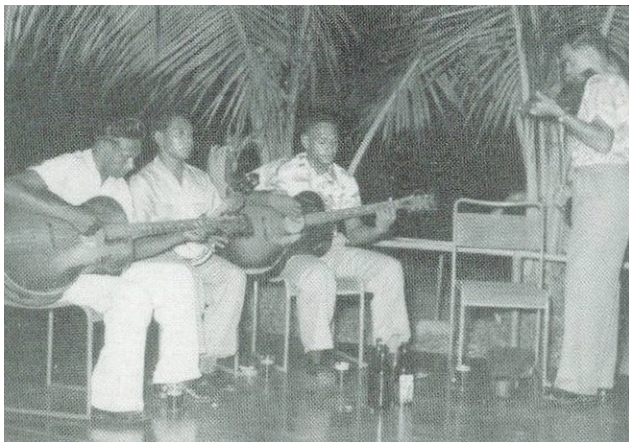
and the women were mostly employed as domestics at the Darwin Hospital or for European families. Many women stayed at home looking after family and doing the usual home duties.

HALF-CASTE PROGRESSIVE ASSOCIATION

A number of Parap Camp residents formed the Half-Caste Progressive Association, later the Australian Half-Caste Progressive Association (AHPA), whose objective was to gain full citizenship rights for Half-castes. The AHPA held regular formal meetings at the Parish Hall in Parap Camp. The AHPA held dances and social events such as fetes for fundraising. People in Parap Camp rallied to support AHPA. Parap Camp resident Jack McGinness was elected President of the AHPA. He was also a member of the Trade Union Movement with the North Australian Workers Union and later President of the North Australian Workers Union. He attended the Australian Council of Trade Union (ACTU) Congress in 1951 where he stated: 'With the full A.C.T.U. backing we may achieve our aims and get rid of the dog collar system which we have been wearing all our lives'.[12] Due to the efforts of Jack McGinness and the AHPA, Half-castes in the Northern Territory were granted full citizenship rights when the Aboriginals Ordinance was replaced by the Northern Territory Welfare Ordinance in 1953.

THE SUNSHINE CLUB

Within the confines of Parap Camp, people created their own social life. Dances, weddings and other gatherings were held at the hall which became known as the Sunshine Club.[13] The club represented the emergence of the culturally rich and diverse music and dance scene of Darwin during the 1950s; it reflected and celebrated the melting pot of cultures in Darwin and created a fusion of music and dance that helped break down barriers with the wider community who started to come along to events. Oral histories record the atmosphere.



Local band — L–R; Peter Cardona, Ken Hazelbane, Henry 'Seaman' Dan, Ray Perez, photograph from author's private collection.

Mary Lee (née Cubillo) said, 'Everybody used to go there and had a ball. We had ballroom dancing, quick step, foxtrot, tango, very graceful sort of dances, waltzes and all that.'[14]

Kathleen Mills (née McGinness) recalled, 'Half-caste people held dances at the Sunshine Club in the 1940s. Some of our musicians played the steel guitars, mandolins and banjos...We learnt the Filipino dances such as the Shake Hand Dance and Polka Mazurka and the Jitterbug and of course a night never went by without someone doing the Hula.'[15]

There was so much talent among the Half-castes, Thursday Islanders, Filipino and other nationalities in the Parap Camp community that local string bands were formed. As Kathleen Mills observed, 'Social restrictions limited social interaction [for half-caste people] in the wider community and had it not been for the formation of the Sunshine Club the Aboriginal population would have endured a very dull existence'.[16]

Buffaloes, c. 1930, photographer unknown, Charles Wilson Collection, NTAS, NTRS 3335 Item 342.

First Aboriginal Netball Team 'Kookaburras', 1944. Jane Ah Mat, Rowena Abala, Dawn Carolin, Evelyn Jones, Molly Harris, Gwen Bonson, Noeline Cubillo, Francesca Cigobia, Lucy White, photograph from author's private collection.

SPORT

Sport was an integral part of life during the early years of the Parap Camp, especially for Half-caste people. It offered them the opportunity to socialise, engage in competition and demonstrate sportsmanship and practical skills.[17]

One Half-caste resident, Reuben Cooper went on to become a Territory sporting icon, considered by many to be the father of football in Darwin. His participation in the sport was instrumental in removing the racial barriers prevalent at the time. In later years, Cooper was inducted into the AFLNT Hall of Fame.[18]

Another Half-caste resident, Bill Dempsey said, 'There was a colour bar in the local competition from the beginning. These people had no human rights – they were looked down upon. But when it came to a Saturday, when they fronted up, they were playing against people who were their bosses – people who had control of their lives. And for once, on the football field, they could be equal.'[19]

Women at Parap Camp organised the women's basketball (now netball) competition in Darwin in 1948. They trained on a mapped-out dirt court in Parap Camp. To promote the sport, they gave exhibitions at various venues and encouraged more women to form teams. Two of the first teams were the Kookaburras and Eagles – all ladies from Parap Camp.

The women changed from playing netball to basketball in 1955. In 1959, a Northern Territory women's team competed at the Australian Women's Basketball Championships in Toowoomba. All the players and coach lived at Parap Camp except the manager.

In 1954 a Northern Territory men's representative team that included Parap Camp residents participated at the National Basketball Championships. They became the first Northern Territory sporting team to participate in an interstate competition. One Parap Camp resident, Michael Ah Mat represented Australia at the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 1964 and the Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968.

CONCLUSION

In 1915 the Administrator of the Northern Territory declared that 'all Half-castes were morally worthless'.[20] A comment from Daisy Bates, who was for many people in the first half

1944 EaglesWomen's Basketball Team. Back: Barbara Assan (Cooper), Josephine Assan (Ah Mat), Sadie McGuinness (Ludwig), Tanny Roe Middle: Evelyn Baird, Hannah Johns, Francesca Cigobia Front: Rowena Abala.

of the 20th century the leading authority on the Aboriginal people wrote in a Western Australian paper in 1921 that 'however early they (half-caste) may be taken and trained, with very few exceptions, the only good half-caste is a dead one'.[21]

My memories and stories from Parap Camp residents prove otherwise. Many Half-castes worked in industries that shaped Darwin and have become recognised achievers in business, art, education, medical, music, sport and other chosen fields. They have streets and places named after them.

Ours is a unique Indigenous cultural history. By bringing to light the history of Parap Camp – through telling my own story, conducting oral histories and drawing out findings from other research – I have begun to document an integral part of the history of Darwin that in turn ensconced in Australian history.

1954 NT Men's Basketball Team preparing for Australian Championships, photograph from author's private collection.

1959 NT Women's Basketball Team, photograph from author's private collection.

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2 Larrikin pushes: place, space and two inner Melbourne suburbs

BY LIBBY BLAMEY, PHA VIC & TAS

The history below takes place on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

Detail from Swanston St Looking South, c. 1880, Nicholas Caire, photographer, H87.269/5, State Library Victoria.

Following the 1880s economic boom, young men coming of age in the economic crash of the 1890s were left with fewer opportunities and more time to fill. The hyperlocal activities of the larrikin pushes (gangs) were fodder for contemporary newspaper reports of the inner suburbs, much in the way that 'A Current Affair' and other modern media outlets eagerly and disproportionately report on youth crime 'waves' today. Drawing on two recent thematic histories prepared for the City of Melbourne heritage reviews of Carlton and North Melbourne, this article explores the connection between larrikins and place, the use of public space, and how the stories of the ways our suburbs are occupied can inform an understanding of heritage value.

INTRODUCTION

> London has its roughs, Liverpool its high rip gang, New York and San Francisco their hoodlums and corner men, and Melbourne and Sydney the larrikins. In Melbourne and its suburbs ... the larrikin nuisance is becoming a crying, intolerable evil. They are physically infesting street corners, breaking and damaging property and subjecting passers-by ... to annoyances, outrages and robberies of the grossest kind.[1]

The idea – and reality – of the larrikin has been a popular trope in Australian culture since the 1860s. Seen as a distinctly Australian character, larrikins have been both applauded in theory and disdained in practice. Reports of their activities peppered newspapers in the 19th century, creating a characterisation of the inner suburbs that in many ways would carry through the 20th century.

Carlton from the Carlton Brewery Tower, 1870, Charles Nettleton, photographer, H96.160/1529, State Library Victoria.

The larrikins are intrinsically connected to the history of the inner suburbs in the late 19th century. An understanding of their activities can give us a deeper sense of place and the use of public space, and how the inner suburbs came to be viewed. Such an understanding of 'place' is foundational in assessing heritage value.

This article draws on work completed as part of two recent heritage reviews undertaken by heritage consultancy Lovell Chen for the City of Melbourne, the Carlton Heritage Review and the North Melbourne Heritage Review.[2] Previous published work on the larrikins, particularly by historians Melissa Bellanta, Chris McConville and Simon Sleight, has also informed this article. The larrikins are addressed in many histories of the city and suburbs of Melbourne.

Bellanta's comprehensive and detailed publication, *Larrikins: A History*, published in 2012, examines numerous facets of the history of larrikins across Australian cities, including the ubiquity of the term. She observes the 'key role' that larrikinism has in Australian society, as a term that 'unlocks the secret to Australian identity', and one that in modern Australia is often given with affection, an excuse for rowdy behaviour.[3] In their collection of essays, *The Outcasts of Melbourne*, McConville discusses larrikins in the context of crime, poverty, and vices in the city.[4] Sleight considers the larrikins in his history of the youth of Melbourne, in *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne, 1870-1914*.

This article considers the history of the larrikins in Carlton and North Melbourne in the late 19th century, with a focus on their occupation of the streets; the newspaper and other discourse that followed them; and how such an insight can assist in the field of heritage.

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church and Manse, Rathdowne Street, c. 1880s, Charles Nettleton, photographer, H4570, State Library Victoria.

INNER SUBURBS AND THE LARRIKINS

The inner suburbs of Carlton and North Melbourne developed after the Melbourne city boundaries were extended to the north in the early 1850s. By the 1870s, both were substantially developed, with freestanding houses, terraces and cottage rows, along with civic and commercial centres.

The suburbs had areas of higher wealth, with substantial terraces at the south end of Carlton closer to the city and more generously scaled residences in North Melbourne in the elevated Hotham Hill area. Away from these areas were more modest single-storey cottages, and in the laneways were tiny structures that housed the suburbs' poorest. As with other inner areas of Melbourne, Carlton and North Melbourne were occupied by substantial working-class populations, increasingly so as the early densely developed suburbs fell from favour, and wealthier residents relocated to the newer garden suburbs of the east and southeast from the late 19th century.

Many inhabitants of Carlton and North Melbourne were employed in building trades, and the economic crash of the 1890s had a disproportionate impact on their livelihoods. For some in these suburbs, particularly the poor and disadvantaged, irreverence and defiance of authorities could be seen as a way of gaining a level of agency during a time of social and economic upheaval.

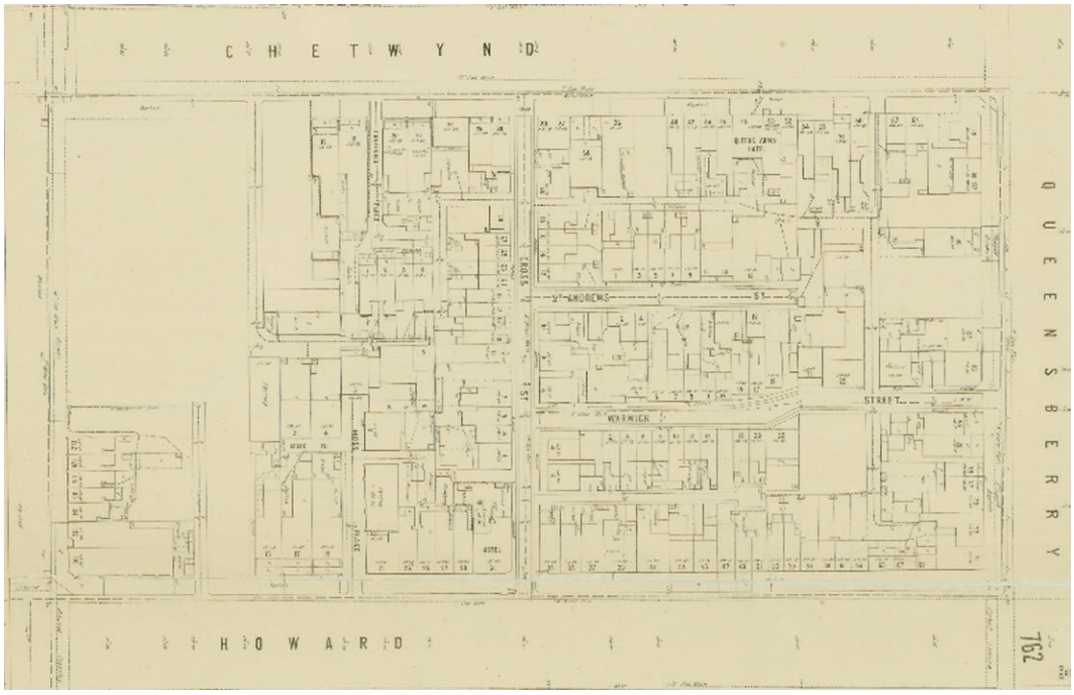
Young men coming of age in this period were left with less opportunities and more time to fill. 'Larrikinism', along with 'boisterism' and 'rowdyism', were terms used to describe youths who gathered in public spaces, often donning a distinctive mode of dress, whose activities ranged from annoyances and nuisances to petty crimes and violent assaults. A 'push' was a term

Example locations of larrikin pushes and larrikin activities, from contemporary newspaper reports, Lovell Chen, Google basemap.

which became common through the 1880s and 1890s, used to describe a group of larrikins – a group of friends or associates who regularly gathered together, and looked out for each other and their interests.[5]

Typical for Australian cultural heroes, the larrikin is assumed to be male, with 'larrikinesses' only occasionally part of the story. Sleight observes girls were an 'essential audience' for male larrikins, with their fashion and 'masculine bravura'.[6] Conversely, some newspapers suggested women could marry larrikins, regarded these women as a civilising influence.[7] Bellanta gives more weight and consideration to the involvement of young women – or 'brazen girls' – in larrikinism, placing them in the broader social network of larrikins. This included their active participation in friendships and rivalries, and rejection of 'demure femininity'.[8] Bellanta astutely observes that with police focused on eradicating the male larrikin element, young women were often able to evade arrest.[9] At a time when much media attention focused on arrests and court cases for the overwhelmingly male larrikins, this has resulted in fewer women being represented in contemporary sources.

Larrikin pushes were hyperlocal in character and membership, often known by the streets on which they congregated – Bouverie Street, Freeman Street, Nicholson Street and Pitt Street in Carlton and North Carlton, all had pushes bearing their name. The name of the Emu Hotel in Bouverie Street led to the Emu Push that emerged at the turn of the century. Larrikins occupied *their* neighbourhood space, their territory, as much as they occupied public space. Many larrikins were teenagers, still living with

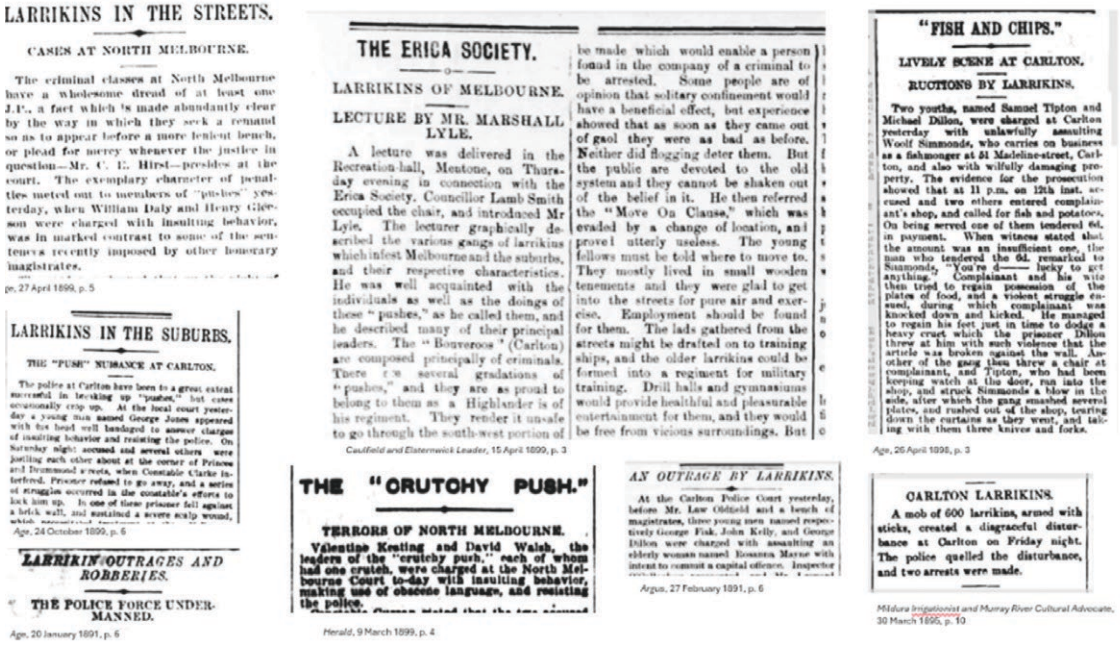


MMBW detail plan, no. 762, 1896, State Library Victoria.

their parents, often in cramped cottages, so, as noted by the socialist newspaper *Toscin*, it was 'the street – the inglorious street' in which they congregated.[10]

In some ways, the larrikins are familiar as modern teenagers, filling in time with their peers and taking up space as part of a growing level of independence and confidence. 'Larrikin' was often a catch-all term for young men, many of whom were not 'nuisances'. However, it was those who found – or got – themselves in trouble with the law who were given the most attention. The activities of these larrikins made for an engaging story in newspaper columns and could be useful for providing moralising commentary on the problems or vices of the inner suburbs. In North Melbourne, one councillor complained about the 'bands of youths' on the thoroughfares at night, annoying 'respectable citizens', with Cross and Howard streets at the city end of the suburb 'infested by the worst type'.[11] The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) survey plan of this area shows the density of development typical of the inner suburbs, with a diverse mix of buildings constructed on the main streets and narrower laneways. Along with terraces to Howard Street and smaller cottages to Cross (now Gardiner) and Warwick streets, were the Fountain Inn hotel and many local service shops (butcher, grocer, dressmaker, bootmaker and others).[12]

Aside from filling in time and taking up space, larrikinism was also a kind of performance. They were recognised by their outfits: bell-bottom trousers, heeled boots, a wide-brimmed slouch hat and a colourful silk scarf tied around the neck. Sleight characterises 19th century larrikinism as heralding 'the noisy arrival of



LARRIKINS IN THE STREETS.

CASES AT NORTH MELBOURNE.

The criminal classes at North Melbourne have a wholesome dread of at least one J.P., a fact which is made abundantly clear by the way in which they seek a remand so as to appear before a more lenient bench, or plead for mercy whenever the justice in question—Mr. C. E. Hirst—presides at the court. The exemplary character of penalties meted out to members of "pushes" yesterday, when William Daly and Henry Gleeson were charged with insulting behavior, was in marked contrast to some of the sentences recently imposed by other honorary magistrates.

pe, 27 April 1899, p. 5

LARRIKINS IN THE SUBURBS.

THE "PUSH" NUISANCE AT CARLTON.

The police at Carlton have been to a great extent successful in hooking up "pushes," but cases occasionally crop up. At the local court yesterday a young man named George Jones appeared with his head well bandaged to answer charges of insulting behavior and resisting the police. On Saturday night accused and several others were jostling each other about at the corner of Princes and Drummond streets, when Constable Clarke interfered. Prisoner refused to go away, and a series of struggles occurred in the constable's efforts to lock him up. In one of these prisoner fell against a brick wall, and sustained a severe scalp wound,

Age, 24 October 1899, p. 6

LARRIKIN OUTRAGES AND ROBBERIES.

THE POLICE FORCE UNDER-MANNED.

Age, 20 January 1891, p. 6

THE ERICA SOCIETY.

LARRIKINS OF MELBOURNE.

LECTURE BY MR. MARSHALL LYLE.

A lecture was delivered in the Recreation-hall, Mentone, on Thursday evening in connection with the Erica Society. Councillor Lamb Smith occupied the chair, and introduced Mr Lyle. The lecturer graphically described the various gangs of larrikins which infest Melbourne and the suburbs, and their respective characteristics. He was well acquainted with the individuals as well as the doings of these "pushes," as he called them, and he described many of their principal leaders. The "Bouverous" (Carlton) are composed principally of criminals. There are several gradations of "pushes," and they are as proud to belong to them as a Highlander is of his regiment. They render it unsafe to go through the south-west portion of be made which would enable a person found in the company of a criminal to be arrested. Some people are of opinion that solitary confinement would have a beneficial effect, but experience showed that as soon as they came out of gaol they were as bad as before. Neither did flogging deter them. But the public are devoted to the old system and they cannot be shaken out of the belief in it. He then referred the "Move On Clause," which was evaded by a change of location, and proved utterly useless. The young fellows must be told where to move to. They mostly lived in small wooden tenements and they were glad to get into the streets for pure air and exercise. Employment should be found for them. The lads gathered from the streets might be drafted on to training ships, and the older larrikins could be formed into a regiment for military training. Drill halls and gymnasiums would provide healthful and pleasurable entertainment for them, and they would be free from vicious surroundings. But

Caulfield and Elsternwick Leader, 15 April 1899, p. 3

THE "ORUTOHY PUSH."

TERRORS OF NORTH MELBOURNE.

Valentine Keating and David Walsh, the leaders of the "crutchy push," each of whom had one crutch, were charged at the North Melbourne Court to-day with insulting behavior, making use of obscene language, and resisting the police.

Herald, 9 March 1899, p. 4

AN OUTRAGE BY LARRIKINS.

At the Carlton Police Court yesterday, before Mr. Law Oldfield and a bench of magistrates, three young men named respectively George Fisk, John Kelly, and George Dillon were charged with assaulting an elderly woman named Rosanna Marne with intent to commit a capital offence. Inspector

Argus, 27 February 1891, p. 6

"FISH AND CHIPS."

LIVELY SCENE AT CARLTON.

RUCTIONS BY LARRIKINS.

Two youths, named Samuel Tipton and Michael Dillon, were charged at Carlton yesterday with unlawfully assaulting Woolf Simmonds, who carries on business as a fishmonger at 51 Madeline-street, Carlton, and also with wilfully damaging property. The evidence for the prosecution showed that at 11 p.m. on 12th inst. accused and two others entered complainant's shop, and called for fish and potatoes. On being served one of them tendered 6d. in payment. When witness stated that the amount was an insufficient one, the man who tendered the 6d. remarked to Simmonds, "You're d—— lucky to get anything." Complainant and his wife then tried to regain possession of the plates of food, and a violent struggle ensued, during which complainant was knocked down and kicked. He managed to regain his feet just in time to dodge a heavy cruet which the prisoner Dillon threw at him with such violence that the article was broken against the wall. Another of the gang then threw a chair at complainant, and Tipton, who had been keeping watch at the door, ran into the shop, and struck Simmonds a blow in the side, after which the gang smashed several plates, and rushed out of the shop, tearing down the curtains as they went, and taking with them three knives and forks.

Age, 26 April 1898, p. 3

CARLTON LARRIKINS.

A mob of 600 larrikins, armed with sticks, created a disgraceful disturbance at Carlton on Friday night. The police quelled the disturbance, and two arrests were made.

Mildura Irrigationist and Murray River Cultural Advocate, 30 March 1895, p. 10

Examples of newspaper articles, 1890s, Age, Caulfield and Elsternwick Leader, Argus, Herald and Mildura Irrigationist and Murray River Cultural Advocate, various dates.

working-class youth in the public sphere'.[13] It was a 'disorderly' occupation of space that confronted a more orderly use of the public arena, resulting in moralising and negotiation about how the urban streets were to be appropriately occupied.[14]

LARRIKINS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Much in the way that 'A Current Affair' and other modern media outlets eagerly (and often disproportionately) report on youth crime 'waves' in cities, the larrikin pushes were fodder for contemporary newspaper reports (Figure 6). Alongside sober accounts of crimes and court cases, sensationalised reports of the larrikins, their pushes and individual leaders were syndicated throughout Victoria. Court reports in the newspaper often characterised the young perpetrators of petty crime as larrikins. In 1899, one group of young men was remanded in North Melbourne on a charge of insulting behaviour, and who were 'making [the] night hideous by using bad language, singing indecent songs, feigning drunkenness and jostling respectable people.'[15] That same year, a hearing at the Carlton Court was held after two youths were apprehended after attempting to access the Golden Age Hotel in Queensberry Street after hours, banging on the hotel's back door, and demanding drinks from the proprietor, Mrs Mahoney.[16] One North Melbourne 'push' that gained particular notoriety from the mid-1890s was the Crutchy push or 'Crutchies', led by Valentine Keating, and was so named due to the defensive use of crutches by its members, many of whom were physically impaired.[17] Although not explored specifically in this article, the weaponisation of disability aids by the Crutchy push members subverted expectations of such impairments in the 19th century, and gave a level of agency to

▲ *Melbourne Punch*, 17 December 1891, p. 4

Melbourne Punch, ▶
30 June 1892, p. 3.

Sketches of larrikins in Melbourne Punch, 1890s, Melbourne Punch, 17 December 1891, p. 4 (left) and 30 June 1892, p. 3 (right).

these men. *The Melbourne Punch* took a particular interest in the larrikins, often satirising them in articles and sketches, characterising the larrikin in 1898 as 'not a pleasant creature. He is mischievous, profane, blatant, pugilistic and very rarely beautiful to look upon.'[18]

Graeme Davison observes that the depictions of larrikins had 'deteriorated' from the sturdy youth of earlier decades, with descriptions of 'thinner, shorter' and 'sallow-faced' young men perhaps reflecting a 'darker' public mood of the 1890s depression and the concerns of the urban middle class.[19] A number of moralising talks were given to audiences drawn from middle-class areas where the pushes were unlikely to frequent. In 1899, a widely syndicated lecture was given in Mentone, a bayside suburb some 20 kilometres south-east of Carlton and North Melbourne. To the members of the Erica Society, 'lawyer and criminologist' Marshall Lyle, 'graphically described the various gangs of larrikins that infest Melbourne and the suburbs'.[20] Carlton was a 'hotbed' of the pushes, and he outlined the activities of a number of highly localised groups, including the Bouveroos of Bouverie Street. The Freeman Street push, for example, was known for the 'cowardly nature of their assaults on elderly people', with the Pitt Street push 'noted for the number of assaults made on women'.[21] Larrikins – those 'lords of misrule' – were also part of a wide-ranging talk given by J H Barrows to the Bankers Institute in 1890 on the 'Barbarisms of Barbarous Melbourne', and the various moral and physical failings of the city.[22]

The prominence of larrikins in the media was too much for some. One correspondent to the *Herald* in 1896 observed: 'There are ambitions of all kinds … it may be considered among the larrikins a fine thing to be connected with …

these 'pushes' and that it may be for them a species of fame, ignoble and criminal it is, to find their names appearing' in the paper.[23] The nature of larrikin pushes, territorially linked to others from the neighbourhood and skirting the liminal space between lawfulness and lawlessness, encouraged social identity and a sense of belonging. As Bellanta notes, being part of a push could mean 'a glorious though short-lived sense of collective empowerment when banding together to defy police'.[24] Or, as the *Herald* correspondent cautioned against, the thrill of seeing the names of you and your friends in the local newspaper.

The question of what could be done about the larrikin problem was also discussed. Some commentators, including the criminologist Lyle, felt that courts were too lenient, with many young men (or their parents) able to pay the relatively minor fines to avoid jail.[25] Others advocated for more recreation and education opportunities as a 'very fair cure for the alleged larrikin pest'.[26] The Salvation Army worked on evangelising larrikins, with incidents of forceful resistance to this by the pushes.[27]

The larrikin 'problem' of the city and inner suburbs both diminished and evolved through the early decades of the 20th century. The economy recovered, with a resultant uplift in employment levels, including building trades, manufacturing and retail. New forms of entertainment, such as cinema, alleviated some of the boredom that had characterised the more benign larrikin element, while the more hardened evolved into what Chris McConville described as an 'ordered underclass', whose income came from alcohol, drugs and gambling.[28] Mobility around the broader metropolitan area changed too, first with public transport networks; then the arrival of cars further shifted the way public space was occupied, and the way crime was committed in the city. The limits on the movements of the hyperlocal of 19th century larrikins had been removed, and perhaps reduced the hyperlocal territorialism that characterised the pushes. Further to societal changes, many youths aged out of larrikinism. In 1910, in a syndicated article, one police officer declared larrikinism was 'dead'. As it was noted in one newspaper, 'there are … pushes but they seem content to smoke and swear [and] insult passers-by', with many of the larrikin leaders now 'middle-aged'.[29] The participation of young men, including larrikins, in World War I may have had an impact on the long-term survival of the pushes. The use of the term larrikin also shifted in the early 20th century to more a sympathetic, good-natured connotation, with links to an emerging sense of Australian identity, as the more sentimental link to the ANZACs developed during the war.[30] The idea of the larrikin today is one of irreverent Australianness, with little to none of the implied misconduct or criminality of the 1890s larrikins.

UNDERSTANDING OF PLACE

The language used by the media and other commentators in the 1890s was designed to demonise these young men and project a sense of growing criminality in the inner suburbs, although the actual prevalence of crime has been disputed. Terms such as 'infesting' and 'evil in our midst' had the effect of othering the inner suburbs and the youth of these areas. The moralistic tone of much commentary on people's lives in Carlton and North Melbourne played to a broader metropolitan audience that was relocating to 'healthier' and more 'civilised' suburbs. The notion of the inner suburbs as

Early terrace row, Arden Street, North Melbourne, Lovell Chen.

uncivilised and unhealthy, particularly in relation to poverty, would continue through much of the 20th century. Likewise, the moral panic of youth crime is one to which the media returns to perennially, particularly if it affects places that are understood to be 'safe'. Larrikins were portrayed as existing at the fringes of society, but were very much part of that society and inner suburban life.

More broadly, what can larrikins tell us about life in late 19th century Melbourne? Certainly, the hyperlocal and at times territorial activities of these groups reflect a broader pattern of very localised living in this period. With the development of Carlton and North Melbourne taking place before public transport infrastructure and well before the rise of the car in the 20th century, people lived, worked and socialised across much smaller areas, with shops, hotels and services located close to home. The existence of numerous newspapers in this period, including many published for individual suburbs such as the *North Melbourne Advertiser*, facilitated the regular reporting of local issues, and such articles were syndicated throughout the state. Socialising and gathering were much more local, with both suburbs boasting numerous hotels. In North Melbourne, for example, there were 71 hotels in operation by the 1880s, the equivalent of a hotel for every 295 people. With an absence of local halls, these hotels were also used for political gatherings, clubs and societies and other public meetings. Street corners became an accessible space to occupy, a so-called 'third' place distinct from the home and workplace/school, in suburbs with relatively limited public or recreational space for young people. Hyperlocal pushes were possible due to the high density of the population of both suburbs, which allowed for micro neighbourhoods to develop within the broader area.

Cottages and terrace houses, Station Street, Carlton, Lovell Chen.

LARRIKINS AND HERITAGE

Between 2018 and 2022, Lovell Chen, a Melbourne-based heritage consultancy, undertook two heritage reviews of Carlton and North Melbourne[31]. Although extensive heritage studies had been undertaken in the 1980s, with protections applied to many properties, these areas had not been subject to detailed reviews since. Along with reviewing and updating building gradings and boundaries of heritage precincts, and recommending new heritage controls, detailed thematic environmental histories were prepared.

Thematic histories occupy an interesting space in heritage practice, both informing and reflecting the places considered for heritage protection. While the histories are wide-ranging, they are always tied to place. The emphasis on historical themes allows for recognition of both the pattern of development and of the way people lived in and occupied the area, including working, socialising, worshipping, growing up and aging. In many ways, the thematic histories also enable the recognition of the important stories and people that can inform an assessment of significance. The connections made between the buildings and the people go some way to informing a sense of identity and what has 'made' the suburbs the places they are today. In a place such as Carlton, the modest cottages, narrow laneways and small pubs tell you as much about the place as the wide streetscapes of ornate boom-era terraces. The suburb was home to a diverse mix of people, from city-based professionals to labourers, which is reflected in the form and scale of 19th century residences. A thematic history can recognise the street patterns, and various building types as 'making' the place, and as such contributing to its historical and architectural value. Recent

heritage reviews, for example, have elevated the significance gradings of rows of small, simple cottages, a building type that was perhaps not seen as significant in earlier studies.

The history of the larrikin pushes of the late 19th century is very much informed by place, and by the urban fabric of the inner suburbs in particular, and was a theme explored in the thematic histories for both heritage reviews. The densely developed Carlton and North Melbourne suburbs with working-class resident populations relatively hard hit by the 1890s crash saw the development of these hyperlocal pushes. Such urban and demographic factors were not present in the more comfortable middle-class suburbs outside the inner ring, and the larrikin pushes are not such a part of the history of those areas. Although the history of the larrikin pushes cannot be reflected in the protection of an individual building, it is in the pattern of the street grids, the rows of cottages and adjoining corner hotels that their activities can be understood.

The daily lives of those who resided in the inner suburbs are no longer overtly evident; their occupation of space is innately related to the character of these places. The larrikins tell us one aspect – a very interesting aspect – of complex and multilayered communities of 19th century urban life, and these stories can feed into an understanding of place, and understanding of its heritage value.

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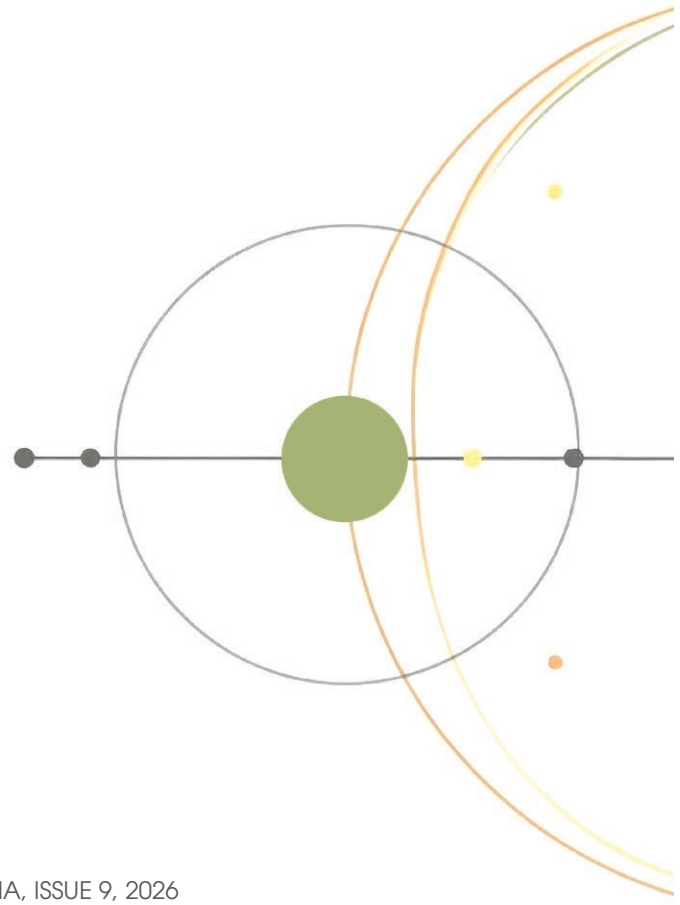


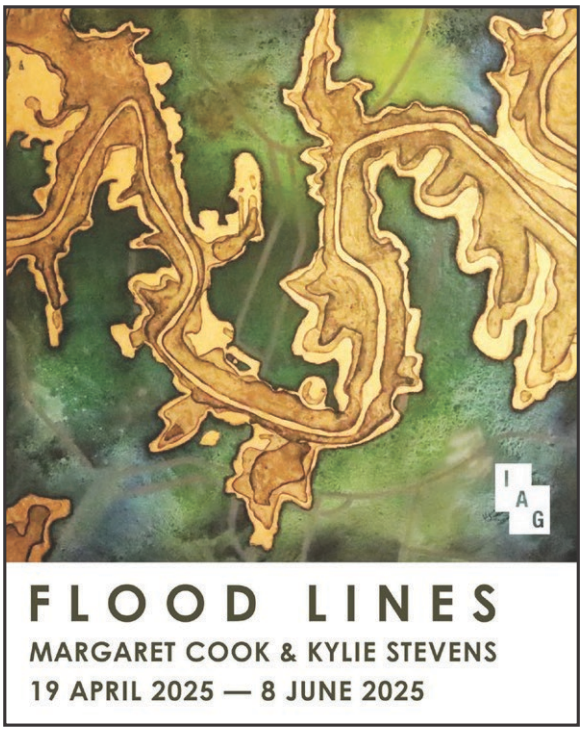
3 Flood Lines Exhibition at Ipswich Art Gallery

BY MARGARET COOK, PHA QLD & KYLIE STEVENS

We live and work on the lands and waters of the Turrbal and Jagara people and pay our respects for their enduring custodianship.

In 2025 historian Margaret Cook and artist Kylie Stevens collaborated on *Flood Lines*, a multi-modal exhibition that combined community stories, historical documents, photography and painting, and was exhibited in the Ipswich Art Gallery. *Flood Lines* explored the watery paths of Urrarar (Bremer River) and its stories of past floods as we face a changing climate. The exhibition of environmental art invited viewers to re-imagine Ipswich's flood history and the watery secrets that lie beneath the city's streets. This article is an example of how historians can work with an artist to find different ways to share history. It may inspire similar co-designed creative projects.

Floods are a common occurrence in Ipswich in Southeast Queensland because the city was created in the 1840s on the banks of the sub-tropical river, Urarrar (Bremer River), the lands of the Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul people. While many residents have lived through floods, in dry times it is difficult to imagine flood heights of over 20 metres. It is hard to recall where past flood lines (the edge of the flood) can reach. As Aboriginal artist Tex Sculthorpe says, 'the water shows us the country'.[1] Research has shown that memory is a powerful tool in flood preparedness. Those who remember past floods are more likely to respond to warnings and evacuate when faced with imminent flooding.[2] But as floods recede so does the memory.[3]



Poster advertising Flood Lines distributed around Ipswich, image Kylie Stevens.

COMBINING ART AND HISTORY

In Australia's climate of floods and droughts it is imperative to find ways to impart that knowledge. This was the key idea behind a collaboration between artist Kylie Stevens and historian Margaret Cook that combined art and history. Stevens had previously exhibited river paintings in *Ways of Water*, an exhibition at the Ipswich Art Gallery and Cook has extensively researched the flood history of the Bremer River, including for her book, *A River with a City Problem*.[4] Together they successfully applied for a grant from the Regional Arts Development Fund[5] to produce the *Flood Lines* exhibition at the Ipswich Art Gallery between 19 April and 8 June 2025.

Margaret Cook and Kylie Stevens at Flood Lines exhibition opening, photo Claudia Baxter.

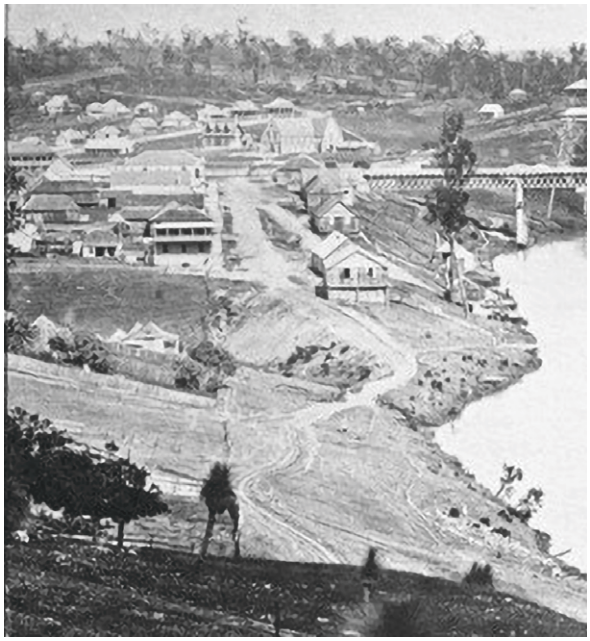
There is often talk of multi-disciplinary research and collaboration between art forms that sometimes remains just a lofty idea. *Flood Lines* was the result of a determination to realise a project in which artist and historian informed the other's work. Stevens and Cook created a multi-modal exhibition that combined community stories, historical documents, photography and painting. They were motivated by the desire to share knowledge in different ways to increase the community's understanding of floods. *Flood Lines* explored the watery histories of Urarrar (Bremer River) and challenges we face as the climate changes. The exhibition invited viewers to re-imagine Ipswich's flood history and the watery secrets that lie beneath the city's streets.

Stevens uses river water and hand-ground ochres in her work to give the painting an essence of the place it represents. In *Flood Lines*, water collected during the 2022 flood has been added to the paint: the floodplains have been depicted with a glaze made of riverbank mud, 2025 floodwater and acrylic emulsion. The copper leaf used to represent the river is symbolic of the energy of the river as it moves through the land. Cook's historical research drew on maps, photographs, flood reports and newspapers as well as her book. Stevens's six paintings drew heavily on the historical record; Cook had the task of naming the paintings and writing the catalogue text and artwork labels for the project.

WHY IPSWICH FLOODS

Historical research usually begins with a question and for *Flood Lines* it was Stevens's desire to understand why the same area in Ipswich, known locally as Devil's Gully which is in the centre of the city, always floods.

Plan of the Town of Ipswich at Limestone Moreton Bay 1843 drawn by Henry Wade Surveyor, copied by A G Maclean, Draftsman, 4 chains to an inch, Queensland State Archives.



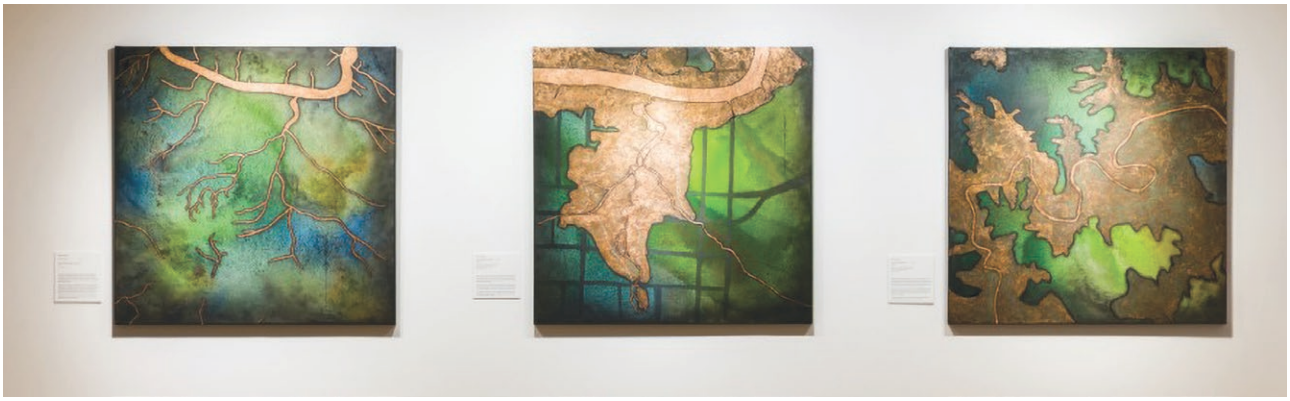
Cropped from Panorama of Ipswich from Limestone Hill, taken by Biggingee Sorabjee Poochee, Ipswich, 1865, Picture Ipswich.

The answer lay in its history and geography. A very early plan of Ipswich drawn in 1843 by the government surveyor Henry Wade[6] was exhibited as a wall-sized facsimile in the exhibition.

The limestone available in Ipswich was needed for cement and the building of Brisbane. So, the town of Ipswich was established at the head of navigation from Brisbane, as far as large vessels could reach. The Aboriginal people advised against the location as the water was salty and surveyor Henry Wade warned of floods, but the Colonial Governor, Sir George Gipps, was undeterred.[7] A city was built on the floodplain; Devil's Gully lay near the river.

The artist's eyes informed history and science as Stevens observed pink shading and a dotted line on Wade's map that she thought may have been a flood line. She was proven correct when, by using the spring tide measurements drawn on the map, geologist Nick Cook and hydrologist Terry Malone established that it was the 1841 flood line. They were then able to calculate its previously unrecorded height.

Wade's map traces a series of creek lines flowing across Devil's Gully and surroundsinto the river. An 1865 photograph shows steep sloping banks, crossed by creeks that are no longer visible. When the railway line between Ipswich and Brisbane was constructed in the early 1870s, the spoil from the railway cutting was used to fill the gully.[8] Later the area was filled with town rubbish and, in the 1920s, the gully was filled with soil provided by the railway department to make an avenue between Brisbane and Bremer Streets.[9] The creeks were encased in earthenware pipes, now channelled directly into the river. The land still slopes to the river, but the gradient is much reduced. Buried and constrained in pipes, the creeks are now hidden but in heavy rains they re-emerge unbidden and the Ipswich floodplain is made visible.



Ghost Creeks, The Waterways of Devil's Gully and Two Record Breaking Floods (Paintings 1 to 3), photo Claudia Baxter.

THE EXHIBITION

The *Flood Lines* exhibition comprised six paintings. The first painting was named *Ghost Creeks* and depicted the creeks shown in Wade's map. The title was chosen to convey that the creeks, although hidden, are a ghost-like presence in the landscape that can re-appear. In floods, they claim their floodplain.

The second painting was *The Waterways of Devil's Gully* as flooded in 1974. This was the deep gully shown in the 1865 photograph that filled when it rained. Since the 1870s this region has been popularly known as Devil's Gully. In January 1974, record breaking rains and downstream flows caused Urarrar to swell and reclaim its floodplain. As Maiwar (Brisbane River) flooded downstream, the flood water in Ipswich could not escape and the city was left submerged by 20 metres for three days until the waters receded. Two lives were lost and the damage was extensive. The painting shows the 1974 flood line and the land that was inundated, as well as the dotted line of Wade's 1841 floodline. The creeks were superimposed on the city's street grid, which allows the viewer to locate themselves and the waterways.

The third painting, *Two Record Breaking Floods*, depicted the two floods of 1893 (Figure 5). In February 1893 water flooded into the Stanley, Upper Brisbane and Brisbane Rivers. Urarrar rose to the highest flood levels since the city was built. Water surged onto the Ipswich floodplain, causing two floods within a fortnight. Both were record breaking floods, 24.5 metres and 23.6 metres at the river gauge, with a small flood in between. Lives were lost, property destroyed, and the bridge between north and south Ipswich was rendered unusable. As the waters receded the town was shrouded in foul smelling mud, debris and decomposing animals. *Two Record Breaking Floods* was informed by a map of the first 1893 flood, held in Queensland State Archives. These floods are still the largest recorded floods in Ipswich.

A Trilogy of Floods, the fourth painting, refers to the major floods of 1974, 2011 and 2022. The smallest flood is the 2022 flood (16.72 metres), 2011 was larger (19.4 metres), and 1974 larger still (20.7 metres), with all heights recorded at the David Trumpy Bridge gauge. This painting was informed by the Ipswich City Historical Flood Information's interactive flood maps and incudes the street grid. *A Trilogy of Floods*

A Trilogy of Floods and An Unmitigated Flood (Paintings 4 and 5), photo Claudia Baxter.

intended to show that the flood footprint (or flood line) is similar in floods, simply shrinking or expanding depending on the volume, location and timing of heavy rain.

The fifth, titled *An Unmitigated Flood*, was based on maps in *The Wivenhoe Dam Emergency Action Plan*. The technical names given to the two possible scenarios shown in the painting were Probable Maximum Flood (if a dam fails during a rainfall event) and a Sunny Day Failure (a flood caused by a dam failure on a dry day). The title, *An Unmitigated Flood*, intentionally has a double meaning. Dams can fail, for example their walls or gates may break, which would allow huge volumes of water to rush uncontrolled downstream. The flood height could not be reduced or mitigated. An essential task of dam management in floods is to save the dam and water must be released as gated dams have a finite capacity. Uncontrolled water from Wivenhoe Dam would create extreme, unmitigated damage, destroying much in its path and leaving Southeast Queensland with a limited water supply. Stevens and Cook hoped to convey the message that, while dams can mitigate floods in favourable conditions, where the flood waters are largely upstream of the dams, they cannot prevent them. Ipswich residents should not become too complacent about the risks of living on a sub-tropical floodplain or too reliant on dams for protection and always respect the dynamism and rhythms of the river.

The sixth painting was largely a street grid and the river on which Stevens projected a series of flood photographs held in the local library collection, Picture Ipswich. In many cases the photographs included local landmarks that could be situated on the map which increased local understanding of the flood line. The intent was to visualise the impact of flooding in Ipswich. The exhibition also included a video played on a large screen, commissioned by the Ipswich Art Gallery and produced by videographer Dr Carl Warner.[10]

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

The Flood Lines launch was well received by the 77 people in attendance and 6952 people visited the exhibition over 51 days (an average of 77 people per day). The art gallery's accompanying social media campaign attracted 3,621 views on Facebook and the video has had 128 views.

Flood Lines launch at the Ipswich Art Gallery, photo Claudia Baxter.

The project included a *Walking with Water Tour*, a free flood line walk and talk conducted for the public. Stevens drew the 1841 flood line in chalk on the streets of Ipswich and on a Saturday afternoon Stevens and Cook led 29 people on a two-hour walk that followed the line. They shared historical information and photographs and answered questions. The feedback forms were all positive with one attendee noting: 'Loved the flood walk. Really brings the history of Urarrar to life. Adds another dimension to Kylie and Margaret's work. It added to my understanding of the area and its history'. A few commented that the information, stories and photographs 'put the floods into perspective', indicating the value of a multi-modal approach to knowledge sharing. Locals and visitors alike commented throughout the Floodlines project that it gave them a greater insight into the flood hazard in Ipswich.

Stevens and Cook consider the project to be environmental art. They deliberately did not include people in the paintings as the exhibition was designed to focus on the dynamics and agency of the river. The river has always flooded and will continue to do so, despite the construction of dams, deposits of landfill and the enclosure of creeks in pipes. A key idea of the exhibition was the layered history of Ipswich from pre-colonisation to the present day, and the layered topography of the floodplain that lies beneath the roads. The artist and historian team created an ecosystem of art, history and nature to intertwine stories and, in doing so, hoped to encourage viewers toward a deeper respect and understanding of the cycles and rhythms of Urarrar (Bremer River).

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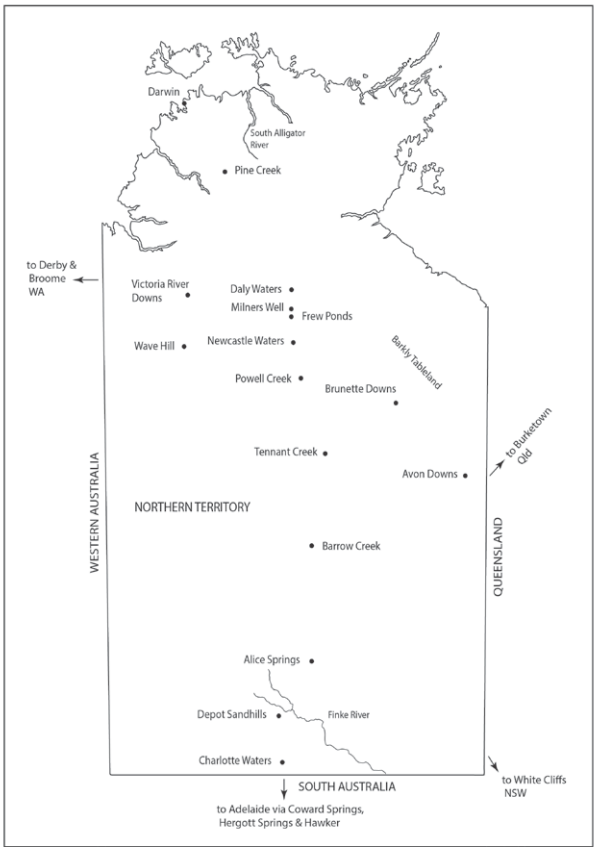
4 Pioneer overland cyclists in the Northern Territory

BY STEVEN FARRAM, PHA NT

This article was written in Garramilla/Darwin in Larrakia Country, and I pay my respects to the Elders past, present and emerging. I also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of other places where the events told here took place.



Northern Territory location map drawn by Paul Clark, 2026.

Jerome J Murif rode a bicycle from Adelaide to Darwin in 1897. The trip took him 74 days. Murif was the first to complete the transcontinental bicycle journey, although his record did not stand for long. But not all the Northern Territory overland cyclists were necessarily interested in making or breaking records. In this paper I look at the rides of several of the early overlanders, their motivations and any special features of their journeys, all undertaken in the days before there were any formed roads and when much of the Territory was still a genuine frontier.

INTRODUCTION

Long-distance or overland cycling began in Australia in 1893 when Percy Armstrong and R. Craig rode from Croydon in Queensland to Sydney before Armstong continued on to Melbourne.[1] Other cyclists were soon proving that sizable distances could be covered relatively quickly, even where there were only the most basic tracks. Records were being set and broken regularly, by both men and women. The stories of these pioneers and their successors have been told by several authors, including Jim Fitzpatrick, Rupert Guinness, Bret Harris, and Daniel Oakman.[2] All are essential sources, but they tell the story of cycling Australia-wide. This paper is a first attempt to bring together details specifically about several of the early riders who travelled through the Northern Territory, not all of whom were necessarily interested in making or breaking records. This paper looks at the rides of these early overlanders, their motivations and any special features of their

journeys, all undertaken in the days when much of the Territory was still a genuine frontier and there were few, if any, formed roads (the main north–south and east–west Northern Territory highways were only built during the Second World War).

Jerome J Murif, 1897
Travelling south–north, Adelaide to Darwin

One of the Northern Territory pioneers was Jerome J Murif, who rode a bicycle from Adelaide to Darwin, arriving in May 1897. The trip took 74 days. He wrote a small book about his ride titled *From Ocean to Ocean*, which underscored his achievement.[3] Murif was the first to complete the transcontinental bicycle journey, but his record did not stand long. Murif began his journey by dipping 'Diamond' (as he had named his bicycle) into the water at Glenelg beach.[4] Outside the settled districts, he found the going could be tough. Travelling over sandy stretches often involved pushing or carrying his machine, but riding through long grass was worse, as he had to stop every few minutes to clear grass out of the spokes and from around the hubs.[5] Murif travelled light, as did most of the early overlanders. He carried a small tool kit and a few items for making repairs. A waterproof sheet strapped to the handlebars contained a change of clothes, toothbrush, soap, towel, mirror and a comb. He also carried a container of water, a pannikin, a revolver, a pipe, and tobacco. He wore 'cool and comfortable' pyjamas rather than the knickerbockers favoured by most cyclists of the day.[6] Arriving in Darwin, Murif went to a spot, soon dubbed Bicycle Point, where Diamond was dipped into the sea once again.[7] Murif was welcomed to the northern capital with a 'smoke social', chaired by Government Resident Dashwood, with singing, speeches, and multiple toasts.[8] In an interview with the local press, Murif said that he had no trouble from Aboriginal people during his ride and that on the rare occasions he did see any, they ran away, presumably frightened by the unusual spectacle of a man riding a bicycle.[9] Murif's speculations may have been correct, but Aboriginal people elsewhere in Australia were already familiar with bicycles, and some had become cyclists themselves.[10] Otherwise, Murif's comments reflect a fear of Aboriginal people that commonly appeared in the period of this study in writing about cyclists and others who ventured far from built-up areas. In relation to the Territory overlanders discussed here, that fear proved largely unjustified, although a few exceptions are noted below. Murif, meanwhile, was a 35-year-old Broken Hill engine driver who had taken leave to undertake his epic ride.[11] But little is known about what happened to him afterwards. As one commentator has put it, it is as if he had 'popped up, ridden across Australia, and disappeared'.[12]

Tom Coleman and Alf Mather, 1897
Travelling north–south, Darwin to Adelaide

Even before Murif had left Darwin, it was announced that others planned to better his record. Charles Greenwood (sponsored by Dunlop tyres and the Austral Cycle Agency) and racing cyclist Tom Coleman (who would write about the journey for *Australian Cyclist*) arrived in Darwin by ship in mid-June 1897.[13] However, only days after they left for Adelaide, they were back again, having discovered their bicycles were not fit for the task.[14] Due to illness, Greenwood then returned south by ship, and a new rider, Alf Mather, took his place. Coleman and Mather

Two Aboriginal men with Mather's broken bicycle, Daly Waters, 1897, photo PH0370/0064, D H Brentwood Collection, Library & Archives NT.

left for Adelaide on 12 August 1897.[15] Mather's machine broke down on the way to Daly Waters station. Spare parts were sent from Darwin, but another breakdown at Barrow Creek caused Mather to abandon his bicycle, and he continued on horseback. Coleman, meanwhile, was forced to return to Barrow Creek to repair a broken fork. He then pushed on again, but falling violently ill, he broke the telegraph line in order to summon help. After a quick recovery, he left once more.[16] The pair finally made it to Adelaide and continued on to Melbourne. Coleman had broken Murif's cycling record for the Darwin–Adelaide leg by only a few days. Given the financial and logistical support the pair had received, the endeavour was generally considered a failure. To add insult to injury, the South Australian Post and Telegraph Office issued Coleman a bill for the cost of repairing the line he had broken near Barrow Creek: £150, a year's wages for an average worker in 1897.[17]

Albert Macdonald, 1898
Travelling north–south, Darwin to Adelaide

Telegraphist Albert Macdonald was the owner of one of the first bicycles shipped into Darwin in 1894. Already in December 1895, it was reported that Macdonald had imagined riding his bicycle right through the Territory and down to Adelaide.[18] By that time, Macdonald was living at the Powell Creek telegraph station (around 690 kilometres south of Darwin), where he had transferred not long after winning the Territory's inaugural bicycle race.[19] Finally, in August 1898, he left Darwin to cycle to Adelaide, aiming to break Coleman's record.[20] From his experience working on the Overland Telegraph line, Macdonald claimed to have intimate knowledge of the first 800 miles (1,288 kilometres) of the track from Darwin, and understood well the conditions he would have to face. He experienced no problems with Aboriginal people along the route, but had anticipated this would be the case. He was fortunate to benefit

Arthur Richardson (fourth from left) with local cyclists, Hotel Victoria, Darwin, September 1899. NTRS 3833, ASTS 1133, Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory, Library & Archives NT.

from tailwinds for parts of the journey, and recent rains allowed him to ride through sandy patches where previous riders had been forced to push or carry their machines. But those same rains made the going difficult for Macdonald when traversing the appropriately named Boggy Flat on his way to Charlotte Waters. Macdonald was determined to break the existing record by a large margin, pacing himself throughout to get the maximum from himself and his bicycle.[21] He outdid the expectations of many by completing the journey Darwin–Adelaide in 28 days, 15 hours and 30 minutes, and Darwin–Melbourne in 33 days, 5 hours and 30 minutes. The full journey had taken Coleman 72 days. Macdonald said shortly after completing the ride that he was willing to get on his bicycle again if anybody bettered his time, but his record stood for well over a decade.[22] Macdonald married in April 1899, seven months after completing his record-breaking journey. After a brief stint in Mount Gambier, he spent the rest of his life working as a telegraphist and postal inspector in Adelaide.[23]

Arthur Richardson, 1899–1900
Circumnavigating Australia, clockwise

In 1896, Arthur Richardson became the first person to cycle across the Nullarbor Plain.[24] He later conceived a plan to ride right around Australia. Richardson left Perth in June 1899, sticking to the coast as far north as Derby. He then struck out cross-country, heading for Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory. Richardson arrived to discover the homestead had recently 'been burnt to the ground by the natives'.[25] Nevertheless, he was able to induce a local Aboriginal man to act as guide and porter through the trackless terrain ahead. After one day, the man expressed a desire to return to his own Country, but Richardson would not let him go, threatening 'severe punishment' if he attempted to leave.[26] When Richardson spotted the man deserting camp, he fired at him with his revolver. Fortunately, the shot missed, but the man dropped the tucker bags he was carrying, took to the bush, and was never seen again.[27]

An image of the incident was later included on the cover of Richardson's book about his ride.[28] The cover sets the tone for the text, where Richardson routinely displays a condescending attitude towards Aboriginal people and makes many disparaging remarks. Despite his apparent fear of Aboriginal attack, Richardson safely made it through to Darwin where he was feted by local cyclists, but he did not stay long and was soon on his way down the track. At Powell Creek telegraph station, he met with three other around-Australia cyclists who were travelling in the opposite direction.[29] But Richardson completed his ride first. He arrived back in Perth in February 1900, thus completing the first around-Australia bicycle journey. It had taken him 243 days. Soon afterwards, Richardson enlisted to fight in the Boer War. He also fought in the First World War.[30]

Frank White, Alex White and Donald Mackay, 1899–1900. Circumnavigating Australia, counter-clockwise

The cyclists Richardson encountered at Powell Creek were Frank White, his brother Alex, and Donald Mackay. While Richardson set off across the Barkly Tableland into Queensland, the Whites and Mackay pushed on to Darwin.[31] On 17 October 1899, the three were joined on the outskirts of Darwin by a group of local cyclists who accompanied them into town.[32] The overlanders failed to get new tyres in Darwin, so they patched up their old ones as best they could and left for Western Australia.[33] Frank had trouble with his pedals and crank and stopped in Pine Creek for repairs, but it was no good and he returned to Darwin to wait for the next ship south. Alex White and Donald Mackay continued without him.[34] West of Victoria River Downs station, they were confronted by Aboriginal warriors gathered on the heights above them, brandishing spears and yelling menacingly. After a few rifle shots were fired, they retreated, only to regather and repeat their actions. Spears were thrown close by the cyclists, who used their rifles once again, but that was the last sign of the men.[35] This was the same area where Richardson experienced his fear of attack and was clearly a place of continuing Aboriginal resistance, a region where 'settler power', as Georgine Clarsen has described it, had not yet been secured.[36] White and Mackay reached Perth not long after Richardson had completed the first ride around the continent. The race was now on to better his time. White was delayed by sickness, but Mackay reached Brisbane, where he had begun his own trip, on 27 March 1900, completing the journey in 240 days, 7 hours and 30 minutes, a new record.[37] The Northern Territory had not seen the last of Donald Mackay, however, as he returned several times in the 1920s–1930s, accompanying scientific expeditions that he had financed. These included aerial surveys and travel by camel, but not bicycles.[38]

Andrew Lennox, 1900
Travelling north–south, Darwin to Adelaide

In October 1900, it was reported in Darwin that 'one of the Alligator River missionaries' was cycling to Adelaide.[39] Andrew Lennox had no notion of breaking records, but he nevertheless followed the now–established custom of dipping his bicycle into the sea before departure.[40] He wanted to raise funds for his mission and was clearly after publicity. For the next eight weeks, reports appeared on the progress of the 'amateur bicycle overlander', until his arrival in Adelaide where he was welcomed by a large crowd at a meeting presided over by

Bishop Harmer.[41] About his journey, Lennox told a reporter that the heat was so intense it caused the rubber of his tyres to melt. He rode 400 miles (644 kilometres) on the rims before he replaced them.[42] On arrival in Adelaide, Lennox was hailed as the fourth to achieve the feat of cycling from 'sea to sea',[43] but he is not remembered this way today. After his machine suffered an unnamed malfunction, he pushed it from Coward Springs to Hergott Springs (Maree), where he then caught the train to Hawker. After repairs, he continued his ride.[44] Others had also pushed or carried their bicycles at some stage, but travelling by train was a step too far. Lennox styled himself 'reverend', but he was not officially ordained. Nevertheless, he conducted divine service at various locations during his ride: Powell Creek (twice), Barrow Creek and Alice Springs. At the latter, he also held Sunday School and performed a baptism for the daughter of Atalanta and Thomas Bradshaw, master of the Alice Springs telegraph station.[45] After raising funds in Adelaide, Lennox returned to Darwin by ship. His mission wound up in 1903, and he then left the Territory.[46]

Francis Birtles, 1908
Travelling south–north then north–south, Queensland border to Darwin, Darwin to Adelaide

A publicity seeker determined to make a living out of his adventures, Francis Birtles made many visits to the Northern Territory, several by bicycle and later by motorcar and even aeroplane. His first visit was in 1908. His aim was to take photographs and otherwise document places of interest as he cycled from Sydney to Cairns, Burketown, Darwin, Adelaide, Melbourne, and back to Sydney.[47] As well as the normal gear carried by most overlanders, Birtles also had a camera, a supply of film, and an aneroid barometer, as he had arranged with the Government Map Compiler to check and correct the height of various mountains.[48] Crossing into the Territory from Queensland, Birtles had to walk through boggy country with mud and grass weighing down his boots. Leaving Avon Downs station, he entered five kilometres of bluebush swamp. Birtles sank knee–deep in the clay and water. He could barely hang on to his bicycle when the water reached up to his chin. He finally got through, but then hit around 18 kilometres of sand. Nearing Newcastle Waters, he found the track had been cut up by passing bullock drays for a distance of 80 kilometres.[49] He was often short of food and also had several bouts of fever. This held him up for three weeks at Brunette Downs station, and he spent 11 days in hospital in Darwin.[50] The journey south to Adelaide was far less dramatic, but it is notable that in his published account, Birtles neglects to mention the three cyclists he met coming in the other direction. The presence of these other overlanders in his narrative would presumably have diminished the impact of his own heroic deeds.

Dick O'Neill, Jim O'Neill and Fred Blakeley, 1908
Travelling south–north, northern South Australia to Darwin

Brothers Dick and Jim O'Neill, and their friend Fred Blakeley, left the White Cliffs opal fields in New South Wales, crossed into northern South Australia, and arrived in Darwin 79 days later, in August 1908. They explored all the mining possibilities en route, with a dingo-collie cross called Jethro trotting along beside them. In Darwin, they recounted meeting Birtles while on the track. The best distance they travelled in a single day was around 87 kilometres. While

crossing the Depot Sandhills, they walked for over 70 consecutive kilometres without once mounting their bicycles.[51] Their thin swags contained only a few blankets and a change of clothes. To keep warm at night, they relied on two or three fires.[52] When the frame of Dick's bicycle broke in two places, Fred repaired it with pieces of bamboo, and wire was used to replace broken spokes. One of Dick's wheels, so repaired, took on a 'slightly oval' shape, resulting in him progressing with 'a peculiar bouncing motion'.[53] They obtained some tubes in Tennant Creek to replace the grass with which they had stuffed their tyres in the interim. They were also able to 'secure a half-worn tyre' to replace one that was beyond repair.[54] The worn tyre was patched with goatskin, which Fred said made the best patches. The skin was soaked in water, applied wet and then left to dry. When so treated, the patches were good for up to 800 kilometres.[55] Jim later went to Western Australia, whereas Dick and Fred moved on to Queensland. Jethro was not allowed on the boat and remained in Darwin.[56]

Ted Ryko, 1914
Travelling south–north, Adelaide to Darwin

Edward Reichenbach, better known as Ted Ryko, left Adelaide for Darwin in May 1914 with his friend Jack Fahey. Their professed aim was to better the cycling record of 28 days, 15 hours and 30 minutes set by Albert Macdonald in 1898.[57] After Fahey sprained an ankle while still in South Australia, Ryko pushed on alone. Crossing the flooded Finke River, he narrowly avoided disaster when he was knocked off his feet and his bicycle was washed downstream. Luckily, he was able to retrieve it, dry out his kit, and head off once again. Ryko had to walk his bicycle through the Depot Sandhills, and was later troubled by grass seeds, which caused great irritation. At Frew Ponds, he had to dig three holes before he found water, and at the exceedingly deep Milner's Well (84 metres), the water was found to be 'absolutely stinking', polluted by the bodies of deceased animals. Thorough boiling and disguising the taste by making coffee was the only solution. At Daly Waters, Ryko realised he had been taking the trip in too leisurely a fashion. Hours were spent taking photographs, and he sometimes did not resume his journey until 11 o'clock in the morning. From that point on, he made a more determined effort, but only narrowly beat Macdonald's record, arriving in Darwin after 28 days 7 minutes. He summed up the track between Adelaide and Darwin as 'sand, sand, rocks, and then more sand with occasional stretches of good going'.[58] But overall, he declared the trip was not so difficult. There was only one day when he did not meet somebody, and he faced no threats from any Aboriginal people he met en route.[59] In Darwin, Ryko opened a photographic studio selling postcards of 'Northern Territory native life and tropical scenery'.[60] He came under suspicion during the Great War, as his travelling and photographs led to fears that he was a German spy. His premises were raided, and he was constantly harassed, convincing him to return south.[61]

Mr and Mrs C J MacDonald, 1936–1937
Circumnavigating Australia, clockwise

Mr and Mrs C J McDonald of Sydney pedalled into Darwin in June 1937 whilst on an around-Australia journey.[62] This was decades after the rides of the early overlanders, but conditions on the road were still primitive, and Mrs McDonald was a true pioneer, widely reported at the time as the first woman to have cycled around the continent. The ride took more than a year, but as the main reason the couple had

Mr and Mrs C.J. McDonald, Melbourne, October 1936. Age, 13 October 1936.

left Sydney was to look for work, they took jobs wherever they could, and only five months were actually spent on the road.[63] Starting out, Mrs McDonald stated that she was 'looking forward to the whole trip with excitement'.[64] Towards the end, she said 'When I complete this trip, I never wish to see another bicycle'.[65] They were once two days without food, they once got lost, travelling over 120 kilometres in a circle after being given wrong directions, and two times they almost died of thirst. Between Broome and Derby, Mrs McDonald lost her purse containing all their money; they backtracked around 100 kilometres and spent two days unsuccessfully searching through the high grass. Later, they were forced to spend two hours up a tree to escape an enraged bull. While crossing the Barkly Tableland, Mrs McDonald was bitten by a death adder. She survived after Mr McDonald cauterised the wound.[66] Mr McDonald claimed that 'The breakdown bill for the entire trip was a penny…for two broken spokes in Western Australia'.[67] Far earlier, however, Mrs McDonald was reported to have already mended her 169th puncture.[68] Mr McDonald said he planned to make another cycling trip 'up the coast from Sydney to the Cape country and then to Darwin', but it was not certain that Mrs McDonald would go with him.[69] No record has been found that they ever went on another cycling trip.

CONCLUSION

Long-distance or overland cycling was a phenomena in Australia, capturing much media attention. Jerome Murif established the Adelaide–Darwin cycling record in 1897. The record was broken several times in the following years. Around-Australia record setters and breakers also passed through the Territory. There were other overlanders who, rather than records, were more interested in publicity for fundraising or seeking employment opportunities. Overlanders still exist today, but those not aiming to break records are rarely considered newsworthy, as it has all been done before. The pioneers discussed here would marvel at modern conveniences such as vastly superior bicycles, satellite telephones, well-provisioned roadhouses, and all-weather sealed roads, not to mention accompanying support crews. How they would cope with the size, speed and volume of modern road transport is another matter.

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5 No home and starving: the plight of homeless women in colonial Queensland 1850-1900

BY SHAUNA HICKS OAM, PHA QLD

I pay respect to the Jinibara, Kabi Kabi, and Turrbal peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which I work and pay respect to the Elders, past and present.

Prisoners inside the work room in the women's prison of Boggo Road Gaol, 1903, State Library of Queensland.

Colonial vagrancy was a crime of poverty and adverse circumstances. This paper uses select case studies to highlight the plight of poor, homeless women in colonial Queensland arrested by police as vagrants between 1850 and 1900. Often with no family support, and no means of obtaining employment, deserted wives, widows and elderly women found themselves serving gaol sentences from three to six months with hard labour. The police and the courts were at a loss as to what to do with them if they did not meet the requirements for admission to institutions such as Dunwich Benevolent Asylum on North Stradbroke Island in Moreton Bay. Court reports in newspapers, together with archival and genealogical resources, throw some light on incarcerated women in 19th century Queensland.

INTRODUCTION

From 1859 to 1900 nearly 1,800 women were imprisoned in colonial Queensland lockups and gaols for a variety of minor offences such as drunkenness, obscene language, disorderly behaviour, vagrancy and some major offences such as assault, infanticide and theft.

This paper focuses on the crime of vagrancy, which was defined as having no regular lawful source of income, not having a home and sleeping rough. Vagrancy was a crime of poverty and adverse circumstances. Without the benefits of social welfare, the only place for the homeless, it seemed, was gaol, at least until the establishment from the 1880s of reception houses, asylums, and Magdalen and Salvation Army rescue homes.

Vagrancy laws were also used to charge women working as prostitutes in addition to those who were homeless and without a source of income.

It was not only older women who might find themselves destitute after the death or desertion of a husband. Young female immigrants were also gaoled for vagrancy if they took too long to find either employment or a husband. Families could be rounded up by police if found to be sleeping rough.

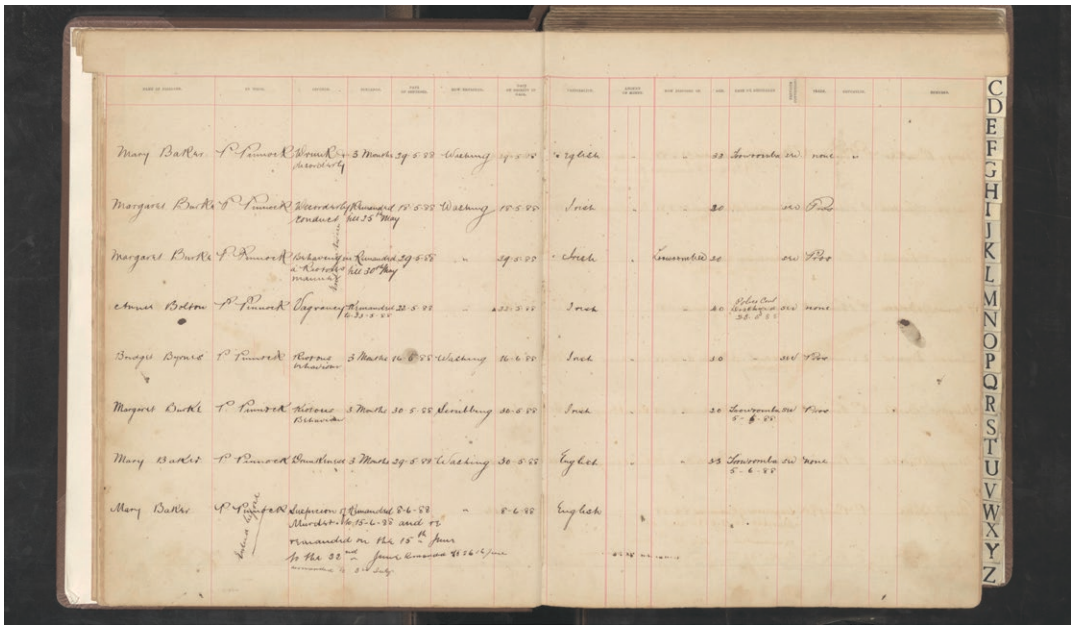
Despite all this, vagrancy as a female offence has not attracted much attention from historians. Further, little detailed analysis has been undertaken in the state of Queensland of what Dean Wilson calls 'policing poverty'.[1] This paper thus undertakes the task of examining women, homelessness, and vagrancy laws in colonial Queensland.

In general, very little research has been done on female prisoners in Australia, with most existing studies based on New South Wales and Victoria. Jan Richardson has examined female convicts in free settlement Queensland after the closure of the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement in 1842. Some of these women were subsequently incarcerated in Queensland's gaols. In the early decades following separation from New South Wales in 1859, a common female offence was drunkenness. Howard Le Couteur's article 'Of intemperance class and gender in colonial Queensland: a working-class woman's account of alcohol abuse' is relevant.[2] Historians such as Alana Piper, Barbara Minchinton, Alexandra Wallis and Michael Sturma have all written about prostitution in Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia.[3]

A History of Crime in Australia: Australian Underworlds looks at various aspects of crime, both male and female. Catherine Coleborne's chapter on 'Identifying Underworlds' examines vagrants by using the 1901 *Victoria police gazette* as a primary source.[4] Coleborne, in her book *Vagrant lives in colonial Australia: regulating mobility, 1840-1910*, describes vagrants as 'a stark window into how colonial societies sought to classify and contain poverty, mobility and deviance'.[5] Male and female vagrants from New South Wales, Victoria and New Zealand were studied, with no reference to Queensland. My research will thus add significantly to this area of study.

There are also relevant international publications. In New Zealand, Miles Fairburn observed that in Australia the male rural transient or bush worker was regarded as a folk hero while in New Zealand they were seen as folk devils.[6] He compared the vagrant in New Zealand society to the witches of 17th-century England in that they were feared and loathed. In Queensland, there are numerous examples of the 'respectable' public complaining to the police about female vagrants in their neighbourhood and wanting them moved on elsewhere. The women were seen as more of a nuisance than something to fear.

Janet Few, an English historian, and one of the creators of the website *A few forgotten women*, gives an insight into female offences including alcoholism, poverty, prostitution, suicide and vagrancy in the United Kingdom in her publication *Marginalised women: tracing 'misfortunate' female ancestors*.[7] The publication is at a general level, while the website tells the stories of individual women and explores why they ended up in the criminal justice system. Anne Ulentin explores female offences in 'Gender, Incarceration and Punishment in the Bahamas, 1860s- 1920s'.[8] As can be seen, the management of incarcerated women was an issue around the world.



Page from Register of Female Prisoners Toowoomba, 1888 – 1890, DR 14048, Queensland State Archives.

By combining archival resources with newspaper and genealogical resources, it is possible to learn more about the lives of women charged with vagrancy in colonial Queensland. The data concerning incarcerated women has been compiled from Queensland police gazettes, and for those sentenced to more than one week in gaol from prison admission and discharge registers. For minor offences with sentences of under a week, newspapers provide the names of women held in watchhouses or on remand. Through analysis of these primary sources, we can gain insight into not only the lives of homeless women, but the social and political institutions that framed their experiences.

WHY WERE WOMEN HOMELESS AND STARVING?

Women found themselves alone after the death of a husband or if their husband deserted them. The gold rushes saw men race off to the diggings, leaving wives and children destitute. Without a breadwinner, these women often lost their homes and had no money to buy food for themselves and their children. Christine Twomey writes that deserted wives and children were the largest and most needy group of the colonial poor in Victoria during the 1850s.[9] Queensland's gold rushes were later in the 1860s in Gympie and the 1870s and 1880s in Charters Towers, but the outcome was the same unless women accompanied the men to the diggings.

There were few employment choices available to women after being widowed or deserted. Incarcerated women were usually from the working class, unskilled and possibly illiterate which would have made employment options harder. The need to care for children was a limiting factor for finding employment as domestic servants. Work as a seamstress or washerwoman might have been undertaken at home.

Prisoners using in the laundry facilities at the new female division of Boggo Road Gaol, Brisbane, 1903, State Library of Queensland.

When sent to gaol for vagrancy women often lost their children, who were admitted to reformatories or orphanages for 'their own good'. The first Reformatory School for Boys was on board the ship *Proserpine* from 1871 to 1881 before the school moved to Lytton and was permanently established in 1900 at Westbrook, near Toowoomba. The Industrial and Reformatory School for Girls (later referred to as the Industrial School) was also established in Toowoomba. Younger children whose mothers were sent to gaol were usually forwarded to orphanages, both state and church administered. Carden and Wimshurst's article 'The Politics of Neglect: policing, institutionalising and providing for neglected children in late nineteenth century Queensland' provides more insight into this aspect of the family life of incarcerated women.[10]

Homeless women needed housing, food and protection from a life on the street. A prison sentence was one option for a magistrate to hand out but did not solve the underlying problem. Often women were given hard labour, which meant laundry or kitchen work. Sewing, too, was considered hard labour as the alternative was no work, and handling heavy sheets was tough. These jobs gave the women skills that could help them, especially the younger ones, find employment outside.

Sometimes magistrates opted to send the accused to a country town, away from the temptations of city life. Organisations such as the Salvation Army and the Magdalen Asylum also tried to assist from their establishment in the 1880s. But not every woman was happy to go to one of these charitable refuges as they had to abide by the institution's rules. Women with an alcohol use disorder found it extremely difficult and often did not stay. Case studies further demonstrate the difficulties homeless women encountered in colonial Queensland.

CASE STUDIES

While court and prison records outline the facts of an offence, newspapers provide more detail on the specifics of an offence. Often dialogue between the accused and magistrates was reported, and this provides an insight into the lives and thoughts of individual women. It is therefore possible to hear the women's voices and experience their despair, as through the three individual case studies below.

Starving

In Brisbane in 1882, Louisa Silcock was charged with stealing about four pounds of potatoes and a half pound of tea valued at one shilling and threepence from Yan Wah's shop in Elizabeth Street. Louisa was seen leaving the shop by Yan Wah and pleaded guilty. Detective Anderson informed the Bench that Louisa was often left without sufficient means of support and consequently, she was discharged. The police magistrate instructed the police to 'locate' her husband and if necessary, charge him for not allowing his wife sufficient means for her maintenance.[11]

Four years later, in 1886, Louisa was charged with vagrancy. It was noted that her husband had left her and their two young children without any provision. The family had no place to sleep and there had been public complaints that the children were sleeping on a veranda at Milton. The children were sent to the orphanage for 'their own welfare'. Louisa was remanded in custody and discharged after seven days when she promised to obtain work. [12] Louisa was unable to find work and faced further charges of vagrancy, attracting further prison sentences over the next few years.

In 1906, Louisa Silcock was listed in the electoral roll as living with her son Walter and his wife Nellie at Longlands Street, Woolloongabba, Brisbane.[13] Louisa died in 1917 at her daughter's residence in Logan Road, Woolloongabba.[14] At some point Louisa had been reunited with her family. This was not always the outcome when women were separated from their young children.

In 1887, Kate Kelly, aged 32 years, Harriet Harrison, aged 37 years and Louisa Silcock (as above) were charged as vagrants having no lawful visible means of support. All three women had just come out of gaol and pleaded guilty. The police stated that they were found 'loafing about Spring Hill and North Quay both day and night'.[15] In this instance, it was probable that they were working as prostitutes. Police magistrate Philip Pinnock stated that 'he did not know what to do with them…and [he] thought it best to send them away into the bush'. He remanded them in custody to give the matter further thought.

Over the years Pinnock found himself facing other female vagrants. In 1889, Kate Herbert, Kate Pious and Margaret McEveney, aged 40, 36 and 35 years respectively, were charged with being vagrants and having no lawful visible means of support.[16] This time police constables provided evidence that the women frequented George and Roma Streets at night for immoral purposes, or they were found loitering in a Wickham Terrace park. Even after a police caution, in the eyes of the police, they made no attempt to earn an 'honest livelihood'. The women had been seen as a nuisance to the public for some time, and each one was sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Pinnock remarked that it was 'the best thing for them during the winter months'.[17]

Police magistrate Philip Pinnock, State Library of Queensland.

Kate Herbert's last six-month gaol sentence was in June 1895 for supplying liquor to Pacific workers, known as 'kanakas' in Bundaberg.[18] She was described in the newspaper as a 'depraved creature'. Kate died in gaol on 23 August 1895 and was buried in the Drayton and Toowoomba Cemetery.[19]

Margaret McEveney died in Brisbane Hospital in 1900 from a reaction to chloroform. She had been arrested and taken to the lock up prior to being admitted to hospital with two broken shoulders. The inquest into her death suggested the possible use of force by the arresting police officers.[20]

Drunk and disorderly

Police Magistrate Pinnock often found himself perplexed by the women who appeared before him on a regular basis for drunkenness. There were two options open to magistrates. They could sentence the offender to a short stay in the cells until they sobered up or send them to prison for a longer term of three or six months. Either way it was not long before the women appeared before the courts again.

Sarah Mattie, a young woman, was a regular offender and had completed various terms of imprisonment for being drunk, disorderly and a vagrant. Sarah was born in July 1862 in Warwick, Queensland, to parents Dominick Doherty and Catherine Carroll.21 They had married in Armidale, New South Wales in 1857.[22] Catherine was left a widow with two young children and baby Sarah when her husband Dominick died in October 1862.[23] In 1881 in Warwick, when she was18 years old, Sarah married Pio Giancinto Mattei, a cook from Pisa, Italy.[24] The couple separated and there were no children from the marriage. In December 1884 Sarah was first charged with vagrancy and it was noted that her husband had left her.[25]

When Pinnock saw Sarah in 1889, he said 'you again – I don't know what to do with you. You are sentenced to one month's imprisonment for I believe that is the best thing I can do with you'.[26] Pinnock then added 'I wish they would give me an institution for these people, as this is a perfect farce'. He wanted the government to establish an inebriate's asylum which would help the women with their addiction. Without help and support, and somewhere to live away from their friends and temptation, it was unlikely that these women would manage on their own. Sarah spent

the rest of her life in and out of Queensland and northern New South Wales gaols before she died in Murwillumbah, New South Wales, in 1939.[27]

Deliberately seeking gaol time

Elizabeth Noy was a mature woman charged on several occasions with destroying other people's property. Born in Middlesex, London in 1838, she was the daughter of Alfred Ward and Sarah Higgs.[28] Elizabeth Ward arrived as a 19-year-old in Sydney in 1857 on board the *Mary Anne*.[29] Her daughter, Frances Ward, was born in Queensland about 1858, and a son Joseph Ward was born in 1862.[30] No father was given on the birth registrations for either child.

In 1894 Elizabeth Noy was charged with breaking two plate glass windows at the Imperial Hotel in Brisbane. Although the landlord tried to restrain her, Elizabeth continued to try and smash the windows. When he questioned what she was doing, Elizabeth simply said 'Never mind, I know what I am doing'.[31] She pleaded guilty and as there were 89 convictions already recorded against her, Elizabeth received 12 months in Toowoomba Gaol with hard labour.

The following year 60-year-old Elizabeth Noy and 53-year-old Margaret Hayes gave themselves into custody, stating they had no homes to go to. Elizabeth had just returned to Brisbane after another six months' stay in Toowoomba Gaol. Both women had applied for admission to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum but were refused by the doctor as they did not meet admission requirements. [32] Both pleaded guilty to vagrancy; Pinnock remarked that 'they seemed anxious to get back to gaol'. Elizabeth responded, 'What are we to do? We are not able to work, and we cannot get into Dunwich. We are not going to stop in the streets to be killed'. Pinnock gave them hard labour and Elizabeth simply said, 'hard labour or soft labour it is all the same'. Both women received a six-month sentence in Toowoomba Gaol.

When Elizabeth Noy was eventually admitted to Dunwich Benevolent Asylum in 1896, she said she had never been married.[33] No explanation was given for why she used the surname Noy and not Ward. Elizabeth died from valvular heart disease at Dunwich in December 1911, aged 74 years.[34]

CONCLUSION

These few examples show how difficult life was for homeless women in colonial Queensland. Without a husband or family support, or a paid occupation, life was a struggle for women whose real crime was poverty. The lack of institutional and welfare support was obvious, yet Pinnock's pleas for the establishment of an inebriate's institution failed to get support from the colonial government. Public attitudes to homelessness mostly surfaced when the homeless lived close by to them or they had to pass by the homeless on the streets. By then it was a police matter, not something that the public could assist with.

For those addicted to alcohol, help was available through the Salvation Army Rescue Home and the Magdalen Asylum from the 1880s. Both institutions tried to help the women with their alcohol use disorders and provided accommodation and meals. But many women could not adhere to the strict rules and regulations required and left, even though living rough and wondering about the next meal was a worry. For some women, life in gaol, even with hard labour, was preferable as it guaranteed a place to sleep and regular meals.

My continuing research into incarcerated women will allow comparisons to be made with other Australian states and territories and other countries. I am looking at the women, the offences, the prisons and courts, as well as police and society responses. It will fill a gap in the literature, and in our knowledge of lower-class female struggles in the 19th century. Incarcerated women's stories deserve to be told to shine a spotlight on life in colonial Queensland for those less fortunate.

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6 Northern Australia's last imperial outpost: Somerset, Cape York, 1864-67

BY JEFF HOPKINS-WEISE, PHA NSW & ACT

I acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which I work and reside, along with the Gudang people of Cape York, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging and recognise their ongoing connection to Country, culture, and community.

Hand-tinted 1868 newspaper illustration — "View of Somerset — township and harbour — northern Australia" with HMS Salamander, from the Illustrated Sydney News, 13 June 1868, author's private collection.

British expansionism across the Australian continent saw a small number of very isolated military outposts established in northern and western locales far removed from the core areas of initial European settlement, including Fort Dundas on Melville Island (1824–29), Fort Wellington in Raffles Bay (1827–29) and Port Essington (1838-49) on the Coburg Peninsula in what is today the Northern Territory. Another far-flung outpost was established in King George Sound in 1826, in what is today Albany, Western Australia, and another short-lived military outpost was associated with the abortive North Australia Colony in 1847, later the site of Gladstone (Port Curtis) in central Queensland. The military forces at these settlements included various detachments of regiments of the British Army along with Royal Marines at Fort Dundas and at Port Essington.

This article is my preliminary exploration into the history of the last imperial military outpost in northern Australia during the nineteenth century – the Royal Marines at Somerset (Port Albany) in Cape York, 1864-67. This forms part of an ongoing project to better document the often-forgotten imperial detachments of the British Army and the Royal Navy that served in Queensland during the nineteenth century, for which the Royal Marines at Somerset has so far eluded my attention, despite having carried out a large body of research decades past. It was the passing of Rod Pratt, a good friend and colleague, in 2022, who shared this same passion that re-ignited my purpose to 'tick off' one more of those 'to do' projects.[1]

In a 2019 article, Pratt and I drew attention to the service of the British Army and Royal Navy in the Australian colonies as one of the least explored and understood aspects of Australian history. As Pratt and I noted, part of

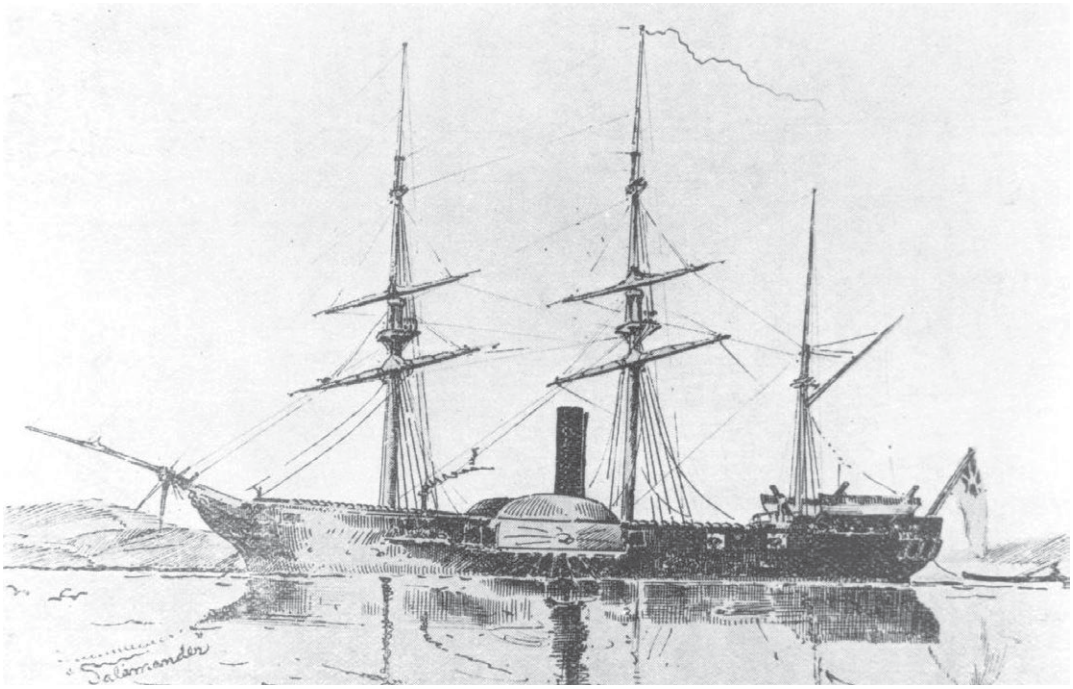
this historiographic oversight is 'attributable to a reluctance or refusal to incorporate the role of the British soldier', sailor or marine, 'into the conceptual framework of our national military historiography', and where 'there has been a quite deliberate distinction of what constitutes 'Australian' military history from its British origins.'[2]

The force known as The Marines (1755-1804) formed part of the Royal Navy and was colonial Australia's first garrison force allotted to the First Fleet to establish the Colony of New South Wales (NSW) in 1788. The Marines served in NSW until 1792 when they were replaced by the NSW Corps. Prior to this, small detachments of Marines also served in Australasian and Pacific waters aboard Royal Navy vessels involved in Cook's three voyages of exploration (1768-1779). The Marines were designated 'Royal' by King George III in an order in April 1802. In 1855, the infantry section of the Royal Marines took the name Royal Marines (Light Infantry), and in turn became the Royal Marines Light Infantry in 1862.[3] Another early detachment of Royal Marines was involved with the abortive Port Phillip settlement in 1803-04, before being relocated to form the second settlement after Risdon on the Derwent River in Van Diemen's Land in 1804, which established Hobart. Royal Navy vessels also carried small detachments of Marines during service in Australian and New Zealand waters throughout the nineteenth century.

NORTHERN OUTPOSTS OF EMPIRE AND THE PLACE OF THE ROYAL NAVY

While the Royal Navy's Australia Station based in Sydney was not established as a separate naval command until 1859, it is important to reflect on the power of the Royal Navy presence in Australasian waters and the south-west Pacific.[4] Despite at times a sparseness of warships on station in these waters, the prestige of having units of the Royal Navy in port or showing the flag along the coasts was immense. John Bach, in his seminal work on the Australia Station, noted that 'the values and practices of the mother country prevailed virtually undiminished' in these colonies, 'and among these characteristics shared … a susceptibility to the mystique of the Royal Navy.'[5] The Royal Navy was also a visible symbol of imperial power 'far more charismatic' than that of its colonial governors.[6] The Royal Navy, like its British Army compatriots serving in garrison, not only greatly enhanced 'the crimson thread of Kinship' that linked distant Britain with the colonies, but these imperial forces were also an assurance of the protection and military might of the British Empire in these distant shores.[7]

Through the nineteenth century, Royal Navy ships were crucial players in colonial services. The services they provided ranged from surveying expeditions, selection of sites for navigational aids including lighthouses, and the establishment, ongoing communications, and resupply of the various northern outposts from the 1820s through to the establishment of Somerset in the 1860s.[8] For Somerset, vessels strongly associated with the Royal Navy included the wooden screw gun vessel HMS *Pioneer*[9] and the paddle sloop HMS *Salamander*.[10]



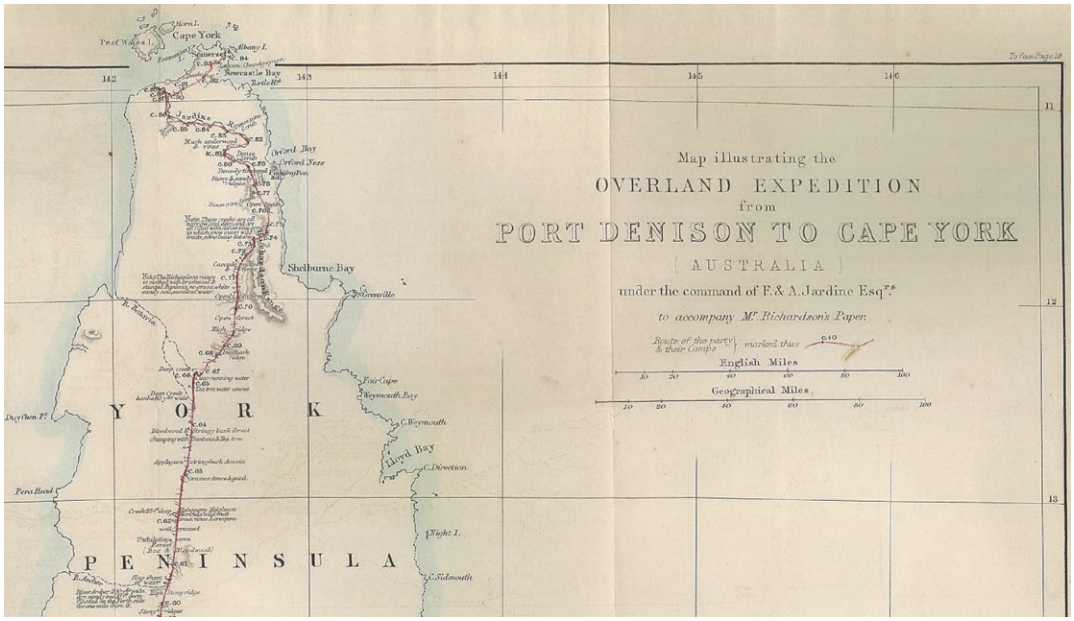
The Royal Navy's paddle sloop HMS Salamander, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Neg 168785.

ORIGINS AND ESTABLISHMENT OF SOMERSET, CAPE YORK

The growing French presence in the Pacific and its takeover of New Caledonia in September 1853 was one factor for the British to better secure northern Australia and the Torres Strait. HMS *Herald*, which carried out extensive survey work around Australia and the Pacific during the 1850s, after one lengthy cruise returned to Sydney in January 1855. Among the correspondence awaiting its commander Captain Henry Denham, was one from Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort, Hydrographer of the Royal Navy, dated May 1854. Beaufort elaborated on potential threats posed by growing French and American interests in the western Pacific, 'and you may therefore soon learn through their lordships that HM Government intend securing at Albany Island or Cape York, some fortified station in order to retain the permanent command of Torres Strait.'[11] As it turned out, it would be some ten years before such a 'station' eventuated on Cape York.

Following Queensland's separation from NSW in 1859, the new colony's first governor, Sir George Ferguson Bowen, became an enthusiastic supporter of creating a second Singapore on Australia's far northern coast to secure the maritime routes through Torres Strait. This, it was hoped, would facilitate British trade and communications, and encourage regular steamship mail services, as well as provide a port of refuge for shipwrecked sailors.[12]

In an aside to the history of the Royal Marines in Queensland, it is worth noting that when Bowen arrived in Moreton Bay aboard HMS *Cordelia* to take over the gubernatorial duties, Queensland at that time did not possess any garrison of British soldiers. So, when Bowen landed at the Botanical Gardens in Brisbane in December 1859, the 'red-coat' guard of honour provided as part of the welcoming spectacle was formed by a detachment of Royal Marines from the *Cordelia*.[13]



Map showing Cape York, Somerset, and nearby islands, published for the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, London, 1866, author's private collection.

In a despatch in December 1861, Bowen reiterated earlier calls for establishing a formal presence in far northern Queensland, 'somewhere about Cape York, or the entrance of Endeavour Strait.'[14] Commander Frederick Robinson of HMS *Pioneer* was an advocate for the Inner Route through Torres Strait and in 1863 corresponded with Bowen that this route took less time to transit and the *Pioneer* and other naval vessels had 'made passages to Cape York in far less time than generally applied to the Outer Route.'[15] Robinson no doubt had already established a good rapport with Bowen, who during August-September 1862, personally inspected Torres Strait and Cape York aboard HMS *Pioneer* in conjunction with the new officer commanding the Australia Station, Commodore William F. Burnett, to select 'the most eligible site for the proposed settlement.'[16] Burnett had only taken over this senior command in July, but just over six months later, he, along with 189 officers, seamen, and Royal Marines aboard HMS *Orpheus*, the new flagship of the Australia Station, lost their lives when the warship was wrecked near Auckland, New Zealand.[17]

Bowen, in a despatch in November 1862, reported that he boarded HMS *Pioneer* in Moreton Bay on 27 August and travelled northwards to Booby Island in Torres Straits, where they checked the cache of stores left for shipwrecked sailors.[18] On the return voyage, the *Pioneer* passed through the Endeavour Strait and, from 10-22 September, anchored near Cape York in Evans Bay and Port Albany. During this time, Bowen and Burnett made careful examination of this region and both concluded the site for the proposed settlement should be at Port Albany. Bowen also announced this new settlement would be named Somerset in honour of the 'present First Lord of the Admiralty, the Duke of Somerset', and if a better site was discovered the settlement would be relocated.[19] As it turned out, a more suitable (better sheltered)

site with a deep water port at Thursday Island (Port Kennedy) was in time found and the government administrative centre at Somerset was relocated to Port Kennedy in 1877.

Following Bowen's return to Brisbane, the pace of plans for Somerset as a joint imperial and colonial undertaking quickened. Arrangements confirmed that the Queensland colonial government would supply the civilian personnel, including a surveyor, along with building materials, while the imperial authorities provided the necessary finances, a military force comprising a detachment of Royal Marines, a Royal Navy surgeon for the settlement's medical care, and guaranteed regular visits by Royal Navy vessels for re-supply and communications purposes.[20] While Albany Island had been initially selected for the settlement, another site on the mainland across the channel from this island was instead chosen, but this soon showed itself unsuitable for various reasons. Most crucially, as one of the most important purposes was to establish a suitable port, the strong tides that ran through Albany Passage turned out to be hazardous for shipping.[21]

On 14 July 1864, HMS *Salamander* commanded by Commander John Carnegie departed Moreton Bay with a cargo of supplies for the new settlement at Cape York and a detachment of 19 Royal Marines Light Infantry under the command of Lieutenant Robert James Pascoe[22], along with Royal Navy Surgeon Dr Timotheus J. Haran from HMS *Curacoa*.[23] In June, when still in Sydney, Carnegie chartered the merchant vessel *Golden Eagle* to convey other essentials, including its civilian staff, stores, supplies, over 250 sheep, and pre-fabricated buildings prepared in Brisbane for the police magistrate, surgeon, Royal Marine officer, barracks for the Marines, office for customs and post office, a hospital, and a lockup. The *Golden Eagle* arrived in Brisbane on 30 June, and after loading departed on 13 July. Another Royal Navy doctor, Assistant Surgeon Richard Cannon, also undertook a period of service at Somerset during Dr Haran's leave of absence during 1864-65.[24]

The Royal Marines landed on 3 August 1864, followed by the civilian party the next day, with the sheep landed on Albany Island. The *Salamander* departed on 7 September, and Carnegie soon after reported to Bowen that the settlement had been successfully established. The *Salamander* thereafter continued to provide communications and supplies and undertook several voyages to Somerset each year.[25]

While John Jardine had been appointed Somerset's Police Magistrate and Commissioner for Crown Lands in February 1864, he could call upon the Marines detachment to assist the civil establishment in an emergency, although he did not command this military force. Akin to the experiences of earlier far-flung military outposts elsewhere, 'relations with local Aboriginal people [in this case the Gudang or Djagaraga people[26]] was fraught with fear and lack of cultural understanding, and tensions between the races ran high.'[27] At Somerset, this was further complicated by the fact that the Royal Marines detachment had no Australian experience and had arrived directly from England aboard HMS *Salamander* via Sydney and Brisbane. The detachment would work alongside members of the civil establishment, such as John Jardine, who had hardened frontier experiences and very different and ruthless attitudes in their dealings with First Nations peoples, as quickly became evident.

Assistant Surgeon Richard Cannon in an 1885 account recalled that after the *Salamander* departed in August 1864, this

> left us twenty-eight men in all, to our own resources, a thousand miles from any other Europeans and surrounded by many hundreds of … [Aboriginal people] who might at any moment become our enemies. The crisis soon came, for one day … [John] Jardine soundly belaboured … [an Aboriginal] who he caught stealing an axe, and his son Johnny, … gave one or two other … [Aboriginals] a taste of his stock-whip.[28]

Aboriginal warriors in prompt response speared two Marines on 13 September 1864 – Private John Saich, who was serving as Lieutenant Pascoe's servant,[29] and Corporal David Dent.[30] Saich was severely wounded with a spear through an arm and another in his chest.[31] Dent sustained a barbed spear deep to the chest, which Cannon was unable to extract, 'and it only came out after many months of suffering' but he recovered and went on to have a lengthy career until discharge in 1876.[32] Cannon had been able to extract the spears from Saich but this Marine suffered greatly, and it was not until HMS *Salamander* arrived on its second voyage to Somerset on 22 December that an opportunity to evacuate him became possible. The *Salamander* departed for a return to Sydney on 16 January, where Private Saich finally succumbed to his wounds in a Sydney military hospital on 21 April 1865.[33] Marines and civilian personnel in turn carried out reprisals during October 1864, and in one incident led to the deaths of a group of Aboriginal men in a canoe.[34]

Other aspects of the service of the Marines at Somerset included involvement in exploration with John Jardine using a cutter from the *Salamander* to investigate the mouth of the Kennedy River during 1865. The Marines also provided much of the labour force for clearing land and building works at Somerset during 1864-65, and in June 1865, three cottages for married Marines were completed but it is unclear whether any families of Marines ever arrived at the settlement.

CONCLUSION

HMS *Salamander* arrived at Somerset for the last time in August 1867 on its return voyage for England. Arriving aboard were Queensland Police Acting Sub-Inspector W H D Howe and six constables who were to take over the security of the settlement. Seven Marines, their terms of enlistment expired, chose to take their discharges and remain in Australia at Somerset until they could take passage in January 1868 aboard HMS *Virago*, where their discharges were formalised in Sydney. The remaining members of the detachment departed with the *Salamander* and Somerset became wholly Queensland-controlled. Imperial authorities continued to provide annual financial assistance to maintain Somerset as a port of refuge, but in 1872 the Admiralty withdrew its support on the grounds that it was economically 'unjustifiable to send a ship on a 3000 mile round voyage twice a year … to supply a colonial settlement of only twelve persons.'[35]

Somerset did not become a second Singapore and generally failed to meet any of its expectations. Port Albany was a poor harbour

and was situated too far from the main shipping channel, and relations with local First Nations peoples were tense and marked with hostility and bloodshed. It was only as a port of refuge that Somerset realised some degree of success.[36] When the British government recalled the detachment of Royal Marines in 1867, both imperial and colonial authorities considered abandoning the settlement altogether and maybe this would have soon eventuated had it not been for the emergence of a new and lucrative maritime enterprise in Torres Strait – the pearl shelling industry.[37]

So where to from here? Hopefully, the exercise that generated my paper presented at the *Hot Histories* PHA Conference in Darwin on 26 October 2025, and in turn this article, will re-invigorate my efforts to more fully document the history of the Royal Marines at Somerset. This will also place this small and remote detachment – Australia's last imperial outpost, within this force's own distinct record of service as extolled by its motto *Per Mare, Per Terram* – 'By Sea, By Land'.

Artwork showing the regimental badge, motto, and stand of colours of the Royal Marines, in PH Nicolas, Historical Record of the Royal Marine Force, London, 1845.

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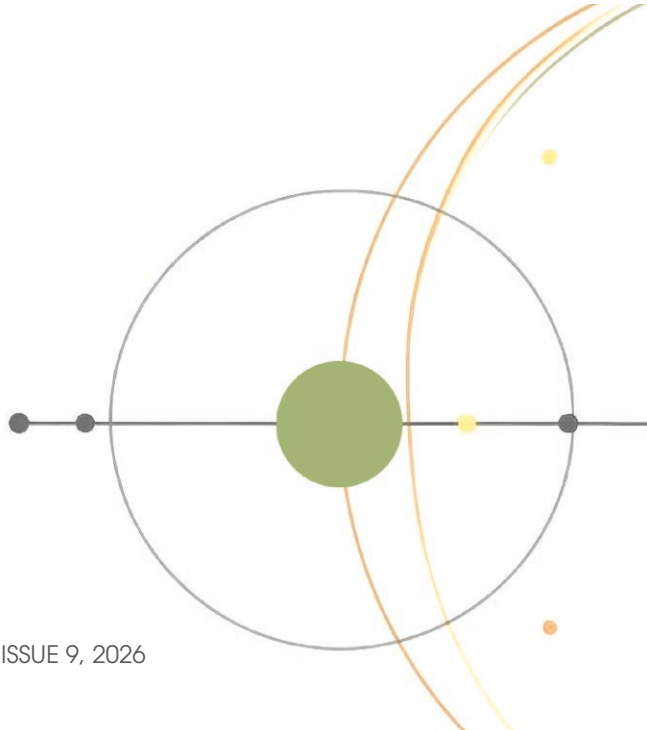


7 A new approach to old documents: how historians can critically engage with AI

BY DEBORAH LEE-TALBOT, PHA VIC & TAS

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which I work, live and play. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

This paper argues that historians should critically intervene in Artificial Intelligence (AI) development. At the University of Melbourne's Archive (UMA), I used an AI-supported platform, Transkribus, to transcribe handwritten station diaries from the late 19th and 20th centuries to improve access to records. The following discussion and case study show one example of how to do supervised learning: a process where expert humans correct and tag AI-generated outputs. This process establishes parameters of accurate transcription within specific historical contexts. Supervised learning by experts has value as it improves transcription accuracy and metadata content for cultural institutions. Historians are essential participants in AI development because they can safeguard against decontextualisation and historiographical silences, while ensuring archival and historical principles remain central to a project.

INTRODUCTION

Mass digitisation of 19th and 20th century diaries at the University of Melbourne Archive enables remote access to colonial records. The UMA has been my travelling companion across Victoria, Australia. Through a mass digitisation project, hundreds of pages of handwritten diaries appeared as open access on the UMA catalogue. If I were online, whether it was in the home office, a public library or onsite in the archive, with a few clicks on my keyboard, I could access these historical pages for research. The defining characteristics of this collection, a mass of information and the cursive handwriting the authors used, are indicative of colonial materials in many Australian archives; open to read but, at times, difficult to access and decipher.

After briefly situating historians' engagement with technological change, this paper presents findings from a UMA pilot to demonstrate how supervised learning improves model accuracy and addresses historiographical concerns regarding the marginalisation of people and communities in archives.

HISTORIANS, TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS AND SUPERVISION

Historians have previously leveraged technological change to advocate for improved understandings of our pasts. During the 1950s, Australian historians worked with librarians and archivists on the Australian Joint Copying Project (AJCP) to reproduce overseas records that were then used to decentralise imperial

narratives.[1] Working with record-keepers, historians helped improve collection access and knowledge of the AJCP more broadly. Critiques of microfilm, such as transcription errors, loss of context, and concerns over record authenticity, resonate today in debates about AI-assisted processing.[2] Similar to the microfilm advocates of the 1950s, institutional enthusiasm for AI can be deployed to improve access to historical collections. Now, historians are able to prompt and augment AI output. They use their contextual knowledge, including their expertise in historiography, to improve a model's 'understanding' of material.

Being active in training models draws historians into the process of addressing the mass data problem that librarians and archivists have experienced. While digitising terabytes of manuscripts and records has made records more available, improved metadata and transcripts are needed to facilitate the accessibility of all these records.[3] This is being made possible with advances in AI but 'supervised learning' of AI outputs is integral to this process. Having experts, in this instance historians, train and validate AI outputs reduces decontextualisation issues and improves the reliability for discovery and data mining. Importantly, the supervised learning process itself becomes an opportunity to address metadata gaps. As historians review transcripts, they can identify previously undocumented topics for archive staff to include in collection descriptions.

The Australian government has identified AI as a major area of productivity with its promise of 'speed and accuracy' for Australian industries.[4] And as Australian cultural institutions incorporate AI, there is an opportunity for experts to critically assess AI's potential for research.

Digital humanities researchers have argued that AI may develop the capability to replicate human cognition with the extraction of information from digitised historical records.[5] Both historians and AI programs extract information from historic records for purposes that were unimaginable at the time of creation.[6] The difference is that only historians critically engage with the past. AI is designed to identify patterns without offering a critique. It is this critical interaction with digital technologies that offers the best chance to take an ethical approach to AI-processing of historical documents.[7]

Further, historians' active participation in the AI training process is a means of addressing the uneven representation of historic perspectives and experiences based on race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexuality and economic status. This involvement is known as 'supervised learning': a human corrects and tags data to demonstrate to the computer program what output is deemed 'correct' in a particular instance. By supervising AI transcription development, historians have an opportunity to reinterrogate and reshape collections, their descriptions, and improve access to that knowledge.

If historians are involved in this process, they can interrogate the 'who, when, and why' of colonial archives, reading these against the grain. Thus, as the anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has noted, colonial documents become ripe with potential for reclassification and 'for new initiatives'.[8] For example, they have a greater opportunity to produce histories of marginalised individuals and communities from colonial records.

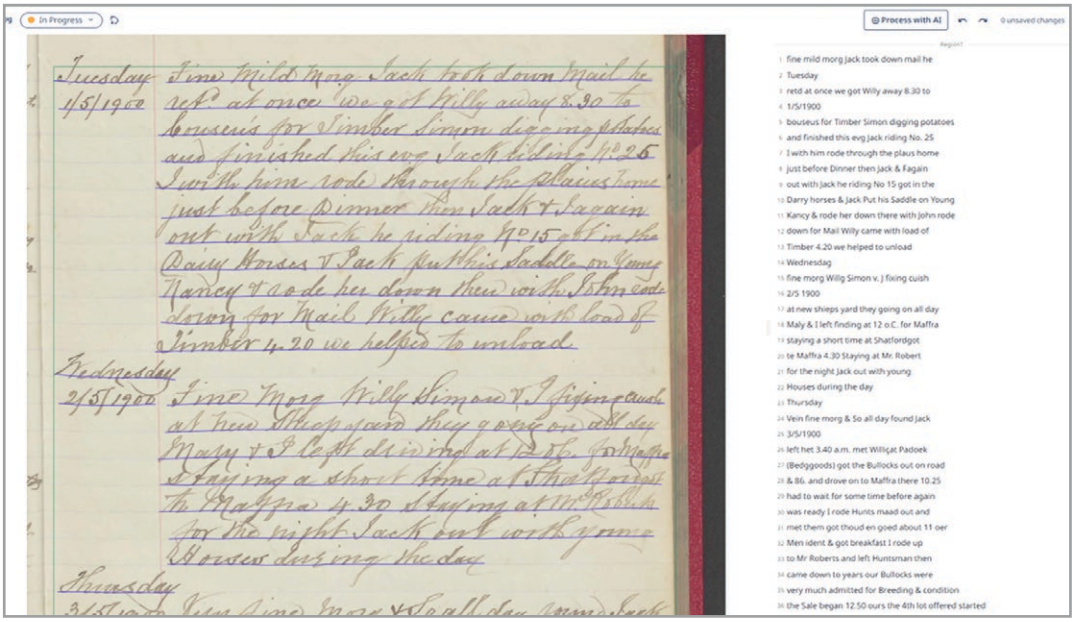
Photograph of the Strathfieldsaye homestead c. 1895, Harold Clive, Disher, Mr and Mrs H.R. Disher and Clive Disher at Locksley, Rosedale (c.1895), [UMA-ITE-1976001300064], University of Melbourne Archives.

TRANSKRIBUS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE ARCHIVE

In 2025, UMA ran a pilot project to test AI transcription within its workflows. UMA staff chose the Strathfieldsaye diaries – a significant collection of difficult-to-read cursive handwritten documents – for both principled and pragmatic reasons. Though settler-created, these diaries are also connected to Ramahyuck, a 19th-century Aboriginal mission, thus fitting with UMA's mandate to increase collection discovery, especially regarding Indigenous histories.[9]

One aim for this project was to test whether we could use AI ethically. Our intention was to improve access to the records and, hopefully, illuminate traces of Indigenous presence in the diaries. The national guidelines for AI use in research have not yet achieved clarity and consistency for Indigenous research use. We applied the argument from data and AI ethicist, Gry Hasselbalch, that AI should be tailored to organisational mandates, culture, and histories and not be universally applied. [10] At the UMA, research concerning Indigenous researchers and histories is committed to redressing 'the consequences of … exclusions, to promote Indigenous recognition and inclusion, and to work towards better supporting and promoting Indigenous research'.[11] A guiding question for us was: could using a subscription program like Transkribus create ethical research regarding Indigenous pasts at the UMA?

Pragmatically, the collection offered sufficient volume and complexity for training a custom model and evaluating Handwriting Character Recognition (HCR) combined with computer vision, or Optical Character Recognition (OCR). Many of these digitised records contained writing by multiple authors, varied writing technologies (pen, paper, blotting paper, pencil and ink), non-standard writing (two or more authors), inconsistent spelling and



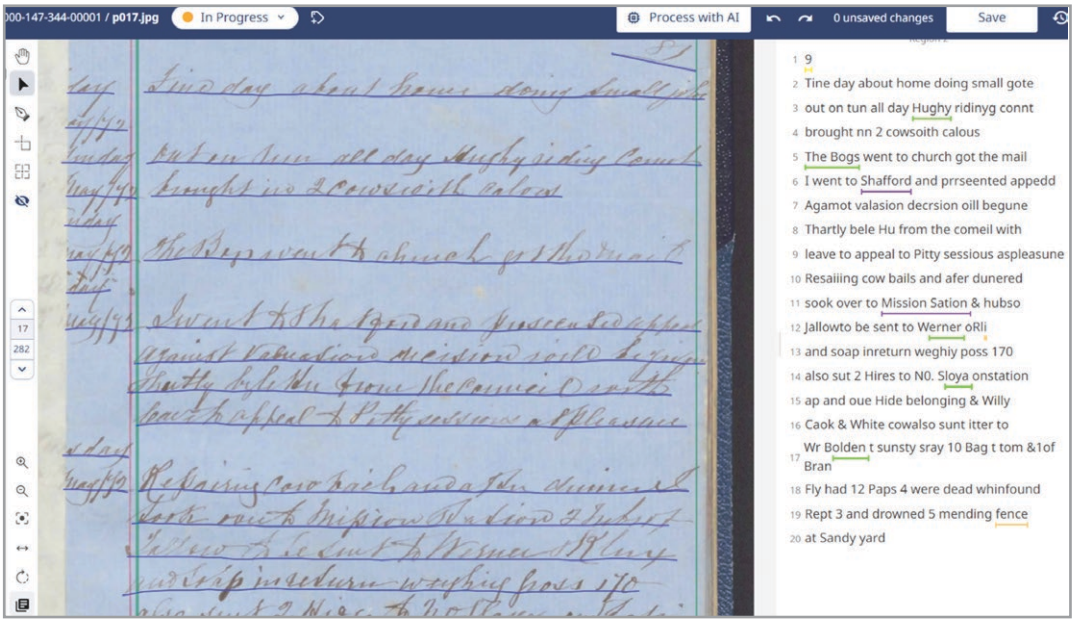
Screenshot by author (UMA 2025) showing content after runs through a supermodel and then a unique model. Issues persist with proper nouns, such as Mary, and words like 'sheep'. The output offers a strong foundation for expert augmentation and historical research.

abbreviations, and connections to Ramahyuck mission station photographs. This complexity and the value of these records offered a strong test case for AI-supported HCR, to determine if adding AI to the workflow would improve the processing time of handwritten documents and the production of accurate transcripts.

Transkribus was selected for its text and image recognition capabilities, secure servers, and institutional uptake.[12] The pilot would determine whether Transkribus could generate readable text for incorporation into Recollect, the UMA's collection management system.

To achieve useable output, we undertook a multi-step process. The senior archivist, Lachlan Glanville, determined that to meet UMA principles and data processing ambitions we would need a transcript that clearly identified people associated with the station. Glanville provided instructions on how to access the digitised diaries online. I uploaded a selection of digitised versions of the Strathfieldsaye diaries to the Transkribus virtual desk. Then, with HCR and OCR, I processed the material using a unique model.

The decisions made about the model were the most important project decisions, as they ensured the model we applied to digitised images had the capacity to process the handwriting. Transkribus offers three AI-processing options: supermodel, standard model, and new model. A supermodel has the capacity to recognise characters from one to three million European-language words.[13] No suitable supermodel existed that would completely transcribe the images of the diarists' non-conforming cursive handwriting, which contained subtle changes in each entry. Their style of writing was unique compared to common cursive, being spiky at the point of character shift, not curved like many examples in the Transkribus super model database.



Screenshot by author (UMA, 2025) showing the output of Model 1. Note that the typed transcription is replicating the letters in the diary entry, however, with spelling errors, unique abbreviations and personal writing style. These elements do not make for a clear and usable output for metadata, readers and researchers.

As no other user had created a standard model that I could apply to these digitised images, I created a new model for this series of UMA records. This required tagging words, abbreviations, dates and people, to create a 'ground truth' document. The concept of 'truth' is contentious for historians.[14] In this context, ground truth is a computer science term that indicates a step in machine learning: 'training' a document involves providing an AI program with evidence about what is correct, or incorrect, output. When an AI model is provided with clearly and consistently tagged data as ground truth, the model is taught how to make predictions. These predictions ensure the UMA material is processed with increasing accuracy.

The process of supervised learning is a crucial step for researchers using Transkribus. Creating a document that is suitable for training an AI model required the following steps:

1. Process the digitised image through a supermodel.

2. Compare the diary page content with the AI output to correct errors in presentation, such as a missing letter or misidentified words. For this pilot project, an average of 130 changes were made per page. However, I ensured the original spelling mistakes and word variations were maintained.

3. Tag names, places, or dates of interest. This tagging indicates to the model the type of information that will be required for later data mining (an AI process that uncovers patterns and other valuable information from large datasets).

This supervision ensures high-quality output through expert validation. The tagging was also an opportunity to contest the machine-to-machine interactions by critically questioning the content being highlighted in colonial records by the platform. Tagging data for a model is

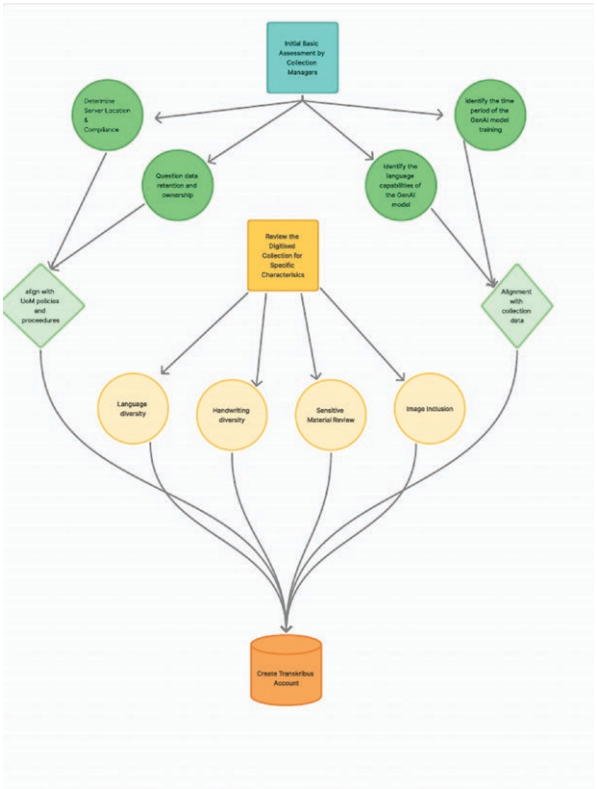
a good opportunity to identify information not acknowledged during previous archival acquisition work. It is also an opportunity to pose ethical questions such as: Are you uploading material that is historically truthful or can it be used to perpetuate disinformation and/or misinformation?

Disinformation involves knowingly sharing false information designed to deliberately mislead public opinion for deceptive purposes. In their analysis of European approaches to fake history, Michaela Teodor and Bogdan Teodor, demonstrate how Second World War fake history, or disinformation, has removed 'important key facts in order to present victims as oppressors and oppressors as victims', significantly changing shared knowledge of global history.[15] Providing citizens access to a range of historical records supports a narrative style where political agendas are secondary to historical facts: a 'facts first' approach to the past.[16]

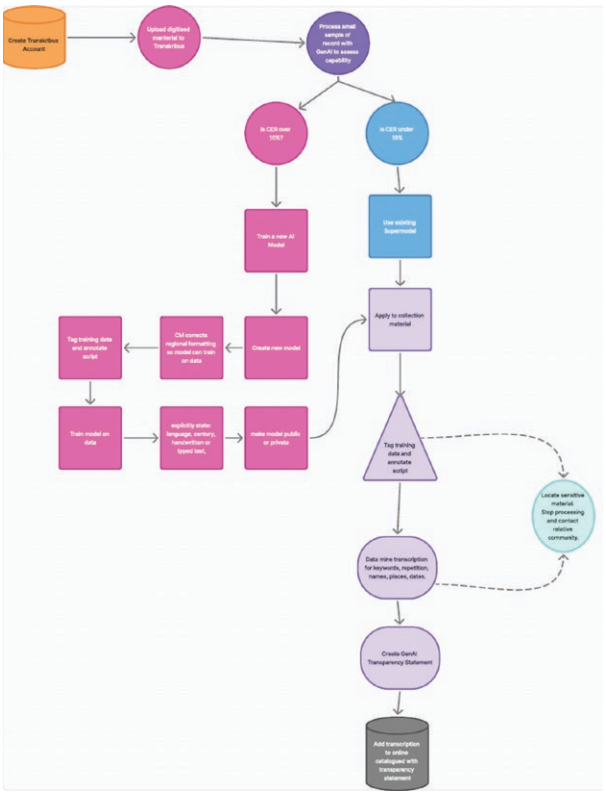
Sharing misinformation is when a user shares false information due to ignorance or error. Holly Randell-Moon's discussion of sovereign communication and data distribution shows that '[m]isinformation about First Nations continues through deficit discourse'.[17] Access to a range of narratives about Australia's past, including mentions of First Nations individuals, offers an important means to challenge the dominance of colonial narratives in Australian history. Doing so restores sovereignty to First Nations people.[18] And so, closely processing data for Transkribus is an opportunity to question the validity and scope of the archival material as much as the AI-produced content.

After completing these steps, I uploaded the tagged material to Transkribus to create a custom model. The most successful results came from correcting and tagging 50 pages of data (approximately 24,000 words) for the training of the Strathfieldsaye model.[19] When this Strathfieldsaye model was applied to other diary images in the collection, the need to correct material almost halved. Seventy changes were needed per page, rather than the initial average of 130 changes. There were words the diarist wrote inconsistently, which AI then transcribed incorrectly: Jim, ewes, fence, and steer. If the pen curved differently each time the author wrote a line, then the model needed to receive multiple consistent inputs to learn from those variations. These challenges and the retention of some errors indicate that historian-supervised learning produces better transcriptions, with corrections being made by the researcher.

This project focused on improved character recognition of the visual elements of the writing and vocabulary retention, not contextual understanding of the material. For example, once the user selects 'English' as a category for the Transkribus model, a particular set of rules are applied to the output; the alphabet being A to Z, spelling, sentence construction and punctuation marks. While the model learned to recognise some of the diarists' particular letter formations, it did not maintain the contextual understanding across multiple sessions to consistently acknowledge the distinction between, for example, 'Jim' and 'jam'. Correction and tagging are crucial in supervised learning to consistently produce trustworthy data for collection discovery, data mining and metadata creation.



Flow chart stage one: before uploading material to Transkribus, an assessment process regarding principles and proposed outcomes needs to occur.



Once the collection has been accessed for processing, users of AI have multiple choices before them regarding the development of a model for their needs. This is a sample of the pilot's UMA–Transkribus process.

The time-saving benefits of supervised learning are cumulative. The process of persistently correcting errors (130 errors per page, across 50 pages) reduces the number of corrections needed over time. This process does not erase the need for historians; they have an avenue to adapt their skills to a new tool that improves record access. By using platforms like Transkribus to create transcripts for review, over time they can focus more on analysing the records. The larger the collection, the better the output from Transkribus. If the collection has 50 pages or less, manual transcription will be more cost-effective.

The value of a historian's time, and the financial investment spent on such a project, is subjective. The costs initially have value as the unique Transkribus models can subsequently be applied to similar collections and the far-ranging impact of historical expertise can be magnified if the model is shared across entire institutional collections. Potentially, this model could be applied to records with similar characteristics at other organisations. However, it would be worth asking whether this model meets an organisation's principles and needs, and if it adheres to Hasselbalch's ethical advice about tailored AI models. No matter how far a model travels, virtually, expertise in AI assessment, historiography and archival principles should be part of implementing the model.

When considering the diversity of historical practice, AI-augmentation is just one technological development in a long line of transformations.[20] Now, with the ubiquity of AI, professional historians have an opportunity to redefine archival records for a range of users. Processing handwritten records through Transkribus shaped both data and knowledge in the UMA pilot project. This process of 'data shaping' was defined by Alana Piper in her discussion of crowdsourcing and transcription of historic records by citizen scientists.[21] The UMA project was an opportunity for the researcher to partake in 'knowledge shaping' while correcting the AI-enhanced text.[22] Similar to the way historians add to the National Library of Australia's Trove metadata, the pilot project allowed us to add new tags, content and scope, to UMA's Recollect. This process illuminated topics previously excluded from content descriptions made by earlier generations of archive staff. [23] Topics such as land clearing and sales, harvests, musters, stock inoculation processes, and weather records were added to Recollect. Working this closely with material improves the detail in scope and content descriptions.

CONCLUSION: THE VALUE HISTORIANS ADD TO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND RESOURCES

The UMA pilot project demonstrated that historians can provide expertise and skills to support the introduction of responsible usage of AI in cultural institutions. By being active participants in AI development and sharing their expertise, historians address the biases, silences and power dynamics that are embedded in records. Expert validation safeguards historical data from decontextualisation and improves our understanding of the past. The settler diaries did not, in this instance, provide clear details concerning the Gunai/Kurnai people. However, the process of developing an improved transcript and metadata tagging facilitated easily searchable documents from Australia's colonial history. In turn, this output could reduce the burden on Indigenous researchers who must process settler accounts to locate personal and community histories. The pilot at UMA indicates that when cultural institutions seek to adopt AI transcription technologies, resources should be allocated for the integration of AI into workflows that involve historians. This involvement supports policies committed to decolonial practices in the archives and historical accuracy.

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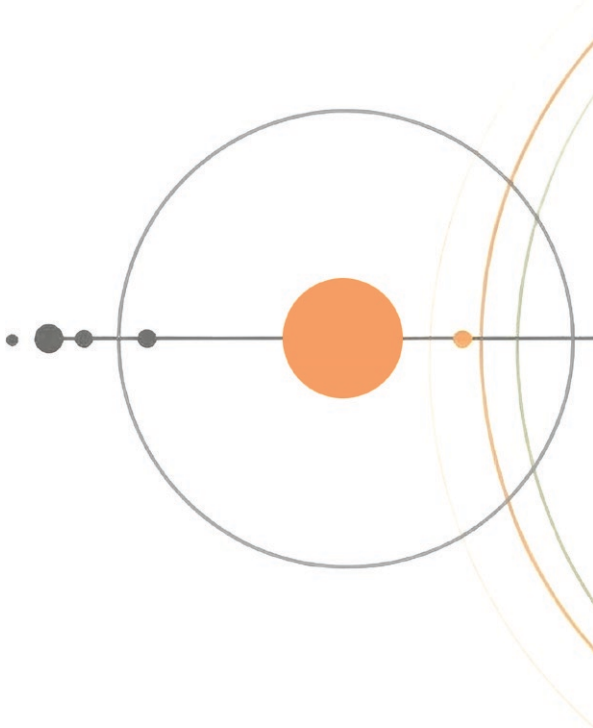


8 In the pursuit of connection: the value of history and passion projects

BY KIMBERLEY MEAGHER, PHA VIC & TAS

I live and work on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung People. Winslade Pastoral Station was located on the ancestral lands of the Mitakoodi, Kalkadoon and Wunumara Peoples.

Kimberley Meagher on the Queensland Rail commemorative train, Western Queensland, photo by Jeff Hoogenboom 2017, author's collection.

The author presented a lightning paper at the 2025 PHA Hot Histories Conference describing a commemorative train journey in search of a former pastoral station in outback Queensland. She used her grandfather's diary and old photographs as a guidebook. The journey revealed lost stories and provided unexpected connections to this place across Australia, both in the past and in the present. This article explores the place of passion projects in a professional historian's practice, the quandary of time and the value of history.

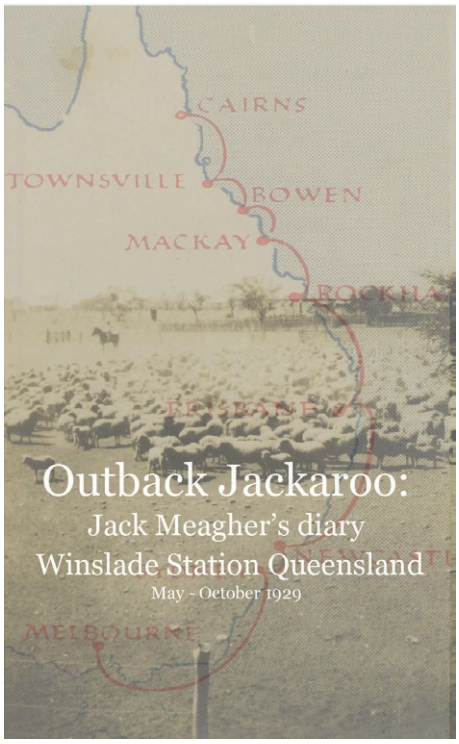
An epic moment, caught on film, loomed large in Jack's mind as the defining memory of a trip to outback Queensland in 1929. He said it was 'a beautiful photo' and asked if I had seen it. I hadn't. He lamented that no one in the family knew where the photo was, and that it had been missing for years. He went on to describe the capture of an eight-foot-long snake, possibly a King Brown /Mulga snake (*Pseudechis australis*), when he was at *Winslade* pastoral station.

The ancient symbol of ouroboros depicts a snake eating its tail, representing the eternal cycle of life. Family history, like the ouroboros, goes through continuous cycles of birth, death and renewal. The rise of family history as a

past-time in the 1970s[1] means it is time for a new generation of family history keepers, as the cycle returns full circle with births, deaths and stories of the current generations.

Occasionally professional historians and academics turn their attention to family history when they retire, and a paid history job is no longer required; they choose to tap into unlimited time to pursue a history with no strings attached[2]. In some cases, professional historians recognise the potential of their own family history to add to the canon of historical understanding, or it provides the impetus for historical research and reflection[3]. For many First Peoples historians, family and ancestral history is a primary focus area for their research[4]. My family history work sits squarely in the margins of professional work, in the category of passion project, or to use the language of generation Z, side-hustle territory.[5]

I presented a lightning paper at the 2025 PHA Hot Histories Conference on Larrakia Country (Darwin) using a family story about a pastoral station in outback Queensland. In 2017, Cloncurry celebrated its 150th anniversary and the 110th anniversary of the railway line opening, with a historic steam train journeying from Townsville to Cloncurry over four days. I joined this commemorative train trip in search of a former pastoral station, using my grandfather's diary and old photographs as a guidebook. The journey to outback Queensland not only revealed to me the lost stories of the pastoral station, but also provided unexpected connections to this place across Australia, both in the past and the present. The material for the lightning paper was drawn from a 2018 self-published book, *Outback Jackaroo: Jack Meagher's diary, Winslade Station Queensland*. Using *Outback Jackaroo* as a case study, I reflect on the tensions of fitting passion projects into a professional career, the quandary of time and the value of family history.



Self published book cover, author's collection.

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL NON-PROFESSIONAL HISTORIAN

My tertiary degrees, a Bachelor of Arts majoring in art, architecture and history, and a Master of Cultural Heritage, set me up well to pursue a career as a project and program manager in heritage consultancies and the public service. In 2009, I worked as a professional historian transitioning from the private heritage sector to the Victorian Public Service (Public Records Office Victoria, Heritage Victoria and Creative Victoria). Working full time in the public service

curtailed the time I had available for history research and writing, although my work in government required both these skills. In 2012, I chose to forgo a full wage for flexible working hours of full-time equivalent 0.8 to effectively buy time – one day a week – to focus on the craft of history: maintain and develop my history skills, feed my creative soul, and tackle the vast family history project I inherited from my late mother. She had amassed an extensive family archive of primary and secondary sources, research notes and correspondence over 30 years, none of which had been shared or packaged into what we would consider an easily digestible, finished history. I have now been tinkering with the family history for an additional 14 years.

TIME – THE ETERNAL MASTER

The parameters applied to a professional project can also be applied to a passion project; however, there are some distinct differences. Along with the who, what, where and why of the history topic, the professional historian must grapple with the day-to-day project components: clients, budgets, timelines, resources, ethics, available source material, methodology, meetings and so on. The passion project has all these elements too, but clients are often family members who may or may not be project collaborators; budgets are likely sourced from the historian's personal travel and recreational allocations; the necessity of self-reliance covers resources such as archiving, digitising, desktop publishing, copy-editing, and time – the eternal master – often allows projects to languish where deadlines and timelines are arbitrary dates innocuously marked 'one day'.

For *Outback Jackaroo*, the interview with my paternal grandfather, Austin (Jack) Meagher – recorded in 2003 when he was 98 years old – marks the beginning of this passion project. Concerned that time was running out to record his stories, he happily indulged me where he could. His memories were sharp and lucid, his stories peppered with chuckles. After he passed on, much of the historical cache from his house came to my mother, in aid of the family history. Rifling through these boxes and plastic bags, I found a collection of papers related to Jack's trip to Cloncurry in Western Queensland. It contained a green pocket-sized leather-bound diary, packets of photographs, and old tourist brochures for Magnetic Island. The collection revealed a tantalising glimpse into his life on the pastoral station, *Winslade*. I recall looking at this collection on the dining table in our family home, storing it carefully in an archival folder and putting it away for another day. When I interviewed Jack, he mentioned there were letters from his time in Cloncurry. The letters never surfaced, but it's possible he meant the diary. As a family historian, I long not for winning the lotto, but for the resurfacing of long-lost family letters, photos and diaries.

Not long after my mother died, she appeared in a vivid dream saying 'we must do something'. Laying in the quiet still of the night, jolted awake by this subconscious message, I decided to digitise Jack's diary so it could be gifted to my aunts (my grandfather's twin daughters) for their 70th birthday in 2012. I naively thought it could be done quickly. It would partially address my mother's long held aspiration to share the family history.[6] I worked solidly digitising the diary, almost 200 pages and over 40 photos. Their birthday came and went, and years later this 'quick' project remained unfinished.

Undina Siding, Winslade Station, Western Queensland, 1929, author's collection.

In 2017, I rummaged around in a wardrobe for the audio recordings I had made in 2003. I wanted to use them for a PHA digital stories workshop hosted at ACMI (the Australian Centre for the Moving Image). I had forgotten the questions I had asked about Jack's time in outback Queensland. Why he went, who owned the property, what was memorable? It was a joy to hear his voice again. His memories of working at *Winslade* station were particularly vivid. I asked, why he went to Cloncurry?

'TB!' he said.

'It was decided by the family I should go far afield, so my eldest brother Leo's wife's people had a property…35 miles east of Cloncurry. So Austin John was dispatched up there for six months… I went to Townsville by boat and then a train out to Cloncurry, just this side of Cloncurry. Undina siding, rejoice in that name, what it means, a platform for the train to pull up on the property.'[7]

Four weeks after the digital stories workshop, I saw an advertisement for a commemorative railway journey from Townsville to Cloncurry to celebrate 150 years of Cloncurry's settlement. I pulled out all stops to book this four-day steam train odyssey so I could use it as a field trip to retrace Jack's journey to *Winslade*. Mindful of Tom Griffiths' book, *The Art of Time Travellers*, and in particular his chapter on historian, Keith Hancock, who considered, 'Discovery is not a once-for-all achievement, but rather is a continuing effort, whose end – if ever there was an end – still lies far beyond sight.'[8] I took the pursuit of history 'with boots on' quite seriously. My father came along for the ride.

PAST AND PRESENT CONNECTIONS

Evoking the spirit of Jack and what I had read in his diary, I wandered around the Queens Hotel in Townsville, took photos of Magnetic Island and travelled on the steam train to Cloncurry.

Kimberley Meagher and her father standing at Undina siding, Western Queensland, photo by Jeff Hoogenboom 2017, author's collection.

Just like Jack, I took photos of the Julia Creek Hotel from the train and agreed wholeheartedly with his diary entry that the 'time passed pleasantly enough' on the journey.

Jack departed Melbourne on 22 May 1929. His black and white photographs show a dry and barren landscape dotted with gum trees. One photo is centred on a wooden sign for 'Undina' surrounded by outbuildings, a bush pole enclosure and railway equipment. He was shown around the pastoral property by the station manager, Tommy Dodd[9], and met a jackaroo, Stephen Wharton, of whom he wrote in his diary, 'a very decent chap about my own age'.

Today there is nothing to indicate what was once a working siding, the primary point of arrival and departure for people, livestock and fettler's camps: all but gone, no hint of life. My first acquaintance with Undina from the train was a Google pin on a digital map. On closer inspection, this time on foot, a contemporary railway sign indicates the place of Undina, marking the spot in the vast Queensland outback where Jack got off the train on his arrival at *Winslade*.

Dirt roads hug the railway tracks on both sides, eventually leading back to the Flinders Highway. Wire fences separate the pastoral land from the train tracks. A gate hinged to old, weathered bush poles opens onto a red dirt track heading south in the direction of where I imagine the old homestead once stood, '1 ½ miles from the siding' according to Jack's diary. The owner of a nearby property, *Wynberg*, told me the buildings were pulled down in the 1970s when the station was absorbed into the *Fort Constantine* pastoral run, and the owner of *Bendigo Park* (80 kms to the north) noted that *Winslade* used to be known as silver city in the 1960s, due to its silver painted [or clad] buildings.[10]

Stephen Wharton, Jackaroo, Winslade Station, 1929, author's collection.

Sitting in the motel in Cloncurry, my diary records, 'I had a mad burst of research on the free Wi-Fi and was able to track down a descendent of Stephen Wharton.' I followed up on my research notes and rang the daughter of the jackaroo. She introduced me to her younger brother, Geoff Wharton, a historian based in Queensland who also happened to be a PHA member! Geoff and I shared research and met up in Sydney at the 2018 PHA conference. Through Geoff, I was able to expand my knowledge of Jack's brother's 'wife's people', the Wharton family.[11] Not only did Geoff have a personal connection to my grandfather's diary through references to his father, but he grew up on nearby pastoral stations along the Townsville–Mt Isa railway line. He told me classic outback stories of surviving snake bites, explained terminology in Jack's diary specific to outback pastoral stations and provided valuable peer support towards my publication of Jack's diary.

VALUE OF FAMILY HISTORY

The opening sentence in the joint 2019 History Councils of Australia *Value of History* statement is, 'The study of the past and telling its stories are critical to our sense of belonging, to our communities and to our shared future.'[12] Dr Tanya Evans notes in her book, *Family History, Historical Consciousness and Citizenship: A new Social History*, that '[f]amily history has been understood by a range of sociologists and human geographers in Europe and Australia to have an important role in identity formation'.[13] The values the History Councils and Evans are referring to are what economist, David Throsby would define as cultural values, as opposed to the theory for economic value arising from market and non-market values. Throsby argues, 'Individuals may find it inappropriate or impossible to express their valuation of some cultural phenomena in terms of willingness to pay; for example, they may have difficulty articulating in financial terms the value they place on their cultural identity or on their spiritual experiences.'[14] In the absence of a commonly accepted and agreed methodology or framework for measuring cultural value, Throsbys suggests deconstructing cultural value into components which could be evaluated separately, including historical and social value. Using an artwork as an example, Throsby's components are defined as 'Social value: The work may convey a sense of connection with others, and it may contribute to a comprehension of the nature of the society in

which we live and to a sense of identity and place … Historical value: An important component of the cultural value of an artwork may be its historical connections: how it reflects the conditions of life at the time it was created, and how it illuminates the present by providing a sense of continuity with the past.' [15]

Telling Jack's story has not only enabled access to a slice of Jack's personal history through the publication of his diary and photographs, but effectively it has broadened the collective family histories of the Meagher and Wharton families. At the 2018 PHA conference in Sydney, in addition to meeting Geoff Wharton for the first time, I introduced him to two descendants of the Meagher family from the marriage that originally brought the Whartons and Meaghers together almost a century prior. At the same time, my contact with the Meagher-Wharton descendants enabled me to reveal the provenance of a middle name, Carden, a hitherto unknown great-grandmother's maiden name. The inherited naming convention had previously been despised for its difference; however, the matrilineal provenance generated a newfound respect and pride.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns in Melbourne in 2020, expanding on the work of *Outback Jackaroo*, I provided some historical context for the contemporary malaise using Jack's diary entries detailing a case of chicken pox at *Winslade* where he had to isolate from others on the pastoral station. The article on my blog, what will be, juxtaposed versions of social distancing in 1929 and 2020.[16] Sharing the knowledge and research gained from family history and setting it in a broader context taps into universal themes of family, identity, and civic society. These historical explanations

Jack Meagher holding a snake captured at Winslade Station, 1929, author's collection.

generate meaning and cultural value for those who engage with the work. Ultimately, the value of family history (in all its guises) is difficult to measure objectively; the first point in creating any semblance of value is to tell the story.

CONCLUSION

The commemorative train trip to outback Queensland provided much needed inspiration and motivation to finish the digitisation project and reach self-publication. It took 15 years from the first interview to digitising every diary page and photograph, to learning the skills and undertaking the desktop publishing work using Adobe InDesign to eventual proofing and publication. Here was a natural conclusion: a self-published book that could be shared with family and project collaborators.

Of course, the subject of the *Winslade* pastoral property is by no means exhausted. There are many more facets yet to be explored, researched and written. The characters mentioned in the diary, the life on the station, the existence of other private archives will keep me coming back to spend more time on *Winslade*, with a deadline of 'one day' which, in turn, will reveal new connections, shared belonging, and hopefully, contribute to the value of family history.

Maintaining passion projects in the margins of a career without a hard deadline is both a blessing and a burden. Evans asserts, 'The practice of family history has become well integrated into the burgeoning practice of lifelong learning across the globe since the 1970s. It is one of the world's most popular leisure pursuits, understood by sociologists to be a form of "serious leisure", a means of both enjoyment and education. This educative function among lifelong learners, at all stages of the life cycle, is often unappreciated.'[17] While I have not assigned myself key performance indicators, I am satisfied with what I have produced in my 'side hustle'. There is value in timeworn expertise and continuous personal and professional development that bridges both lifelong learning and leisure.

As for the missing photo of Jack and the eight-foot-long snake, to my absolute delight, it resurfaced in a montage for Jack's 100th birthday in 2005. Given I am still talking about Jack's story at *Winslade* twenty years on, the fire of this passion project still burns brightly.

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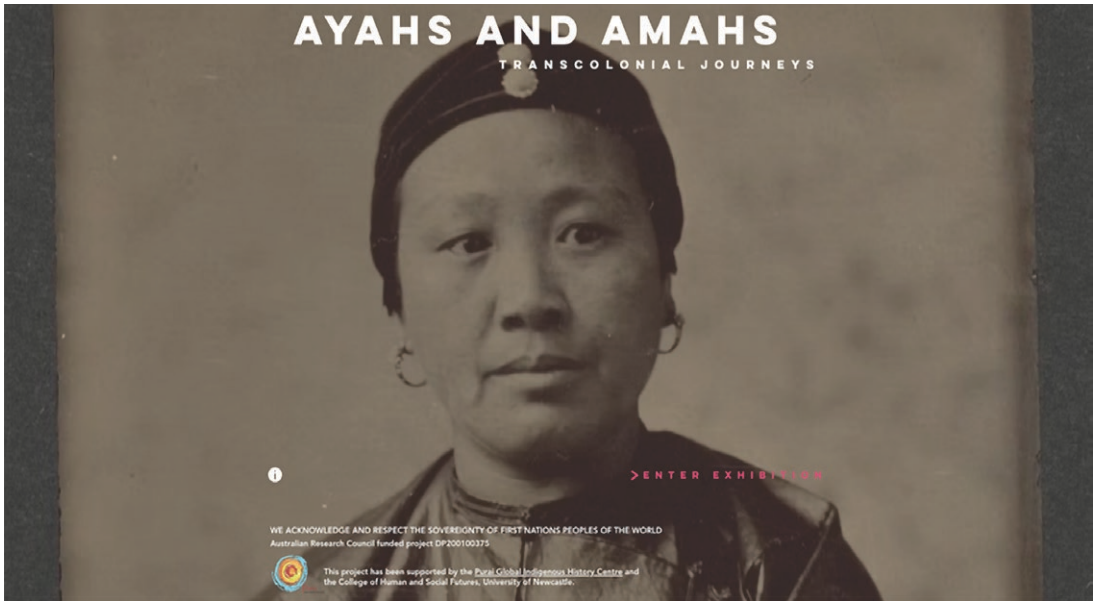
9 World Wide Webs: perspectives on building online exhibitions

BY LAUREN SAMUELSSON & SRISHTI GUHA, PHA NSW & ACT

We live and work on the unceded lands of the Dharawal and Awabakal peoples. We pay our respects to elders past, present and future, and recognise their long history of storytelling and connection to country.



The front page of the Ayahs and Amahs: Transcolonial Journeys exhibition featuring 'Assu, the Drew family's Chinese amah', photograph, c.1891, courtesy of Harvard–Yenching Library, Harvard University.

Ayahs and Amahs: Transcolonial Journeys was an award-winning online exhibition that highlighted the lives and experiences of South Asian and Chinese ayahs and amahs using a wide range of cultural artefacts, including photographs, postcards, dolls, fine art, and books. In this article, the authors share their experience in conceptualising, researching and curating digital historical content for the exhibition. They hope this will be useful to other historians who are considering developing an online exhibition as a part of public-facing research dissemination.

INTRODUCTION

Ayahs and Amahs: Transcolonial Journeys is an online exhibition that launched in September 2022.[1] The exhibition was developed as part of a larger Australian Research Council-funded project on the history of South Asian and Chinese nursemaids (ayahs and amahs) in the British Empire. The project brought together a team of academic and professional historians from Australia and the United States to research the transcolonial origins of global domestic work.[2] The authors of this article led the creation of this award-winning exhibition that represented the lives and experiences of ayahs and amahs through a wide range of cultural artefacts, including photographs, postcards, dolls, fine art, and books. The wider project's overarching themes – those of gender, labour and migration – were central to the curatorial decision-making process for the *Transcolonial Journeys* exhibition. Here, we share our practical experience in

conceptualising, researching and curating digital historical content for the online exhibition. We envision this article to be useful to other historians who are considering developing an online exhibition as a part of their public-facing research dissemination.

WHY AN ONLINE EXHIBITION?

When the wider project was conceived, we expected the exhibition would be physical. However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the team decided to make it available in an accessible online format. This was a successful choice for the project because it enabled us to reach visitors worldwide and engage far more people than would have been possible in a traditional physical format.

Online and virtual exhibitions have been relatively popular for the past two decades. Until recently, they were generally supplements to physical exhibitions, but many museums soon found that their virtual visitors vastly outnumbered those visitors who walked through the door. Closures related to COVID-19 nudged some of the largest cultural heritage institutions in the world into presenting their collections online.[3] Museum studies scholars have analysed the experiences of some of these institutions, and we drew on that scholarship in developing our exhibition.[4]

The emergence of digital public history has presented many opportunities, challenges and limits of *doing* and *presenting* history in ways that expand our understanding of the past. This new approach to storytelling demands that academic and professional historians adapt their historical narrative practices to recent digital advances.[5] It positions the public as active agents in the interpretation of these stories, challenging the traditional role of historians as keepers and producers of history.[6]

The rich archive of diverse visual media of the travelling ayahs and amahs, supplemented by the affordances of digitisation, allowed us to fully embrace the online exhibition format. At this intersection of digital history, public history and visual history, a new curatorial ethic emerges – one that emphasises public engagement and technological innovation, extending beyond the specialised worlds of galleries, libraries, archives and museums.[7] This ethos enabled us to bring together diverse cultural institutions and their collections across the world, contextualising and creating meaning within the broader scholarship of migration and domestic histories. By curating images and objects that moved across national and cultural boundaries as part of a 'comprehensive organization of people, ideas, and objects',[8] this digital approach created new ways of understanding the histories and cultural memories of these global domestic workers. The exhibition format allowed us to draw connections between the diverse visual representations of nursemaids circulating in the public iconosphere and their individual voices and memories. Our idea was to place all these various forms of visual, textual and aural representations in conversation not only with each other but also with the visitors to the exhibition.

Distinct in both content and style from our project website, which hosts blogs by team members and other authors as a space for updates and reflections,[9] the exhibition required the team to collaborate in creating a more immersive and contextualised experience that invited a deeper exploration from the broader public. Recognising the crucial importance of

content, layout, navigability and interactivity, we set out to conceptualise and create this online exhibition in our roles as researchers/digital curators.

PROS AND CONS OF ONLINE EXHIBITIONS

There are a lot of positives to online exhibitions. They are generally cost-effective and are not limited by distance, time and space like traditional exhibitions. They allow teachers and educators access to materials that they can use in syllabi. They are also flexible and dynamic, and can be readily updated with new objects, materials and information. They offer the ability to incorporate multiple forms of media content, including text, audio and video, but also augmented reality and virtual reality. There are opportunities for visitors to return, backtrack and jump through the content in non-linear ways, engage through social media and also visit using multiple devices – a mode of engagement not possible in physical exhibitions that rely on spatial and physical movement through galleries.

There are also challenges that emerge when designing online exhibitions, as a relatively new digital method of public engagement with cultural heritage. These include: the imperative for making online exhibitions interesting and interactive; providing enough direction for visitors so that the experience is engaging and follows an embedded narrative; and technical issues such as making the exhibition available on various devices and maintaining website subscriptions for an extended period of time. Apart from these, there are difficulties familiar to those curating traditional exhibitions – obtaining permissions to reproduce the images and financial costs in reproducing the images.[10] In addition, online exhibitions by their very nature do not display the 'real thing' like physical exhibitions do. While this can be a positive as it offers a chance to display otherwise fragile objects, it can also create a 'distance' from the past for the viewer as they cannot get up close with the object, something that needs to be considered by the exhibition developer.[11] While the digital reproduction of images and objects may not carry the same aura as a physical object, it does allow for dynamic interactive engagement that would be impossible with the physical artefact. The role of the digital curator is to produce a sense of authenticity by establishing a 'connection between the viewer and the stories and traditions of the object's cultural trajectory' in an engaging manner.[12] Ultimately, the online exhibition must be understood as an ambivalent format, simultaneously opening up new possibilities while remaining bound by inherent limitations.

THOUGHTS ON DESIGN

There are many platforms available for displaying online exhibitions, including increasingly popular 3D exhibition platforms such as Kunstmatrix.[13] While these 3D platforms have been used to great effect by various organisations, especially art galleries, we felt that our audience, likely not 'digital natives', would not necessarily be comfortable with the disorienting experience that these platforms can create.[14] The format also did not lend itself to the diversity of our content, which included both objects and texts, ranging from dolls to books. Instead, we built the exhibition as a standalone website, which gave us not only the capacity to utilise a range of modalities to present the content, but also the ability to focus on the user experience of our visitors within the narrative structure we wanted for the exhibition.

When designing the exhibition, we had three key considerations in mind: accessibility, embodiment and narrative.

ACCESSIBILITY

One of the major advantages of online exhibitions is increased accessibility for those who cannot easily attend a physical event due to constraints of time, money and proximity. Visitors can view the exhibition at any time, from anywhere, and on multiple devices. The accessibility of online exhibitions appealed to us also because it reflected the transnational theme of our exhibition: as ayahs and amahs travelled globally, so should the exhibition. We endeavoured to make the exhibition truly reflective of the global spread of the cultural representations of these early domestic workers through the way in which we curated the objects for display. Objects, images, and recordings were collated from institutions across the globe, including the National Library of Australia, the Victoria and Albert Museum (UK), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (USA) and the National Archives of Singapore, as well as private collections.

Accessibility extends beyond simply putting the exhibition online. We also had to consider our visitors and how they would likely be accessing the exhibition. Recognising that our graphics would need to work on a screen instead of a gallery wall, we chose a platform that allowed for the options of desktop, tablet and mobile viewing. We optimised the exhibition for viewing on desktop, as many of the more interactive displays require a larger screen, but we also enabled mobile viewers to view a condensed version of the exhibition and still engage with many of the objects and their stories.

The site was also optimised for accessibility by visually impaired visitors. This included incorporating alternative texts for the images, as well as ensuring that all headings and text were compatible with common screen reading (text-to-speech) software.

EMBODIMENT

Embodiment is the conscious experience of the body that creates engagement and makes our world meaningful. Museums have been increasingly incorporating sensory experiences to foster embodiment and encourage visitor interactivity; however, in an online environment, there are limitations to sensory and bodily engagement.[15] Acknowledging this, we focused on creating a dynamic environment that added to the experience of engagement and interpretation. This meant making the act of visiting the exhibition more than just scrolling through the website. Our design encouraged active participation, practical actions and interactivity. These activities within the context of the online exhibition can create a sense of 'elsewhere'; they transport the visitor into the 'museum'.[16]

To allow visitors to engage with the content in a non-linear fashion, we designed the website using a 'hub and spoke' model. A central 'landing' page and smaller 'branches' of content (which we called 'galleries') offered visitors options to explore the exhibition depending on their personal preference.[17] At the same time, it was important to provide some level of guidance for visitors. Not only have online audiences shown a preference for exhibitions that include some signposting, but also because the model helps to avoid 'interpassive', or disengaged, visitors.[18]

The four 'galleries' in the Ayahs and Amahs: Transcolonial Journeys exhibition, design by Lauren Samuelsson.

We wanted to strike a balance between a 'choose your own adventure' structure and a narrative direction or focus that we believed would work best to present the objects in our exhibition.

Each of our 'galleries' has a thematic focus and allows the visitor to engage via multiple forms of media (text, image, audio, sound and video). 'Down Memory Lane' looked at the relationship between ayahs and amahs and their charges. 'Turning the Page' featured literary representations of ayahs. The 'Moving Images' gallery delved into the visual and artistic representations of ayahs and amahs. Finally, in 'Ayahs and Amahs Making their Way,' we traced the movement of ayahs and amahs throughout the British Empire and drew attention to their autonomy and personal perspectives.

The concept of embodiment was consciously worked into the names we chose for our 'galleries'. We wanted to evoke a sense of movement – a journey – that not only mirrored the exhibition's focus on the transnational movement of these nursemaids and their cultural representations but allowed the visitor to feel as though *they* were moving. Words such as 'Turning', 'Moving' and 'Making their Way' were all deliberately selected to foster this embodied sense of motion.

Within each 'gallery' we presented our objects in multiple formats, from simple image galleries to interactive 'playable' galleries that allowed viewers to look at photographs in greater detail. Using hyperlinks to support both linear and non-linear discovery of items, we aimed to encourage different learning opportunities for our visitors that are often difficult to replicate in physical exhibitions. We also incorporated parallax image scrolling effects, which create

An interactive 'pinboard' of images featuring ayahs, amahs and the children they cared for, design by Lauren Samuelsson.

The interactive StoryMap tracing the journey of amah Wong Chun Sung from Sarawak to Australia and eventually to Hong Kong.

an illusion of depth to two-dimensional images. These are very popular with websites of major cultural institutions and are used to great effect on Google Arts & Culture websites. To engage the viewers' senses, the exhibition also had aural elements (oral histories and personal testimonies) and interactive 'story maps', which were incorporated to make the exhibition more than just a website.

NARRATIVE

The importance of narrative, or storying, has been confirmed by many scholars working in the curatorial space over the last two decades.[19] Establishing and co-creating a narrative design that linked the archival material together using innovative approaches was central to the creation of our exhibition. As historians, we understood that the stories behind the objects and images were the most engaging and essential part of the exhibition. We wanted to avoid the mere online reproduction of digitised collections of images and objects.

The thematic links between the objects that we chose and the labels that we included alongside them were designed to do the important work of helping our visitors to 'make connections between museum artifacts and images and [their] lives and memories', to not only engage our visitors but also encourage 'personal reflection' and 'public discussion'.[20] Each digital item in the exhibition was accompanied by a short description that not only highlighted the individual object, but also connected that object thematically and through its own story, to other items in the 'galleries'.

We also highlighted individual stories of these travelling nursemaids, such as that of amah Wong Chun Sung, who travelled between China, Sarawak, Singapore, Brisbane, Sydney and back to China, and whose story exemplifies the mobility and agency of travelling ayahs and amahs. Stories like these invite visitors to think about individual or regional stories in the broader context of transnational history and memory. These narratives formed the foundation of our exhibition, creating an engaging and educational experience that promotes and engages a public understanding of the past.

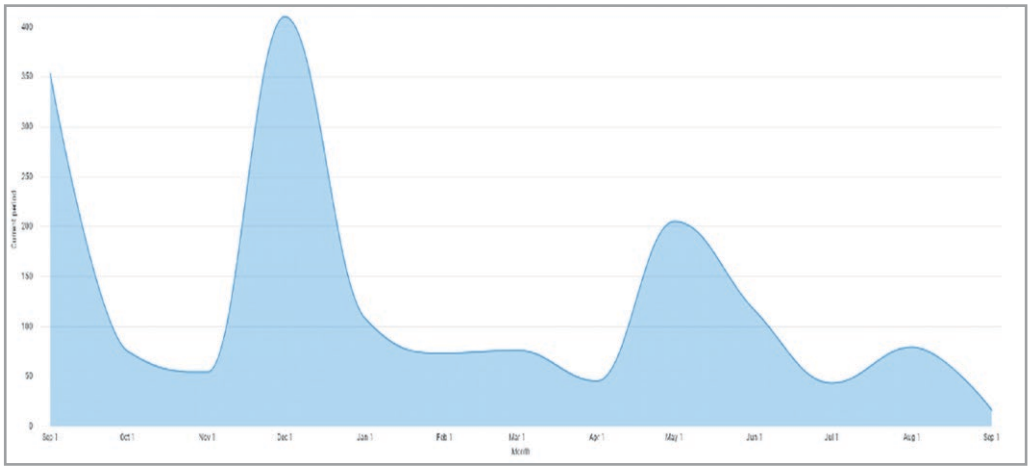


Figure 1: Exhibition Visitor Numbers by Month, September 2022—September 2023.

EVALUATING THE EXHIBITION

In its first 12 months, the exhibition drew 2,088 unique visitors.[21] Of these, 1318 were 'returning visitors'. This suggests that when people had viewed the exhibition once, they were likely to return. Over time, total visitor numbers dropped, which was to be expected. However, there were a number of notable 'spikes' in visitor numbers over the 12 months (Figure 1). These spikes correlated with key events in the life of the exhibition.

September 2022 saw the opening of the exhibition, with a launch at the History Council of New South Wales annual History Week event. In December 2022, the exhibition was awarded the History Council of New South Wales Addi Road Award for Multicultural History. The spike evident in this month correlates with the advertising surrounding this achievement. In May 2023, historian Julia Laite reviewed the exhibition for *History Workshop Online*, once again driving traffic to the site.[22] This demonstrates that, just like a physical exhibition, events and media coverage promoting online exhibitions are essential for driving traffic.

The exhibition attracted visitors from 50 countries. Most visitors came from Australia (544), followed by the United Kingdom (375), the United States (260), India (117), and Singapore (54). These visitor numbers closely correlate with the geographical subject matter of the exhibition. Most visitors came to the exhibition via 'direct traffic', where the visitor typed the URL into the address bar of their browser, though notable traffic also came via links on social media, through the History Council of New South Wales website and via *History Workshop Online*.

As well as numbers of visitors, considering how long the average visitor spent perusing the exhibition also delivers insights into audience engagement. For the exhibition overall, the average time spent on the site for visitors who did not immediately leave was seven minutes and 10 seconds. This compares to the physical exhibition environment, where research suggests typical visitors spend less than 20 minutes total in viewing the exhibition.[23] While quantitative data can give some idea of visitor behaviour, feedback from visitors to the site is important in considering audience engagement. Visitor feedback, gathered by a

webform on the site, demonstrated some of the ways in which those visitors interacted with the exhibition. Several were reminded of their own or their families' ayahs, sharing those stories with other exhibition-goers, thereby creating a user-generated digital archive of testimonies and stories. Others saw the exhibition as a potential teaching tool and still others as a 'visual treat' that put 'the spotlight on the lives and labours of these often forgotten women'.[24]

The exhibition was also reviewed in two prominent historical publications, *History Workshop Online* and *Australian Historical Studies*. The key takeaway from both of these reviews was that the exhibition, through a rich array of historical sources, brought the history of care work (and the 'most historically invisible care workers' providing it) to a wide, international audience.[25] While the British review praised the exhibition as being 'beautifully designed and accessible', the Australian review was critical of the multiple modes of navigation, and of the parallax scrolling effects used in several sections of the exhibition, though acknowledging that these elements would 'appeal to younger audiences'.[26] This feedback underscores that digital literacy and the level of competence of the audience cannot be taken for granted. It is vital that digital public history projects identify the needs and expectations of various user groups at the conception stage to 'develop adequate user interface strategies' that define the visitor experience.[27]

The impermanence of the online exhibition was also a major consideration, as the funding to keep the website online was linked to the ARC project. There are some excellent options available to archive websites, including the National Library of Australia's Australian Web Archive and the Internet Archive's WayBack Machine, both of which have archived versions of this exhibition available. However, there are limitations associated with archiving websites. Dynamic content (such as photo galleries and other 'playable' features) is often only semi-interactive in archived instances of websites that are often also besieged by 'link rot' (the process of archived URLs becoming 'broken' over time).[28] This means that the archived exhibition is not the 'full version', despite improving technologies in this area. Even without issues of longevity linked to funding, the practical considerations of archiving online content need to be considered by historians creating digital history projects.

CONCLUSION

The development and production of this digital history project was to share historical knowledge with others. The online exhibition has been largely successful in this, having been awarded the History Council of New South Wales Addi Road Award for Multicultural History in 2022 and shortlisted for the New South Wales History Award for Digital History in 2023. The History Council of New South Wales judges said of the exhibition that:

> The creators skillfully utilise digital technologies to present the wealth of visual and literary representations to a wide audience of scholars and the general public. The interactive exhibition also makes full versions of old prints available to scholars, thus facilitating further research into the topic.

Based on our experience, these digital history practices have allowed the team's research and public outcomes to be more accessible and

engaging for various user groups. The online exhibition format allowed us to highlight and position the individual stories and experiences of these forgotten women, while situating them within the project's central themes of gender, labour and migration.

Our experience has shown that a well designed online exhibition can also be a standalone public-facing research production in its own right. Close thought must be given to audience, design and technology so that those narratives engage, excite and educate viewers. Now, more than ever in our post-truth world, it is important for historians to create histories for wider audiences, and digital platforms give them the opportunity to do this.

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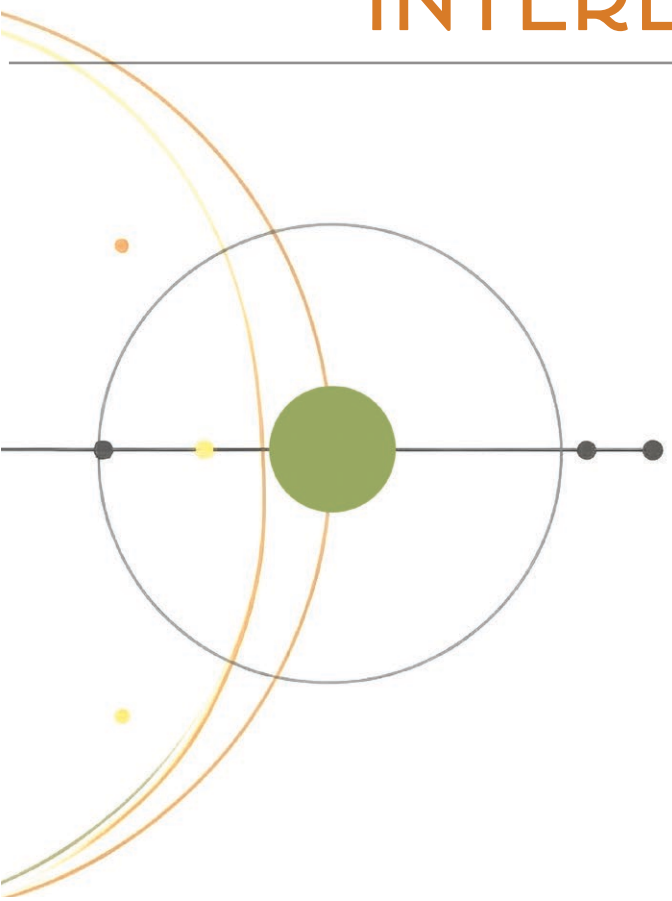
INTERLUDE



Some like it hot: piquing the Australian palate

BY JACQUI NEWLING, PHA NSW & ACT

This work was written on Wangal Country, Aboriginal land that has never been ceded.

Jacqui Newling delivers her after dinner speech for Hot Histories delegates at Pink Chopstix in Darwin, 25 October 2025, photo Jeff Hopkins-Weise.

Our visual impressions of the 19th century are very often monochromatic, black and white, or sepia. This aligns with our understanding of the colonial diet being bland and unappetising. Good 'plain' cooking was promoted in England and by extension, Australia, as wholesome, temperate and respectable, without the fuss and frippery of French cookery, which was in the minds of the British, over-worked, over-egged and overwhelmed with rich, creamy masking sauces.[1] English cookery was simpler, more honest, less 'tricked-up'.[2] Basic cooking techniques were universal – meat and fish were boiled, broiled (grilled), fried, roasted, baked in pies, and stewed along with any vegetables on hand.

While French chefs refined flour-based velouté and bechamel sauces, and mayonnaise-like emulsions, the British relished in the more simply made gravy, a sauce of melted butter infused with capers or anchovy essence, or a bread sauce, made with crumbs boiled in milk with aromatics such as an onion stuck with cloves, blades of mace and a bay leaf. So while the cooking itself was plain the embellishments added nuance and complexity. Salt was the major flavour enhancer, but there was much more going on in the spice department. Along with mace, nutmeg and clove, we have sweet spices such as cinnamon and coriander seed, and at the hotter end of the scale, mustard seeds, ginger and horseradish, and various kinds of pepper – all used since Old Testament times.

From before mediaeval times, the use of spices was, literally, prescriptive; added to foods to temper their potential effects on the body. Foods were classified as hot or cold and moist or dry, and needed to be cooked or eaten in ways that would balance these 'humours'.[3] Many of the food marriages we take for granted today have their roots in this humoral ethos:

> Beef was cold and dry, and should therefore be eaten with something hot,

such as garlic, mustard or horseradish; and to counter its dryness, be cooked in a wet medium, either boiled in water or in stew, sauce or gravy. Salted beef was also dry but the salt made it hot, so required cooling accompaniments such as fermented sauerkraut or pickled cucumbers.

Mutton was coarse and dry, and like beef, best boiled, a practice that continued into 19th century Australia. Lamb was milder and regarded as warm and moist, offset by acidic condiments such as vinegar-based mint sauce, or lemon with rosemary or oregano.

Pork was warm and moist when fresh but dry and cold when cured or salted. Tart, fruity flavours such as spiced chutney or clove-infused apple sauce worked well with roasted pork. Bacon and ham were boiled to offset their dryness and served with mustard or pickles or astringent fruits. Ham and pineapple begins to make sense when considered this way.

Fresh fish was cold and wet, and river fish often had an earthy taste, which acidic accompaniments helped balance – hence the obligatory squeeze of lemon, and when citrus was not in season, a piquant vinegar and in Victorian times, chilli vinegar.

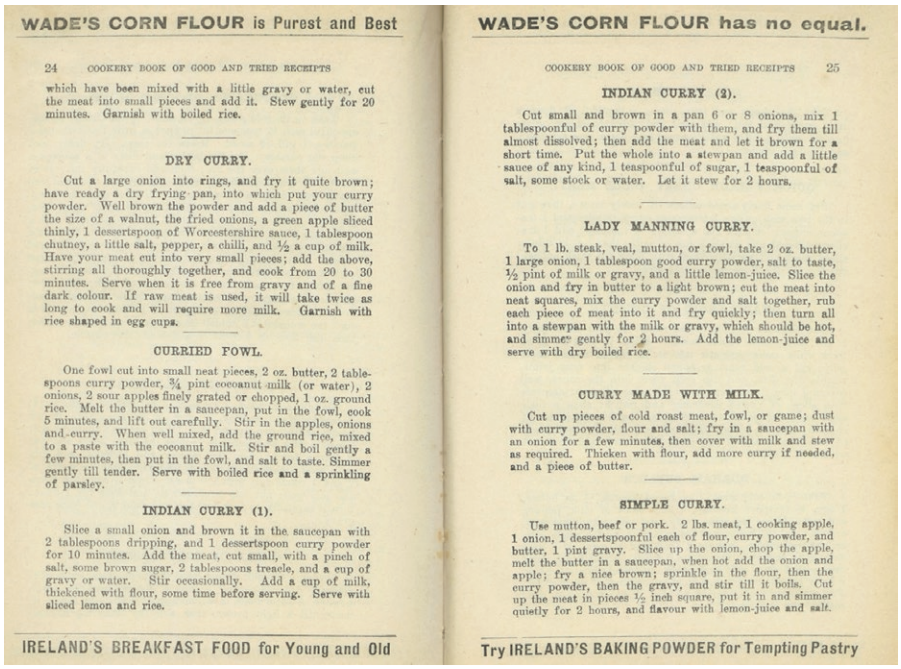
These centuries-old traditions are still with us today, with pickles, relishes and exotic sauces such as Worcestershire and the now-ubiquitous tomato sauce, ready-made combinations of the sharp, savoury and sour elements needed to offset their various food partners' humours.

IMPERIAL CONTESTS AND CONQUESTS

Until the 18th century, many of the exotic spices from Asia and the Orient were rarefied and expensive commodities, and limited to elite tables. Wars were fought over control of pepper, nutmeg, mace, cloves, cinnamon and other precious spices. European invaders conquered or colonised places in which they grew, and then fought each other for primacy in lucrative trading ports. The quest for pepper famously resulted in Europeans discovering the so-called 'New World' and its wealth of exotic flavours. These political contests shaped global empires and the resulting geographies shaped the way we eat today.

By the late 1700s, the Spanish and Portuguese gained hegemony in South America, the Dutch in the Moluccas, and the British East India company monopolised trade with India and Ceylon. The British also secured parts of the West Indies, which saw a ready supply of New World spices: 'Jamaican pepper' became known as allspice, offering a cheaper alternative to warmers cinnamon, nutmeg and clove. Even a small amount of *Capsicum* chilli – often sold as cayenne pepper – delivered a more immediate, hotter kick than the Asian *Piper* peppers, so was a much cheaper option. In Jamaica, ginger, along with sugar, was also grown cheaply, by enslaved Africans. These flavours, now standard issue in the domestic spice rack, are a legacy of European colonialism and for Australia particularly, British imperialism.

Increased trade and military presence in the Indian subcontinent brought to tables back home a generic version of the flavours the



which have been mixed with a little gravy or water, cut the meat into small pieces and add it. Stew gently for 20 minutes. Garnish with boiled rice.

DRY CURRY.

Cut a large onion into rings, and fry it quite brown; have ready a dry frying-pan, into which put your curry powder. Well brown the powder and add a piece of butter the size of a walnut, the fried onions, a green apple sliced thinly, 1 dessertspoon of Worcestershire sauce, 1 tablespoon chutney, a little salt, pepper, a chilli, and ½ a cup of milk. Have your meat cut into very small pieces; add the above, stirring all thoroughly together, and cook from 20 to 30 minutes. Serve when it is free from gravy and of a fine dark colour. If raw meat is used, it will take twice as long to cook and will require more milk. Garnish with rice shaped in egg cups.

CURRIED FOWL.

One fowl cut into small neat pieces, 2 oz. butter, 2 tablespoons curry powder, ¾ pint cocoanut milk (or water), 2 onions, 2 sour apples finely grated or chopped, 1 oz. ground rice. Melt the butter in a saucepan, put in the fowl, cook 5 minutes, and lift out carefully. Stir in the apples, onions and curry. When well mixed, add the ground rice, mixed to a paste with the cocoanut milk. Stir and boil gently a few minutes, then put in the fowl, and salt to taste. Simmer gently till tender. Serve with boiled rice and a sprinkling of parsley.

INDIAN CURRY (1).

Slice a small onion and brown it in the saucepan with 2 tablespoons dripping, and 1 dessertspoon curry powder for 10 minutes. Add the meat, cut small, with a pinch of salt, some brown sugar, 2 tablespoons treacle, and a cup of gravy or water. Stir occasionally. Add a cup of milk, thickened with flour, some time before serving. Serve with sliced lemon and rice.

INDIAN CURRY (2).

Cut small and brown in a pan 6 or 8 onions, mix 1 tablespoonful of curry powder with them, and fry them till almost dissolved; then add the meat and let it brown for a short time. Put the whole into a stewpan and add a little sauce of any kind, 1 teaspoonful of sugar, 1 teaspoonful of salt, some stock or water. Let it stew for 2 hours.

LADY MANNING CURRY.

To 1 lb. steak, veal, mutton, or fowl, take 2 oz. butter, 1 large onion, 1 tablespoon good curry powder, salt to taste, ½ pint of milk or gravy, and a little lemon-juice. Slice the onion and fry in butter to a light brown; cut the meat into neat squares, mix the curry powder and salt together, rub each piece of meat into it and fry quickly; then turn all into a stewpan with the milk or gravy, which should be hot, and simmer gently for 2 hours. Add the lemon-juice and serve with dry boiled rice.

CURRY MADE WITH MILK.

Cut up pieces of cold roast meat, fowl, or game; dust with curry powder, flour and salt; fry in a saucepan with an onion for a few minutes, then cover with milk and stew as required. Thicken with flour, add more curry if needed, and a piece of butter.

SIMPLE CURRY.

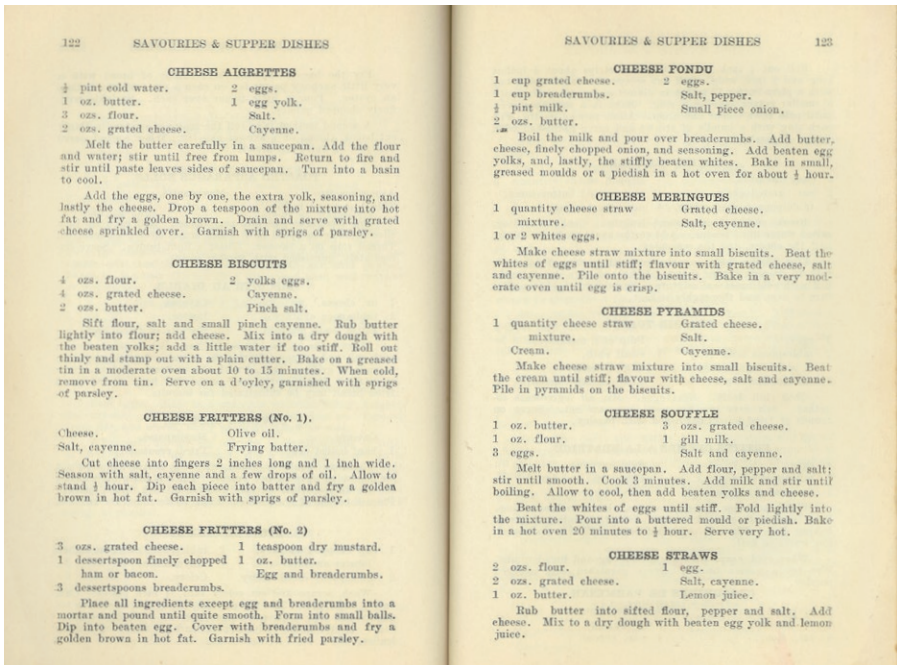
Use mutton, beef or pork. 2 lbs. meat, 1 cooking apple, 1 onion, 1 dessertspoonful each of flour, curry powder, and butter, 1 pint gravy. Slice up the onion, chop the apple, melt the butter in a saucepan, when hot add the onion and apple; fry a nice brown; sprinkle in the flour, then the curry powder, then the gravy, and stir till it boils. Cut up the meat in pieces ½ inch square, put it in and simmer quietly for 2 hours, and flavour with lemon-juice and salt.

Pages with curry recipes in the Presbyterian Cookery Book of Good and Tried Receipts, compiled by the Women's Missionary Association of New South Wales. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, c.1926, pp. 24–25.

British encountered there. Recipes for curry and rice 'pellow' (pilou) began to appear in English cookbooks from 1747, and evolved in complexity as the century progressed, along with claims of their authenticity.[4] The first curry known to be served in Australia was one of duck, at a dinner hosted by Governor Macquarie and his wife Elizabeth in 1810.[5] Macquarie had served in India before coming to New South Wales so would have been well versed in Indian fare. Ready-made curry powders were being sold by import merchants in colonial Sydney by 1813 and was a regular offer from about 1825, and recipes for making curries and sometimes for home-made curry powders appear in household receipt books.[6] The earliest recipe published in the colony for making a curry is from 1829, attributed to 'Arnot'; it required curry powder as well as pepper and cayenne.[7] Taste makers of the day were critical of curry powders made with 'too great proportion of cayenne',[8] and complained 'we are apt to rely too much on turmeric and cayenne for the flavour.'[9] Even so, cayenne became more and more common in curry recipes as the 19th century progressed; clearly, people liked it hot!

INCREASING THE HEAT, AUSTRALIAN STYLE

Australia was connected to global trading routes long before British occupation, but the only record of flavour exchanges would be embedded in First Nations foodways (an avenue for further research). Colonists were delighted to find spicy and aromatic Indigenous botanicals such as peppery-flavoured greens and berries to enhance their diets, and *Smilax glyciphylla* and *Leptospermum* leaves used as tea. More classical spices were brought on the First Fleet, as part of the hospital supplies but also in the personal 'survival kits' of those who could be described as the 'foodies' of the fleet. Ginger, '[m]ustard, pepper and [other] spices' appear for sale in the first edition of the Sydney Gazette in 1803.[10] Allspice appears in 1804.[11] The earliest reference to chillis being sold in colonial Australia is in 1806, with 'a bale of chillies' advertised for auction.[12] It was several years before they appear again, but from the 1820s, cayenne and chilli vinegar are regularly listed.[13] Several varieties of fresh chilli were available from plant nurseries from the 1820s.[14] By the late 19th century companies like Keen's and Mackenzie's – both still in business today – were



122 SAVOURIES & SUPPER DISHES

CHEESE AIGRETTES

½ pint cold water. 2 eggs.
1 oz. butter. 1 egg yolk.
3 ozs. flour. Salt.
2 ozs. grated cheese. Cayenne.

Melt the butter carefully in a saucepan. Add the flour and water; stir until free from lumps. Return to fire and stir until paste leaves sides of saucepan. Turn into a basin to cool.

Add the eggs, one by one, the extra yolk, seasoning, and lastly the cheese. Drop a teaspoon of the mixture into hot fat and fry a golden brown. Drain and serve with grated cheese sprinkled over. Garnish with sprigs of parsley.

CHEESE BISCUITS

4 ozs. flour. 2 yolks eggs.
4 ozs. grated cheese. Cayenne.
2 ozs. butter. Pinch salt.

Sift flour, salt and small pinch cayenne. Rub butter lightly into flour; add cheese. Mix into a dry dough with the beaten yolks; add a little water if too stiff. Roll out thinly and stamp out with a plain cutter. Bake on a greased tin in a moderate oven about 10 to 15 minutes. When cold, remove from tin. Serve on a d'oyley, garnished with sprigs of parsley.

CHEESE FRITTERS (No. 1).

Cheese. Olive oil.
Salt, cayenne. Frying batter.

Cut cheese into fingers 2 inches long and 1 inch wide. Season with salt, cayenne and a few drops of oil. Allow to stand ½ hour. Dip each piece into batter and fry a golden brown in hot fat. Garnish with sprigs of parsley.

CHEESE FRITTERS (No. 2)

3 ozs. grated cheese. 1 teaspoon dry mustard.
1 dessertspoon finely chopped ham or bacon. 1 oz. butter. Egg and breadcrumbs.
3 dessertspoons breadcrumbs.

Place all ingredients except egg and breadcrumbs into a mortar and pound until quite smooth. Form into small balls. Dip into beaten egg. Cover with breadcrumbs and fry a golden brown in hot fat. Garnish with fried parsley.

SAVOURIES & SUPPER DISHES 123

CHEESE FONDU

1 cup grated cheese. 2 eggs.
1 cup breadcrumbs. Salt, pepper.
½ pint milk. Small piece onion.
2 ozs. butter.

Boil the milk and pour over breadcrumbs. Add butter, cheese, finely chopped onion, and seasoning. Add beaten egg yolks, and, lastly, the stiffly beaten whites. Bake in small, greased moulds or a piedish in a hot oven for about ½ hour.

CHEESE MERINGUES

1 quantity cheese straw mixture. Grated cheese. Salt, cayenne.
1 or 2 whites eggs.

Make cheese straw mixture into small biscuits. Beat the whites of eggs until stiff; flavour with grated cheese, salt and cayenne. Pile onto the biscuits. Bake in a very moderate oven until egg is crisp.

CHEESE PYRAMIDS

1 quantity cheese straw mixture. Grated cheese. Salt. Cayenne.
Cream.

Make cheese straw mixture into small biscuits. Beat the cream until stiff; flavour with cheese, salt and cayenne. Pile in pyramids on the biscuits.

CHEESE SOUFFLE

1 oz. butter. 3 ozs. grated cheese.
1 oz. flour. 1 gill milk.
3 eggs. Salt and cayenne.

Melt butter in a saucepan. Add flour, pepper and salt; stir until smooth. Cook 3 minutes. Add milk and stir until boiling. Allow to cool, then add beaten yolks and cheese.

Beat the whites of eggs until stiff. Fold lightly into the mixture. Pour into a buttered mould or piedish. Bake in a hot oven 20 minutes to ½ hour. Serve very hot.

CHEESE STRAWS

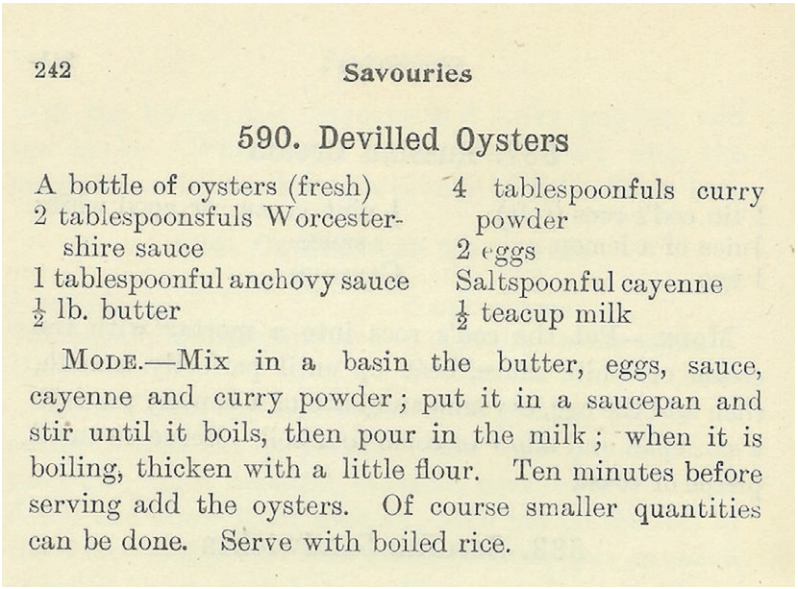
2 ozs. flour. 1 egg.
2 ozs. grated cheese. Salt, cayenne.
1 oz. butter. Lemon juice.

Rub butter into sifted flour, pepper and salt. Add cheese. Mix to a dry dough with beaten egg yolk and lemon juice.

Cheese savouries recipes from the New Goulburn Cookery Book, Jean Rutlege, revised by Mrs Walton McCarthy, Edwards, Dunlop & Coy Limited, 1937, pp. 122–123. Eight of the 10 recipes call for cayenne.

selling spices and 'signature' blends of curry powder. Curry powders were also being made by chemists, who were well versed in making medicinal compounds. In their original, less generic guise, what became known singularly as 'curry' were often prescriptive concoctions made according to health principles, not dissimilar to dietary humours. All manner of foods were curried – fowls, rabbit, and mutton being the most common, but also oysters and, in Australia, kangaroo. Other curry-flavoured dishes such as mulligatawny soup and rice kedgeree (an Anglo-Celtic derivation of traditional Indian *kichri*) remained popular in Australian recipe books well into the 20th century.

Chilli and cayenne were enjoyed in other ways, beyond curries. Australian cookbooks from the 1890s to the 1930s demonstrate a varied engagement with chilli from minimal to enthusiastic.[15] Books associated with wholesome 'plain cookery' generally offer fewer recipes involving chilli or cayenne than those promoting more sophisticated and adventurous tastes. Two texts stand out in the latter category, for their enthusiastic embrace of hot spicy cooking. One is *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book*,[16] which includes more than 20 recipes that include fresh or dried chillis. Hannah Maclurcan grew up in Queensland, running the dining rooms in her father's pubs. She later became a Sydney socialite, managing the restaurant in the fashionable Wentworth Hotel. Several of her recipes call for fresh birds eye chillis or cayenne as a key ingredient, including mango chutney, pickled cucumbers, tomato chutney and even ginger beer, presumably for readers who were not quite ready to tackle the chilli beer recipe. Less a woman ahead *of* her time than of her time and probably her place, Maclurcan was influenced by flavours brought to northern Queensland by labourers (often



242 Savouries

590. Devilled Oysters

A bottle of oysters (fresh)
2 tablespoonsfuls Worcestershire sauce
1 tablespoonful anchovy sauce
½ lb. butter
4 tablespoonfuls curry powder
2 eggs
Saltspoonful cayenne
½ teacup milk

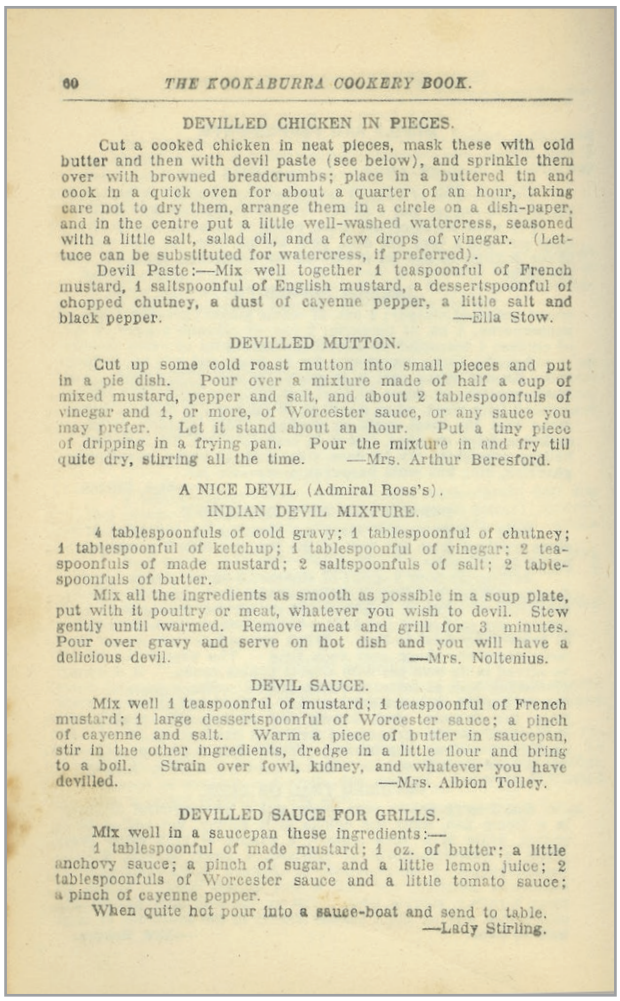
Mode.—Mix in a basin the butter, eggs, sauce, cayenne and curry powder; put it in a saucepan and stir until it boils, then pour in the milk; when it is boiling, thicken with a little flour. Ten minutes before serving add the oysters. Of course smaller quantities can be done. Serve with boiled rice.

Devilled oysters recipe using both cayenne and curry powder, Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book, George Robertson & Co. 1905, p. 242.

indentured or through illegal 'blackbirding' arrangements) from India and Asia.[17] The other standout is the *Kookaburra cookery book*, first published in Adelaide in 1911, as a fundraiser for the Lady Buxton Girl's Club. The *Kookaburra* is a compilation cookbook of recipes from South Australian residents, many of them well-to-do. The contributors show a healthy appetite for dishes spiced with cayenne and some for fresh chillis, which could be easily grown in people's gardens.[18]

Even in the conservative texts a pattern emerges in the types of dishes where chilli was used. Chilli – generally but not always referred to as cayenne, is found in fish dishes, especially croquettes; chutneys, relishes and tomato sauces; with various preparations for kidneys; and cheese dishes including macaroni cheese, Welsh rabbit and cheese biscuits. For oysters, physician and dietary advisor Philip Muskett advises that, in addition to a squeeze of lemon, 'a sensation of cayenne pepper is distinctly an improvement'.[19]

Devilled foods, which became popular in 18th and 19th century England, feature in several of the early Australian cookbooks. Devilled eggs are the best known these days, usually flavoured with curry powder, but traditionally, the key ingredients were mustard, Worcestershire sauce and cayenne pepper, curry powder finding its way into the mix in the 19th century. All manner of foods were devilled – meats, kidneys, and by the early 1900s, almonds and sardines. You could make wet or dry devils, the wet being a spicy sauce in which to cook meat, or for a dry version, the sauce was more of a marinade, before grilling or roasting your soon to be bedevilled food item.



60 THE KOOKABURRA COOKERY BOOK.

DEVILLED CHICKEN IN PIECES.

Cut a cooked chicken in neat pieces, mask these with cold butter and then with devil paste (see below), and sprinkle them over with browned breadcrumbs; place in a buttered tin and cook in a quick oven for about a quarter of an hour, taking care not to dry them, arrange them in a circle on a dish-paper, and in the centre put a little well-washed watercress, seasoned with a little salt, salad oil, and a few drops of vinegar. (Lettuce can be substituted for watercress, if preferred).

Devil Paste:—Mix well together 1 teaspoonful of French mustard, 1 saltspoonful of English mustard, a dessertspoonful of chopped chutney, a dust of cayenne pepper, a little salt and black pepper. —Ella Stow.

DEVILLED MUTTON.

Cut up some cold roast mutton into small pieces and put in a pie dish. Pour over a mixture made of half a cup of mixed mustard, pepper and salt, and about 2 tablespoonfuls of vinegar and 1, or more, of Worcester sauce, or any sauce you may prefer. Let it stand about an hour. Put a tiny piece of dripping in a frying pan. Pour the mixture in and fry till quite dry, stirring all the time. —Mrs. Arthur Beresford.

A NICE DEVIL (Admiral Ross's).

INDIAN DEVIL MIXTURE.

4 tablespoonfuls of cold gravy; 1 tablespoonful of chutney; 1 tablespoonful of ketchup; 1 tablespoonful of vinegar; 2 teaspoonfuls of made mustard; 2 saltspoonfuls of salt; 2 tablespoonfuls of butter.

Mix all the ingredients as smooth as possible in a soup plate, put with it poultry or meat, whatever you wish to devil. Stew gently until warmed. Remove meat and grill for 3 minutes. Pour over gravy and serve on hot dish and you will have a delicious devil. —Mrs. Noltenius.

DEVIL SAUCE.

Mix well 1 teaspoonful of mustard; 1 teaspoonful of French mustard; 1 large dessertspoonful of Worcester sauce; a pinch of cayenne and salt. Warm a piece of butter in saucepan, stir in the other ingredients, dredge in a little flour and bring to a boil. Strain over fowl, kidney, and whatever you have devilled. —Mrs. Albion Tolley.

DEVILLED SAUCE FOR GRILLS.

Mix well in a saucepan these ingredients:—

1 tablespoonful of made mustard; 1 oz. of butter; a little anchovy sauce; a pinch of sugar, and a little lemon juice; 2 tablespoonfuls of Worcester sauce and a little tomato sauce; a pinch of cayenne pepper.

When quite hot pour into a sauce-boat and send to table.

—Lady Stirling.

Page of devilled food recipes in The Kookaburra Cookery Book, compiled by the Lady Buxton Girl's Club, E W Cole, Melbourne, 1912, p. 60.

Mrs Maclurcan's cookery book has no fewer than 15 'devilled dishes', many of them recommended for breakfast. *The Kookaburra cookery book* contains a small section dedicated to 'Devils and pepper pots' which includes seven different devils including a 'Wet devil: (for immediate use)' and 'A nice devil' aka (Admiral Ross's) Indian Devil mixture which required time to marinate.

Devilled dishes are conspicuous in their absence in the *Commonsense cookery book*, published by the New South Wales Cookery Teachers' Association from 1914 and *The Presbyterian Cookery Book of Good and Tried Receipts*, published from 1897. Religious conservatism, the closely associated temperance movement and sentiments of racial purity and distrust of foreigners in the late 19th and early 20th centuries fed into dietary discipline. As historian Barbara Santich notes, 'plain food was synonymous with moral rectitude…and the plainer the food the more virtuous the eater.'[20] Devil as an 18th century English cookery term, along with other hotly spiced 'Diablo' dishes – by nature as hot as Hades – suggest evil connotations. Spicy foods, and chilli especially, were stimulating and, echoing the humoral logic, risked exciting the body.

POPULAR 'MYTHCONCEPTIONS'

Despite the available evidence of Australians' culinary curiosity and the longstanding appetite to add 'a bit of kick', it is these conservative late-19th and early-20th century tastes that have come to represent Australia's food history. Colonial Australians were not strangers to piquant, spicy and at times, hot foods and yet the enduring mantra is that until post-Second World War migration, Australian palates were bland, boring and unworldly. Is this a form of self-flattery, to think that our modern tastes are superior and more adventurous than our forbears? Or perhaps embracing 'new' unusual flavours from other cultures provides an opportunity to distance ourselves from who we were, whether that be from the shackles of British colonialism, puritanical wowser-ism or the racial discrimination of the White Australia policy. Gastronomic politics aside, many of the spices and flavoursome condiments in our contemporary culinary repertoire were equally at home in the historical pantry.

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PRACTICE REVIEWS

PRACTICE REVIEWS

Writing, reading and reviewing

BY RACHEL FRANKS, PHA NSW & ACT

Rachel Franks lives, works, and writes on the lands of the Gadigal People.

In a world of headlines documenting the decline of the tertiary sector, with the humanities – including history – positioned as especially vulnerable, the work of historians is as resilient and as inspiring as ever. This can be seen in the number, and quality, of books reviewed for the Professional Historians Australia website: from slim, summary volumes such as *A Little History of the Australian Labor Party* (2024) by Nick Dyrenfurth and Frank Bongiorno through to Sarah Luke's *Marion and the Forty Thieves* (2024), a rare example of a historian writing creative non-fiction for children. These accessible histories, intended for general or younger audiences are supplemented by traditional edited collections, including coffee-tabled-styled books like *The Adelaide Art Scene: Becoming contemporary 1939-2000* (2023) edited by Margot Osborne. In addition, the single-authored substantial work of history continues to be in rich supply.

Health remains a key area of investigation for historians, with Geraldine Fela's oral history-based work *Critical Care: Nurses on the frontline of Australia's AIDS crisis* (2024) the winner of the 2025 Prime Minister's Literary Awards for Australian history. Raina MacIntyre's *Vaccine Nation: Science, reason and the threat to 200 years of progress* (2025) offers a case study of an epidemiologist drawing on the discipline of history to further her argument on vaccines.

Familiar topics in the books that crossed my desk include crime, the environment and immigration. That noted, the interdisciplinary nature of history has also been on display with books covering food studies, linguistics and poetry enthusiastically received by reviewers.

Works unpacking histories of First Nations peoples continue to make an impression, with recent reviews including *The Years of Terror, Banbu-Deen: Kulin and the colonists at Port Phillip, 1835-1851* (2023) by Marguerita Stephens with Fay Stewart-Muir and *A Very Secret Trade: The dark story of gentleman collectors in Tasmania* (2024) by Cassandra Pybus. The trade in human remains also features as a key line of inquiry in Katherine Biber's criminal and political history *The Last Outlaws: The crimes of Jimmy & Joe Governor and the birth of modern Australia* (2025).

Importantly for historians, new works exemplify the value of multiple approaches, showcasing the ongoing need to engage with our past in a variety of ways: from painstaking archival work to oral histories and mixed methods. Some recent titles have explicitly served as professional development for historians, including the 32-chapter long *The Relationship is the Project: A guide to working with communities* (2024) edited by Jade Lillie and Kate Larsen with Cara Kirkwood and Jax Brown.

The merit of pursuing historical studies might be debated in halls of administrators and in newsrooms, but the value of history is as obvious as ever in the outputs of our profession.

Reviewers for the book blog have included stalwarts of the PHA, new members and a few guests recruited to share their specific expertise. Thank you.

PRACTICE REVIEWS

Working with the community to claim the flames in Truganina

BY SONIA JENNINGS, DR MIRANDA FRANCIS AND DR JILL BARNARD (LIVING HISTORIES), PHA VIC & TAS

The authors wish to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People, the traditional owners of the land on which we live and work, and the Bunurong people, the traditional owners of the land on which the events described in this article occurred. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present

> [The] Truganina fire was the 13th fire to start that day. Yep. Lara was already going, I think the Truganina fire truck was up there…no one dreamed it was going to happen here, but it did.[1]

On the western fringe of Melbourne, Truganina's landscape has transformed rapidly over the past half-century. Open paddocks and scattered farmhouses have given way to sprawling residential and industrial estates. Beneath the suburb's contemporary landscape lies an important chapter in Truganina's history, one that is shaped by fire. It is a story remembered with emotion by residents who distinguish their experience from other local fires.

Memories of this milestone event in Truganina emerged through oral histories for a commissioned local history. David Moloney conducted 33 interviews with the Truganina community, including current residents and others who identified with the district through family connections or geographical proximity. For some whose families left the district generations earlier, the ties remained strong and continued to endure. Although Moloney noted the prominence of the fire in people's recollections, it was the Living Histories team, researching Truganina's history from 1935, who systematically drew together these fire stories and analysed their content. We identified the fire as central to the experience of this small farming community and determined that it warranted its own chapter, raising wider questions of trauma, identity, and the power of personal recollection in preserving history.

THE FIRE

On 8 January 1969, Victoria was engulfed by 230 fires that burned through over 324,000 hectares, an event that revived memories of the catastrophic 1939 fires.[2] In Truganina, that January day back in 1969 began like any typical Melbourne summer; it quickly proved to be anything but ordinary. As temperatures soared to 118° F (47° C), residents noticed signs of trouble when smoke appeared in the north-west. The grass fire advanced rapidly due to strong winds, taking the community by surprise. Barry Hopkins, then a local farmer, recounted his experience:

> That was a horrible day. It was just a horrible day – we had wheat in that year – and the smoke that came up – I couldn't see anything, so I just parked the header on a dry bit of ground and went home. The wind was just shocking…you would look up and get a face full of cinders. Somebody said, 'Here it comes', and that's it. It came.[3]

Truganina inhabitants, unprepared for the fire's speed and ferocity, were forced into hasty evacuations while flaming grass and debris

Truganina State School in 1967. The much cherished school, built in 1869, was lost in the fire of 1969, Public Record Office Victoria VPRS 14515 0001 unit 000046.

roared through and around their houses and sheds. Historical bluestone buildings exploded in torrents of heat and livestock bolted through the fields. Those who fought the fire at close range faced serious challenges to protect themselves and their properties.

Evan, a novice fire brigade volunteer, recalled driving straight into the inferno:

> I jumped in the truck because I'd just started with the fire brigade then and I was carting Uncle Roy's grain and I was heading back to his property…there was smoke everywhere and cattle come running at me in the paddock. And I knew what I'd done, I'd driven into the head of the fire.[4]

Truganina was spared the deaths that occurred in the neighbouring area of Lara where, tragically, 17 motorists were trapped and died on the Princes Highway, the main road between Melbourne and Geelong. However, the damage at Truganina was profound. The fire destroyed: '28 houses, 7 hay sheds, 40 outbuildings, two halls, a school and heavy losses of fencing, poles and fodder.'[5] The emotional toll lingered long after the ashes cooled.

In the immediate aftermath, the Truganina community rallied. Families with houses still standing offered shelter and fundraising was extensive. Locals registered both relief that no lives were lost in Truganina and also solidarity with those who suffered in Lara. Recognition of shared vulnerability and survival laid the groundwork for a powerful collective memory – one shaped not just by physical loss but by the destruction of communal spaces. Most significant was the destruction of the 100-year-old school and the well-loved community hall.

CLAIM THE FLAMES IN TRUGANINA (CONT.)

Truganina Mechanics Institute Hall built in 1908 and destroyed by fire in 1969. The hall was a landmark and social hub for the Truganina community. Image from Wyndham History website www.wycl.libsvic.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/.

As a farming community, the loss of livestock was also traumatic:

> Yeah, all the paddocks were black, the fences were all gone, posts burnt and where the posts burnt out of the fence, black wire, rusty wire everywhere, black wire. Dead stock everywhere, dead sheep, cattle. Thousands and thousands of sheep got burnt.[6]

OWNING THE NARRATIVE

Fifty years later, when the Living Histories team began work on Truganina's commissioned history, we found that memories of the fire remained vivid among residents. Although public records grouped the 8 January 1969 fires under the 'Lara fire', we soon realised that the Truganina community wanted their own story told. They felt strongly that their experience should not be overshadowed or subsumed by the events at Lara. We quickly realised that the fire required its own chapter.[7]

However, sources were scarce. Unusually, there was no official inquiry into any of the many Victorian fires that occurred that day, apart from the inquest into the deaths in the Lara fire. Major fires both before and after this event prompted inquiries. The only formal archival trace, therefore, was the Lara inquest, which, while documenting weather and firefighting conditions, spoke little of the lived experience, the losses or the emotional aftermath encountered in Truganina.

Burnt-out cars on the Geelong Road, 1969, Lara bushfire inquest files, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 24/P2/293 1969/1054.


GEELONG ADVERTISER

Ten Killed At Lara

FIRE TRAGEDY

43 Homes Destroyed

Lara Holocaust Takes Life, Stock, And Homes

Ten people are dead and 43 homes destroyed at Lara following yesterday's tragic fires, the worst in Geelong's history.

It was also Victoria's worst fire day in history. The State death toll is at least 14, and there were at least 72 separate fires.

Worst Fires For Quarter Century

RING OF FIRES SURROUND GEELONG; HEAVY LOSSES

102 — HOTTEST DAY SINCE LAST SUMMER

Geelong Advertiser, 9 January 1969, which highlighted the destruction caused by fire at Lara but made no mention of similar devastation at Truganina.

In our early drafts, we explicitly referenced the disaster at Lara, aiming to place Truganina's fire within the wider context of the events of that day. The feedback we received from the community steering committee was immediate and emphatic:

> Too much on the Lara fires, which got extensive newspaper coverage because of the dreadful fatalities, especially on the dual carriageway of Geelong Road/Princes Highway. Truganina fire was totally separate to the Lara one, although our fire brigade was involved in fighting it.[8]

This tension between the historian's responsibility to provide context and the community's preferences for how their story is told presents an ethical dilemma. Whose narrative is privileged? How is trauma to be recorded when there are gaps in the 'official' archive?

For our project, oral history helped fill the gaps left by the lack of official records, as the fire remained an important part of the community's identity, even for those who moved to the area later. Decades on, people vividly recalled what they saw, heard and lost, with these memories remaining strong. One local farmer had filmed the destruction around Truganina shortly after the fire, but this footage was later lost in another fire, further highlighting the value of personal recollection in preserving history.

The emotional and social impact of the fire also shaped survivors' very sense of self and time. As historians Scott McKinnon and Margaret

CLAIM THE FLAMES IN TRUGANINA (CONT.)

Cook note, 'For survivors, disasters provide a biographical temporal marker, life before and after the disaster; they are at once both a singular event and a process of recovery with an indeterminate end.'[9] For Truganina, the fire is remembered not only as a moment of destruction, but as the beginning of a long, ongoing process of community recovery and change.

Our experience with Truganina residents revealed that, in the aftermath of the fire, they picked up the pieces and carried on. In the 1960s physical and emotional support services in Victoria were scarce. The farming community did not strive to forget, but they also did not have the opportunity to stop and talk it through. This echoes Peg Fraser's research on the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, in which she argues that the timing of interviews after a natural disaster is crucial. Fraser notes that interviewing survivors immediately can be difficult, as trauma remains raw and experiences have not yet been fully processed. Waiting until individuals feel ready, she suggests, leads to more thoughtful and meaningful accounts, and can assist both historical understanding and personal healing.[10] As one steering committee member reflected:

> It's a shame no one thought to document interviews and things after the fire, but it was all too raw. I don't know who could have been brave enough to get first-hand accounts after the fire was so recent. It's really good that we are doing the history of that time now![11]

For the Living Histories team, the timing of the retelling was as significant as the retelling itself. The lack of personal testimony recorded in the immediate aftermath of the fire, paradoxically, became part of the story. This was not unexpected; in 1969, trauma counselling was virtually unknown and oral history was in its infancy. As a result, the accounts collected half a century later are memories shaped by time, reflection and community change, rather than immediate reactions—survivors were ready and needed to share their experiences.

This leads to an important point for historians of disaster: the ideal time to record memories may not always be immediately after the event, but rather when individuals and the wider community feel ready to share experiences. This factor is subject to generational change and collective healing. The simple act of telling and re-telling, editing and listening, became a way for the Truganina community to reclaim agency. The 'Fire Chapter' was as much a product of community debate as of historical research.

CONCLUSION: LOCAL FIRE, LOCAL MEMORY

The Truganina fire of 1969 transformed a rural community and, 50 years later, reconfigured the writing of its history. In navigating the tensions between collective memory, gaps in the record and professional rigour, the Living Histories team members found themselves guided above all by the 'ownership' of disaster – the urgent conviction of survivors that their fire must not be lost to the narrative of the 'Lara fire'.

Such fire stories, fiercely claimed and intensely retold, reveal not only the specificity of local trauma but the vital importance of community voice in historical production. As Truganina has changed from a rural area to a modern suburb, memories of the 1969 fire continue to be central to how the community understands its past.

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4. Interview by David Moloney, 6 November 2019, recording and transcript held by Truganina Progress Association Inc.

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PRACTICE REVIEWS

Striking gold in contested ground: writing on the Eureka Rebellion for a public audience

BY ELIZABETH OFFER, PHA VIC & TAS

I acknowledge to the original custodians of the land on which I work and live, and which is where this article has been created, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, as well as the Traditional Owners of the land where the Eureka Centre is located, the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung people. I pay respect to their Elders and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

On the outskirts of Ballarat, a goldfields city located to the far west of Melbourne, Victoria, is the Eureka Centre, a museum dedicated to telling the story of one of Australia's most significant colonial events: the Eureka Rebellion of 1854.[1] Aptly situated in the Eureka Stockade Memorial Park, the Eureka Centre explores the history of the Victorian gold rush and the Eureka Rebellion, speaking to its lasting social and cultural impacts through interactive technologies, interpretative signage and displayed objects. In 2024, I worked with the Eureka Centre to research and redraft the signage located within the main exhibition space. My task was to write a balanced history, one that acknowledged the tensions and complexities that surround the event, the people involved and its legacy, as well as recognising those not often discussed, such as women and children. No easy task, especially having to do it in 120 words or fewer per panel!

I wrote 18 interpretative signs, after conducting primary and secondary research into the Eureka Rebellion, including the events leading up to the rebellion and immediately after. The Eureka Rebellion (and its most well-known symbols) is an enduring and popular event in Australian history that not only spans various political, social and cultural groups, but is also becoming increasingly contested and divisive. How then to achieve a balanced history of the Eureka Rebellion for a public audience?

I relied on three tools from my Historian's Toolbox: letting the sources speak for themselves; acknowledging the conflicting nature of events, people and ideas; and recognising the importance of differing accounts, ideas and symbols.

LETTING THE PRIMARY SOURCES SPEAK

There are some incredible primary sources available regarding the Eureka Rebellion. These range from newspaper articles to dispatches from the Governor General of the colony (at the time Charles Hotham). I wanted to use these sources verbatim rather than to rewrite their words and therefore possibly overlay an additional meaning. This meant incorporating as many as I could in a way that allowed them to be appropriately contextualised. For instance, I felt it was important to include a quote from Governor Charles Hotham, who faced many challenges on his arrival in Victoria in the middle of 1854 (such as huge amounts of administrative debt and an exploding population in a colony that lacked adequate infrastructure). A quote from a speech he made just months before the rebellion demonstrates his intentions to institute reform: '…all power proceeds from the people. It is on that principle that I intend to conduct my administration'.[2] Those words conveyed Hotham's intentions in a more compelling way than reporting that he had reform in mind.

The Eureka Centre, Ballarat, Victoria, as set within the Stockade Memorial Park, photo Elizabeth Offer.

Such use of quotations can be a powerful tool that allows ideas to be conveyed without overlaying further conceptions on them, thus contributing to a more balanced history.

INTRODUCING COMPLEXITY

Often, as a historian crafts their history, they are required to formulate an argument based on sound evidence, selecting sources that will best fit their intended argument. To write a more nuanced history requires acknowledging diverging evidence, to note when accounts differ on specifics or when individuals involved may have acted against their previous stated aims.

Take, for example, the case of Peter Lalor, leader of the Eureka Stockade. When a monster meeting was held on Bakery Hill on 30 November 1854 after a particularly violent police hunt for miners who had not paid their licence fees, Peter Lalor agitated the crowd to undertake direct action, calling men to volunteer in armed companies and to swear an oath to 'defend their rights and liberties'.[3] Less than two years later, Peter Lalor, by this time elected to the Legislative Council, opposed a bill to introduce voting for all white males in 1856.[4] Following this decision, Lalor claimed in defence of his decision the danger inherent in conferring voting rights on 'an unsettled population', which should be balanced 'by infusing into the people a conservative element by attaching them to the land'.[5] By acknowledging these facts, a more complex image is drawn of Lalor; stating one without the other may lead to the sort of simplistic portrayal seen in histories that present actors as either heroes or villains. The more balanced history I was aiming for required room for complexity.

EXPLAINING THE EUREKA LEGACY

It was also important to acknowledge the varied ways that the Eureka Rebellion has been interpreted, even co-opted. Historically, the Eureka Stockade and its most well-known

symbol, the Southern Cross Flag, have been associated with left-leaning political and social groups, including trade unions and socially progressive protest movements.[6] However, in recent years, Eureka has been appropriated by exclusionary nationalistic and far-right groups to lend legitimacy to extreme political and social views. Eureka is now seen by some as a symbol of social division.[7] I needed to record these interpretations, without either prejudice or support. In order to achieve this, I relied upon clear yet essentially impassive language, one that did not assign judgment but remained factual. It is best in such instances to use words that are well-known and are in common use. To write a balanced history is to write an unbiased one, to acknowledge points of view that diverge from your own – to give voice without necessarily giving credence. In doing so, a more nuanced history, one that acknowledges divergent ideas, can be produced.

USING THE HISTORIAN'S TOOLBOX

The Eureka Rebellion is an enduring event in Australia's past, one that has been told and retold since its occurrence. Writing the story of such a well-known yet contested event for public audiences carries many challenges, one further complicated by the need to write a balanced and inclusive history. Luckily, the Historians' Toolbox contains a most useful set of devices, which, if used consciously and sensitively, can provide the means of writing such a history. In doing so, gold can be found in contested ground.

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PRACTICE REVIEWS

Communicating history:
social media and the historian

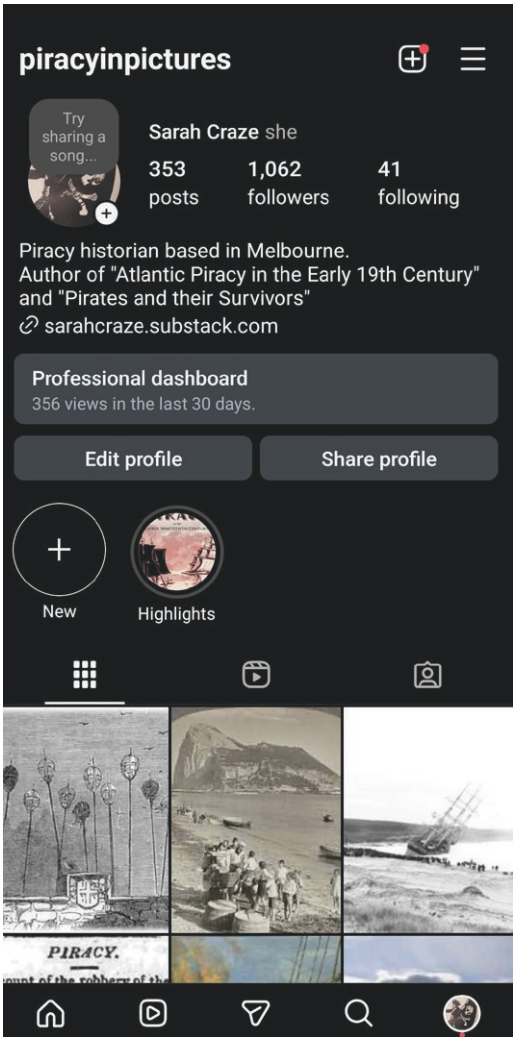
BY SARAH CRAZE, PHA VIC & TAS

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands where I live and work in Boroondara and pay respect to their elders past and present.

Social media refers to the use of an internet-based platform to share content, connect and build communities. Although it began in the 1960s with early digital networks like ARPANET and Telnet, most people discovered it in the 2000s after the development of web-based social media platforms, such as American-owned Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter. Each platform attracted different demographics and served different functions. LinkedIn (2003) facilitated networking between businesspeople and white-collar workers. Facebook (2004) focused on connecting friends, sharing information and ideas between them. YouTube (2005) provided a search function for video uploaded to the internet.

Mobile internet heralded the arrival of Twitter (2007), a short text-based (known as micro-blogging) social media platform popular with journalists, writers and politicians. Twitter also pioneered the use of hashtags to cross-reference user-generated content by topic or theme. Many historians remember with fondness the popular #twitterstorians created by academic historian Katrina Gulliver in 2011.[1]

The launch of Instagram (2010) coincided with the arrival of smartphones and began the shift toward image-based content. Its early adopters used it to express their ideas and creativity, show off their skill set and build a reputation for themselves within their area of expertise.



The author's profile page on Instagram.

PRACTICE REVIEWS

COMMUNICATING HISTORY (CONT.)

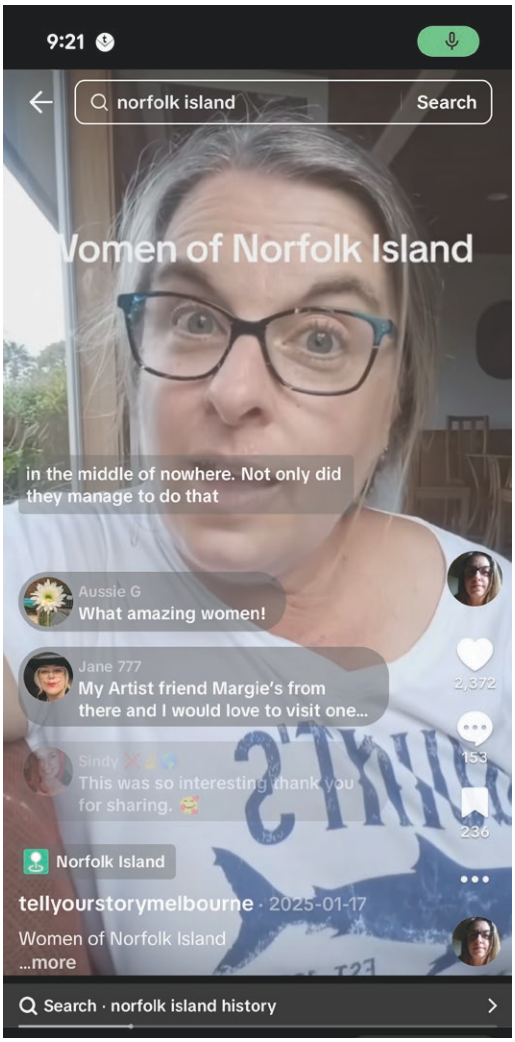
By this time, a social media presence was an essential marketing tool for large and small business. To capitalise on the valuable data the American owners of the social media platforms collected, they sought ways to monetise it. They changed the algorithms behind their social media platforms to prioritise and push out 'sponsored' and targeted advertising content to their users.

In 2017, the arrival of TikTok, a Chinese-owned video sharing platform, drove American social media platforms towards prioritising short-form (90 second) video, known as "Reels" on Instagram and "Shorts" on YouTube, to their users. Over time, Facebook began incorporating more short videos in its feeds too.

Today, over five billion people use some form of social media. It continues to evolve at an extraordinary rate.[2] Facebook remains the most popular social media platform worldwide but newer social media platforms targeting younger demographic groups, including Snapchat, Discord, Telegram, Threads and BlueSky, gain traction as the original users of social platforms age.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE HISTORIAN

Most professional historians have some kind of presence on the main social media platforms. They find them a helpful tool for hunting down people, photographs and memories, particularly of niche topics, institutions and interests that may have otherwise been much harder to find. However, the way you curate your presence on social media needs to reflect your credibility as a historian, particularly if you have a new business, project or publication to promote.



Screenshot from TikTok.

Increasingly, digital media and book publishers require a robust social media presence as a component of an author platform. Your social media presence is a marketing tool for yourself, your brand as an author, and for your publisher to sell more books. But it does not come out of nowhere. Building a consistent presence on social media is the most effective way to create a relationship with buyers, readers and listeners.

The more you post on social media the more your content is pushed to people who do not yet know they are interested in your work.

Social media in 2026 is so diverse and constantly changing that the best option is to pick a platform you are comfortable with and start building from there. Whether you build a new social media presence on an entirely new platform (such as TikTok or BlueSky) or begin expanding your existing social media presence on Facebook and Instagram is going to depend on the time you have available. No matter the platform/s you decide to use, the two keys to all content creation in 2026 are authenticity and consistency.

KISS: KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID

Start by searching for and following creators in the Australian art and culture space, including history enthusiasts, historians, writers and associated institutions. Seeing how other people are doing it is a great way to find ideas for your own content. Also start following people who can give you tips on creating content on your chosen platform. There is a wealth of useful information offered by creators on all social media platforms that can help you learn more and get started.

The biggest selling point in your favour is your expertise. Historians can be a reticent species; not inclined towards self-promotion or communicating their historical work and historical practices in the dynamic way that social media platforms now prioritise. This is unfortunate, as historians possess the skills and abilities, communicate history and historical concepts simply and articulately, and produce exceptional outputs of work that deserve to reach a wider audience. They can also critically analyse Artificial Intelligence (AI) information appearing in social media feeds. To do all this for maximum effect, historians need to give serious consideration to putting themselves on camera and talking to social media users.

Short-form video is now prioritised by all the major social media platforms. They do not (yet) prioritise AI-generated informational content in their search results. Instead, they return results that are authentic and engaging, featuring real people talking about their expertise. This provides an opportunity for historians to place themselves in front of people who are seeking information of accuracy, value and interest.

Keeping the story simple and for a general audience is essential. Videos about niche historical research are far too complex for a general social media user but talking about how you have undertaken the research is not. Incorporating video creation into your daily work is a good way to start. Videos about the difference between primary and secondary sources, documents you have found, working in archives, the need to use diverse research sources, how you set up and undertake oral histories are all great options for communicating history. Other short, simple video ideas include: talking about a problem you're trying to solve, standing outside the Public Records Office and saying what you'll be looking for inside, explaining how microfilm machines work, talking about information you found on Trove or about a history book you've just read. If you have a specific area of historical interest that you think may appeal to the public or a book coming out, talk about researching, writing and publishing it.

Making these videos need not be daunting. There are many free, easy-to-use editing tools available for smartphones to edit and collate videos, including iMovie for Apple and YouCut for Android. Instagram and TikTok both have editing tools embedded within them and other user videos can show you how to use these tools. You can also use the in-built transcription services within the apps to make your video more accessible with subtitles. Another approach is to string photographs that are in the public domain together and turn them into a video with a voiceover or intersperse yourself speaking with photographs. You need to speak clearly, with short and simple sentences. A 90-second video is the maximum unless you have a very compelling story to tell.

Reply to any comments and comment on other users' content that you like because this will help boost your content in the platform's algorithm and push it out to more users.

SHOWCASING WRITING: MICRO-BLOGGING PLATFORMS IN 2026

Of all the first-generation social media networks that have changed the most, the transition of Twitter to X is arguably the most significant. As of January 2026, none of the new micro-blogging platforms have come close to attracting the 298 million active users of X. There are competitors, including BlueSky and Threads. BlueSky has a progressive political bent but a small user base of around three million, mostly American, users. Threads is a much larger alternative. Owned by Meta (the owner of Facebook and Instagram), Threads follows more of a Q & A format than the observational topics of conversation on BlueSky. Both can be dominated by political discourse but they also automate the organisation of posts into subject matter.

Other platforms that include a micro-blogging component are Tumblr, LinkedIn, Discord and Substack. It is worth reviewing them all and deciding on the best fit for you. Micro-blogging successfully requires you to construct succinct sentences that communicate your idea or ask an intriguing question. Use humour if you can and steer clear of criticism of others. Substack has an accompanying subscription-based long-form writing function that may suit those seeking to build awareness of their historical writing.

CONCLUSION

Social media in 2026 presents a unique opportunity to promote, in an authentic way, the historian's expertise and knowledge in a world increasingly compromised by artificial intelligence. Although social media continues to evolve rapidly in ways that are impossible to predict, as historians, it offers us an important tool to promote ourselves as communicators of relevant and engaging material and to find new audiences.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Maisie Austin, OAM, ASM, CMC was born on Thursday Island but since she was three months old has lived in Darwin, where she was raised and educated with her 12 siblings. Her ancestry is European, Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Filipino, Chinese and Malaysian. She lived in Parap Camp up to her teenage years. She is a student at Charles Darwin University, Faculty of Arts and Society and is currently completing her PhD on life at Parap Camp. Maisie has been a small business owner/operator for over 45 years. For her contributions to sport, she was awarded the Order of Australia Medal, the Australian Sports Medal and was inducted into the Northern Territory Sports Hall of Champions.

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Dr Margaret Cook is a both a public and academic historian. She is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Rivers Institute, Griffith University and an honorary Research Fellow at La Trobe University. She is an environmental historian whose work includes histories of waterways. She is the author of the award-winning book *A River with City Problem: A History of Brisbane Floods*, co-editor of *Disasters in Australia and New Zealand* and co-author of *Cities in a Sunburnt Country: Water and the Making of Urban Australia.*

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Dr Sarah Craze completed her PhD in 2019 and is the author of *Atlantic Piracy in the early 19th Century: the shocking story of the pirates and survivors of the Morning Star*. During the Covid era she turned her attention to local history and in 2024 self-published *Ashburton Stories: A History of the Melbourne Suburb*. She is the coordinator of the Boroondara Writers Group, undertakes local history research projects and runs life story writing workshops. She is currently researching a book on the Melbourne suburb of Glen Iris and you can find her on LinkedIn, TikTok and Instagram as tellyourstorymelbourne.

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Shauna Hicks OAM worked for over 35 years in Australian libraries and archives including, Queensland State Archives and the State Library of Queensland in Brisbane, the National Archives of Australia in Canberra, and the Public Record Office Victoria. She is a Fellow of the Queensland Family History Society, Patron of History Queensland and a recipient of the Australian Society of Archivists Distinguished Achievement Award and the Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations' Services to Family History Award. In 2024 she was awarded the Order of Australia medal for community history. She has a blog, Diary of an Australian Genealogist.

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Dr Eleanor Hogan is Collection Development Coordinator for Library & Archives NT. She is also an independent researcher and a literary non-fiction author whose writing focuses on revisiting history and place in Central Australia. Her most recent book, *Into the Loneliness: the unholy alliance of Ernestine Hill and Daisy Bates* (NewSouth, 2021) was listed for the University of Queensland Non-Fiction Book Award 2021, the Chief Minister's NT Book Awards 2022, the Magarey Medal for Biography 2022 and the National Biography Award.

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Jeff Hopkins-Weise is Senior Heritage Advisor/ Historian for Navin Officer Heritage Consultants in Kingston, Canberra. He is a long-term member of the Professional Historians Australia and is the 2025-26 President of the national body as well as Deputy Chair of PHA NSW & ACT. He has many years of history and heritage experience including heritage assessment and management, museums curatorial and collection management, and with local councils, state and Commonwealth government departments. Jeff has an special interest in the British Army and Royal Navy in Australasia, memorials and memorialisation, Australia and the New Zealand Wars, and the colonial trans-Tasman world, and has published widely in these and other areas.

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Deborah Lee-Talbot is a freelance historian. Her work involves the transcription and analysis of handwritten diaries and documentary sources, with particular attention to identifying Indigenous individuals and contextualising historical information related to missions in the Pacific Islands and associated communities. She has worked with regional museums and cultural institutions to enhance the accessibility, accuracy, and research value of archival collections. She contributes to scholarly and policy discussions on the implications of AI for historical method, archival practice, and academic integrity, advocating for critically informed, historically grounded approaches to technological adoption in historical research and higher education.

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Kimberley Meagher is a professional historian and former Victorian public servant. She has over 20 years' experience in the public service and private sector working in archives, history, heritage and creative sectors. A member of PHA Vic & Tas since 2009, Kimberley has served on the PHA Vic &Tas Committee of Management as President, Vice President and Events Coordinator. Kimberley blends professional interests in creative and digital infrastructure with personal interests in people, places, and travel. She writes and publishes research at www.whatwillbe.blog

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Dr Jacqui Newling is a public historian and museum curator. Specialising in Australian settler-colonial history and food heritage, Jacqui uses food to engage with diverse audiences and encourage people to reflect on their own, and others', social identity in the past and the present. Her recent publications include articles on food and settler-colonialism in Australia and First Fleet colonists' responses to wild food sources as a form of survival.

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Dr Elizabeth Offer completed a Doctor of Philosophy in history at La Trobe University, where she is currently a Research Adjunct. Elizabeth's PhD research examined the Jewish communities that formed in Bendigo and Ballarat between 1851 and 1901, focusing in particularly on the intersection of faith, identity and Britishness. She has published several articles relating to her research, including in the *Journal of Australian Studies*, for which she won the award for Best Article. She is co-editor of *Circa*.

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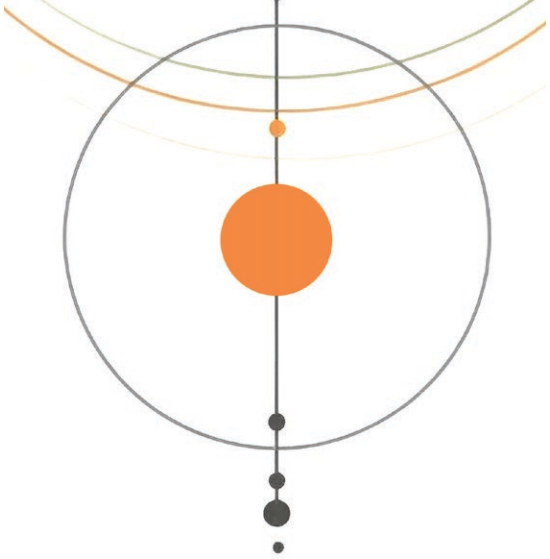
Dr Lauren Samuelsson is a historian at the University of Wollongong. She is also on the committee of the PHA NSW & ACT. Her research interests include histories of food, popular culture, media and gender. She is passionate about bridging the gap between academic and public history – making history accessible for wide audiences.



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