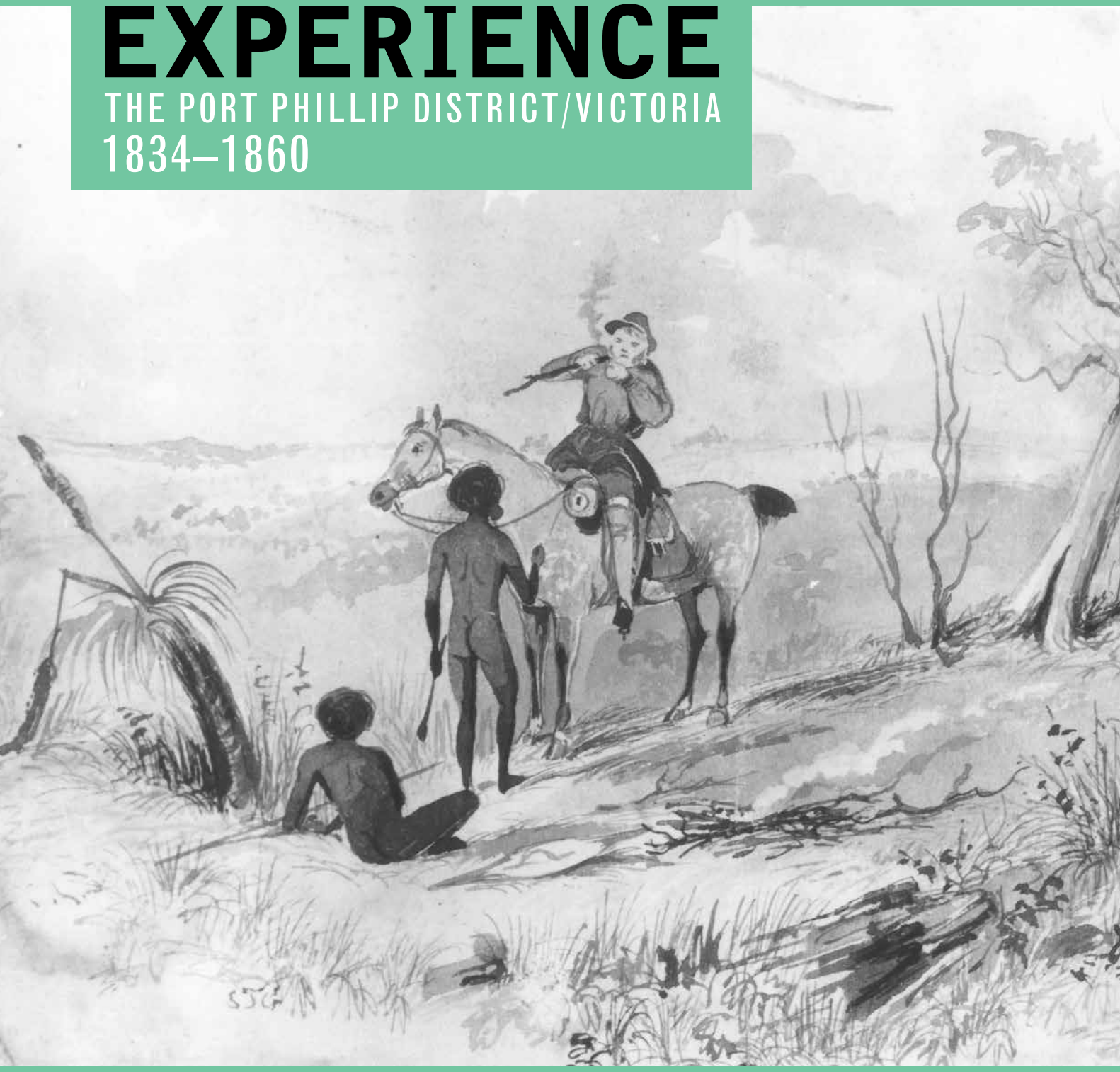
4TH EDITION • NEW STUDY DESIGN

THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

THE PORT PHILLIP DISTRICT/VICTORIA 1834–1860



Richard Broome

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY STUDIES IN HISTORY

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The Colonial Experience: The Port Phillip District/Victoria 1834-1860
By Richard Broome

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PREFACE

Early Victoria has two wonderful stories. First, a forgotten, almost a secret history, that is, its years before Separation in 1851 from its Mother Colony, New South Wales. Second, the story of the fabulous wealth produced from gold finds in Victoria during the rushes of the 1850s. The second story has all but overshadowed the first, almost to the point of obscuring it. The deluge of population which came in those golden years of the fifties and the social and political changes they produced, have all but overlaid the pastoral phase in the memory of our beginnings as a European society. In these pre-1850 years, Victoria was known as the Port Phillip District of New South Wales. It was an administrative appendage to New South Wales, run firstly by a Captain Lonsdale from 1836, and then Superintendent Charles La Trobe from 1839.

This period has only recently had its first substantial history written: Alan Shaw's *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation* (1996). With Separation from New South Wales in 1851 Port Phillip was renamed Victoria. Its history has been written by many, most notably Geoffrey Serle in his *The Golden Age. A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1851-1861*, (1963).

This secrecy or forgetfulness about the first years is unfortunate. The Port Phillip years of our history are moments of great interest and importance, particularly in understanding the themes of the making of a new society followed in this book. It was the beginnings of Victoria as a European and immigrant society, and the dramatic moment in this region when Aboriginal and European people first engaged each other - an encounter that is still being resolved in the post-Mabo era.

The 4th edition of this book is divided into four Investigations or parts.

Investigation 1: 'Evaluating Aboriginal Ideas of Land and Land Management' is completely new in this edition to match the new themes introduced into VCE Australian History, Unit 3 for 2016+. This investigation allows students to identify, describe, explain, analyse and evaluate (IDEAE), Aboriginal ideas about country and their use and management of land. Early settlers had little idea of how Aboriginal people survive in Australia. They believed they lived a miserable life and were continually desperate in their search for food. Those who came to know them better understood that they were at ease with their environment and worked for only a few hours each day to gain their food, spending the rest of the time building culture. Even fewer observers understood how they managed their land. Indeed, scientists and historians are making new discoveries all the time about how they managed land. There are 33 documents in this new Investigation.

Investigation 2: 'Evaluating European Ideas of Land and Emigration', explores what forces urged people in the United Kingdom to uproot and emigrate across the world to settle a barely known place. It was an awesome move, as many found to their cost. One failed settler Richard Howitt, wrote of his experience: 'there is scarcely any human act so important in its consequences as that of exchanging one country for another'. Our investigation cannot encompass the myriad situations and the many reasons for emigration of the 90,000 people who came to Port Phillip in those years. However, it will focus on the idea of land and contains a new section of documents entitled: 'British Ideas Regarding Ownership and Use of Land'. Investigation 2 explores through the tools of IDEAE, ideas of land and emigration in diaries,

reminiscences, pamphlets, newspapers, maps, illustrations, to reveal the complexity of why people forsook the familiar and launched into the unknown.

We can feel great empathy with the difficulties of these people. Yet their struggles in a new world for them, created a new world of destruction for Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. In this colonial situation, European opportunity was the Aborigines' loss. We need to decide in our own minds whether this was an invasion, a settlement, or an occupation of Aboriginal lands.

Investigation 3: 'Evaluating the Impact of Colonisation on Aboriginal People to 1860', invites you again to use the tools of IDEAE – identify, describe, explain, analyse and evaluate - by beginning with the nature of colonialism as a power relationship. However, you will be invited to analyse carefully just how one-sided it might be. Were Aboriginal people in these years of white colonisation entirely victims of the colonial process? Or did they have some power, some room to manoeuvre? How did they counter the European presence? And how was it that Aboriginal culture managed to survive in some form in the face of a migration inflow of many times their number? A new section of documents has been added entitled: 'Pastoralism's Impact on Aboriginal Land and Resources', which invites you to evaluate outcomes from Investigation 1 on Aboriginal land use and management.

Investigation 4: 'Evaluating the Demographic and Political Consequences of the Gold Rushes', will allow you to evaluate the impact of gold on the the creation of a European society as it was remade in a deluge of gold rush immigrants. We will use IDEAE again, to identify, describe, explain, analyse and evaluate documents to understand the size of the population increase, its diverse nature, and how old ideas and new experiences shaped new visions and politics of the future. This will be demonstrated by examining ideas of political change; the unlocking of the lands to small settlement; the creation of ideas of a better society through the eight hour day; and decisions about who should be part of this new world society, by attempts to exclude Chinese diggers and Aboriginal people.

Not only must we analyse and evaluate the evidence on these matters for ourselves, but we must ponder the nature of history itself. An English historian, Geoffrey Elton, in *The Practice of History* (1967), argued very hard that historical facts were truths. Elton implied that, as long as we could collect all the relevant facts, we could know the past, and that knowledge would not be under much dispute. But this is not the case, as history is continually rewritten and contested.

Another English historian, E. H. Carr in *What is History?* (1961), argued that historical facts were like freshly caught fish under glass at the fishermen's co-operative. They did not represent all the varieties of fish in the sea, but only what had been caught that day, and by those particular fishermen. Once purchased, those fish are taken home and prepared in a diversity of ways, by the varied methods of the individual purchasers, and cooked and spiced to their individual tastes.

So it is with the making of history. The interpretation will depend on the ideas buzzing in the historian's head as well as the facts that he or she finds, selects and through them gives meaning to the past. This does not mean that there are endless interpretations or that the historian can say anything. Historians must

use the evidence with care and attention to the ideas of the past. History is thus a conversation between the individual historian and the facts from the past. This means then, that a fact can be viewed differently, and does not always contain one truth. Each individual fish can be seen differently, depending on one's preference and how it is held. It can be viewed from the side; by gaping down its mouth; from the top; underside; or from its tail. It is still the same fish, but it looks different to the viewer, depending on the angle.

History is exciting, and challenging, because it is debatable. Each of you will hold an individual view of these documents in this collection, and you will need to be able to defend that view. You will probably agree many times on these documents, but you may emphasise different points or words in them. Because of the way E. H. Carr and others have shown us that history is contestable, we have chosen an inquiry-based book. Within these pages are over a hundred documents, all with introductions to orientate you, followed by questions to stimulate your reading, your thinking, and finally your evaluation of the evidence.

This book has been well-received for a decade and is now in a fully revised fourth edition with a new Investigation on Aboriginal ideas of land use and management, and other new sections to carry this story forward. I would like to thank the HTAV team executive for advice on the writing of this book and for its layout and picture preparation. Special thanks go to Sally Bond and Georgina Argus at the HTAV.

Have fun and good fortune with your studies. Read on!

RICHARD BROOME
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December 2016

OVERVIEW

The 1830s witnessed the remaking of the area of land known as the Port Phillip District of New South Wales, which was renamed Victoria after 1851. This region, home to numerous Aboriginal people, was reshaped by the forces of capitalism in the form of pastoralism and also by the dictates of European civilization. By 1850, Aboriginal society was overlaid by European culture and the land was transformed. Then Port Phillip itself was overlaid by a gold rush which transformed its social life, helped change its political culture and added significant new wealth to the colony.

This brief overview and time line that follows provides an introduction to Port Phillip and Victoria of the 1850s. This brief outline is based on the author's own research and reading in Port Phillip and Aboriginal history, more of which can be found in Richard Broome, *Arriving*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1984, chapters 1-4, and Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians. A History Since 1800*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005, chapters 1-6.

ABORIGINAL VICTORIA

The archaeological record reveals that Aboriginal people have resided in Victoria for about 50,000 years. On river terraces at Keilor, archaeologists located Aboriginal campsites that have been occupied continuously for 40,000 years. Other sites found around the region confirm this ancient occupation. During this extensive period, six times longer than western civilization's history, Aboriginal people in Victoria experienced an ice age, dramatic sea level changes and massive changes to the region's ecosystem. For instance, Victoria shrank by a quarter as the sea rose with the warming of the earth 10,000 years ago. Aboriginal people responded effectively to these changes, forging new survival and living techniques as expert hunters and gatherers and farmers of fish, eels, ducks and kangaroo by various ingenious methods recorded by the first white observers.

Until recently, scholars believed that the numbers of Aboriginal people in Victoria prior to the coming of the Europeans was fewer than 20,000. However, Noel Butlin who believed that smallpox decimated Aborigines in the area in the years before the European occupation, estimated that the pre-contact Aboriginal population may have been four times higher. Whatever the truth, these people lived in about 30 language and cultural groups (tribes), in turn bound in four large federations, the Kurnai of Gippsland, the Kulin of central Victoria, the Mara of the Western District and the Wotjo of the north-west of the state. They lived in small family groups and only collected as clan, tribal and federated groups at various times of the year for ceremonial, exchange and social reasons.

Aboriginal life was hard and by no means perfect, but Aboriginal people had developed satisfactory answers for many of life's problems. The problems of food and shelter were met by clever economic strategies that satisfied needs within four or five hours of work a day. Intricate social and kinship rules ordered the problems of small-group living and inter-group contacts. Malevolent sorcery by strange groups over the horizon threatened to bring the downfall of an individual, but counter sorcery by a friendly clever man could save the situation. The problem of relations between young and old, and men and women, was balanced by the power of tradition. Aboriginal culture had tackled problems for forty millennia. But in 1834

Victorian Aboriginal people faced their biggest test, the invasion of their country by Europeans, the implications of which are still being acted out today.

EUROPEAN PENETRATION

In 1770 Lieutenant Hicks on board Cook's *Endeavour* sighted the coast of Victoria, but it was not until early 1798 that George Bass penetrated the Strait later named after him and reached Western Port. Despite some explorations of Port Phillip Bay soon after, the area lay free of European penetration until the mid 1830s, when the Hentys at Portland in 1834 and John Batman at Melbourne in 1835 laid the land open to European immigration and pastoral expansion.

The European pastoral invasion of Port Phillip came from three directions. A group of Hobart professionals who formed the Port Phillip Association which funded Batman's venture in 1835, were but part of a group of Tasmanian businessmen who sought wider fields for their flocks and venture capital. As soon as Batman founded Melbourne there was a rush across Bass Strait. Within a year of Batman's 'Treaty' with the Port Phillip Aborigines there were 177 Europeans (including 35 women) and 26,000 sheep living in Port Phillip. Within a further six months, that is by the end of 1836, this number has doubled. By this time people (mostly men) and their flocks and herds of cattle were overlanding from New South Wales. By 1837 adventurers were arriving from Great Britain to try their hand at sheep raising.

At first this activity was considered illegal as the British government had banned settlement on the southern coast in an attempt to confine its spread and maintain law and order. However, despite denouncing Batman's 'Treaty' as worthless and illegal, Governor Richard Bourke in Sydney was forced to recognise the settlement and send a magistrate there to regulate affairs in May 1836. Bourke visited the new settlement of Melbourne, then called 'BearBrass', in 1837 and named it after Viscount Melbourne, the then current British Prime Minister.

LAND SETTLEMENT

A battle for the land developed between pastoralists and Aborigines and later between the pastoralists and small settlers. The pastoralists perpetrated the largest land grab in Australia's history, and perhaps that of the modern world, as they spread across much of central and Western Victoria within about seven years. They did not own the land, for it was held under annual lease from the government, which claimed the land as crown land. Aboriginal rights to the land were ignored by the British Crown, which claimed the land at settlement, without treaty, as its own. However, the pastoralists ('squatters' as they were known), effectively controlled the wealth from the land at least on an annual basis, for a paltry ten pounds annual fee, equivalent to about $5,000 per annum today. The rapid rise in sheep prices and profits was only arrested once a recession developed between 1842 and 1845 brought on by excessive speculation in leases and sheep.

Aboriginal people at times resisted the invasion of their lands. However, they were hampered by their traditional groupings that made military coalitions difficult, their

lack of a tradition of fighting for land, and the fact that each tribe was pitted against the local squatters who were backed by police and military forces when required. Many Aboriginal groups chose wisely not to fight, and accommodated themselves to the newcomers instead. Indeed, bargains and uneasy compromises between blacks and whites were acted out as much as violent confrontations. Aboriginal people tried a variety of ways of relating to the Europeans in an effort to control them and the worst effects of their invasion of Aboriginal lands. However, despite their efforts at physical and cultural resistance and their many compromises, the Aboriginal population declined rapidly before the Europeans' presence. Introduced diseases, especially European childhood diseases and respiratory infections and dysentery were the most deadly to them. Malnutrition through displacement from their land and European violence played secondary roles in their demise. By the 1850s, the Aboriginal population of Victoria had been reduced by over eighty per cent, for there were only 1,907 Aborigines remaining in the colony by 1853.

THE EUROPEANISATION OF PORT PHILLIP

The period after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 witnessed the age of emigration as people from Great Britain, Ireland and Europe flocked across the seas in search of a better life. In the era of the Port Phillip District, that is 1835 to 1851, almost two and a half million people left Great Britain. Most went to the New World of the Americas, but one in fourteen came to Australia and one in thirty to Port Phillip. More might have come, but America was a traditional destination, a more settled place, closer and therefore one fifth the price to reach. For this reason the British Government introduced an assisted immigration scheme to attract settlers to Australia. After 1832, money raised from land sales in the Australian colonies was used to provide assisted passages for immigrants to Australia, although they had to fit the categories of farm labourers and domestic servants. Thirty thousand came as assisted migrants while another 60,000 people, mostly from England, Ireland and Scotland paid their own passage. Not all of them remained in Port Phillip. Immigration and natural increase swelled the population of Port Phillip to almost 80,000 by 1851. This meant that Europeans outnumbered the surviving Aboriginal people by forty to one.

This population increase underpinned the Europeanisation of Port Phillip. These many thousands of newcomers brought their own ideas about social, economic and political relations, about class and gender, law and religion, and about land use. All of these things can be called their 'cultural baggage', the set of ideas they brought with which to order their lives in the new land. This baggage led to the creation of British institutions, clubs and societies through which people reformed their lives. However, while these institutions were recreated in colonial society they were also transformed by the local environment and by the new mix of ideas as English, Scottish and Irish people confronted each other and the local environment.

Port Phillip became the site of many struggles besides that between black and white. Squatters and other settlers struggled for control of the land, once the squatters, the most powerful men in the colony, made it known that they wished to change their annual leases to longer leases and potentially to gain freehold of the land. Merchants

and small farmers sought to prevent the establishment of large pastoral estates. Their vision was for a colony of small holders supporting a thriving urban and export economy. Working class people, while not as militant as the working class of Britain, were still asserting themselves in their relations with their masters, creating a new egalitarian spirit in the colony.

As the colony grew, those in Port Phillip developed the idea that they should not be governed from Sydney by the New South Wales Governor advised by a Legislative Council full of Sydney men. A desire for local autonomy developed as the colony and its pastoral economy matured. Resentments grew as well because New South Wales had a convict past, whereas the people of Port Phillip saw themselves as free. The movement for Separation from the mother colony of New South Wales expressed all these ideas. Separation became a reality in mid 1851. The new colony showed its patriotism by calling itself Victoria after the beloved reigning monarch. By 1851 the era of Port Phillip Society had formally ended.

A GOLDEN TRANSFORMATION

The discovery of gold in the same year as the formal creation of Victoria as a separate colony led to a tumultuous decade which transformed the Colony. Over a half a million immigrants came to Victoria in the 1850s from Europe, North America and China. Many stayed and contributed to the widespread changes in society. Melbourne grew rapidly and new towns were created by the gold discoveries, especially in the triangle of central Victoria. The existing pastoral industry was stimulated feeding this increased population and new industries arose to service the mining industry. The face of Victoria changed as men dug up the surface of vast tracts of land and chopped trees to line mine shafts and feed hungry mining machinery. The infrastructure of the colony was transformed as roads and bridges were built, water supplies created and railways began. New institutions were created from the State Library, and the University of Melbourne, to Pentridge Prison.

The diggers came with ideas of democratic reform in their heads and these were reinforced by the experience of digging for gold. The diggers were placed into a situation where muscle, not one's background or connections, determined how you would succeed – and luck! An egalitarian spirit developed which encouraged new social ideas to emerge, concerning who should hold power and who should share in the colony's resources. The protests against the size and administration of the gold license system led to long term dissatisfaction. Eventually in late 1854 violent protest erupted at Ballarat in the Eureka uprising. This shocked the colony and accelerated political changes already underway and put Victoria in advance of Britain. Protest then developed over the land issue as many diggers sought to create a future for themselves on small farms once their digging had ended. Other movements for change emerged as workers sought relief from the standard of ten hours of work back in England. They called for an eight hour working day. Others imagined that Victoria should be kept for British people which led to discrimination against the large number of Chinese diggers who has also joined the rush for gold. All these changes led to a transformed Victoria by 1860 – which in many ways began to look much like the physical and socio-political terrain of modern Victoria.

TIMELINE

Dates in history should not be over emphasized. We are, or should be, much more interested in the meanings events held for people in the past and the interpretations for the present that we give to past events.

However, interpretations depend on knowing trends, patterns etc. and dates help us to establish time and thus the relationships of events that establish meanings. The dates in the timeline below should help you to grasp a sense of time in Port Phillip and Victoria's History.

Why not add some dates of your own that are needed for your own interpretations?

1770 First European sighting of the Victorian coastline by the crew of the Endeavour

1798 George Bass enters Western Port and lands at Phillip Island

1802 Port Phillip Bay discovered and entered by Lieutenant John Murray

1803 First European settlement attempted but fails at Sullivan's Bay, near Sorrento

1824 Hamilton Hume and William Hovell overlanded from NSW to Corio Bay

1825 Military post created at Corinella but abandoned after sixteen months

1834 Edward Henty and family settle at Portland, the first permanent European settlers

1835 John Batman makes his treaty with the Aborigines and purchases land

1836 Port Phillip proclaimed as open for settlement

1837 Governor Bourke inspects and names Melbourne, and Hoddle begins surveys

1839 Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate created

1842 Melbourne proclaimed as a town, first town council elected

1844 Petition calling for separation from NSW sent to Queen Victoria

1849 Select Committee disbands the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate

1850 An Act grants Port Phillip Separation from NSW and Responsible Government

1851 Separation proclaimed. Charles La Trobe becomes first Victorian Governor

1851 Gold discovered at Warrandyte and Clunes

1852 Gold rush immigration from overseas begins

1854 Battle of Eureka Stockade

1855 Victorian Constitutional Act proclaimed

1855 Landing tax levied on all Chinese arrivals by sea

1856 Eight Hour Day won by Stonemasons

1856 First Victorian parliament sits

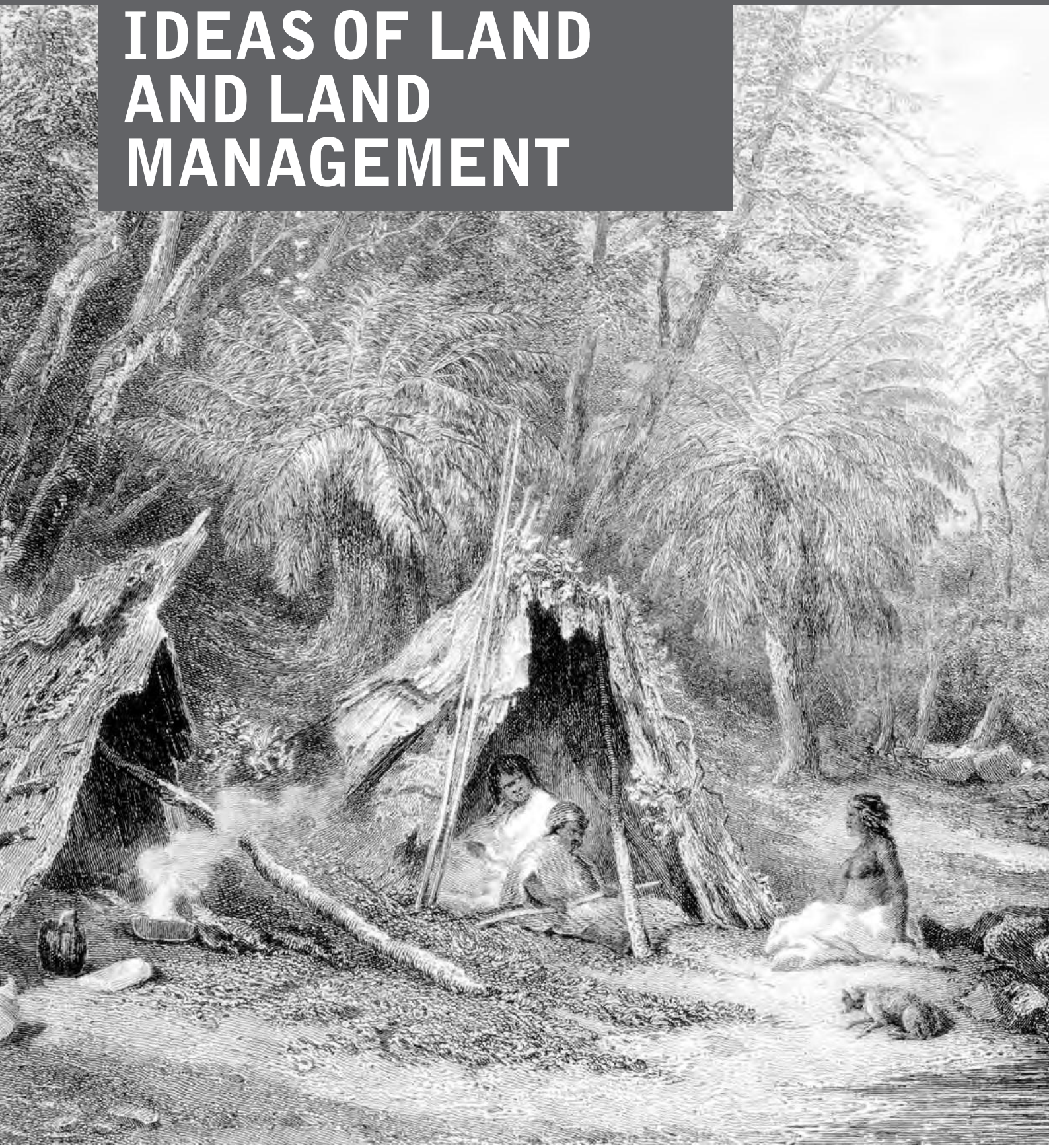
1857 Victorian Land League holds Convention

1859 Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines

1860 Central Board for the Aborigines formed

1860 Nicholson Land Act passed

EVALUATING ABORIGINAL IDEAS OF LAND AND LAND MANAGEMENT



ABOVE: 'Native encampment' by John Skinner Prout. *Dixson Galleries, State Library of NSW.*

This Investigation contains documents and questions which enable the reader to evaluate Aboriginal relationships to land, including spiritual and ritual understandings, and land use and management practices.

We can investigate and evaluate relations to land from several sources. First, by what we learn from key colonial observers who observed and talked with Aboriginal people on the frontier. Second from nineteenth century ethnographers and anthropologists who talked with Aboriginal people in the late nineteenth century onwards, and wrote down what they heard. Third from Aboriginal people directly through their words written down *verbatim* (word for word) in the nineteenth century. Fourth, through Aboriginal people today, who know and speak of Aboriginal cultural ideas, which have been passed to them by oral tradition.

William Thomas and Alfred William Howitt were two key observers of Aboriginal society, largely because they listened to Aboriginal informants as part of their gathering of evidence. William Thomas, an English school teacher, became a government official in the Aboriginal Protectorate, created in Port Phillip in 1839. He remained after it was disbanded in 1849 to be Guardian of the Aborigines until his death in 1867. His knowledge of Victorian Aboriginal people was unrivalled among Europeans. Alfred Howitt was an explorer, natural scientist and public servant who began studying Aboriginal society in the 1860s and wrote the classic, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (1904). As part of his gathering of evidence. Howitt talked with many settlers, officials and importantly Aboriginal informants, including Barak (Berak), who was a small boy when Melbourne was settled. Thomas and Howitt sometimes used words like 'native', 'blacks' or 'blackfellows', which are unacceptable today. Other observers quoted below even used such words as 'primitive' and 'savages'. Their words must be read with caution as value judgements, not fact. However their observations are often very informative about land management practices.

The first document is a shortened version of 'Reflections', the opening section of my book *Aboriginal Victorians* (2005).

DOCUMENT 1.1

About 1600 generations of Aboriginal people made a continuous life in Victoria over at least 50,000 years. People experienced massive environmental changes, which altered ecologies and food supplies, which extinguished some species, including the giant forms of current Australian fauna. Global warming thereafter led to a rising of the seas by 100-150 metres over 15,000 years, which flooded coastlines forming Bass Strait and Port Phillip Bay 9,000 years ago. Levels only stabilised to near current levels 6,000 years ago. The Victorian land mass was reduced by one fifth in this process, causing slow but massive alterations to tribal territories.

Over millennia, a Great Tradition of belief evolved, not quickly or immediately, as human knowledge is cumulative and piecemeal. Ideas about creation, life, death, land, species and people, formed in relationship to a changing land. Surviving stories of the great ancestors collected by early settlers clearly indicate the existence of a moral and imaginative life. Artworks reveal a Great Tradition as well. Early settlers witnessed artworks for ceremonies painted on bodies and bark, or drawn in sand, and much therefore did not survive. However, over a hundred rock art sites in the Grampians-Gariwerd region of western Victoria survived, revealing animal figures, bird tracks, and stencilled hands. These shelters have been dated to over 20,000 years. Aboriginal art is generally refreshed and over-painted, suggesting layers upon painted layers exist, revealing a continuous but changing tradition.

Technological change over long periods reveals an adaptation to the changing climate. New tools, indigenous to Australia, emerged such as the returning boomerang, whose subtle aerodynamics indicate a long development without design drawings, or wind tunnel tests. Their tool kit became more diverse over time, incorporating more wood and bone, and tools became smaller and more refined. Strategies for hunting Australian animals that jumped, ran and burrowed were devised, including stealth, diversions, disguises an implements such as hooks, nets and traps. Massive nets were made out of fibre to trap ducks made to swoop low at the end of a billabong. Many of these technologies altered Aboriginal people from being hunters and gatherers constantly on the move, to being semi-sedentary for parts of the year.

In Victoria there were about thirty cultural-language groups formed by hundreds of clans or land-owning groups. Many of these cultural-language groups (tribes as they used to be called) interacted and intermarried with adjoining groups, but they were at enmity with those further afield, who were feared as possible enemies and sorcerers. Warfare existed with such distant groups, and even with neighbours, after disputes arose over women, trade or ritual transgressions. However, there were traditional mechanisms for containing excessive violence, especially with neighbouring groups. These thirty cultural-language groups comprised perhaps 60,000 people before Europeans and their diseases arrived.

A precise from Richard Broome, 'Reflections', in *Aboriginal Victorians. A History Since 1800*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005, pp. xviii-xix.

QUESTION

1 What are the dominant idea(s) that you draw from a reading of this passage about Aboriginal traditional life before Europeans arrived?
List these points.

DOCUMENT 1.2

The cultural-linguistic groups of Victoria can be seen on the map of 'Aboriginal Languages of Victoria'

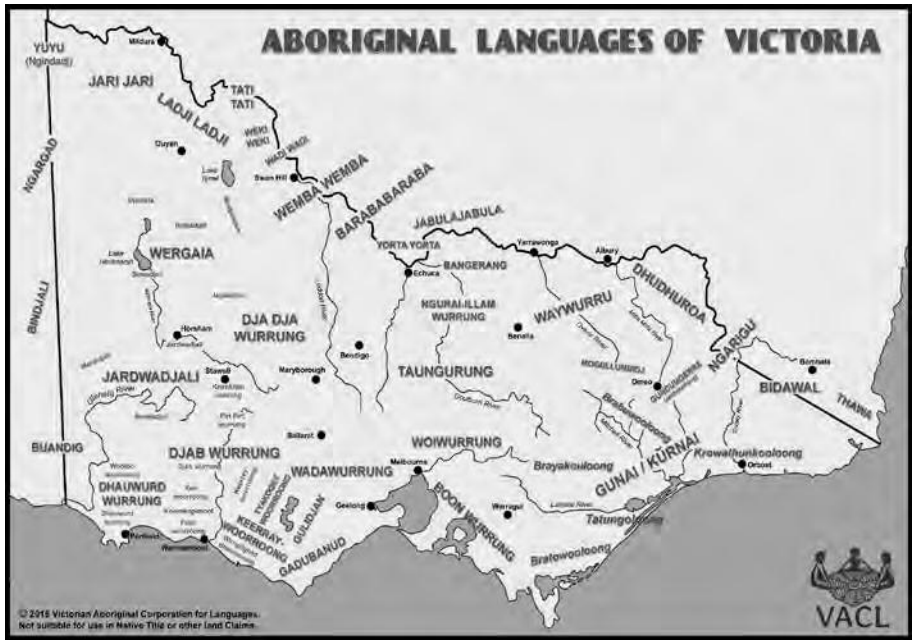


FIGURE 1
Aboriginal Languages of Victoria
Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages

IDEAS OF CREATION

Aboriginal people, like all human societies, had beliefs and explanations of how the world began. The Kulin people believed Bunjil was the great creator. The Kulin comprised a federation of five cultural-linguistic groups in central Victoria, which shared the same language, namely: the Boon Wurrung of Westernport, the Woiwurrung of the Yarra River Catchment; the Wadawurrung of the Werribee plains-Geelong-Ballarat region; the Taungurung of the lower Goulburn River area and the Dja Dja Wurrung of the lower Loddon river region and to its west (see the VACL map in document 1.2). Note that spelling of tribal names vary immensely and will do so in the discussion and documents that follow. However, the sound of the name is indicative of which group is being referred to. Thus Dja Dja Wurrung is the same group as Jajowrong, Wadawurrung is the same as Wathaurung.

There are many stories of Bunjil, both from colonial times in European records and Aboriginal memory. William Thomas, the Assistant Aboriginal Protector and later Guardian of the Aborigines from 1839 until 1867, knew the Kulin better than any non-Indigenous person. Following many conversations with Aboriginal people over more than a decade, Thomas wrote this of Bunjil around 1854.

DOCUMENT 1.3

> The Australian Aborigines believe in two principal Deities:- Punjil [Bunjil], the maker of the earth, trees, animals, and man.... The Australian's next Deity is Pallian, brother of Punjil. Pallian made all seas, rivers, creeks, and waters, also all the fish in the oceans, seas, rivers, &c. He governs the waters; was always in the waters, walking, bathing, and going over the seas.
>
> Creation of Man. Punjil one day cut, with his large knife, two pieces of bark, mixed up a lot of clay, an made two black men, one very black and the other not quite black – more like dirty red brick. He was from morning to night making them; it was not bright day then, but the sun was like blood all day. He began to make a man at the feet, then made legs, and so on to the head. He then made the other in a like manner, and, smoothing them both over with his hand from feet to the head, he put on one's head curly hair and named him Kookinberrook; on the other straight hair and named him Berrookboorn. After finishing the two men, Punjil looked on them, was pleased, and danced round them. He then lay on each of them, blowing into their nostrils, mouth, and navel, and the two men began to move. He bade them get up, which they did ([as] young men not pickaninnies [babies]); he told them their names; he showed his brother Pallian the two men he had made.
>
> William Thomas in Thomas Francis Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers,* first edition 1998, this edition Lloyd O'Neil Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1983, p. 422.

William Howitt who wrote many books and papers on Aboriginal society and culture in the late nineteenth century learned much from Aboriginal informants, including William Barak. Barak told him that Bunjil 'taught the Kulin the arts of life', and divided the Kulin into two groups, bunjil (eaglehawk) and waa (crow). Bunjil instructed the Kulin to marry only into the opposite group: 'Bunjil should marry Waang, and Wang marry Bunjil'.

Howitt recorded this:

DOCUMENT 1.4

Another legend relates that he [Bunjil] finally went up to the sky-land with all his people (the legend says his 'sons') in a whirlwind, which Bellin-bellin (the musk crow) let out of his skin bag at his order. There, as the old men instructed the boys, he [Bunjil] remains looking down on the Kulin. A significant instance of this belief is that Berak [Barak], when a boy, 'before his whiskers grew', was taken by his kangun (mother's brother) out of the camp at night, who, pointing to the star Altair with his spear-thrower, said: 'See! That one is Bunjil; you see him, and he sees you.' This was before Batman settled on the banks of the Yarra River [that is, before 1835], and is conclusive as to the primitive [old] character of this belief.

Howitt also related that a relative, Richard Howitt, in 1845 witnessed a corroboree in Melbourne and heard that:

The Legend is that Bunjil held out his hand to the sun (*Gerer*) and warmed it, and the sun warmed the earth, which opened, and black-fellows came out and danced this corroboree, which is called *Gayip*. At this ritual, images carved in bark were exhibited.

A.W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-east Australia*, first published 1904, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1996, pp. 491-2.

FIGURE 2
Bunjil and his dogs, Bunjil's Cave Grampians
By Michael Barnett (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

Contemporary Aboriginal stories of Bunjil can be found on the following websites

DOCUMENT 1.5

- Joy Wandin Murphy 'Bunjil the Eagle' http://www.yarrahealing.catholic.edu.au/stories-voices/index.cfm?loadref=79
- Ian Hunter, 'Bunjil and Pallian Creation Story' Wurundjeri Dreamtime Stories , transcription from a recording 2004-05 https://mdei.files.wordpress.com/2009/08/bunjil_pallian_creation_story.pdf
- Martin Gordon, 1998, Gariwerd Creation Story - our dreamtime story, Grampians National Park http://www.brambuk.com.au/assets/pdf/GrampiansNationalParkGariwerdCreationStory.pdf

QUESTIONS

1. In your own words list some of the deeds of Bunjil in Documents 1.3-1.5.
2. Is Howitt correct to use the word 'legends' in reference to stories of Bunjil?
3. How would you describe the connections of Bunjil to land?
4. What does Joy Wandin Murphy, a Kulin elder, say of Bunjil? Is this a religious statement? How can you tell?

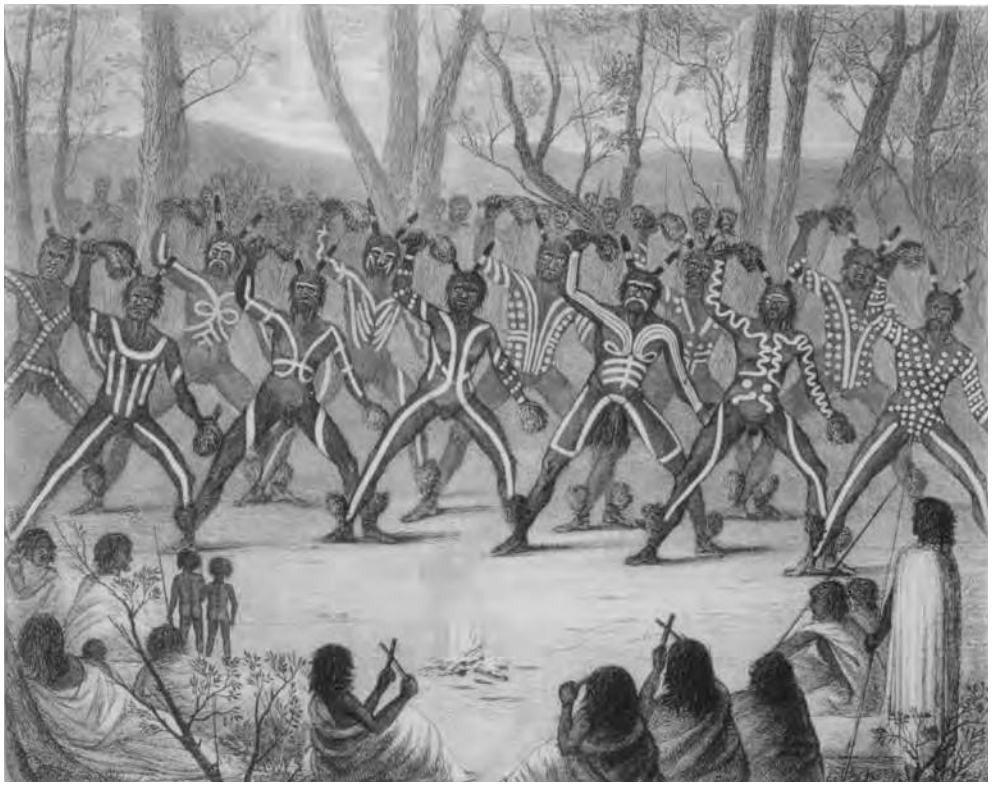


FIGURE 3
'Corroboree' from Australia Terra Cognita (1854) by William Blandowski
Courtesy of Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW PXE864

ONENESS WITH COUNTRY

Aboriginal people, as we have just seen, have always believed that the great beings like Bunjil in central Victoria, the Bram Bram brothers in the North West - the Wimmera and Mallee country, and Munga-ngana in Gippsland, created all things. Humans and all species were placed in a relationship of oneness by these acts of creation. Aboriginal people were custodians of land and its creatures, and had a duty to perform rituals to perpetuate and increase the supply of living things created by these great ancestors.

At birth and then initiation, Aboriginal people gained a special relationship to another species according to the precise place they were born, and inherited other special connections to certain species through the clan land they were born into, and the moiety [half] of the group they belonged - Bunjil or Waa - eagle hawk or crow. Anthropologists call this totemism, and each individual had both personal and group totems.

Read this story told by William Thomas about a journey near Westernport in the 1840s.

DOCUMENT 1.6

> The bear [koala] is a privileged animal, and is often consulted in very great undertakings. I was out with a celebrated Western Port black tracking five other blacks. The tracks had been lost some days at a part of the country where we expected they must pass. We ran down a creek; after going some miles a bear made a noise as we passed. The black stopped, and a parley commenced. I stood gazing alternately at the black and the bear. At length my black came to me and said, 'Me big one stupid: bear tell me no you go that way'. We immediately crossed the creek, and took a different track. Strange as it may appear, we had not altered our course above one and a half miles before we came upon the tracks of the five blacks, and never lost them after. The bear, too must not be skinned.... [Thomas then related a belief concerning why.] The wombat (or warren) is also a scared animal, and must not be skinned. Many birds are also sacred; some may be eaten but by the aged only; others by the doctors [clever men] only
>
> William Thomas in Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, pp. 426-7.

William Howitt who learned much from his Aboriginal informants also wrote about totemism, in this case among those he termed the 'Kurnai' of Gippsland – who now call themselves: Gunai-Kurnai. His words reinforce the relationship explained in the previous document.

DOCUMENT 1.7

> Each Kurnai received the name of some marsupial, bird, reptile, or fish, from his father, when he was about ten years old, or at initiation. A man would say, pointing to the creature in question, 'That is your *thundung*; do not hurt it'. In two cases I know of, he said, 'It will be yours when I am dead'. The term thundung means 'elder brother', while the individual was the protector of the *thundung*, it also protected its 'younger brother', the man, by warning him in dreams of approaching danger, or, by coming towards him in its bodily shape, it assisted him, as in the case of the man Bunjil-bataluk mentioned elsewhere, or was appealed to by song charms to relieve sickness.
>
> Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-east Australia*, p. 135.

QUESTIONS

1. In your own words describe what totemism is, and what are the implications of its existence for Aboriginal people.
2. Is this a different mode of thought to your own? Explain.

IDEAS OF LAND AND RESOURCE OWNERSHIP

Anthropologists have now unravelled many of the complex relationships of Aboriginal people to land by talking with Aboriginal people who have explained their views. The late William Stanner, one of Australia's foremost anthropologists, spent decades talking with and understanding Aboriginal people and their cultures. (See W.E.H. Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming. Essays 1938- 1973*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1979).

In regards to land, Stanner argued that each Aboriginal family and clan owned land which he called their 'estate'. They also had access to a larger area of land as their living area, which he called their 'range'. Estates were owned due to inheritance, whereas ranges were access by right of agreements or marriage.

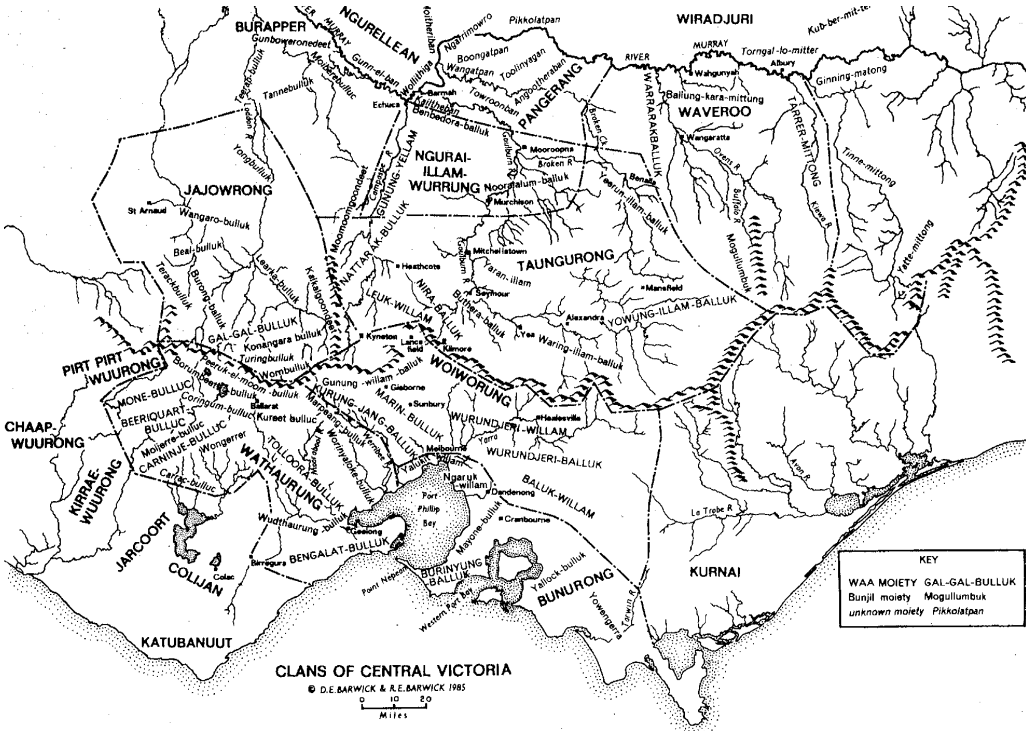
Aboriginal people had custodianship of their estate and the sole right to make decisions about that land and the sole responsibility to perform rituals to keep it in good health and to shape it through burning. Aboriginal people also foraged over a large area of land or range according to the seasons and with the permissions of the local owners.

Thus one family's estate was in the range of other people, in a mosaic of overlapping estates and ranges all controlled by rights and permissions.

The map of central Victoria below, document 1.8, published in 1984 by the anthropologist, Diane Barwick, shows some of these complex land owning and land use arrangements put in place by Aboriginal people by the 1840s. It shows the land of the Kulin Nation, a group of five cultural-linguistic groups (tribes), which shared a common dialect, all inter-married and had access by marriage and agreement to each other's land for resources, trade and food resources. Barwick lists them as the Bunurong, Woiworung, Wathaurung, Jajowrong and Taungurong. They all had their own language as well and distinguished themselves by an individual name but with a common suffix or ending of their name, *w*(*urrung*), meaning mouth or speech. In a sense, the central Victoria area was one large range for these five tribal groups.

Each of these five tribal groups had within them a number of clans which were the land-owning groups, and whose land and resources could only be used by permission. For instance, from the map below you can see that the Woiwurung comprised six clans groups, whose names ended in either '*willam*' (dwelling place) or '*balluck*' or '*bulluck*' (a number of people). Within clans individual families also had specific rights to particular pieces of land or resources as we will discover below. (See Diane Barwick, 'Mapping the Past: An Atlas of Victorian Clans 1835-1904', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 8, part 2, 1984, pp.100-131.)

DOCUMENT 1.8



Courtesy Diane Barwick, 'Mapping the Past: An Atlas of Victorian Clans 1835-1904', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 8, part 2, 1984, p.118, ANU Press.

Thus Aboriginal people had various levels of identity to land. Each person was connected to a personal totem or totems; was a member of a moiety group, eagle hawk or crow; was a member of a clan or *willam* group; a tribal group; and finally a nation - the Kulin for those central Victoria or the Kurnai in eastern Victoria.

This section will explore evidence about the nature of these identities and the rights and permissions to land and resources that underpinned them.

William Thomas often travelled and camped with Aboriginal people in the early 1840s in his role as Assistant Protector. He spent time especially with the Woiwurrung and the Boon Wurrung of the Yarra and Westernport areas. He wrote of one day's journey with them:

DOCUMENT 1.9

In each body are a few old men, who take charge of the small community, and give instructions in the morning where they will encamp at night. They seldom travel more than six miles a day. In their migratory moves all are employed; children in getting gum, knocking down birds, &c.; women in digging up roots, killing bandicoots, getting grubs &c.; the men in hunting kangaroos, &c., scaling trees for opussums, &c.,&c.

They hold that the bush and all it contains are man's general property; that private property is only what utensils are carried in the bag; and this general claim to nature's bounty extends to even the success of the day; hence at the close, those who have been successful divide with those who have not been so. Three is 'no complaining in the streets' of a native encampment; none lacketh while other have it; nor is the gift considered a favour, but a right brought to the needy, and thrown down at his feet. ...Wherever one is born, that is considered his or her country.

William Thomas Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p. 399.

Alfred Howitt was given much information by William Barak (Berak), including evidence of Aboriginal relationship to land. Barak also told stories of Billi-bellari (alternative spelling Billibellary), who was a ngurungaeta or leader of his group the Woiwurrung (people of the Yarra valley region).

DOCUMENT 1.10

The right to hunt and to procure food in any particular tact of country belonged to the group of people born there, and could not be infringed by others without permission. But there were places which such a group of people claimed from some special reason, and in which the whole tribe had an interest. Such a place was the 'stone quarry' at Mt William near Lancefield, from which the material for making tomahawks was procured. The family proprietorship in this quarry had wide ramifications, including more than Wurrunjerri (sic) people... [Howitt explains the rights that extended to other groups through marriage]. But it was Billi-billeri, the head of the family whose country included the quarry, who lived on it, and took care of it for the whole of the Wurunjerri (sic) community. When he went away, his place was taken by the son of his sister, the wife of Nurrum-nurrum-biin, who came on such occasions to take charge, when it may be assumed, like Billi-billeri, he occupied himself in splitting stone to supply demands. The enormous amount of broken stone lying about on this mountain shows that generations of the predecessors of Billi-billeri must have laboured at this work.

When neighbouring tribes wished for some stone they sent a messenger to Billi-billeri saying that they would send goods in exchange for it, for instance,

such as possum skin-rugs. When people arrived after such a message they encamped close to the quarry, and on one occasion Berak heard Billi-bellari say to them, 'I am glad to see you and will give you what you want, and satisfy you, but you must behave quietly and not hurt me or each other'.

If, however, people came and took stone without leave, it caused trouble and perhaps a fight between Billi-billeri's people and them. Sometimes men came by stealth and stole stone. I have heard Berak speak of such a case, and the manner in which it was met is described further on.

[And this is the story Barak (Berak) told]:

As a good instance of the manner in which trespasses by a person of one tribe on the country of another tribe were dealt with, I take the case of a man of the Wudthaurung tribe, who unlawfully took, in fact stole, stone from the tribal quarry at Mt. William near Lancefield. I give it in almost the exact words used by Berak in telling me of it, and who was present at the meeting which took place in consequence, probably in the late [18]forties. [It would have been the early 1840s as Billibellary, who was part of this story, died in 1846.]

It having been found that this man had taken stone without permission, the Ngurungaeta Billi-billeri sent a messenger to the Wudthaurung, and in consequence they came as far as the Werribee River, their boundary, where Billi-belleri and his people [the Wurunjerri] (sic) met them. They were the men who had a right to quarry [stone axe head blanks], and whose rights had been infringed. The place of meeting was a little apart from the respective camps of the Wununjerri (sic) and the Wudthaurung.

At the meeting the Wudthaurung sat in one place; and the Wurunjerri (sic) in another, but within speaking distance. The old men of each side sat together, with the younger men behind them. Billi-belleri had behind him Bungerim, to whom he 'gave his word'. The latter then standing up said. 'Did some of your send this young man to take tomahawk stone?' The Headman of the Wudthaurung replied, 'No, we sent no one'. Then Billi-belleri said to Bungerim, ' Say to the old men that they must tell that young man not to do so any more. When the people speak of wanting stone, the old men must send us notice'. Bungerim repeated this in a loud tone, and the old men of the Wudthaurung replied, 'That is all right, we will do so'. Then they spoke strongly to the young man who had stolen the stone, and both parties were again friendly with each other.

Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-east Australia*, pp. 311-312 and the second part is pp.340-41.

QUESTIONS

1. Analyse what Thomas is saying in document 1.9 about ideas of ownership. Are there various forms? If so, list them.
2. How does document 1.10 extend our understanding of Aboriginal ideas of ownership described in document 1.9?
3. Was Billi-bellari's claim of ownership over the axe-head quarry upheld? By what power?

FIGURE 5

Billibellary, Chief of the Yarra tribe on settlement being formed

William Thomas,c. 1839, pencil sketch on paper, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

This quarry owned by Billi-bellari's family was widely renowned in Aboriginal society. The archaeologist Isabel McBryde did a chemical analysis of all the known axe heads in museum collections. She then tracked where they were found by settlers who donated them to the museums over many years since the late nineteenth century.

McBryde proved that of all the known axe-heads from different quarries around Victoria, those from Mt William travelled the furthest, up to several hundred kilometres, and were the most widely distributed. This revealed the Mount William axes were of the highest quality. (Isabel McBryde, 'Wil-im-ee Moor-ring: Or, Where do Axes Come From?', Mankind, vol. 11, 1978, pp. 354-382.)

When groups travelled into new places, William Thomas described what happened, which is also revealing of ideas of ownership.

DOCUMENT 1.11

Ceremony of Tanderrum or Freedom of the Bush [Welcome to Country] - There is not, perhaps, a more pleasing sight in a native encampment that when strange blacks arrive who have never been in the country before. Each comes with fire in hand (always bark), which is supposed to purify the air - the women and children in one direction, and the men and youths in another. They are ushered in generally by some of an intermediate tribe, who are friends of both parties, and have been engaged in forming an alliance or friendship between the tribes; the aged are brought forward and introduced. The ceremony of Tanderrum is commenced; the tribe visited may be seen lopping boughs from one tree and another, as varied as possible of each tree with leaves; each family has a separate seat, raised about 8 or 10 inches [20-25 centimetres] from the ground, on which in the centre sits the male and around him his male children, and the female and her sex of children have another seat.

Two fires are made, one for the males and the other for the females. The visitors are attended on the first day by those whose country they are come to visit, and not allowed to do anything for themselves; water is brought to them which is carefully stirred by the attendant with a reed, and then given them to drink (males attend males and females females); victuals are then brought and laid before them, consisting of as great a variety as the bush in the new country affords, if come-at-able; during this ceremony the greatest silence prevails, both by attendants and attended. You may sometimes perceive an aged man seated, the tear of gratitude stealing down his murky, wrinkled face. At night their mia-mias are made for them; conversation, &c., ensure. The meaning of this is a hearty welcome. As the boughs on which they sit are from various tress, so they are welcome to every tree in the forest. The water stirred with a reed means that no weapon shall ever be raised against them.

On Saturday, the 22nd March 1845, at an encampment east of Melbourne, near 200 strangers arrived. The sight was imposing and affecting, especially their attendance upon that old chief Kuller Kullup, the oldest man I have ever seen among the blacks; he must have been near 80 years.

William Thomas, in Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, pp. 434-5.

QUESTIONS

1 Ceremonies have deep meaning. What is the meaning(s) of this one?

2 How does it alter or deepen your understanding of Aboriginal relationships to land?

ABORIGINAL USE AND MANAGEMENT OF LAND

Aboriginal people lived securely and comfortably in an environment that European settlers found difficult. This does not mean that it was a land of plenty for them, for Aboriginal people faced food scarcity at times of drought. However, they had strategies to contend with scarcity. And of course some seasons and some countries offered greater abundance than others. William Thomas who travelled a great deal with the Boon Wurrung in 1839 when he first became Assistant Protector, had this to say:

DOCUMENT 1.12

I have on entering their new encampment and often while pitching my tent among them, and the blacks erecting their miams, had kangaroos sunning amongst us as tho' unconscious of our intrusion, after 3 days stay have been out with them and not seen a kangaroo within their daily range, thus their migratory moves. ... The fare of the Aborigines is often precarious, I have often known them when passing thro' an arid country like that from Western Port bay to Gipps Land to live for days on roots and gum, and the opossums they had cured before entering on their barren migration. They have a way of appeasing hunger by a cord around their belly which they tighten daily till appeased....I have tasted after a fortnight an opossum [cured] as eatable as a bit of bacon.... [of the eucalyptus gum which made a sweet energy drink, they carried] as much as 30lbs [14kgs] by them and [took] a further precaution to plant in trees at different locations as much as 50lbs [22kgs], so that in passing thro' the bush tho' out of season they could enjoy the luxury....In passing through a country where game abounds I have observed that those who are out foraging one day, remain in the encampment the following, enjoying themselves sleeping thro' the day, smoaking (sic), or what not, so that they merely work each alternate day.

William Thomas, 'Brief Remarks of the Aborigines of Victoria 1838-9', unpublished manuscript, La Trobe Library MS 57838, State Library of Victoria.

QUESTION

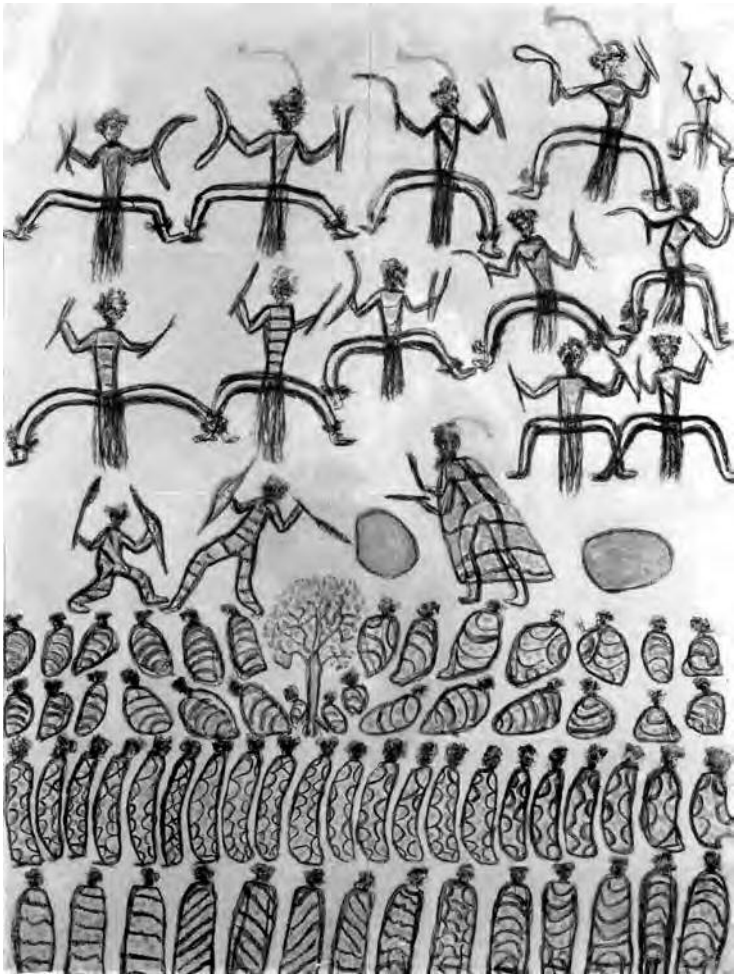
1 Identify and comment on food strategies used by Aboriginal people that Thomas observed on this trip.

FIGURE 6

Corroboree, by William Barak

c. 1880s, black and red ochre pigments on paper with cardboard back

Royal Historical Society of Victoria ART-001



This section will examine four case studies concerning techniques used in the management of different resources: weirs for marine resources; nets for birdlife; digging sticks for plants; and fire for all manner of plants and animals.

CATCHING FISH AND EELS

Marine foods were plentiful in the region that became known as Port Phillip. Shell fish and mussels were found wherever there was permanent water and the numerous shell middens [heaps] that remain today besides watercourses, testify to their role as a staple food. Fish and eels were also plentiful, and caught in a variety of ways, both familiar and unfamiliar.

Peter Beveridge settled near Swan Hill in 1846 on a pastoral run called 'Tyntynder'. Beveridge published a book in 1889 detailing his observations of Aboriginal life over the two decades he lived in the area. He described many food gathering activities, including all-day fishing expeditions, one of which returned with 93 fish 'besides those demolished at our midday meal', as well as several large lobsters.

Beveridge also described how the Murray River in the Swan Hill region ran through 'an immense area of reedy plains', fringed by a river bank a metre or so higher than the surrounding plain that acted like a dike or dam. For five months of the year this area was flooded by the snow melt from the Australian Alps, which flowed down the Murray River. He wrote of the food supply implications of this annual natural phenomenon:

DOCUMENT 1.13

Whilst the waters cover the reedy plains for miles on every side, the various kinds of fish find delectable grounds in the shallow, semi-tepid fluid wherein to pursue the prey upon which they feed.

In the artificial looking banks at irregular intervals there are drains three or four feet wide, through which, when the river commences to fall, the waters of the plains find their way back to their parent stream. As a matter of course the fish instinctively return to the river with the receding water. At those seasons the aborigines are in their glory, and no small wonder either, as these times are actual harvests to them. They make stake weirs across the drains, the stakes being driven firmly into the soil within an inch of each other, so that anything having greater bulk than that space must perforce remain on the landward side of the weir.

Without any great stretch of imagination, the reader can easily fancy the shoals of fish which congregate behind these weirs when the river is falling, and what a very simple matter the taking of them must be. When the fish are required a native takes his canoe into the midst of one of these shoals, and harpoons as many as he wishes, or until he becomes tired of the fun.

The water continues to run through these drains for five or six weeks, during all that time the natives slay and eat at their hearts' content, and are consequently sleek by reason of the vast quantities of adipose matter which they devour in those times of abundance, together with that with which they fail not plentifully to lubricate their bodies from crown to toe. ...

When the waters have all receded from the reedy plain behind every weir, fish of all kinds are left by thousands to rot and fester in the sun, or to be devoured by crows and other carrion-feeding creatures which are attracted to those points in countless numbers.

Peter Beveridge, *The Aborigines of Victoria and Riverine as seen by Peter Beveridge*, first published 1889, reprinted Lowden Publishing co., Donvale, 2008, pp. 89-90.

QUESTIONS

1 Would you call the Aboriginal people he is describing 'farmers'? Why? Why not?

2 Why might it be sensible to rub excess fish into their skin?

James Kirby also settled on a pastoral run in 1846 at Swan Hill. He wrote his reminiscences fifty years later and referred to the various fishing strategies of Aboriginal people living along the Murray. He too described the weirs that caught the fish as the flood waters receded. Kirby also wrote this:

DOCUMENT 1.14

As soon as the water began to run back to the river the blacks used to make a fence across these channels of thin sticks stuck upright, and close enough to prevent the fish going through, but leave a space at one side, however, so that when the fish found they could not get through the fence, they naturally made for the opening. A black would sit near the opening and just behind him a tough stick about ten feet long [3 metres] was stuck in the ground with the thick end down. To the thin end of this rod was attached a line with a noose at the other end; a wooden peg was fixed under the water at the opening in the fence to which this noose was caught, and when the fish made a dart to

go through the opening he was caught by the gills, his force undid the loop from the peg, and the spring of the stick threw the fish over the head of the black, who would then in a most lazy manner, reach back his hand, undo the fish, and set the loop again on the peg. I have often heard of the indolence of the blacks and soon came to the conclusion after watching a blackfellow catch fish in such a lazy way, that what I had heard was perfectly true.

James Kirby, *Old Times in the Bush of Australia. Trials and Experiences of Early Bush Life in Victoria During the Forties*, Geo Robertson and Co., Melbourne, p. 36.

QUESTIONS

1. Get clear in your own mind how this fishing technique worked.
2. Was Kirby correct to call the technique 'lazy'? Why, why not?
3. What word would you use instead to describe the actions of the fisher? Why?
4. Might you call his rod a machine? Explain your answer and its implications.

William Buckley, the English convict who escaped from the failed British settlement (near present-day Sorrento) in 1803, and who lived with the Wadawurrung until 1835, wrote his memoirs in 1852 with the help of a journalist, John Morgan. Buckley often referred to the catching of eels in his reminiscences:

DOCUMENT 1.15

I became, also, expert at catching eels, by spearing them in the lakes and rivers; but in the later they generally catch them with lines - the bait being a large earth worm. Having these worms ready, they get a piece of elastic bark, and some long grass, on which they string them; this is tied to a rod, and as the eel, after biting, holds on tenaciously, he is thrown or rather jerked upon the bank, in the same way as boys catch the cray-fish in England. Some of these eels are very fine, and large. They are generally - and more easily - caught by the natives during the night, and are eaten roasted. They used to take me out on calm evenings to teach me how to spear salmon, bream &c. Their manner is to get some dry sticks, cut them into lengths of ten or twelve feet [three to four metres], tie several of these together into a kind of faggot [torch], and then light the thickest end; with this torch blazing in one hand, and a spear in the other, they go into the water, and the fish seeing it, crowd round and are easily killed and taken. This - as the reader is perhaps aware – is the general practice throughout all the world. [p.50]

We next went about forty miles, I should think, to a place called Kironamaat [Gerangamete], there is near to it a lake about ten miles in circumference. ... We here made nets with strips of bark, and caught with them great quantities of shrimps. We lived very sumptuously and in peace for many months at this place, and then went to the borders of another lake, called Moodewarre {Modewarre]; the water of which was perfectly fresh, abounding in large eels, which we caught in great abundance. [pp. 55-6]

A messenger came from another tribe, to tell us they would be glad to see our party near a river they called Booneawillock [Barwon] - so named from a sort of eels called Boonea – with which that stream abounds. ... Many parts of that river are rocky, leaving but an inconsiderable depth of water, into which the eels get in great numbers, indeed so numerous were they, that we caught them in dozens. These eels appear to be very sagacious [smart], but not so much so

as to avoid our fishing parties; for although they would shoot away into deep water at the falling of a star, or any extraordinary noise, yet they would come to our fishing torches and allow themselves to be taken placidly.

When the flood in the river – which had been occasioned by very heavy and continuous rains - had subsided, we passed over, and hutted ourselves on the other side. Another tribe soon after joined us, amounting to about one hundred men, women and children. I should here say, that the eels mentioned, seemed inexhaustible at this place; those of the smallest kind being the most numerous. They are light blue on the back with white bellies; these the natives call Mordong; and the larger kind, the Babbanien; the latter being brown on the back, with white bellies. [p.79]

John Morgan, *The Life and Adventures of William Buckley. Thirty-two Years a Wanderer amongst the Aborigines*, 1852, this edition published by Roland Schicht, Tower Books, Sydney, 1996, pp. 50, 55-6, 79.

The botanist Daniel Bunce observed this about eel fishing practices:

DOCUMENT 1.16

With a small spear in his hand, the aboriginal eel-catcher walks slowly and cautiously about the shallow water, until he has trodden so gently upon the object of his search as not to awaken its attention. Although half-buried in the mud, its position is judged with such accuracy, that, with one blow, the eel is pierced by the native. Immediately he takes it out of the water, and disables it by giving it a crush between his teeth.

Daniel Bunce *Travels with Dr Leichhardt*, first published 1859, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1979, p. 68.

FIGURE 7
Latticed weir (*yereroc*) with holds woven funneled-shaped baskets (*arrabine*) to form an eel trap

Sketched by George Augustus Robinson below Mount William, Grampians, Robinson Papers, vol.17 , reproduced by courtesy Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML A7038/4

In April 1841 George Augustus Robinson, the Chief Aboriginal Protector of Port Phillip, saw Aboriginal people bake eels in a trench of ashes and tried the cooked product. He wrote in his work journal: 'the flavour is preserved and the flesh is snow white, skin peels off. The eels of Lake Bolak are delicious'. Robinson saw evidence of eel consumption at Kilgower on the Port Fairy River and at Mt William near the Grampians. He was quite astounded at what he saw.

At Kilgower an Aboriginal man showed Robinson the river.

DOCUMENT 1.17

He also took me to a very fine and large weir and went through, with several other of the natives, the process of taking eels and the particular spot where he himself stood and took them. I measured this weir with a tape, 200 feet, five feet high [65metres long by 3.5 metres high]. It was turned back at each end and two or three holes in the middle were left for placing the eel pots as also one at each end. The eel pots are placed over the holes and the fisher stands behind the yere.roc or weir and lays hold of the small end of the arrabine or eel pot. And when the eel make its appearance he bites it on the head and puts in on the linger or small stick with a knob at the end, or if near the bank, throws them out. The fishing is carried on in the rainy season. Arrabine or eel pot made of bark or plaited rushed with a willow mouth and having a small end to prevent the eel from rappidly (*sic*) getting away.

These yere.roc or weirs are built with some attention to the principles of mechanics. Those erected on a rocky bottom have the sticks inserted in a grove (sic - he means groove) made by removing the small stones so as to form a grove (*sic*). The weir is kept in a straight line. The small stones are laid against the bottom of the stick. The upright sticks are supported by transverse sticks, resting on forked sticks as shown above. These sticks are three, four and five inches [7-12cms] in diameter. Some of the smaller weirs are in the form of a segment of a circle. The convex side against the current.

The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate. Volume Two 1 October 1840-31 August 1841, Ian D. Clark (ed.), Heritage Matters, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 162-63.

At Mount William he witnessed something more astonishing:

DOCUMENT 1.18

At the confluence of this creek with the marsh observed an immense piece of ground trenched and banked, resembling the work of civilized man but which on inspection I found to be the work of the Aboriginal natives, purposely constructed for catching eels. A specimen of art of the same extent I had not before seen and therefore required some time to inspect it, and which the absence of transport enabled me to do. These trenches are hundreds of yards in length. I measured at one place in one continuous trepple (*sic* - he means triple) line for the distance of 500 yards. These treble watercourses led to other ramified and extensive trenches of a most tortuous form. An area of at least 15 acres was thus traced over.... These works must have been executed at great cost of labo[u]r to these rude people the only means of artificial power being the lever, the application and inventive of which force being necessity. This lever is a stick chisel, sharpened at one end, by which force they threw up clods of soil and thus formed the trenches, smoothing the water channel with their hands. The soil displaced went to form the embankment. ... The VDL native [Robinson's Tasmanian Aboriginal companion on the journey] was struck with amazement and exclaimed 'Tat is winem paner wrongwaly wornaddud' - 'oh dear, look at that! Black fellow never tired'. To me it was new and particularly interesting and evinced great perseverance and industry on the part of the Aborigines. The description of work is called by the natives cro.cup.per.....At intervals small apertures were left and where they placed their arabine or eel pots. These gaps were supported by pieces of the bark of trees and sticks. In single measurement there must have been some thousands of yards of this trenching and banking. The whole of the water from the mountain rivulet is made to pass through this trenching were it reaches the marsh; it is hardly possible for a single fish to escape. I observed at a short

distance higher up, minor trenching was done through which part of the water ran in its course to the more extensive works. Some of these banks were two feet in height, the most of them a foot and the hollow a foot deep by 10 or 11 inches wide. The main branches were wider.

The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate. Volume Two 1 October 1840-31 August 1841, p.308.

QUESTIONS

1. List the various methods of catching eels in documents 1.15-1.18.
2. Which is the most complex? Why?
3. List the job occupations in your own society that best fit the skills and practices of these various Aboriginal eel catchers.

In recent times archaeologists have rediscovered what George August Robinson saw at Mt William and pondered its significance. Harry Lourandos is one who has studied these features in the landscape and their implications. He wrote this in 1980 and later published a book on the subject.

DOCUMENT 1.19

In the development of these water controls, which demanded a high expenditure of energy in construction and maintenance, we have a clear example of a shift (amplification) in one sub-system within the overall hunter-gatherer economic system. This change would have allowed for greater control over the local environment, certain of its resources, and by implication their yield. It can be seen as a form of artificial niche expansion.

Lourandos then went on to speculate why this shift to a greater control over their environment occurred. He listed three possible factors:

1. The emerged of drier conditions 3,000 years ago that might have stimulated more efficient use of water and fish stock resources.
2. Increased use of eel stocks led to more sedentary living in houses with stone foundations and wickerwork tops, and a growing population, which in turn created pressures to maximise the food supply.
3. Increased completion and rivalries might have arisen between Aboriginal groups to hold large ceremonies that were prestigious, but which needed large food supplies to stage such events. For instance, the local community at Lake Bolac 45 kms to the south of Mt William, hosted large ceremonies that lasted for weeks due to the plentiful supply of eels in the lake at certain times of the year.

Lourandos also discovered that the Mt William system of trenches, and another at nearby Toolondo, lay between two major river systems - coastal and inland. The coastal and inland riveres had been connected by trenches dug by Aboriginal people to extend the range of the eels and increase their harvest. One trench was 3kms long, 2.5 metres wide and 1m deep. Consider how much effort was involved in creating such a trench.

Lourandos also observed in 1980:

The size and construction of these drains points to their operation as more than mere eel harvesting devices. As artificial water controls, the drainage systems operated as a form of swamp management, coping with excess water

during floods and retaining water in times of drought. This would have served to counteract the effect of variations in water availability on the distribution, and therefore the availability, of eels in these marginal areas of their range. An extension of eel range, by providing access to further inland swamps and waterways, would have led to an increase in the annual production of eels.

Harry Lourandos, 'Change or Stability?: hydraulics, hunter-gatherers and population in temperate Australia', *World Archaeology*, vol. 11, no 3, 1980, p. 255, p. 154.

QUESTIONS

1 What does Lourandos add to our understanding of Aboriginal resource beyond that observed by George Augustus Robinson?

2 Are there skills detected by Lourandos that need to be assigned a present–day occupational equivalent? What would that name be?

FIBRE AND NET MAKING

The reed beds along the Murray and in lakes and swamps throughout Victoria provided rich resources for Aboriginal people. Nelly Zola and Beth Gott in their book, *Koorie Plants. Koorie People. Traditional Aboriginal Food, Fibre and Healing Plants of Victoria*, (1996) have identified a number of key plants utilised by Aboriginal people. Early settlers and others observed the importance in particular of varieties of *typha*, especially *typha muellera*, known by some Aboriginal people as *kumpung*. This reed was an important food source. The new shoots of *kumpung* made a fine salad and the roots contained a potato-like starch, a rich source of carbohydrate for energy. However it had other uses in the management of the environment. Gerard Krefft, a naturalist who made surveys of Lake Boga and the Murray River around Mildura in 1857, wrote this:

DOCUMENT 1.20

In this part of the country where extensive reed beds are of common occurrence, the natives live for several months during the year on 'Typha roots', or Wongal (Typha Shuttleworthii); at a certain period, I believe January or February to be the months, the women enter these swamps, take up the roots of these reeds, and carry them in large bundles to their camp; the roots thus collected are about a foot to eighteen inches in length [up to 0.5 of a metre], and they contain besides a small quantity of saccharine matter, a considerable quantity of fibre. The roots are roasted in a hollow made into the ground, and either consumed hot or taken as a sort of provision upon hunting excursions; they are at the best but a miserable apology for flour, and I believe that it was more on account of the tough fibre thus obtained that these roots are made an article of food.

As soon as a sufficient quantity of 'Wongal' had been roasted, the whole tribes (sic) settled around the improvised oven, every body chewing the roots vigorously; the lumps of rejected fibre were afterwards collected by the women, and spun into threads from which their fishing-nets and other domestic utensils were manufactured, these nets forming the staple article of barter between the tribes inhabiting the reed beds and those parts where no 'Wongal' was produced. If we take into consideration the large nets for catching water-fowl in use, it is indeed astonishing how great the

perseverance of these people (and how their teeth) must have been, and it is not to be wondered at that the possession of one of these nets has always been considered to be a sort of fortune to its owner.

Gerard Krefft, 'On the Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of the Lower Darling and Murray', *Transactions of the Philosophical Society of NSW 1862-65*, vol. 1862-65, read to the Society on 2 August 1865, pp. 361-2.

Both Peter Beveridge and James Kirby witnessed this typha production and wrote about it. But how great was the effort? Aboriginal people, besides having small personal fishing nets, shared very large communal duck, fish, and emu nets, each custom-made for the weight and size of the prey. How much fibre and labour went into making such nets? I recently considered Aboriginal net making on the Murray River based on Peter Beveridge and James Kirby's description of these nets.

DOCUMENT 1.21

How much labour went into making a net? Duck nets were 90m long, 2m wide and with a 10cm mesh size. From Beveridge's dimensions I have calculated that one duck net of 180 square metres, with a mesh size of .01sq metres, had 18,000 meshes woven together. This would have taken considerable labour to tie together. If it took a skilled maker twenty seconds to tie one square mesh, knotting two pieces of cord running perpendicular to each other, it would take 100 hours to weave a whole net. How much cordage was needed to make the 18,000 meshes of the net? With each 10cm square mesh needing 40cm in length of cordage, 18,000 meshes required approximately 7,000 metres of cordage, or double that, as each was made up of two strands, namely 14,000 metres of raw fibre hanks – formed by a whole lot of chewing. Emu nets being 90m x 2m with a 20cm mesh size required 7,000 metres of hanks and fish nets of 90m x 1.5m with a 7.5cm mesh size, required 15,000 metres of hanks. Living groups had a net of each type, requiring 36,000 metres of raw fibre to make them. Nets would last two years or more, according to Beveridge, unless damaged. Add to this the fibre needed for smaller hand nets for catching fish or corralling rats, as depicted by Gerard Krefft, as well as fibre for bags, belts, binding tools and small fish weirs, and for ritual purposes, and the effort is large.

FIGURE 8
Engraving based on photo of 'Young man with a fishing net' by J W Lindt

Taking the life span of a large net as three years, the group had to produce each year perhaps 15,000 metres of twine: each metre by collecting, cooking, chewing, scraping and twisting. Chewing and scraping took time and energy perhaps several minutes per metre of preparation, although chewing extracted energy as well as expended it. Does it take a further few minutes to twist fibres into one metre of cordage, adding in new hanks at every twist? If so, this length of cordage per year would take over 500 hours to prepare and 500 hours of labour to twist. Knotting it into three nets might take another 900 hours, perhaps 2000 hours all up, equivalent to 60 current 35 hour working weeks for one person. People shared the work but net making alone was an enormous work effort. Then there was the need to make other cordage items, just one task in the sustaining of life.

Richard Broome, 'Murray Mallee: A Riverine Geography of Aboriginal Labour', paper to an environmental history conference, La Trobe University, 2014, to be published in *Agricultural History*, 2017.

How were these nets, so painstakingly made, used to harvest resources?
Peter Beveridge described duck hunting with 100 metre-long nets, which were two metres in width. Others like Gerard Krefft gave similar descriptions:

DOCUMENT 1.22

Four men (generally patriarchs in the tribe) go off with the net to the point of the lagoon where they propose fixing it. It is stretched across the lagoon, and close enough to the water to prevent the ducks for escaping underneath. In the meantime the young active men of the tribe range themselves at regular intervals along both sides of the lagoon, and high up amongst the branches of the trees with which the margin is fringed, those in the trees having a light disc of bark about seven or eight inches in diameter. When they are all properly settled, one who has been sent off for the purpose startles the ducks. As is natural with these birds, the moment they are put to flight they fly along the lagoon, following the sinuosities [bends] pretty closely. Should it happen, however, as it occasionally does at these times, that they wish to leave the course of the lagoon for some other water in the vicinity, one of the natives in the trees nearest the flying birds whistles like a hawk, and hurls his disc of bark into the air. The ducks, hearing the whistle, look sharply about, and seeing the revolving disc, imagines it a hawk, consequently a simultaneous swoop is made down close to the surface of the water to escape their fancied enemy. ...having run this exciting gauntlet the poor birds finds themselves suddenly enveloped in the folds of a treacherous net.... Scores and scores of ducks are captured in this manner every season in those districts which abound in wild fowl, and where suitable lagoons obtain.

Beveridge, *The Aborigines of Victoria and Riverine*, pp. 85-86.

Gerard Krefft described a work scene of net making he witnessed one evening in 1857 near Yelta Mission on the NSW side of the Murray, just east of the confluence of the Murray and Darling Rivers.

DOCUMENT 1.23

There was no moon when we crossed the river, and following our guide, we soon found ourselves in the midst of about two hundred natives, stretched around camp fires, which formed a semi-circle, the middle being occupied by 'Old Jacob' the famous chief, who appeared to keep them merry by telling a number of tales; all were busy except Jacob. Some tried to straighten young shoots of the Myall, by heating them in the ashes, and then bending the wood into shape - keeping their feet and the whole weight of their body upon it; others were occupied knitting nets, using the same instrument as our fishermen do, and working with their hands and feet; the women cooking fish, of which a large supply had been obtained during the day, - carefully reserving the taboo's fish called manor, for the use of the aged, no youth or lass being permitted to partake of it; - carving their waddies, or preparing opossums' skins for their rugs, kept others busy, and all this time the sonorous voice of old Jacob could be distinctly heard, and shouts of laughter testified how well the old man's tales were appreciated.

Krefft, 'On the Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of the Lower Darling and Murray', p. 367.

QUESTIONS

1. List the net making techniques of Aboriginal people on the Murray.
2. Do you consider this skilled and/or difficult work? Why, why not?
3. What words would you use to characterise the hunting of ducks in document 1.22?
4. Was the Aboriginal workplace described in document 1.23 different to workplaces today? In what way(s)?

PLANT ROOTS/VEGETABLES

These were mostly collected by women and formed the most reliable of Aboriginal foods. The women's main tool was their short digging stick. They dug with it for small burrowing animals, grubs, and a great variety of roots and yams. It was often held in one hand, while pulling away the soil with the other. For this purpose it acted like a fork or hand spade. One of the most plentiful of the many varieties of roots and tubers was the yam daisy or *murnong* (*Microseris scapigera*). It was available for most of the year, but was most edible and easily seen in spring and summer, marked by its single bright yellow flower. Many colonial observers remark on its prolific use.

James Dawson, a long time Western District pastoralist, gave this account of the use of a yam daisy plant, called by Aboriginal people in his area, murrang (with variant spellings murnong, myrnongs etc.):

DOCUMENT 1.24

> The muurang, which somewhat resembles a small parsnip, with a flower like a buttercup, grows chiefly on the open plains. It is much esteemed on account of its sweetness, and is dug up by the women with the muurang pole. The roots are washed and put into a rush basket made on purpose, and placed in the oven in the evening to be ready for next morning's breakfast. When several families live near each other and cook their roots together, sometimes the baskets form a pile three feet high. The cooking of the muurang entails a considerable amount of labour on the women, inasmuch as the baskets are made by them; and as these often get burnt, they rarely serve more than twice.
>
> James Dawson, *Australian Aborigines. The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes of Aborigines in the Western District of Victoria, Australia*, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1881, pp. 19-20.

FIGURE 9
'Native Women Getting Tam Bourn Roots. 27 Ag. 1835'

From John Helder Wedge's field book, reproduced by courtesy of La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria

Isaac Batey, a settler at Sunbury in the 1840s, recorded this in his reminiscences written in 1910:

DOCUMENT 1.25

There is a sloping ridge at the lower end of what was originally known as Sideline Gully. The soil on the spot referred to is a rich basaltic clay evidently well fitted for the production of myrnongs. On this spot adverted to are numerous mounds with short spaces between each, and as all these are at right angles to the ridge's slope it is conclusive evidence that they were the work of human hands extending over a long series of years. This uprooting of the soil to apply the best term was accidental gardening, still it is reasonable to assume that the aboriginals were quite aware of the fact that turning the earth over in search of yams instead of diminishing that form of food supply would have had a tendency to increase it.

James Batey, quoted in David Frankel, 'An Account of Aboriginal Use of the Yam-Daisy', *Artefact*, vol. 7, no. 1-2, 1982, p. 44.

QUESTIONS

1. Analyse what Dawson and Batey tell us of murnong gathering and the skills of women.
2. Is Batey correct to call it gardening? Why, why not?

Beth Gott, a plant specialist and ethno-botanist at Monash University, has studied the murnong and other Aboriginal plant foods for over thirty years. She commented:

DOCUMENT 1.26

If murnong was gathered in such large quantities, does it follow that this resource would have become exhausted over the years? An examination of gathering practices and its effect on the plant indicates that its abundance and productivity would probably have been increased by Aboriginal activity.

The growth of new tubers and the proliferation of rosettes results in plants of murnong becoming clumped if left undisturbed. Breaking-up of the clumped tubers, with some parts of the clump inevitably remaining in the soil, equivalent to the well-known horticultural practice of thinning tuberous perennials, would have promoted the growth and spread of the plants.

Beth Gott, 'Murnong – *Microseris scapigera*: A Study of a Staple Food of Victorian Aborigines', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no.2, 1983, p. 13.

QUESTIONS

1. Do Beth Gott's comments in document 1.26, support Batey's view in document 1.25? How?
2. After reading Gott, do you think Batey was right to use 'accidental' with the word 'gardening'? Give reasons.

USING FIRE

Beth Gott suggested the yam daisy's growth and spread could have been encouraged not only by digging over of the soil to harvest yams, but by regular firing of the land. Was regular firing of the land common, and was it deliberate?

In 1838, Major Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor General of NSW, explored inland NSW and Port Phillip. After extensive observations, Mitchell had this to say of Aboriginal use of fire.

DOCUMENT 1.27

Fire, grass, and kangaroos, and human inhabitants, seem all dependent on each other for existence in Australia; for any one of these being wanting, the others could no longer continue. Fire is necessary to burn the grass, and form those open forests, in which we find the large forest-kangaroo; the native applies that fire to the grass at certain seasons, in order that a young green crop may subsequently spring up, and so attract and enable him to kill or take the kangaroo with nets. In summer, the burning of long grass also discloses vermin, birds' nests, etc., on which the females and children, who chiefly burn the grass, feed. But for this simple process, the Australian woods had probably contained as thick a jungle as those of New Zealand or America, instead of the open forests in which the white men now find grass for their cattle to the exclusion of the kangaroo.

T. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia with Descriptions of Recently Explored Australia Felix, and the Present Colony of New South Wales*, T. and W, Boone, London, 1848, pp. 412-13.

Edward Curr, a young squatter in central Victoria in the 1840s who rose to become a stock inspector and researcher of Aboriginal life, wrote this in his reminiscences in 1883.

DOCUMENT 1.28

As the state of this continent is gradually undergoing some changes consequent on our introduction of the domestic animals of Europe, so, as I have already said, it seems to me that its condition, when we took possession of it, was largely attributable to the customs of its aboriginal inhabitants. Small in numbers - a few hundred thousand - their existence, at first glance, would seem to have been most inconsequential. Mere hunters, who absolutely cultivated nothing - the spear, the net, and the tomahawk could have produced no appreciable effect on the natural products of a large continent. Nor did they; but there was another instrument in the hands of these savages which must be credited with results which it would be difficult to over-estimate. I refer to the *fire-stick*; for the blackfellow was constantly setting fire to the grass and trees, both accidentally, and systematically for hunting purposes. Living principally on wild roots and animals, he tilled his land and cultivated his pastures with fire; and we shall not, perhaps, be far from the truth if we conclude that almost every part of New Holland [Australia] was swept over by a fierce fire, on an average, once in every five years. That such constant and extensive conflagrations could have occurred without something more than temporary consequences seems impossible, and I am disposed to attribute to them many important features of Nature here; for instance, the baked, calcined, indurated condition of the ground so common to many parts of the continent, the remarkable absence of mould which should have resulted from the accumulation of decayed vegetation, the comparative unproductiveness of our soils, the character of our vegetation and its scantiness, the retention within bounds of insect life (notably of the locust,

grasshopper, caterpillar, ant and moth), a most important function, and the comparative scarcity of insectivorous birds and birds of prey. They must have also have had an influence on the thermometrical range, and probably affected the rainfall and atmospheric and electrical conditions.

When these circumstances are weighed, it may perhaps be doubted whether any section of the human race has exercised a greater influence on the physical condition of any large portion of the globe than the wandering savages of Australia.

Edward M. Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria then called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)*, first published 1883, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1965, pp. 87-88.

Stephen Pyne in his history of fire in Australia commented of the impact of Aboriginal people on the fire experience of the Australian continent:

DOCUMENT 1.29

In the Aborigine, Australian fire had discovered an extraordinary ally. Not only did ignition sources multiple and spread, but fire itself persisted through wet season and dry, across grassland and forest, in desert and on mountain. Lightning was a highly seasonal, episodic ignition source; the Aboriginal firestick was an eternal flame. The domain of fire expanded, not only geographically but temporally, for this inextinguishable spark obliterated even the seasons. But 'if fire was maintained by the Aborigines, it is also true,' as Phyllis Nicholson notes, 'that the Aborigines were maintained by fire'. The relationship between them was reciprocal, symbiotic. ...

As nearly every observer of the Aborigine has commented, it was far simpler to keep an existing fire going than to start a new one. It was easier to carry a firestick. ...

The constant interaction between firestick and landscape replenished both. The liberal distribution of fire also meant that, if lost, fire could be more readily reclaimed from the land. The banking of fires in large tree boles, the lighting of heavy scrub, the ignition of large trees directly or indirectly, all littered the scene with fire caches, not unlike food caches or waterholes - temporary sources of an essential element. Everywhere smoke marked the presence of Aborigines, ...

Stephen Pyne, *Burning Bush. A Fire History of Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, pp. 85, 87, 88.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the relationship between Aboriginal people and fire?
2. Was it intentional?
3. What did Mitchell and Curr (documents 1.27 and 1.28) believe was the impact of Aboriginal use of fire on the Australian continent?
4. Does Stephen Pyne (document 1.29) agree? Justify your answer.
5. Do you think Curr exaggerated or not, when he said no other human group had 'exercised a greater influence on the physical condition' of a large part of the globe?
6. What is the essence of Mitchell and Pyne's view of Aborigines and fire? Explain

Helen Doyle explains how the way Aboriginal people used fire has been thought about in more recent times.

DOCUMENT 1.30

Fire-stick farming, a term coined by archaeologist Rhys Jones in Jim Allen et al. (eds), *Sunda and Sahul* (1977), describes a highly specific, localised process of deliberate regular and organised burning of the land that has been used by Australian Aborigines for thousands of years, and continues to be used in northern Australia, as a form of land and resource management. Aborigines controlled and modified vegetation by setting fire to the land using the sticks of smouldering wood that they carried with them. This prepared the land for, and stimulated, new growth and was also the means of staking a claim on an area of land. Firing the bush affected a region's ecology by encouraging or discouraging particular plant species, and so was a means of promoting food sources. It was also responsible for the creation of Australia's open woodlands, which provided increased visibility for hunting.

Helen Doyle, 'Fire-stick Farming', in G. Davison, J. Hirst, and S. Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, revised edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001, p. 256.

The historian Bill Gammage argues that Aboriginal people used fire to create what he calls 'templates', a mosaic of diverse spaces on country, created by Aboriginal people through fire.

DOCUMENT 1.31

Most people now accept that in 1788 Aboriginal people burned land in patches to hunt and lure game. Mere random burning does not achieve this. Burning must be precise and predictable, otherwise it simply moves game haphazardly around the country. People needed both to burn and not to burn, and to space each appropriately. In fact they did much more, shaping and associating plant communities to create the various conditions of feed and shelter each animal preferred. This made the animals abundant, and carefully locating their habitats made them convenient and their movements and habits predictable. ...In short, we should see Australia in 1788 not as natural, but as made...

Bill Gammage, 'Victorian Landscapes in 1788', *Studies in the History of Gardens & designed Landscapes, An International Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, April-June 2011, p. 83, p. 86.

Gammage expanded his ideas in his recent award-winning book, *The Biggest Estate on Earth. How Aborigines Made Australia* (2011), whose argument is summed up in its subtitle.

DOCUMENT 1.32

What plants and animals flourished were related to their management. As in Europe land was managed at a local level. Detailed knowledge was crucial. Each family cared for its own ground, and knew not merely which species fire or no fire might affect, but which individual plant and animal, and their totem and Dreaming links. They knew every yard [metre] intimately, and knew well the ground of neighbours and clansmen, sharing large scale management or assuming responsibly for nearby ground if circumstance required.

They first managed country for plants. They knew which grew where, and which they must tend or transplant. Then they managed for animals. Knowing which plants animals prefer let them burn to associate the sweetest feed, the best shelter, the safest scrub. They established a circuit of such places, activating the next as the last was exhausted or its animals fled. In this way they could predict where animals would be. They travelled to known resources, and made them not merely sustainable, but abundant, convention and predictable. These are loaded words, the opposite of what Europeans once presumed about hunter-gatherers.

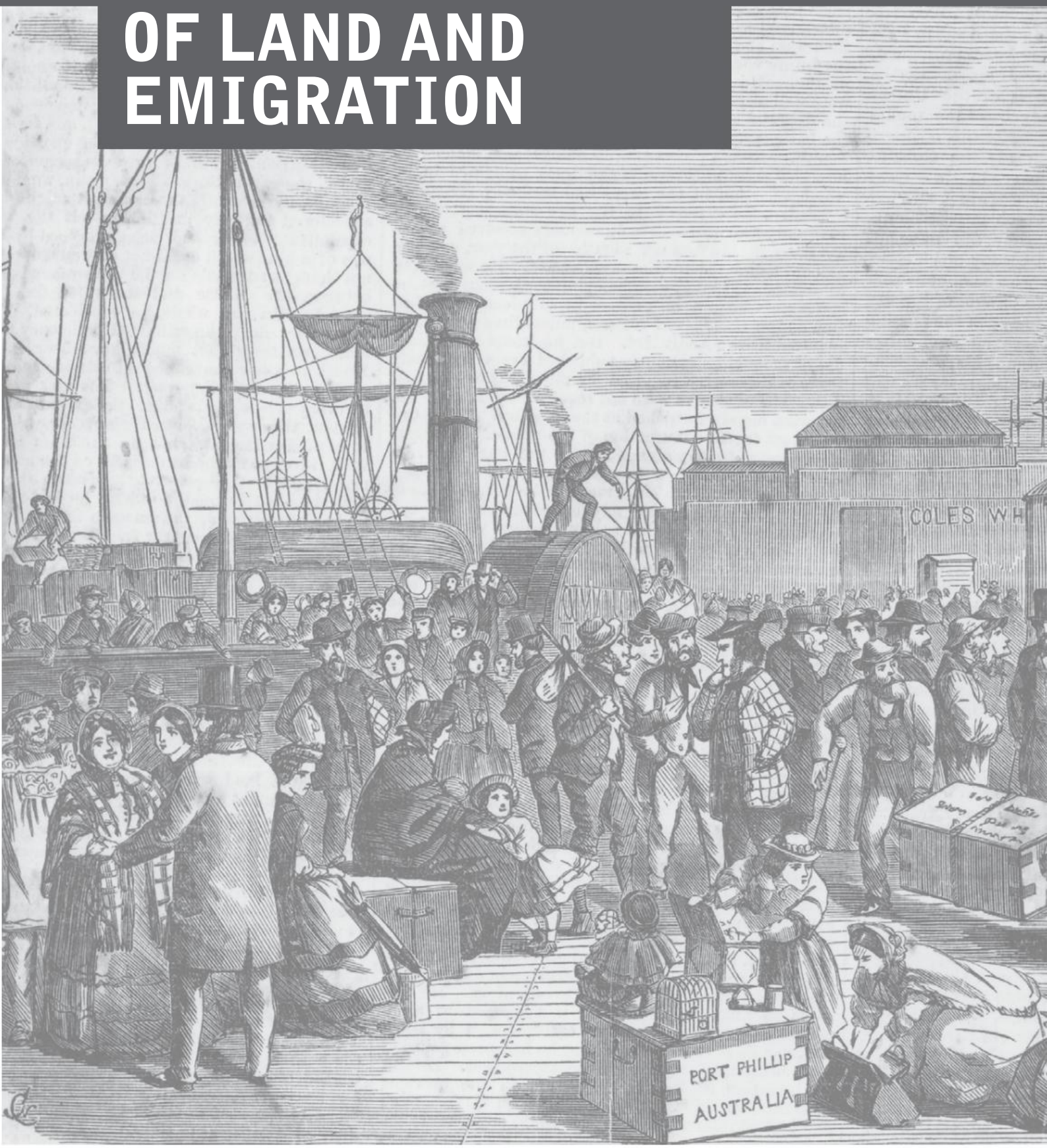
Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth. How Aborigines Made Australia*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011, p. 3.

QUESTIONS

1 In your own words describe the term 'firestick farming'.

2 Does Bill Gammage's use of the words 'cared for' (document 1.32, line 3) hint at what Gammage might add to that definition? Expand this thought.

EVALUATING EUROPEAN IDEAS OF LAND AND EMIGRATION



ABOVE: Frederick Grosse. Emigrants landing at the Queen's Wharf, Melbourne.
nla.pic-an7497113 National Library of Australia.

The desire to own land was strong in those who lived in nineteenth century England and indeed the whole of the United Kingdom. Land was desired for three reasons. It was the source of all wealth until the Industrial Revolution began to generate new sources of wealth through industry to rival that held by landowners. Land was also the basis of prestige and influence. The 'blue bloods' of England, who were the social elite of the country, were members of the great landed families of the United Kingdom. The House of Lords was composed of large landowners and the House of Commons was also largely formed from the ranks of landed gentlemen. Thus land was also the basis of political power. The power of land was revealed in the country estates of lords and country gentlemen, which were serviced by a hoard of tenant farmers, servants and shopkeepers in the local village.

However, at the start of the nineteenth century land fell into fewer and fewer hands in England. The Enclosure Movement of the late eighteenth century, by which the village commons were expropriated by numerous separate acts of parliament, passed the common lands into the hands of large landowners. The Agrarian Revolution through technology and newer farming techniques, created a shift from small holdings to large holdings of land. By the 1870s, 80 per cent of the land of England was owned by just 7,000 people, almost entirely men!

When emigrants left England, they went from a country where land was king, to a new world where it seemed unlimited. They carried ideas about land that were deeply embedded in British culture. These ideas reflected religious thinking of the time; notions of human progress; and contemporary ideas of the ownership of land and property.

The following documents and questions will allow you to explore these background ideas that shaped how European settlers thought about land.

BRITISH IDEAS REGARDING OWNERSHIP AND USE OF LAND

RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF RESOURCES

Most British and European settlers were Christian in general belief, if not practise, and their beliefs in the early nineteenth century were shaped by a literal belief in the *Bible*, that is, the words of the *Bible* were the words of God and true and accurate. Their thinking had not yet been challenged or modified by emerging scientific ideas of the age of the earth or of creation.

The *Bible* declared that after God created Adam and Eve, God outlined the relationship of people and nature. Fifty generations later, God directed Noah and his three sons and their wives to build an ark to survive the great deluge that God decided to send as punishment for human wickedness. The flood, which lasted forty days and nights, destroyed all except Noah's family and the animals taken into the ark. God then spoke again about the relationship between people and nature. These things were set out in the Book of Genesis.

DOCUMENT 2.1

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'.

The Holy Bible, Book of Genesis 1: 27-28, New Revised Standard Version, 1989.

> God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and the dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, and everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered'.
>
> *The Holy Bible, the Book of Genesis 9:1-2*, New Revised Standard Version, 1989.

QUESTIONS

1. In your own words describe the relationship between humans and nature as set out in the Book of Genesis.
2. How do you think Christian people would view the rights to resources of those who were not Christian?

IDEAS OF PROGRESS

In the eighteenth century philosophers and others reflected on the nature of humans and their progress through historical time. In a body of thought and way of thinking known as the Enlightenment, ideas emerged about the nature and mechanism of human progress, usually centred on the power of mind and education to transform lives and societies.

In the 1790s a Frenchman, Marie-Jean Antoine-Nicholas, Marquis de Condorcet, reflected on human progress. He was educated by Jesuits at the famous College de Navarre, excelling in mathematics. At the age of twenty-six, Condorcet was elected to the Academy of Sciences in France, becoming its perpetual secretary in 1785. He published many scientific and philosophical papers on mathematics, and on social justice, including slavery and the ill-treatment of Protestants in Catholic France. During the French Revolution de Condorcet was prominent in the attempt to make a constitution for the new Republic, before fleeing during the Reign of Terror. While in hiding he wrote his *Sketch for the Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), which summed up the Enlightenment view of human progress.

FIGURE 10
Portrait of Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794).
Jean-Baptiste Greuze

DOCUMENT 2.2

The first stage of civilization observed amongst human beings is that of a small society whose members live by hunting and fishing, and know only how to make rather crude weapons and household utensils and to build or dig for themselves a place in which to live, but are already in possession of a language with which to communicate their needs, a small number of moral ideas which serve as common laws of conduct; living in families, conforming to general customs which take the place of laws, and even possessing a crude system of government.

The uncertainty of life, the difficulty man experiences in providing for his needs, and the necessary cycle of extreme activity and total idleness do not allow him the leisure in which he can indulge in thought and enrich his understanding with new combinations of ideas. The means of satisfying his needs are too dependent in chance and the seasons to encourage any occupation whose progress might be handed down to later generations, and so each man confines himself to perfecting his own individual skill and talent.

Thus the progress of the human species was necessarily very slow; it could move forward only from time to time when it was favoured by exceptional circumstances. However, we see hunting, fishing and the natural fruits of the earth replaced as a source of subsistence by food obtained from animals that man domesticates and that he learns to keep and to breed. Later, a primitive form of agriculture developed; man was no longer satisfied with the fruits or plants that he came across by chance, but learnt to store them, to collect them around his dwelling, to sow or plant them, and to provide them with favourable conditions under which they could spread.

Property, which at first was limited to the animals that a man killed, his weapons, his nets and his cooking utensils, later came to include his cattle and eventually was extended to the earth that he won from its virgin state and cultivated. On the death of the owner this property naturally passed into the hands of his family, and in consequence some people came to possess a surplus that they could keep. If this surplus was absolute, it gave rise to new needs; but if it existed only in one commodity and at the same time there was a scarcity of another, this state of affairs naturally suggested the idea of exchange, and from then onwards, moral relations grew in number and increased in complexity.

A life that was less hazardous and more leisured gave opportunities for meditation or, at least, for sustained observation. Some people adopted the practice of exchanging part of their surplus for labour from which they would then be absolved. In consequence there arose a class of men whose time was not wholly taken up in manual labour and whose desires extended beyond their elementary needs. Industry was born; the arts were already know, were spread and perfected; as men became more experienced and attentive, quite casual information suggested to them new arts; the population grew as the means of subsistence became less dangerous and precarious; agriculture which could support a greater number of people on the same amount of land, replaced the other means of subsistence; it encouraged the growth of the population and this, in its turn, favoured progress; acquired ideas were communicated more quickly and were perpetuated more surely in a society that had become more sedentary, more accessible and more intimate. Already, the dawn of science had begun to break; man revealed himself to be distinct from the other species of animals and seemed no longer confined like them to a purely individual perfection.

Marie-Jean Antoine-Nicholas, marquis de Condorcet. *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, 1795, reprinted by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1955, pp. 5-6.

QUESTIONS

1. List the stages of human development which de Condorcet saw as creating growth and 'progress'.
2. Which stages were seen to be the most progressive? Why?
3. Which stage was the least admirable? Explain your reasons
4. What does he claim is the relationship between progress and property?
5. After having studied Investigation 1 on Aboriginal land management, do you agree with de Condorcet's view of hunter gatherers?

CHANGING BRITISH IDEAS OF OWNERSHIP

In his book *Frontier* (1987), the historian Henry Reynolds reflected on the nature of the frontier conflict in Australia. He wrote:

DOCUMENT 2.3

The gun accompanied the bullock dray and preceded the plough. The prolonged conflict was, by general consensus, a sort of warfare. Yet war is by no means a perfect analogy because most wars are not accompanied by a total transfer of land from vanquished to victor or by the complete overthrow of an existing economic and social order. White settlement was more like revolution than war. ...

Many things contributed to frontier conflict... . Perhaps the single most important element in a complex situation was the revolutionary concept of private property, which the settlers brought with them from Britain along with the will and the weapons to impose it in Australia. For 200 years before the great expansion of settlement in Australia traditional concepts of property had been undermined in Britain both by parliament and the courts. The open fields had been enclosed, as had many of the commons. The ancient, customary rights to hunt and gather had been progressively restricted. The old idea of land being used for different purposes by different people, none of them with absolute right of possession, had been replaced by the concept of absolute and exclusive property rights. That great revolutionary document the *Code Napoleon* expressed it as 'the right of enjoying and disposing of things in the most absolute manner'.

Settlers arrived in the colonies with the desire to own the land and everything on it 'in the most absolute manner'. Most of them preferred to drive the blacks away whenever they were seen, both for security and to consummate that burning passion for property. Typically they prevented, as far as they could, Aboriginal hunting and gathering, stopped their burning of the country, shut off their access to water and punished with severity any attacks on the sheep or cattle. All this took place on land that was often only held under lease or license from the Crown. But the idea of absolute and exclusive property rights has taken such deep root in Australia. ...

Henry Reynolds, *Frontier*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, pp. 189-190.

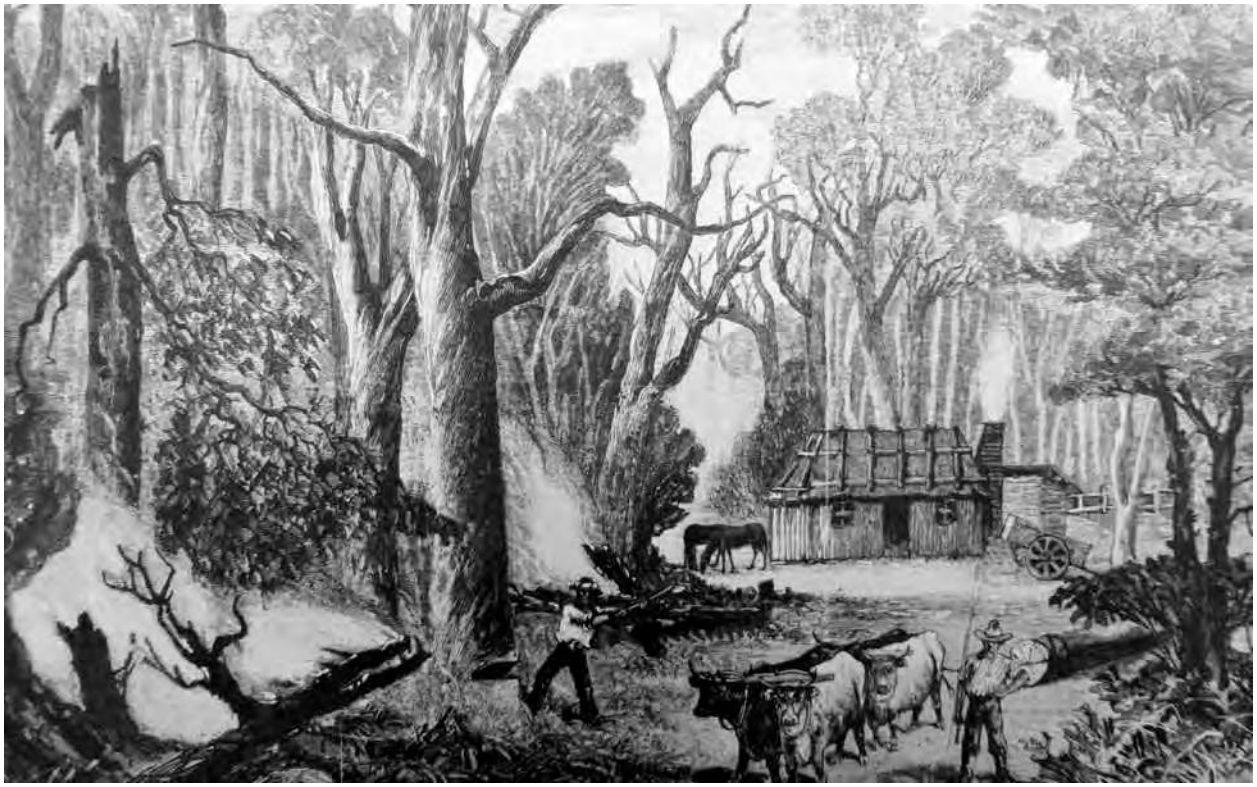


FIGURE 11 Possessing the land. Unknown engraving

QUESTIONS

1. Why does Reynolds think the frontier is best explained by the word 'revolution' not 'war'?
2. Explain what he means by 'absolute and exclusive property rights'.
3. Think of an analogy in your own life of 'absolute and exclusive rights'.
4. Did squatters have any right to think this way about the land they were on?

WHY CROWN OWNERSHIP?

In document 2.3 Henry Reynolds states that 'All this took place on land that was often only held under lease or license from the Crown'. This is an important point to remember: the Crown claimed the land of (eastern) Australia in 1770 and from the 1830s pastoralists were issued with leases of land of just one year's duration in places distant from Sydney, and did not enjoy the rights to grants or purchase.

How was it that the Crown claimed ownership? Most, but not all of eighteenth century jurists, thought land new to European discovery could be claimed if it was purchased or ceded by the local owners, or considered 'waste'. By 'waste' it was meant, not used by blending one's labour with the land, as in what the European considered to be agriculture. (See document 2.2, paragraphs 2 and 3).

Lieutenant James Cook 'discovered' the east coast of Australia, and took possession of it on 22 August 1770 at what is now called Possession Island. The following day he wrote in his journal of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the East Coast:

DOCUMENT 2.4

Neither are they very numerous, they live in small parties along the Sea Coast the banks of Lakes, Rivers creeks &c. They seem to have no fix'd habitation but move about from place to place like wild Beasts in search of food, and I believe depend wholy upon the success of the present day for their subsistence. ...In short these people live wholy by fishing and hunting, but mostly by the former for we never saw one Inch of Cultivated land in the Whole Country, they know however the use of Taara [yams] and sometimes eat them. We do not know that they eat anything raw but roast or broil all they eat on slow small fires. Their Houses are mean small hovels not much bigger than an oven, made of pieces of sticks, Bark, Grass &c. and even these are seldom used but in the wet seasons for in the dry times we know that they as often sleep in the open air as any where else. ...We are to Consider that we see this Country in the pure state of nature the Industry of man has had nothing to do with any part of it and yet we find all such things as nature hath bestowed upon it in a flourishing state. In this extensive Country it can never be doubted but what most sorts of Grain, Fruits, Roots, &c of every kind would flourish here were they once brought hither, planted and cultivated by the hand of Industry and here are Provender for more Cattle at all seasons of the year than can be brought into this Country.

From *Journal of the First Voyage of Captain James Cook* in M. Clark (ed.), *Sources of Australian History*, London, Oxford University Press, 1957, pp. 52-54.

QUESTIONS

1. List the views of James Cook about Aboriginal land use
2. How does that compare with de Condorcet's view of human progress?
3. How might Cook's description of Aboriginal people explain why he took possession of Australia?
4. How do Cook's views compare with what you have learned about Aboriginal people and their land usage in Investigation 1?

These ideas of land underpinned people's thinking as they contemplated emigration to the British colonies, as emigration was so bound up with the idea of attaining land as private property. Ideas about land also played out as settlers took up land and justified it in their clashes with Aboriginal owners, which is the theme of Investigation 3.

LAND AND EMIGRATION

Human movement both within and between countries is an ancient occurrence. Historians who seek to understand these movements refer to push and pull factors: recognising that people are forced or pushed out of their home country, and also attracted or pulled elsewhere. Actually, both forces usually operate at the one time on any particular individual. Such is the fragmentary nature of historical evidence that it is often difficult to tell in precise terms why individuals moved.

The aim of the remainder of this investigation is to identify where possible the ideas, beliefs and motives that caused people to emigrate from Great Britain, Ireland and the early Australian colonies to the Port Phillip region, now called Victoria. It will become clear that the words 'land' and 'emigration' were deeply connected in the minds of most emigrants to Port Phillip.

DESIGNS ON THE SOUTHERN COAST OF AUSTRALIA

A region can only attract settlers if it is known. In 1770 Captain James Cook's men were the first Europeans to sight the southern coast of the continent. European eyes did not gaze on the coast for a further generation until the Sydney Cove was wrecked on Preservation Island in 1797. George Bass explored Bass Strait and Western Port in the following year and soon parties of convict sealers out of Sydney were at work. Lieutenant John Murray entered and took possession of Port Phillip Bay in March 1802. His action and the explorations of the French led to the founding of a settlement near present-day Sorrento in 1803. The settlement was abandoned after seven months in favour of Hobart as the Lieutenant-Governor, David Collins, found it an 'unpromising and unproductive country'. In 1824, Hume and Hovell travelled overland from Lake George near present-day Canberra in search of pasture land, reaching the coast at Corio Bay. Two years later a military outpost was established at Corinella to protect Bass Strait but it was withdraw after sixteen months. The coast remained in the undisputed possession of Aboriginal people. During all this time, sealers, bark-cutters and other adventurers were touching the coast, exploiting land and Aboriginal people and carrying back their assessments of the place to the other Australian colonies.

FIGURE 12
Thomas Henty.
Historical Sketches of Victoria, Ure Smith, 1886.

THE HENTYS' DECISION TO EMIGRATE

Thomas Henty, a sheep breeder, farmer and banker from Sussex on the south-east coast of England emigrated with his family to Australia in 1829, choosing the new Swan River Colony (now Perth). Poor land caused them to move to Van Diemen's Land. However, an end to the land grant system and bleak prospects there caused them to pioneer the southern coast at Portland in 1834, the first European settlers in what soon became known as the Port Phillip District. Henty became a prominent Victorian settler.[1] The Henty family's motives for emigration are revealed in the following documents. In 1822 Thomas Henty wrote to a friend, John Street, who had recently emigrated to New South Wales, about the state of farming in England. Henty reflected the beliefs of many farmers of his day.

DOCUMENT 2.5

> The state of Agriculture is worse than when you were here, there is absolutely no sale for anything in the shape of Agricultural; produce, I have not sold Sheep or taken £20 for Corn. ...Ruin stares the Farmer full in the face, and Rents are lowering all over the Kingdom, but this will not save the Farmers, unless prices are brought up, and I confess I now think there is no chance of it. ... We are in full expectation of a Property Tax being laid on when Parliament meets...

Henty then wrote of Street's emigration:

> It requires great courage to surmount the many difficulties and privations you necessarily will have to encounter, and nothing but perseverance and well husbanding your Money, Strict Economy at starting, and in fact

1 M. Bassett, 'Thomas Henty' in D. Pike (ed.), *Australian Dictionary of Biography* , vol. 1, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1966, pp. 531-34.

> great prudence, with the best management will enable you to retain that independence, so delightful, and so desirable in every sense of the word - I long to receive a letter from you, giving me *a very particular* account of the Country, but more particularly of the prospect for a Farmer with a pretty good stock of Agricultural Knowledge, Capital and Industry- I shall believe more from your opinion given than all the books I may read upon the subject.

Henty then listed about twenty-five questions about the land, its grasses and quality, about how livestock, especially sheep fared in Australia, what an emigrant family should bring, what the Aborigines were like and the state of social and sporting life in the colonies.

Marnie Bassett, *The Hentys: An Australian Colonial Tapestry*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1954, pp. 28-30.

QUESTION

1 Why was Thomas Henty so interested in emigration?

By 1828 the Hentys had decided to emigrate. In August, James Henty, Thomas' eldest son, set out the arguments for emigration to another of the sons, William.

James wrote:

DOCUMENT 2.6

> I have almost come to the conclusion that New South Wales will do more for our family than England ever will, considering the means we have to commence business with... Father says he has no doubt he can land in New South Wales with £10,000 independent of Freighting a ship out. Stock, both Sheep and Horses and other investments-if so, with that, we might be enabled very soon to get a large Stock and Farm on a most extensive scale if we thought it desirable when we got there. What can we do in England with £10,000 amongst all of us. It would be quite impossible for me to carry on the Bank and my other business in both of which; we have at this time full £4,000 locked up and it is out of the question to suppose we can continue that sum for any period even if it produced a good return but as it does not do that any argument for its continuance falls to the ground. I have mentioned it to Charles and he seems impressed with the same opinion as myself... It would be idle to suppose he can live many years longer on less than £200 a year, brought up as we all have been unless indeed we chose to descend many steps in the scale of Society and which our feelings could ill stand, having at the same time an opportunity

FIGURE 13
Henty's Wool Store, Portland.
Historical Sketches of Victoria, Ure Smith, 1886.

of doing as well and perhaps considerably better in New South Wales, under British Dominion and a fine climate... If Father and Mother go, I do. I cannot be separated from them at that distance particularly as I agree with Father in the policy of the undertaking and my presence might be of consequence and tend more to the comfort of the whole. Jane might at first feel some uneasiness at going but if we decide upon it as being the most beneficial thing for us all, she will soon get over it, particularly when she finds Mother's determination fixed. I can have no other feeling than that of doing all in my power to benefit the whole of us and I am convinced that spirit actuates us all. How many thousands are there who go to India for twenty years certain in a pestilential climate under a burning sun and for what? Why, to secure themselves (if they live) £400 or £500 a year for the remainder of their lives in England. At the expiration of 10 years in New South Wales I shall be much disappointed if we individually are not worth double that sum, arising from the accumulation of our Stock and our annual exports to England. For the first year or two we shall have to endure privations and hardships which we have not been accustomed to in England. What of that? Look at [John] Street –an instance before us of what a man even with little energy and small capital can do. He is now possessed of 2000 acres of fine land, 1600 sheep and cattle, a House and all the comforts (to use his own words) he can either expect or desire. Our situation as compared with his will be vastly superior we go out with 12 or 13 times the amount of capital he did, our name is already well known in the Colony, and immediately we get there we shall be placed in the first Rank in Society, a circumstance which must not be overlooked as it will tend most materially to our comfort and future advantage... If we decide upon going it must be 'una voce' and the Fable of the Unbreakable Bundle of Sticks should be constantly before us... Our amusements would be in sporting and improving our estates and our business growing fine wool and breeding blood horses for both of which we have good markets.

Bassett, *The Hentys*, pp. 34-36.

QUESTIONS

1 Identify the push and pull factors that caused the Henty family to emigrate.

2 Which of the two forces do you consider the stronger in their case?

3 What did James Henty most fear about staying in England?

4 What beliefs and values shaped the Henty's thinking?

5 Explain the fable to which James Henty refers.

VAN DIEMONIANS CONSIDER COLONISATION

The Hentys landed at Portland on 19 November 1834, built huts, planted a kitchen garden and soon imported sheep to stock the pastoral run they excised from Aboriginal lands. The whalers and sealers who had bases at Portland since 1828 had for some years brought encouraging news of the southern coast back to Launceston. Some settlers there formed plans as early as 1825 but official disapproval of new settlements dampened enthusiasm. However, once the whalers reported the Henty's activities, interest re-emerged. In April 1835 eight Launceston capitalists, including bankers, officials and settlers sponsored one of their number, John Batman, to explore Port Phillip and attempt to purchase land by treaty from the Aborigines. Eventually, John Pascoe Fawkner's party settled on the Yarra in August 1835 and Batman returned in November with other pastoralists and their sheep.

Below are extracts from John Batman's Journal written while exploring the present site of Melbourne.

DOCUMENT 2.7

Saturday, May 30 1835

...I went on shore to look at the land, which appeared beautiful, with scarcely any timber on. On my landing I found the hills of a most superior description - beyond my most sanguine expectations. The land excellent, and very rich - and light black soil, covered with kangaroo grass two feet high, and as thick as it could stand. Good hay could be made, and in any quantity. The trees not more than six to the acre, and those small sheoak and wattle. I never saw anything equal to the land in my life. I walked over a considerable extent, and all of the same description. ...

Thursday, June 4 1835

...When on these plains, and where I now stand writing this, I think I can safely swear that I can see every way over plains twenty miles distance, with scarcely any timber, and covered with kangaroo grass eight and ten inches high. This, I think, is the average. Most beautiful sheep pasturage I ever saw in my life. I am sure I can see 50,000 acres of land in one direction, and not fifty trees...

John Batman's Journal in James Bonwick, *Port Phillip Settlement,* Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, London, 1883, pp. 180, 184-185.

Rev. John Lang observed the impact of Batman's return to Van Diemen's Land:

DOCUMENT 2.8

Mr. Batman's report, as to the capabilities of Port Phillip as a grazing country, was in the highest degree favourable; and that report having been subsequently confirmed by the testimony of other creditable witnesses, who were afterwards sent across from Van Diemen's Land on his track, the result was as if the whole colony of Van Diemen's Land had been suddenly electrified. I happened to visit that island, on a clerical tour from New South Wales, in the months of October and November 1835, when the excitement was at its height; and on traversing the island, to and fro between Hobart Town and Launceston at its opposite extremities, I found almost every respectable person I met with preparing, either individually, or in the person of some near relation or confidential agent to occupy the Australian El Dorado...

John Dunmore Lang, *Port Phillip or the Colony of Victoria,* by the author, Glasgow, 1853, p. 26.

Documents 2.9 to 2.12 examine the motives of four Van Diemonian pastoralists, Charles Wedge, David Fisher, John Robertson and James Willis, who went to Port Phillip.

DOCUMENT 2.9

The settlement of this colony of Victoria originated with my father's brother, Mr. John Helder Wedge, and Mr. John Batman...in 1835 a company was formed, and an expedition despatched, under Mr. Batman, to report on the nature of the country and its adaptation to the growth of wool, as an outlet for our surplus stock was then beginning to be severely felt. Immediately on the return of that expedition, and on the report of its leader of the great fertility of the soil being bruited abroad, several private adventures as well as the company previously formed determined on the occupation of the country.

Charles Wedge's Reminiscences in T. F. Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, Robert S. Brain Government Printer, Melbourne, 1898, p. 161.

DOCUMENT 2.10

In the year 1835 I was a resident of Van Diemen's Land, when the rumour of this fertile land reached that place, and induced many of my fellow colonists to make a voyage to spy out the land. ... Mr Batman returned, and by his flattering accounts I was induced to forward to Port Phillip a flock of 750 sheep[1], with six freedmen as shepherds; and on the next voyage of the same vessel I sent 1,100 sheep and seven men.

David Fisher's Reminiscences, Bride, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers,* p. 11.

1 Sheep were then worth over one pound per head at a time when shepherds' wages in Port Phillip were £40-£50 per annum.

QUESTIONS

1 What did Batman (document 2.7) think of Port Phillip's lands?

2 From documents 2.8 to 2.10 assess the impact of Batman's views on pastoralists in Van Diemen's Land

DOCUMENT 2.11

I arrived in the neighbouring colony of Van Diemen's Land in the year 1831, and, like many of my countrymen, with a light purse - one half-crown and a sixpence was all my pocket contained when I landed at Hobart Town with a few fellow-passengers. After walking through the streets for some two hours, they proposed having something to eat and drink, which I could not refuse joining. After bill was checked – the little now I was left with, only sixpence - I found it would not do for me to keep company any longer; so I left under the pretence of seeing a friend, but in reality to look for employment, which was easily found. Next morning I left the ship for my work, and I never saw any of the passengers again. I remained nine years in Van Diemen's Land, as overseer with two different masters on their farms, and at the end of 1840 I had saved about £3,000 from hard work. About this time I learnt that one of my sisters had been recommended to come to the colony [from Scotland] on account of bad health, and that another of them would come with her. I determined to form a home of my own, and, owing to the extravagant price of land and stock in Van Diemen's Land, I looked to this colony as the place where I ought to

invest my little all. In January 1840 I bought 1,000 ewes for £1,800; a team of six working bullocks, two cows, and a horse, for £195. Freight, stores, tools, &c., &c., cost £311. With four men at a wage of £175, I left for Portland Bay...

John G. Robertson's Reminiscences, Bride, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, p. 22.

QUESTIONS

1 What values did John Robertson hold?

2 Calculate how many times a shepherd's wage, Robertson outlaid to start his Port Phillip venture.

3 Would you describe him as a venture capitalist? Explain your answer.

DOCUMENT 2.12

Monday, 22nd May 1837

...Edward returned from Melbourne, bringing letters from Charles, William and Kate and a very hurried note from dear Mama evidently written under feelings of considerable excitement caused by a renewal of my father's brutal conduct towards his children, whom it seems he has exposed to insults from his servants, and because they resent it he (the delicate-minded father) threatens to kick them out of his house, and that in the presence of his wife, their Mother. ...Some impending calamity awaits our family. I dread to conjecture when my father's unnatural conduct will have an end - he has driven all his sons from his roof...

James I. Willis's Diary, reprinted in Michael Cannon and Ian Macfarlane (eds), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol. 6, p. 195.

In the 1820s Van Diemen's Land had experienced rapid growth from immigration and pastoral expansion. The following two documents illuminate the changing economic situation there in the early 1830s. The first is from the Hobart newspaper, *Bent's News*.

DOCUMENT 2.13

For some time back, landed property in the interior has advanced in price beyond all bounds, owing in some measure to the increasing profits derived form sheep-grazing, not only on account of the wool, but the carcass-to the great neglect and injury of agricultural pursuits. Estates which five years ago would not fetch five thousand pounds have recently realized nearly double that amount... rents the most fearful are now demanded- indeed in some instances so very unreasonable as would ruin any tenant by taking them. ...many of the original Proprietors have made their fortunes in the disposal of their respective properties, and, like all other birds of passage, having feathered their nests, have returned to England to retire in ease and independence thereon. Other persons, more keen observers, and who know how to embark their capital more beneficially, ...instead of adding to their estates by the purchase of more land, they also immediately commenced disposing of what they possessed, and, converting its proceeds into sheep, have removed themselves and their flocks to the 'New Settlement' at Port Phillip, where hundreds of acres of the finest soil in the world may be obtained for nothing, without paying any taxes or being in anywise molested. Under these encouraging prospects, who would not give a preference to Port Phillip rather than embark his capital in agricultural pursuits in Van Diemen's Land?

All who have the means are emigrating thither. ... While many persons are selling land in the interior, several old established Colonists residing in Hobart Town have for the last several weeks been putting their fine properties up for sale by auction; but such is the present embarrassed state of affairs that not one single sale has been effected! This speaks volumes. In Elizabeth street, the Cheapside of the Capital, where a short time since a house could scarcely be obtained at any price or rent, there are now scores of shops shut up. A death-blow is thus been put to building, and consequently hundreds of poor workmen and their families will, it is feared, soon be thrown out of employment. Those who have capital are afraid to embark it in mercantile business or in landed property in Hobart Town, but prefer buying sheep to send to Port Phillip, the formation of which Settlement has also in a great measure reduced the artificial value of property in the interior.

Bent's News (Hobart Town), 2 April 1836.

FIGURE 14 'Looking for a Run', A. D. Lang, 1847. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Henry Melville who wrote a history of Van Diemen's Land in 1835 stated:

DOCUMENT 2.14

The present year, 1835, has presented to the Colonies but one continued series of troubles and misfortunes; nothing but Public Meetings, complaining of grievances, and unprecedented distress of every kind - altogether confirming the approach of the often prophesied 'crisis'...of late the imports have so far exceeded the exports and our income, that a stagnation in pecuniary affairs is now being felt, and hence it is that the lamentable sight is to be witnessed of every other shop in the town being closed, and almost every other man that is met in the street (except Government Officers) being in an almost destitute state. When this Colony produced food sufficient for the Colonists and the prisoner population, then indeed, was it prospering, and when the stimulus of giving[1] land was held out, and fresh settlers daily arrived, with capital, then indeed, was a foundation laid, perhaps for a mighty empire; but the importation of foreign capital, the pernicious effects of usury, and the Impounding Law[2], and the vast encrease [sic] of pauper and prisoner population, turned the tables. More than the whole of the Commissariat expenditure goes to pay the foreigner for food, for the free and the bond, and the check given to emigration by selling land, has left the Colonists with a heavy debt, both to the foreign merchant and the foreign usurer!

Henry Melville, *The History of the Island of Van Diemen's Land From the Year 1824 to 1835, Inclusive,* Smith and Elder, London, 1835, pp. 191, 194-195.

1 Until 1831 land was given to new settlers with capital. This was ended by the Ripon Land Regulations which established land sales in the colonies initially at five shillings an acre, a half a week's salary for a rural labourer or shepherd.

2 The Impounding Law (1830) allowed any cattle on crown land to be held and sold to the highest bidder by the pound keeper. For most small landowners and the many without fences, this was a disaster. Many sold off their cattle: leading to a local meat shortage; followed by the necessary importation of meat, and therefore higher prices.

QUESTIONS

1 Briefly outline the economic cycle of Van Diemen's Land around 1835 as revealed in documents 2.13 and 2.14.

2 List the forces shaping that cycle in its up and down phases.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1 List the major push and pull factors in documents 2.7 and 2.14 that shaped emigration between Van Diemen's Land and Port Phillip.

2 Now imagine you are a journalist, a correspondent for the London *Times*. Write several paragraphs about the push-pull forces that brought people from Van Diemen's Land to Port Phillip.

BRITISH AND IRISH IDEAS OF THE AUSTRALIAN COLONIES

News of Port Phillip and the other Australian colonies filtered back to the United Kingdom. Of considerable importance were the views of Major Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor-General of New South Wales, who overlanded from Sydney to Portland Bay in 1836. Mitchell wrote this description of Port Phillip's land in his account of his journey published in London in 1838:

DOCUMENT 2.15

June 29 -The scene was different from anything I had ever before witnessed, either in New South Wales or elsewhere. A land so inviting, and still without inhabitants! As I stood, the first European intruder on the sublime solitude of these verdant plains, as yet untouched by flocks or herds; I felt conscious of being the harbinger of mighty changes; and that our steps would soon be followed by the men and the animals for which it seemed to have been prepared.

General remarks [of the area south of the Murray River] -The land is, in short, open and available in its present state, for all the purposes of civilized man. We traversed it in two directions with heavy carts, meeting no other obstruction than the softness of the rich soil; and, in returning, over flowery plains and green hills, fanned by the breezes of early spring, I named this region Australia Felix, the better to distinguish it from the parched deserts of the interior country, where we had wandered so unprofitably, and so long.

T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia with Descriptions of the Recently Explored Australia Felix, and the Present Colony of New South Wales,* T. & W. Boone, London, 1839, vol. 2, pp. 159, 333.

FIGURE 15
Sir Thomas Mitchell.
State Library of Queensland, Image no. 18741.

QUESTIONS

1. Look up the meaning of 'felix' in the dictionary.
2. Discuss why Mitchell found the land so inviting.
3. How do his views compare with those of John Batman (document 2.7)?
4. Discuss the meanings behind the phrase 'a land so inviting, still without inhabitants'. Is this an odd statement? Why?
5. Which group was likely to have been impressed by Mitchell's descriptions?

THE IMPACT OF THE PRINTED WORD ON EMIGRATION PATTERNS

After the discovery of Port Phillip by Europeans: travellers, reformers and others began to discuss emigration in print. The following documents, 1.12 to 1.16, sample some of this material available in the 1840s.

DOCUMENT 2.16

Emigration, when conducted with prudence, is a public blessing; while it relieves the home country of superabundant members of the producing classes, it also creates a market for the produce of our looms and manufactories. It promotes the prosperity of thousands who, if they continued in their fatherland would, from excessive competition, be merely able to eke out a miserable existence - ending their days, perhaps, in the receipt of public or private charity.

Such a fate as this, is, as a rule, impossible in any one of the countries before named [which included the Australian colonies]. With no rates or taxes levied on the articles necessary for subsistence; with land cheap because plentiful, and the produce of that land, in the shape of animal food and agricultural produce, vastly lower in price than at home; industry cannot fail in procuring not only present means of ample support, but, with perseverance, ultimate prosperity; so that instead of ending his life in a workhouse, the labouring emigrant in most places, in his old age, had the happiness of seeing around him his offspring prosperous and contented, freeholders of the soil on which they dwell in substantial comfort and independence.

The struggle for existence of the lower and middle classes, at home, annually becomes more difficult as population increases and wealth consolidates in the hands of those already rich. ... Who then, with those facts before them, would or should hesitate to seek in emigration better hopes and prospects, and a country where the proprietary of soil is not confined to certain classes, or the food of man, bestowed by a benevolent Providence, consumed only by the rich.

J. C. Byrne, *Twelve Years' Wanderings in the British Colonies from 1835 to 1847*, Pritchard Bentley, London, 1848, vol. 1, pp. 6-7.

DOCUMENT 2.17

The land in the neighbourhood of Melbourne produces splendid crops. For growing wheat, maize, and potatoes, the Port Phillip district is unrivalled in Australia. I know two or three instances in which the potato crops for one year paid the whole of the original cost of the land, and also the expense of the cultivation. The appearance and variety of the gardens in the vicinity of Melbourne, prove the superior fertility of the soil and the general character of the climate...

Labour is, perhaps, the only capital which many of you possess, but in exchange for this capital, for which you sometimes receive but a scarce allowance at home, we will give you here abundance of the most substantial food for yourselves and families. ...Any man who is able and willing to work may here obtain remunerative employment. I do not know any sober industrious freeman, of half-a-dozen years' standing in the colony, who has not saved money, or accumulated its equivalent in property.

D. McKenzie, *The Emigrant's Guide or Ten Years' Practical Experience in Australia*, W. S. Orr and Co., London, 1845, pp. 30, 184.

FIGURE 16
George Baxter, 'News from Australia'.
nla.pic-an8930070 National Library of Australia.

QUESTION

1 Study this picture and discuss the relative importance of family letters and printed material in encouraging emigration.

DOCUMENT 2.18

The Australian colonies present an almost boundless field for the industry of man. All who are willing and able to work may live, and live well, there. The country is in most places in a state of natural pasture, growing food sufficient for flocks and herds without limit. A large proportion of it is fertile open land, fit for the plough, where a man with a hoe, and the labour of a few days, may 'chip' into the earth sufficient maize or Indian corn to sustain him for the entire year. Starvation is unknown in Australia.

R. J. Mann, *Mann's Emigrant Guide to Australia,* William Strange, London, 1849, p. 76.

QUESTIONS

1 Why does Byrne (document 2.16) claim emigration is a 'public blessing'?

2 What have working people to gain from emigration?

3 How was Australia (and Port Phillip in particular) portrayed?

4 Do McKenzie (document 2.17) and Mann (document 2.18) agree?

5 Reread Henty (document 2.5) and view figure 16.
Do you think books are all that influential? What would you need to find out?

DOCUMENT 2.19

None should leave England who are advanced in years, or ill in health. It requires an energetic, and healthy mind, to contend with the troubles of a first settlement, and not one already bowed down by age or disease. Those who can compete with their own particular grade of life in England, should not risk their happiness by emigrating. The solitude of a life in the woods ill accords with an Englishman's ideas of comfort.

G. H. Haydon, *Five Years' Experience in Australia Felix,* Hamilton Adams and Co., London, 1846, p. 160.

DOCUMENT 2.20

Those who can obtain 'food and raiment', in addition to peace of mind, in their own country, would do well to endeavour to be content therewith, rather than to incur the risks attendant on emigration, unless health, or some other sufficient motive, render a change desirable. While sober, industrious, and prudent persons have, in many instances, found it easier to obtain a livelihood in the Australian colonies, than in England, many from speculations of various kinds, have been ruined, and others from inefficiency or instability, have sunk into hopeless degradation.

James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies,* Hamilton Adams and Co., London, 1845, p. 560.

QUESTIONS

1 Which types of people were advised to emigrate?

2 What qualities did these writers say the emigrants should possess?

3 Was emigration universally recommended? Explain.

THE WORKING CLASS ENGLISH PRESS

The working class newspapers of the 1840s took a different view of colonies to that held by travel writers and reformers, as a historian, Alan Beever, explains:

DOCUMENT 2.21

For most of the 1840s the British working- class could have been expected to think poorly of Australia. News from the colonies was almost uniformly bad. Through colonial newspapers, circulars, journals and private communications, the British were well acquainted with the severe depressions in both New South Wales and South Australia in the early part of the decade. Meanwhile Van Diemen's Land was oppressed by transportation as well as the slump, and Western Australia was in a state of economic torpor.

News as such, however, was only one element in shaping opinion. Another and in some ways more important element was the analytical and ideological framework which absorbed, sifted and shaped the news. At the time there was a deep distrust of, indeed outright hostility towards, the British Empire, specially colonies of recent settlement of which the Australian colonies were prime examples. Such colonies were seen as sources of wealth and power which the rich could exploit to boost their ascendancy in the class struggle. ... The colonial rich were identified with the lesser aristocracy or junior members of large families for whom the colonies provided scope for patronage,

jobbery and speculation. ...The patronage-jobbing image provided the basis for other unfavourable verdicts. Under the 'curse of aristocratic misrule' the development of responsible government, self-governing colonies, and democracy, was impossible. A rapacious derivative aristocracy had virtually complete control of the land, the all-important factor in colonial development. Through its political ascendancy, it was able to sell land in the colonies at such a price or in such large allotments (or both) as to preclude people with limited capital from making viable purchases. Ordinary workmen had no chance of becoming small farmers. In fact only a small number of the most fortunate rich could buy land, so small a number that they were able to form an effective monopoly.

Alan Beever, 'From a Place of "Horrible Destitution" to a Paradise of the Working Class: The Transformation of British Working Class Attitudes to Australia, 1841-1851', *Labour History,* no. 40, May 1981, p. 3.

One of the working class newspapers, *The Spirit of the Age,* wrote that emigration:

DOCUMENT 2.22

...is a deep laid scheme to achieve two results; first, to relieve the rich from the pressure of the poor at home, thus easing rents and lightening poor rates; secondly to perpetuate in the Colonies the gross social and political injustice which characterize society at home... The land monopolists of Australia and New Zealand, only require our agricultural labourers and mechanics, in order to improve the value of the soil on which they have laid furtive hands; and our females, in order to make them domestic drudges.

The Spirit of the Age, 11 November 1848.

Another such newspaper, the *Northern Star,* attacked:

DOCUMENT 2.23

...the delusions practised by those infernal furies, in the shape of Bounty Emigration Agents, who are trying to kidnap the people of this country into a state of bondage worse than death, for the purpose of increasing their ill-gotten gains by the nefarious traffic.

Northern Star, 21 May 1842.

QUESTIONS

1. According to Beever (document 2.21), list the reasons why the working class press opposed emigration.
2. Explain what you think Beever means by the words 'ideological framework' when discussing working class attitudes to emigration.
3. Discuss whether and how documents 2.22 and 2.23 reflect Beever's views or not.
4. Why in particular did the *Northern Star* use the word 'kidnap'?

SOURCES OF EMIGRATION

Who responded to these invitations to begin a new life in the golden lands of *Australia Felix*? And where did these people come from? The following documents will reveal the social profile of some of the Port Phillip immigrants.

From 1834 to 1851, 2.4 million people left the United Kingdom and Ireland, 0.2 million of them heading for Australia, of whom 90,000 arrived in Port Phillip during these years.

A third of these emigrants to Port Phillip came as assisted immigrants, their fares being paid by the proceeds from colonial land sales. As their passages were paid for and organised by government, their movements were tightly regulated and records were kept of their attributes.

Slightly over half of the assisted immigrants were females, forty per cent were married and fifty-six per cent were part of a family. Two-thirds of them were in their physical prime, being between 14 and 30 years of age. These attributes were partly shaped by the government's regulations which only granted assisted passages to young and fit family people.

The following document indicates the occupations of the assisted male immigrants.

DOCUMENT 2.24

Occupations of the Adult Male Assisted Immigrants to Port Phillip, 1837-1850

Occupation	Number	Percent
Agric. Labourers	2,965	33
Building workers	916	10
Shopkeeper/trades	168	2
Skilled workers	844	9
Professionals	39	<1
Unskilled workers	3,747	42
Domestic servants	263	3
Vine-dressers	1	<1
Total	**8,943**	**100**

R. Shultz, 'Immigration into Eastern Australia 1788-1851', *Historical Studies*, vol. 14, no. 54, 1970, pp. 273-82.

QUESTIONS

1 In your own words describe which segments of the United Kingdom's population emigrated by assisted passage to Port Phillip.

2 Try to explain why the profile of the immigrants was skewed in this way.

Little is known about emigration from within counties. However, one study by a historian, Colin Holt, has traced the origins of 2,327 people who came from Cambridgeshire between 1840 and 1867. Of the 158 villages in that county, 102 provided Australian immigrants. Thirty-four villages sent fewer than five emigrants each, 43 sent between six and 20 emigrants each, and 25 villages sent more than 21 emigrants each. Foxton lost a fifth of its population to Australia, Triplow slightly less.

Colin Holt also discovered that a local government officer and emigration agent, Josias Johnson, one of 48 such agents in England, personally encouraged a third of these Cambridgeshire emigrants to move. Johnson and the other agents were paid £1.5 for signing up a married couple, a third of that for a single man and nothing for accompanying children under 14 years. In 1847 he received £7 in fees for this part-time job, and in 1848 £91, at a time when a labourer received only about £30 for a years' work. Johnson, who operated from the local inn, advertised his services thus:

DOCUMENT 2.25

FREE EMIGRATION TO THE AUSTRALIAN COLONIES.

Applications received and Instructions given by Mr Josias Johnson, Barley, Agent to Her Majesty's Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners

Free passages for farm labourers to AUSTRALIA and the CAPE; applications received by Mr Josias Johnson, Barley, near Royston, agent to Her Majesty's Emigration Commission and at the 'Little Rose', Cambridge, on Thursday.

*Cambridge Chronicle,*14 October 1848 and 11 April 1850, quoted in Colin Holt, 'Family, Kinship, Community and Friendship Ties in Assisted Emigration from Cambridgeshire to Port Phillip District and Victoria, 1840-67', MA thesis, La Trobe University, 1987, p. 62.

The Counties of Britain and Ireland

Counties of Scotland

1 Aberdeen
2 Angus
3 Argyll
4 Ayr
5 Banff
6 Berwick
7 Bute
8 Caithness
9 Clackmannan
10 Dumfries
11 Dunbarton
12 East Lothian
13 Fife
14 Inverness
15 Kincardine
16 Kinross
17 Kirkcudbright
18 Lanark
19 Midlothian
20 Moray
21 Nairn
22 Orkney
23 Peebles
24 Perth
25 Renfrew
26 Ross & Cromarty
27 Roxburgh
28 Selkirk
29 Shetland
30 Stirling
31 Sutherland
32 West Lothian
33 Wigtown

Counties of Ireland

1 Antrim
2 Armagh
3 Carlow
4 Cavan
5 Clare
6 Cork
7 Donegal
8 Down
9 Dublin
10 Fermanagh
11 Galway
12 Kerry
13 Kildare
14 Kilkenny
15 Liex (Queen's)
16 Leitrim
17 Limerick
18 Londonerry
19 Longford
20 Louth
21 Mayo
22 Meath
23 Monaghan
24 Offaly (King's)
25 Roscommon
26 Sligo
27 Tipperary
28 Tyrone
29 Waterford
30 Westmeath
31 Wexford
32 Wicklow

Counties of England and Wales

1 Anglesey
2 Bedfordshire
3 Berkshire
4 Brecknockshire
5 Buckinghamshire
6 Caernarvonshire
7 Cambridgeshire
8 Cardiganshire
9 Camarthenshire
10 Cheshire
11 Cornwall
12 Cumberland
13 Denbighshire
14 Derbyshire
15 Devonshire
16 Dorsetshire
17 Durham
18 Essex
19 Flintshire
20 Glamorganshire
21 Gloucestershire
22 Hampshire
23 Herefordshire
24 Hertfordshire
25 Huntingdonshire
26 Kent
27 Lancashire
28 Leicestershire
29 Lincolnshire
30 London
31 Merionethshire
32 Middlesex
33 Monmouthshire
34 Montgomeryshire
35 Norfolk
36 Northamptonshire
37 Northumberland
38 Nottinghamshire
39 Oxfordshire
40 Pembrokeshire
41 Radnorshire
42 Rutland
43 Shropshire
44 Somerset
45 Staffordshire
46 Suffolk
47 Surrey
48 Sussex
49 Warwickshire
50 Westmorland
51 Wiltshire
52 Worcestershire
53 Yorkshire

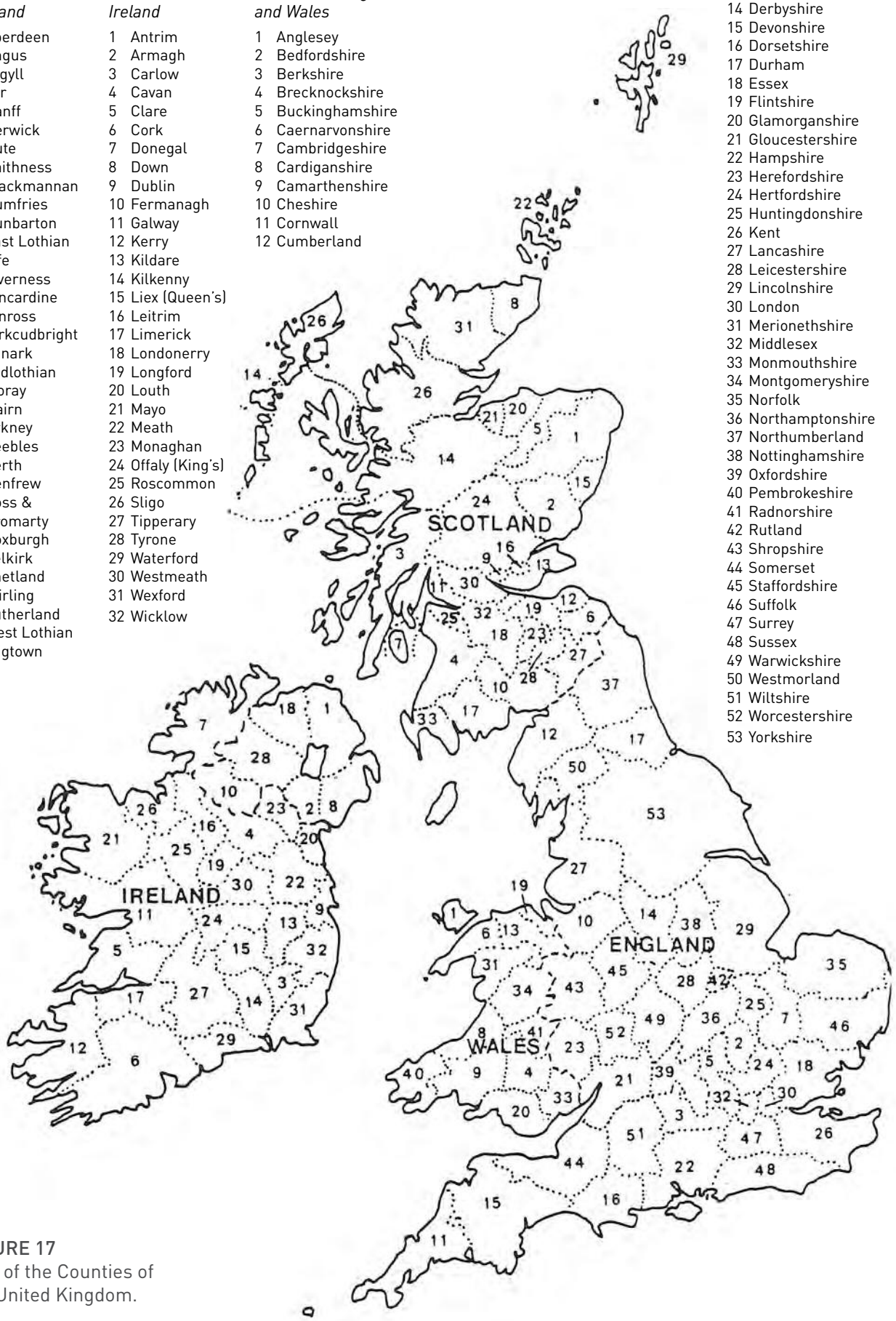


FIGURE 17
Map of the Counties of the United Kingdom.

THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND

The following two documents reveal forces pushing farm workers and labourers from rural England. Most rural labourers by this time worked as day labourers, so their income suffered in wet weather or between the seasons of farm work.

In 1850, Sir James Caird who surveyed English agriculture, wrote this of the diet of southern English agricultural labourers whose wages at 7s to 9s. per week were the lowest in the country.

DOCUMENT 2.26

We were curious to know how the money was economised, and heard from a labourer the following account of a day's diet. After doing up his horses he takes breakfast, which is made of flour with a little butter, and water 'from the tea-kettle' poured over it. He takes with him to the field a piece of bread and (if he has not a young family, and can afford it) cheese to eat at mid-day. He returns home in the afternoon to a few potatoes, and possibly a little bacon, though only those who are better off can afford this. The supper very commonly consists of bread and water. The appearance of the labourers showed, as might be expected from such meagre diet, a want of that vigour and activity which mark the well-fed ploughman of the northern and midland counties. Beer is given by the master in hay-time and harvest. Some farmers allow ground for planting potatoes to their labourers, and carry home their fuel - which on the downs, where there is no wood, is a very expensive article in a labourer's family.

Both farmers and labourers suffer in this locality from the present oversupply of labour. The farmer is compelled to employ more men than his present mode of operations require, and to save himself, he pays them a lower rate of wages...We found a prevalent desire for emigration among the labourers themselves, as their only mode of benefiting those who go and those who remain behind.

James Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-51,* London, 1852, pp. 84-85.

Although conditions were worst in the southern counties, William Cobbett, a radical journalist and passionate defender of the poor, recorded these conditions in the 1820s in midland counties. In Lincoln he observed:

DOCUMENT 2.27

Three poor fellows digging stone for the roads, who told me that they never had anything but bread to eat, and water to wash it down. One of them was a widower with three children; and his pay was eighteen pence a day; that is to say, about three pounds of bread a day each, for six days in the week: nothing for Sunday, and nothing for lodging, washing, clothing, candlelight, or fuel! Just such was the state of things in France at the eve of Revolution!

And in Leicestershire he observed of the labourers' houses:

DOCUMENT 2.28

Look at these hovels, made of mud and of straw; bits of glass, or of old cast-off windows, without frames or hinges frequently, but merely stuck in the mud wall. Enter them, and look at the bits of chairs or stools; the wretched boards tacked together to serve for a table; the floor of pebble, broken brick, or of the bare ground; look at the thing called a bed; and survey the rags on the backs of the wretched inhabitants; and then wonder if you can that the gaols and

dungeons and treadmills increase, and that a standing army and the barracks become the favourite establishments of England.

William Cobbett, *Rural Rides,* Everyman, London, 1912, pp. 253-54, 266.

Some immigrants to Port Phillip had come from towns, although this is impossible to tell from the county-wide statistics. Town workers in general received higher wages than those in rural areas, but their living conditions were often difficult. Friedrich Engels, a young German radical, who lived in the emerging industrial town of Manchester in the early 1840s, wrote this of working class living conditions in the town.

DOCUMENT 2.29

If we briefly formulate the result of our wanderings, we must admit that 350,000 working-people of Manchester and its environs live, almost all of them, in wretched, damp, filthy cottages, that the streets which surround them are usually in the most miserable and filthy condition, laid out without the slightest reference to ventilation, with reference solely to the profit secured by the contractor. In a word, we must confess that in the working-men's dwellings of Manchester, no cleanliness, no convenience, and consequently no comfortable family life is possible; that in such dwellings only a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and physically to bestiality, could feel comfortable and at home. And I am not alone in making this assertion...

It often happens that a whole Irish family is crowded into one bed; often a heap of filthy straw or quilts of old sacking cover all in an indiscriminate heap, where all alike are degraded by want, stolidity, and wretchedness. Often the inspectors found, in a single house, two families in two rooms. All slept in one, and used the other as a kitchen and dining-room in common. Often more than one family lived in a single damp cellar, in whose pestilent atmosphere twelve to sixteen persons were crowded together. To these and other sources of disease must be added that pigs were kept, and other disgusting things of the most revolting kind were found.

We must add that many families, who had but one room for themselves, receive boarders and lodgers in it, a that such lodgers of both sexes by no means rarely sleep[in the same bed with the married couple...

Society, composed wholly of atoms, does not trouble itself about them [the working class]; leaves them to care for themselves and their families, yet supplies them no means of doing this is an efficient and permanent manner. Every working-man, even the best, is therefore constantly exposed to loss of work and food, that is to death by starvation, and many perish in that way... The clothing of the workers, too is generally scanty, and that of great multitudes is in rags. The food is, in general bad; often almost unfit for use, and in many cases, at least at times, insufficient in quantity, so that, in extreme cases, death by starvation results. Thus the working class of the great cities offers a graduated scale of conditions in life, in the best cases a temporarily endurable existence for hard work and good wages, good and endurable, that is, from the workers' standpoint; in the worst cases, bitter want, reaching even homelessness and death by starvation. The average is much nearer the worst case than the best.

Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844,* Allen and Unwin, London, 1892, pp 63-65, 73-74.

FIGURE 18
Agricultural labourer's Cottage, *Illustrated London News*, 7 October 1843.

QUESTIONS

1 List the living conditions of English rural workers that could cause them to consider life elsewhere (documents 2.26 and 2.27).

2 What did Engels mean by saying English cities were 'composed wholly of atoms'?

3 List the conditions of the urban working class that shocked him.

THE CONDITION OF SCOTLAND

The two following documents will help you to assess push factors in Scotland.

In the late nineteenth century, Hugh Miller, a self-taught workingman born in County Cromarty, Scotland in 1802, recalled the conditions of Highlanders between the 1820s and 1840s.

DOCUMENT 2.30

There took place, however, about the beginning of the century, a mighty change, coincident with, and, to a certain extent, an effect of, the wars of the first French Revolution. The price of provisions rose in England and the Lowlands, and, with the price of provisions, the rent of land. The Highland proprietor naturally enough set himself to determine how his rental also was to be increased; and, as a consequence of the conclusion at which he arrived, the sheepfarm and clearance system began. Many thousand Highlanders, ejected from their snug holdings, employed their little capital in emigrating to Canada and the States; and there, in most cases, the little capital increased,

and a rude plenty continues to be enjoyed by their descendants. Many thousands more, however, fell down upon the coasts of the country, and, on mosscovered moors or bare promontories, ill suited to repay the labours of the agriculturist, commenced a sort of amphibious life as crofters [small tenant farmers] and fisherman. And, located on an ungenial soil, and prosecuting with but indifferent skill a precarious trade, their little capital dribbled out of their hands, and they became the poorest of men....The potatoes had become, as I have shown, the staple food of the Highlander; and when, in 1846, the potato-blight came on, the people, most of them previously stripped of their little capitals, and divested of their employment, were deprived of their food, and ruined at a blow. The same stroke which did little more than slightly impinge on the comforts of the people of the Lowlands, utterly prostrated the Highlanders; and ever since, the sufferings of famine have become chronic along the bleak shores and rugged islands or at least the northwestern portion of our country.

Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters,* Collins Clear-Type Press, London, no date, pp. 302-303.

An historian of Scotland, T. C. Smout, in 1986 wrote this of rural Scotland of the 1830s and 1840s.

DOCUMENT 2.31

...the highland counties as a group endured a lower per capita income than any other part of Scotland and especially the central industrial core, which held (despite the slums) the main concentration of both middle-and working- class affluence. All sorts of social and economic indicators showed the poverty of the Highlands in the 1830s and 1840s, but perhaps none more tellingly than the squalor of its people's housing and the monotony of their food.

The nature of the Highland house can be judged from the fact that while tax returns of 1842-3 gave a figure for the 'annual' (or rentable) value of the average Scottish house around 12s.[144d.] per head of population, the figure for houses down the west coast ranged from a pathetic 5d. in Skye and the Outer Hebrides to only 1s. 10d.[22d.] in western Argyl Many were described by witnesses to the Poor Law Commission as having literally no value at all, hovels of earth and stone on which no price could be put. This coast and the islands was the *locus classicus* of the 'black houses', ...The black house was a home of rough stone and turf, its heather thatch pegged to a few roof timbers, without ceiling or paved floor, and without windows or chimney. Animals (cows and perhaps a pony) shared the building for the sake of mutual warmth, but their quarters were separated at floor level from the human living space by vertical deal boarding.... The staff of Highland life was the herring and the potato, the latter a crop on which the inhabitants relied to a far greater degree than other Scots. The monotony of their fare was all too clearly encapsulated in contemporary descriptions of Highland meals. One from Ullapool speaks of potatoes and salt herring twice a day and oatmeal gruel for supper; one from Gigha of 'potatoes and fish or milk, generally twice in a day, and often three times'.

FIGURE 19
A Family on the Move.

Of Scottish Lowland farm workers, Smout wrote:

It was a hard, tough life, but the hind[farm servant] of south-east Scotland was the best-paid and best fed of Scottish farm workers,

a married man's wages being worth £25 or £26 a year in 1843, as compared to £14 to £19 at the other extreme, along the east coast north of Inverness. ...the hind's wages were still largely paid in kind - characteristically in oats, barley, peas, the free carriage of up to four tons of coal, free manured potato ground, the keep of a cow and perhaps a little extra cash...their daily meals reflected a greater affluence than further north; everyone began with a breakfast of porridge and milk, often accompanied by tea or coffee; the mid-day meal was dominated by potatoes and broth, but most people also had bacon, ham or pork(or sometimes fish or cheese as an alternative); supper consisted either of porridge or of another dish of potatoes.

T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950,* Collins, London, 1986, pp. 10-11, 16.

QUESTIONS

1 What forces and conditions in Scotland, according to Hugh Miller (document 2.30), led to a desire to emigrate?

2 List why Smout (document 2.31) believes the Highlands were Scotland's poorest region..

THE CONDITION OF IRELAND

The great problem of Ireland in the nineteenth century was the inequitable distribution of land. Alexander Somerville, a Scottish journalist, recorded his impressions of Ireland in 1847 for a Manchester newspaper. Somerville wrote with passion, being the son of a poor East Lothian rural labourer, and one who grew up in poverty in a Scottish 'black house' to become a man of letters. Somerville described the inequities of land rental in this way.

DOCUMENT 2.32

...rent was usually paid through the sheriff, his officers, the keepers put in possession of the pigs and potatoes, corn and cows, and the armed police who assisted the keepers to keep possession. The property distrained upon was sold by any one whom the landlord or his agent appointed. ...he got legal possession of the crops by means of this distraint and by the aid of the armed police, and he sent the corn, pigs, potatoes, or whatever the property might be, to a seaport town for shipment to England. Arrived in England, they were sold readily. The landlord got his rent by their sale in England, not by their sale under the hammer in Ireland; and the people of England were pleased to find so much food coming form Ireland, though often wondering why the Irish people should be so poorly fed at home, as report said they were, when they sent so much food to England. ...the people were ragged to a degree of wretchedness not seen in any other country; they were lodged with their pigs, the pigs not having a better lodging than a sty, and the food of the people was potatoes, and only as many of them as the distraint system of getting rent left them. ...

This was rendered all the worse by the next characteristic of Ireland, namely, that those tenants thus distrained upon were tenants in the third or fourth degree. The head landlord was not the receiver of the rents. Some leaseholder was under him, both of them perhaps being non-resident. A person of some capital, of much energy, and little conscience, took a townland or other

such portion of an estate. He let that out again at a rent which none of the peasantry who became his tenants could pay, which he knew they could not pay, but which, in the intense competition for land to keep in bare life, they engaged to pay; they not being able to get out of arrears at any time, could always be seized upon by him, and this has been the system - whenever they had anything. He was thus able at harvest time, by the arrears due, to seize, sell, and send to England, or to certain stores to be ready for the English market, the corn and potatoes, before the producer of them eat too much. ... As much was left to the miserable tenantry, but no more, than would keep them in life, with strength enough to put another crop in the ground.

Alexander Somerville, *Letters from Ireland During the Famine of 1847,* K. D. M. Snell (ed.), Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1994, pp. 29-30.

QUESTIONS

1 Check 'distraint' in your dictionary.

2 Then describe the distraint system as outlined by Somerville in document 2.32.

3 Discuss the reasonableness of this system and how it might be viewed by the Irish small tenant farmers.

The Irish historian, Georoid O' Tuathaigh in these extracts describes some of Ireland's economic difficulties. Of its industrial sector he wrote:

DOCUMENT 2.33

By the terms of the Union [of 1800], Ireland and Britain were to be henceforth a single free trade area. However, it was conceded that certain Irish industries would need time to adjust to the new arrangements. Accordingly it was agreed that an *ad valorem* of ten per cent be retained by some eighteen articles until 1821. ...in 1820 these duties were reviewed and the Government first suggested that the ten per cent should remain until 1825, then be phased out prior to final abolition in 1840. However, the Huskissonite free traders in the Government secured the total abolition of duties in 1824. ... From the 1820s on there was widespread distress and unemployment throughout much of the country as industries based on small-scale handcraft gradually gave way before cheaper mass-produced articles...

No doubt the apparent coincidence between the onset of this long cycle of industrial decline and the dismantling of the tariffs prompted the belief in a casual relationship between the two. Such an explanation, however, fails to take note of Ireland's 'economic situation' in the age of the industrial revolution...

The resources of coal and iron in Ireland were very poor, and consequently in the steam age Irish industry was faced from the outset with certain handicaps in any competition with her near neighbour. Raw materials could, of course, be imported, and they were. But this added to costs and, within the Irish economy, placed those ports facing Britain in a relatively favoured position. English factory production, particularly inn textiles, became increasingly mechanised and with the combination of increased output and a reduction of unit costs, English manufacturers were able to meet and beat any other manufacturers sharing the same market...The selling price of mass-produced British goods was so much cheaper than the corresponding Irish products that

> it is likely that they would eventually have succeeded in jumping even the most prohibitive of tariff walls.
>
> British industry's invasion of the Irish market also owed much to the growth of quicker and cheaper transport facilities...
>
> Difficulty of access gave some industries temporary insulation in their local markets, and it was the advent of the railway which finally made Britain and Ireland a single integrated market economy. As late as 1841, over 700,000 gave their occupation as textile workers. However, in order to compete with cheaper imports, these workers were having to sell their products at a lower price, or to work for a lower wage. There can be no doubt that their living standards declined appreciably in the 1820s and 1830s. Many full-time weavers became unemployed; those who had combined part-time weaving with small farming were driven to a total reliance on the land. For those who could not find work or a potato patch there was only the emigrant ship as an escape...

O' Tuathaigh argued that agriculture was the most important sector of the Irish economy. It expanded to cater for a rising population which expanded from 6.8 to 8.2 million people between 1821 to 1841.

> Part of this tillage increase was achieved through reclaiming land hitherto uncultivated. Plots were extended onto the sides of mountains, and to this day the vestiges of pre-famine cultivation can be recognised in those fading lines which mark many an Irish hillside like old surgical scars. Increased potato cultivation reflects not only expansion of acreage but also increase yields, as cultivation of the inferior quality 'lumper' potato became more widespread...
>
> Increased production did not, as we have already noticed, mean a widening base of those sharing in its profits. In fact throughout the eighteen-twenties and thirties there was a marked increase in economic hardship and social disorder. Ejectments became common, as did the incidence of forceful distraining of goods in lieu of [rent] arrears. Landlords were anxious to clear their estates of insolvent tenants and to re-let lots by auction to the highest bidders, recognising no occupancy rights whatever. Rents for subsistence plots were determined by desperate land hunger rather than by the productivity of the soil; and access to conacre land become more difficult and more expensive. Even more serious was the fact that the continued health of the potato crop could not be relied upon. In 1817 there was a serious potato crop failure and distress and hunger were severe. Again in 1821 there was widespread failure of the crop west of a line from Derry to Cork, with distress particularly acute along the Atlantic coast...
>
> The increase in the incidence and intensity of economic hardship had its concomitant a serious escalation in rural disorder. Agrarian secret societies, like the Rockites, Whitefeet and Terryalts, were active over wide areas of the countryside. Land hunger and the struggle to survive were the forces which drove the cottiers and labourers into the secret societies [resulting in] threatening notices, maiming cattle, burning hay, ploughing up grassland and personal assault and battery...
>
> The cumulative effect of many factors - minor potato failures bringing famine, fever and death in their train; chronic unemployment in town and country due to surplus labour and industrial decline - began to register in the eighteen-thirties. There was a drop in the rate of population growth. The total still rose, but the rate of increase had dropped. Alongside this drop in the growth rate, the Irish population in the eighteen-thirties lost an increasing number through emigration. It is estimated that about 1.1 million Irishmen

emigrated to the United States and Canada between 1780 and 1845, about 400, 000 of whom went during the decade 1831-1841. Emigration to Britain was also increasing. In 1841 there were about 420,000 Irish-born in Britain, some 100,000 of whom had arrived during the preceding decade.

Gearoid O' Tuathaigh, *Ireland Before the Famine 1798-1848*, Gill and Macmullan, Dublin, 1972, pp. 118, 119, 120, 121, 137, 138, 140-141.

QUESTIONS

1 List the problems of the Irish economy in the first half of the nineteenth century as set out by O'Tuathaigh.

2 How did these problems affect small farmers and rural workers in Ireland before 1845?

FIGURE 20
Ejectment of Irish Tenants,
Illustrated London News, 16 December 1848.

QUESTION

1 Describe the action in this illustration. How does it compare with Somerville's account, document 2.32?

Minor potato blights caused by a fungus, *Phytophthora infestans*, were common in Ireland. However, in 1846 and 1847 two successive major blights plunged Ireland (and parts of Europe) into mass starvation and turmoil. At first the British Government responded with relief work, and the importation of Indian corn for food distribution, but too little money was given to such efforts, especially after the first of these two years. Alexander Somerville described what he saw after the first year of famine, before conditions reached their worst level.

DOCUMENT 2.34

People are dying of want, and of diseases induced by want. Those alive are, day by day, becoming too feeble to work. They have just been able to do enough to break up half the roads in Ireland in the process of giving public work for public relief, and in that state, almost impassable- in many parts utterly so - the roads must be left. The feeble beings are not able to continue at them if it were desirable they should. It is not desirable. It is imperiously necessary that the fields should be prepared, and planted, and sown. The people have no seed. They have no interest in the land themselves; they never had. The most they ever obtained was a meagre subsistence; the rent was taken from them as I have described. The pay they now receive is not enough to get them food, at present prices, to keep up their working strength. Such as it is on the roads it would only be on the land; they see no difference. Those who can pay rent will not do it; those who have nothing to pay rent with cannot. The landlords, most of them only nominally landowners, are not receiving rent; and they are without funds and without credit. The estates are mortgaged to their full value. Never, in the known history of mankind, was there a country and its people in such imminent hazard of perishing utterly. Apart altogether from the claims which one human being has upon another for life, if that other can save his life, I urge the imminent distress of Ireland upon the attention of England on another ground, which is, that if the land is not sown and planted, the famine of next year will be immeasurably more disastrous than the famine of this year; and if the people are not fed to keep them from sinking down upon and under the earth, which they are now doing, the land cannot be cultivated.

Somerville, *Letters From Ireland During the Famine of 1847,* pp. *31-32.*

The historian, Cecil Woodham-Smith, at the end of his book on the Famine, *The Great Hunger,* commented on the British reaction and the consequences for Ireland.

DOCUMENT 2.35

These misfortunes were not part of a plan to destroy the Irish nation; they fell on the people because the government of Lord John Russell was afflicted with an extraordinary inability to foresee consequences....Much of this obtuseness sprang from the fanatical faith of mid-nineteenth century British politicians in the economic doctrine of *laissez-faire*, no interference by government, no meddling with the operation of natural causes. Adherence to *laissez-faire* was carried to such a length that in the midst of one of the major famines of history, the government was perpetually nervous of being too good to Ireland and of corrupting the Irish people by kindness, and so stifling the virtues of self-reliance and industry. In addition hearts were hardened by the antagonism then felt by the English towards the Irish, an antagonism rooted far back in religious and political history...

In 1841 the population of Ireland was given as 8,175,124; in 1851, after the famine, it had dropped to 6,552,385, and the Census Commissioners calculated that, at the normal rate of increase, the total should have been 9,018,799, so that a loss of at least 2.5 million persons had taken place. Between 1846 and 1851, nearly a million persons had emigrated, and it therefore appears that, roughly, about a million and a half perished during the famine, of hunger, diseases brought on by hunger, and fever.

Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-9,* Hamish Hamilton, London, 1962, pp. 410-411.

QUESTIONS

1 Write a paragraph on the relationship between famine and emigration from documents 2.34 and 2.35 and figure 20.

2 Write an overview essay about push factors involved in emigration from England, Ireland and Scotland to Port Phillip from your analysis of documents 2.25 to 2.35.

AN IMMIGRANT PERSONALITY?

FIGURE 21

Currier and Ives, 'Outward Bound', 1845.

Museum of the City of New York.

QUESTION

1 How is this potential emigrant being portrayed?

We know about assisted immigrants because of the bureaucratic nature of the records generated about them. This is not the case with the two-thirds or 60,000 people who came unassisted. We know that they had the desire to uproot themselves and face a 110 day voyage across the globe at a cost of between £25 and £40. The cost of their fare alone was more than the annual wage of a rural labourer in Britain at the time. Apart from this knowledge we can only talk in generalities or undertake particular case studies where the records exist.

Another way is to consider what type of personality saw emigration as an option. Was it desperation or ambition that caused most to alter their worlds for ever? At the time most emigrants were depicted as the refuse of their society. Examine figure 11 and consider the related questions.

We cannot survey, by personality tests, emigrants, long dead. However, one psychologist, Alan Richardson, administered surveys to British migrants of the *1950s*. He discovered that migrants generally came from large families which enable them to avoid responsibilities to parents. They were not strong family-orientated people, and had broken their ties to family and home by frequent changes of residence and jobs before emigration. Finally, they tended to have 'energetic, outgoing personalities' and were always in search of something better.[2]

It is clear that those who lived in Britain in the 1830s were much more physically mobile than their parents or any previous British generation. The growth of communications beginning with the canal building of the 1790s, the growth of large towns and new jobs with industrialization, all put people in motion. But were emigrants to be found among these restless, energetic and ambitious types as Richardson suggests? And what of their beliefs and values that might have encouraged their emigration? The following documents address these questions. The first are some letters to the editor of an emigrant advice magazine published

2 A. Richardson, *British Immigrants and Australia: A Psycho-social Inquiry*, ANU, Canberra, 1974.

in London. The editor, Samuel Sidney, advised each of these three writers below to emigrate.

DOCUMENT 2.36

Gentlemen,- I am a gardener, with a wife and family of three boys, -one, eight, and ten years respectively. I receive a guinea [21 shillings] per week, out of which, after pinching our bellies, I can save only about 3s. Can you inform me if gardeners are much in request in Australia? I am a man that will work if properly remunerated, but I should like to get a farm of my own, so that I might receive the profits of my industry. I have no money at present. Both my wife and I are careful of what we earn. I was a ploughboy up to the age of seventeen, and would willingly become a ploughboy again if I could benefit by so doing. I see no chance of doing anything for my family here. Will you also inform me what is the smallest sum of money you would recommend a hard-working, farming man, with a wife and three small children, to save before starting to Australia or America, and to what part to proceed?

Gentlemen.- I take the liberty of writing to you respecting emigration to Australia. Of late, I have had a strong inclination to go to some part of that fine country, but I must confess that I feel rather timid about starting, and leaving my native country for a strange one at so great a distance as Australia is from us. I will inform you of my situation as clearly as I can, so that you may be able to give me your advice. I am a blacksmith in a country village, and have been in business for myself for six years; I am single, 26 years of age, enjoy good health, and with no encumbrance whatever; but more work and better payment for it, is what I desire. Although wishful to marry and bring up family respectably, there is, at present, no encouragement to do so. I have no desire to leave my native country, if there was any prospect of obtaining a living here comfortable. I could raise, perhaps, about 100 l.[pounds], and would have no objection to turn my hand to anything. I wish to ask you if the climate is comfortably, and whether there are many annoying and dangerous reptiles, such as snakes, &c.?

Gentlemen.- I am 32 years of age ; I have been in Jamaica for six years; two years on a cattle-pen, rearing stock, and four years in the cultivation and manufacture of sugar and rum. I have a slight knowledge of carpentering, woodturning, and coopering, and I could manage to shoe a horse. I have for the last six years kept a grocer and cheesemonger's shop; my wife is 26 years of age, and is a pretty good milliner; we have one child 4, another 2, and an infant under I year of age. I think I could muster, by turning everything into cash, about 250 l. What would you advise me to do? My present income is 100 l. per annum, and I incline to go to Australia.

Sidney's Emigrant Journal, vol. 3, no. 3, 19 October 1848, pp. 21-22.

QUESTIONS

1. Do these letter-writers match any of the characteristics identified by Richardson above?
2. Identify the values and beliefs that influenced these men to consider emigration.
3. Where on the social scale were these people to be found? What does that indicate about the migrant type?
4. Consider how the discussion of emigration in document 2.36 was gendered.

These documents from *Sidney's Emigrant Journal* were from people who were only considering emigration. We do not know whether they actually moved. However, we can examine the ideas and beliefs of those who had moved to Australia, through statements that Caroline Chisholm wrote down in New South Wales in the 1840s. She used them to advertise the benefits of migration in Britain. Their experience is indicative of conditions in Port Phillip, then part of New South Wales.

DOCUMENT 2.37

Statement No.1

John O, [formerly of] Commercial Road, London.

I arrived at Sydney in 1833; I am a married man, have two children. I am now working at the sugar manufactory at Canterbury, five miles from Sydney, earn about £2 per week. I bought nearly three acres of land at Canterbury, for which I paid at the rate of £100 the acre, have nine cottages my own, built them myself, they are rented at two shillings a week each; I have a garden and have 47 head of cattle running upon Mr Cooper's land, our agreement is , he is to have half the increase. I do not know the number I have now...It's five years they have been on his run. When I arrived in Sydney I had one penny. When I sailed from Liverpool I had this penny. I tell you the whole truth. I worked hard when I arrived, as bricklayer, plasterer, or any work I could get... I have 700 acres of land on the north shore, this is now let at £20 a year. I paid five shillings an acre for it... My brother Mick lives in Plumer's Row, Commercial Road [London]. Now be sure you see them, and do all you can to get them out [to Australia].

Sydney, 10th February, 1846.

Statement No.5

Ellen W, [formerly of] London.

I arrived in 1833. I am married to George W.- my maiden name was T-; we are doing well; I wish to have out my sister...her name is Emma; she is about twenty-two years of age; will give her a comfortable home. Now you mind to tell her that her sister Mary Ann is married well, and lives in the Goulburn District. My brother is doing well. Neither of us have wanted for anything in this country... We pay eighteen shillings a week rent but it is well we get on. Oh, what a difference there is between this country and home for poor folks. I know I would not go back again,- I know what England is. Old England is a fine place for the rich, but the Lord help the poor.

Sydney, 11th March 1846.

Statement No.14

William C, [formerly of] Surrey.

I am from Surrey; married two months after my arrival to Jane M- ...left two married sisters at home...

Wife says: 'Father and mother came with me, and have done comfortably well. [They] have thirty acres of wheat in, nine acres of corn; have eight bullocks, one cow, a good many pigs,- they are very comfortably doing now. This is our first year on the land. We have one cow, one heifer, and six pigs, and everything that we want. I am a great deal better off that at home. I would not go home again, would you? ... We bake our own bread, English fashion; have

meat, bread, butter, and tea three times a day, and plenty of eggs. My husband jobs a little; makes money handy, if we wants it. We use a pound and a half of tea a week, but if you tell that in your book, they'll think it so terribly out of the way, so better say one pound; sugar eight pounds a week. We use quite thirty pounds of meat a week; I'm blessed! If you say forty pounds you'll be on the right side. We are not obliged to spare,- have as much plain food as we can make use of. My sister Matilda cannot mistake the token I send her. Ask her if she remembers the beating father gave her. My other sister, Harriet, has three children; the one token will do for both.'

Caroline Chisholm, *Voluntary Information of the People of New South Wales,* London, 1847, appendix.

QUESTIONS

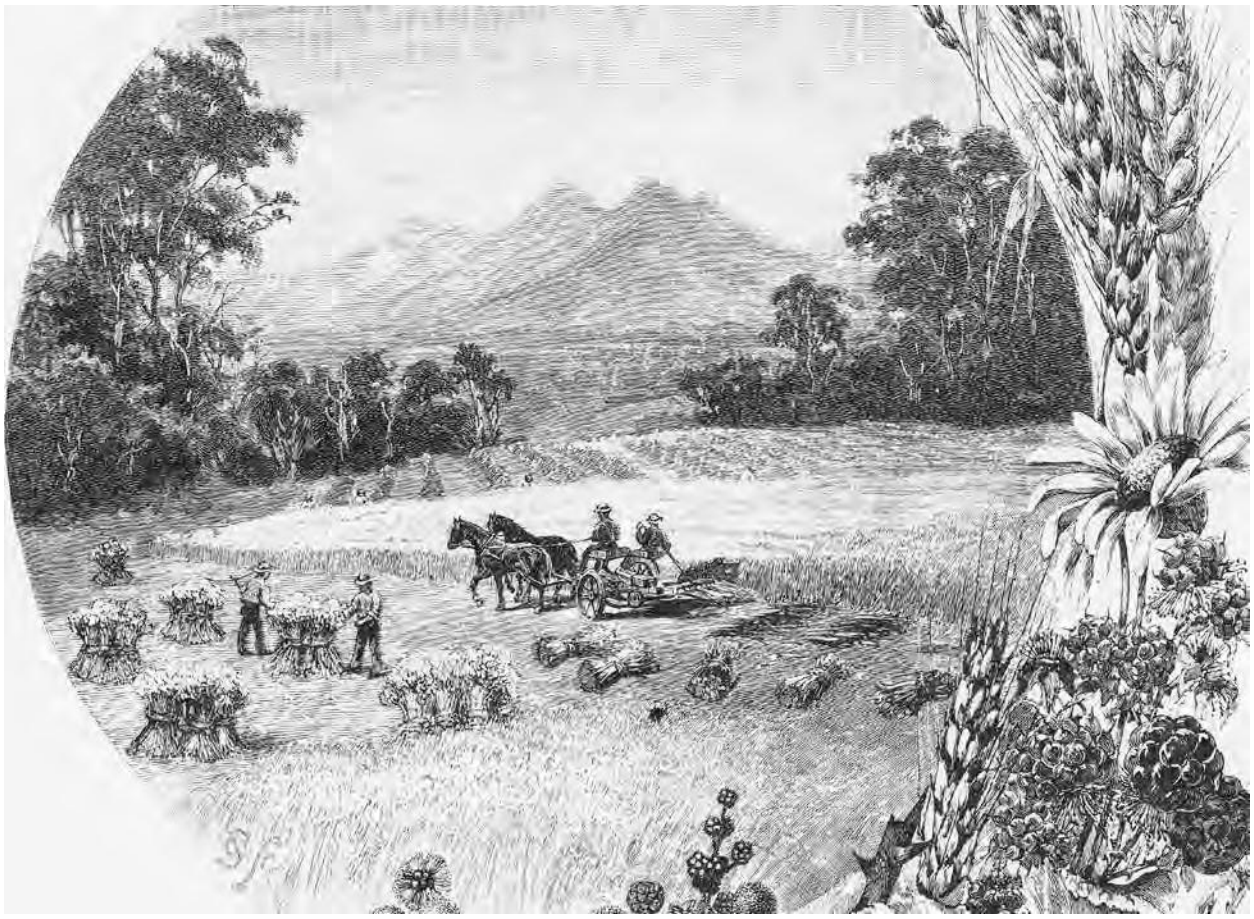
1 What values and beliefs do these three statements reveal?

2 How do they compare with those identified in document 2.37, who were considering emigration?

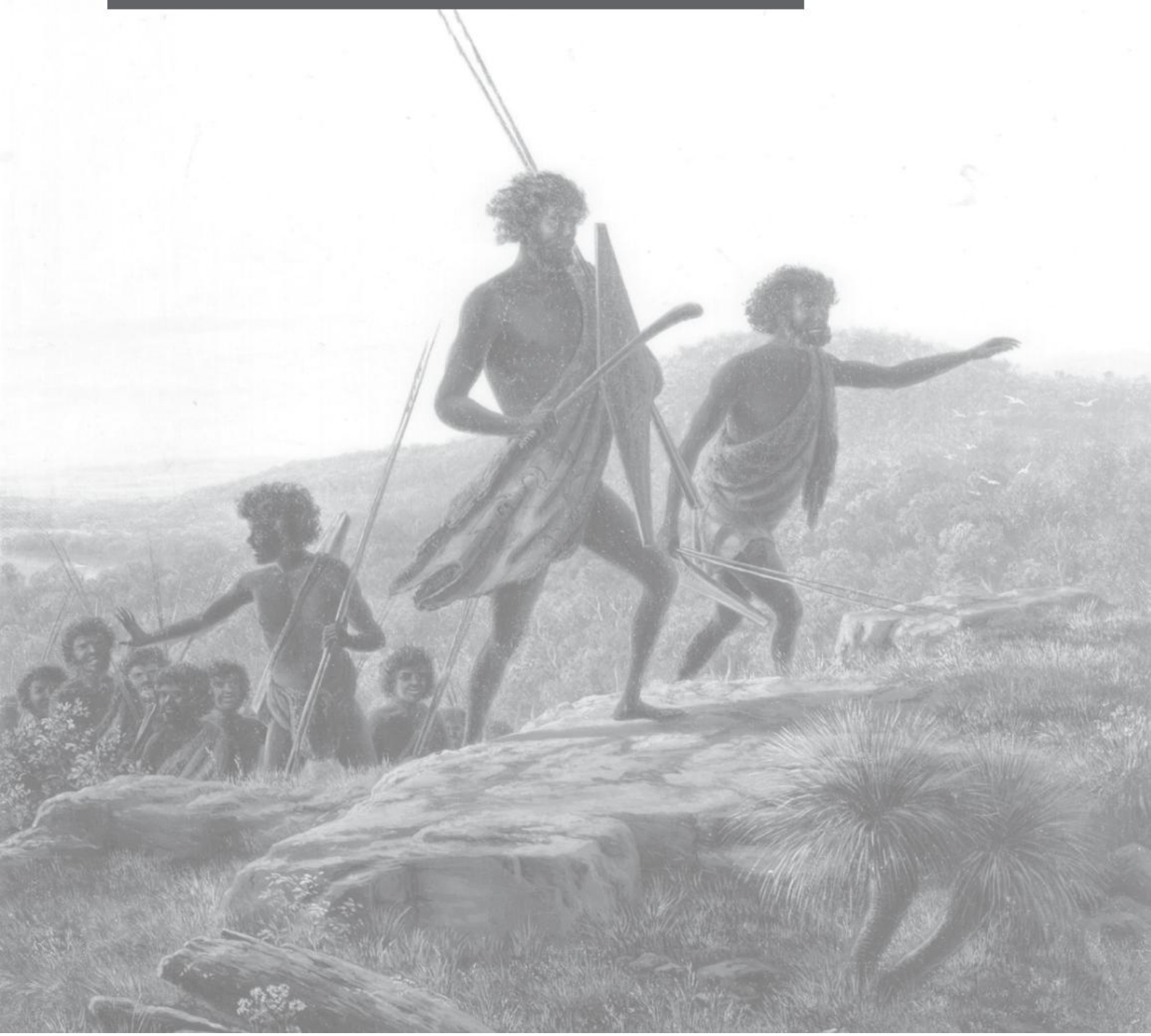
3 List the benefits these people found from living in New South Wales.

4 Discuss how these statements might have been received by the rural populations of England, Scotland and Ireland. Use your reading of documents 2.26 to 2.35 and figures 18 to 21 to answer this question.

FIGURE 22
Haymaking near the You Yangs.
Historical Sketches of Victoria, Ure Smith, 1886.



EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF COLONISATION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO 1860



ABOVE: Frederick Grosse. Emigrants landing at the Queen's Wharf, Melbourne.
nla.pic-an7497113 National Library of Australia.

THE NATURE OF COLONIALISM

With the coming of the Europeans in 1834-35, the world of the Aboriginal people of the region was changed for all time. We will investigate the nature of these changes and how the Aborigines of Port Phillip/Victoria responded to the new challenges before them. However, first we must understand the nature of Colonialism.

COLONIALISM

Colonialism involves the taking of other peoples' land and livelihood. The period from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries was the great era of European expansionism and control over other lands and over other peoples across the seas in Asia, the Americas, the Pacific and Australasia, for commercial exploitation, and strategic gains to protect commercial advantages. For both these reasons Europeans came to Port Phillip.

Such acts of exploitation had to be faced up to by all parties involved, and in a sense our own post-Mabo society is still coming to terms with the legacy of these years.

The first document by the Tunisian writer, Albert Memmi, written in the 1960s, raises this question of what Colonialism meant for those at the time and outlines what he terms the 'usurper complex'.

DOCUMENT 3.1

As was stated before, accepting the reality of being a colonizer means agreeing to be a non-legitimate privileged person, that is, a usurper. To be sure, a usurper claims his place and, if need be, will defend it by every means at his disposal... In other words, to possess victory completely he needs to absolve himself of it and the conditions under which it was attained...

How? How can usurpation try to pass for legitimacy? ... One attempt can be made by demonstrating the usurper's eminent merits, so eminent that they deserve compensation. Another is to harp on the usurped's demerits, so deep that they cannot help leading to misfortune. ...He never forgets to make a public show of his own virtues, and will argue with vehemence to appear heroic and great. At the same time his privileges arise just as much from his glory as from degrading the colonized. He will persist in degrading them, using the darkest colors to depict them. If need be, he will act to devalue them, annihilate them....The distance which colonization places between him and the colonized must be accounted for and, to justify himself, he increases this distance still further by placing the two figures irretrievably in opposition; his glorious position and the despicable one of the colonized.

Memmi then explains how two portraits or myths are constructed by the colonizers, one of themselves as great, the other of the indigenous people as unworthy. These ideas can lead to racism, which develops when people are said to be inferior because of their biological make-up – thus their inferiority cannot be altered.

Racism appears then, not as an incidental detail, but as a consubstantial part of colonialism. It is the highest expression of the colonial system and one of the most significant features of the colonialist. Not only does it establish a fundamental discrimination between colonizer and colonized, a *sine qua non* of colonial life, but it also lays the foundation for the immutability of this life.

Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1967, pp. 52, 53, 54-55, 74.

QUESTIONS

1. Check the meanings of 'usurper' and 'racism' in your dictionary.
2. In your own words summarise Memmi's arguments about the demands of Colonialism.
3. What is the connection between racism and the 'usurper complex'?

The next four documents reveal European responses of the 1840s in Port Phillip to the act of colonial possession.

Charles Griffith, a Port Phillip settler, wrote this in his book, *The Present State and Prospects of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales:*

DOCUMENT 3.2

The question comes to this: which has the better right - the savage, born in a country, which he runs over, but can scarcely be said to occupy, the representatives of a race, which for ages have left unimproved the splendid domains spread out before them, as if to tempt their industry, but of which they may be deemed to have refused the possession; or , the civilized man, who comes to introduce into this unimproved and, hitherto, unproductive country, the industry which supports life, and the arts which adorn it, who will render it capable of maintaining millions of human beings more clearly in that position, which it was intended that men should hold in the scale of creation? I conceive that the original right, whatever it may have been, which the savage possessed, that right, by his lackes [sic], he has forfeited. The Commission to 'go forth and replenish the earth, and possess it', implies something more than the mere obtaining a precarious subsistence from the casual bounty of nature; the thorn and the briar were to be uprooted, and the herb yielding food to be planted in its place... The duties the savage has for centuries neglected, and thus, in my mind, abandoned his inheritance...

If the white man had a right to occupy the country, the native, by opposing no vain resistance to his doing so, acquires no fresh rights; and the indulgence which he is entitled to at the hands of civilized man, is that of an ignorant, and therefore weak being, from one superior to him in knowledge and power, and not as an equivalent for any property that he has given up, or any rights that he has surrendered.

Charles Griffith, *The Present State and Prospects of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales*, William Curry Jr, Dublin, 1845, pp. 169, 171.

Another settler, William Hull, commented in 1846:

DOCUMENT 3.3

It is an axiom of civil life, that no nation or tribe can acquire or maintain a right to the soil, unless it profitably occupies or tills it. Admitting such a rule-the nomadick [sic] tribes of Australia cannot be said to be dispossessed of their country.

William Hull, *Remarks on the Probable Origins and Antiquity of the Aboriginal Natives of New South Wales,* Melbourne, 1846, p. 21.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the essential arguments of Griffith.
2. What was the 'original right' of the 'savage' and why does Griffith believe it has been forfeited?
3. Does Hull agree with Griffiths' views?
4. Explain how these views relate to the values of immigrants identified in Investigation 2.
5. Check Genesis 1:28 in a Bible and consider the religious overtones to Griffith's argument. Do you agree with him that this passage implies more than 'obtaining a precarious subsistence from the casual bounty of nature'?
6. How do Griffith and Hull assume occupation took place? Discuss whether the Europeans settled or invaded. How does your discussion shape how you read these two documents?
7. Was Hull right to call his views an axiom or rule? Might it be an opinion? (For more on this you may care to read Henry Reynolds' book, *The Law of the Land*, 1987, pp. 14-18).

QUESTION

1. What do you think Gill's feelings are about colonisation as expressed in this image?

FIGURE 23
'The Colonized' by S. T. Gill.
Dixson Library, State Library of NSW.

Others at the time saw things differently. An Assistant Aboriginal Protector, James Dredge, a schoolmaster from Salisbury, England, who later became a Methodist missionary, had this to say in a pamphlet in 1845:

DOCUMENT 3.4

It matters but little that we attempt to establish a right to take possession of their territory on the allegation that they were unable to turn it to the same productive account as we; - that they derived their *living* from it is a fact which cannot be denied - and surely nothing can justify our taking that subsistence from them and withholding, instead, other means of support...

What an anomalous aspect then does the present position of the Australian Aborigines in New South Wales exhibit! Their lands are taken from them at the mere will of the British Government, and sold or let to strangers without any reference to their approbation, conveniences, or necessities - they are forced off to make way for others, and no suitable provision is elsewhere made for them as an equivalent. Themselves are proclaimed to be British subjects, and entitled to the immunities of such, yet they are placed under no control, but wander about as they like; no suitable efforts are made to instruct them in the nature of their new relations, whilst such attempts as have been made to ameliorate their condition have been either grossly misdirected or abortively inefficient. Sometimes they congregate about the towns in large numbers, exhibiting the most humiliating spectacle of the degradation of which human nature is capable - diseased, filthy, and disgusting in their appearance - like starving mendicants clamouring for food and money, the latter being too frequently expended in procuring intoxicating liquors, scarce a day passes without some acts of pilfering, which are generally too dexterous for detection. ...

Where, it may be asked, throughout the wide spread dominions of Britain, does there exist a people so helplessly situated, so degraded, so neglected, so oppressed?

James Dredge, *Brief Notes of the Aborigines of New South Wales, including Port Phillip*, James Harrison, Geelong, 1845, pp. 12, 29, 31.

A Quaker visitor to Australia, James Backhouse, had this to say in 1843:

DOCUMENT 3.5

If Europeans occupy the country of savages, the former must act justly, from principle, if they would act as Christians. The untutored natives, forming a thinly scattered and unorganized population, can neither assert nor defend their own rights. It is in cases like this, that principle is put to the Test; and it is lamentable to see, how little principle, in this respect, has been exhibited, in these cases, either by the British Government, or by its European subjects. People in England, maintaining a good character, are little aware, how much of what gains them their character, they owe to the oversight of those, by whom they are continually surrounded, and how little with principle. When they emigrate to a country, where this oversight is withdrawn, too generally, but little that has the appearance of principle remains, especially in their conduct toward the defenceless Aborigines.

Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, p. 503.

QUESTIONS

1. How do Dredge and Backhouse answer Griffith's arguments and Hull's axiom?
2. Was Dredge right to use the word 'oppressed'?
3. What does Backhouse detect about colonies?
4. Do Griffith and Dredge agree as to the role of governments in colonial situations?

The meeting of two cultures in a colonial situation creates ethical difficulties as we have seen. It is also bewildering when people on both sides are faced with Others who are so culturally divergent. The colonial power struggle increases the importance of those differences.

Document 2.6 presents the views of an educated European, which were more liberal than those held by ordinary settlers. Richard Howitt, an English Quaker who settled in Port Phillip in 1840 wrote his book, *Impressions of Australia Felix*, (1845), after returning to England as a failed settler. He described the Aborigines thus:

DOCUMENT 3.6

Soon we had at our fire the singular, wild, red-and-white-earth-smeared-dirt-andwhalegrease-promatumed aborigines. It was odd enough in this strange land to hear such creatures singing the beautiful songs of Burns -correctly too- with a grand rich voice; contrasted too with their outlandish dresses, and rude head ornaments - feathers of their country birds, and a profusion of kangaroo teeth. [As he passed them on the road to Melbourne he heard] 'Good morning, Sir' say the picanininnies. 'Where you go', asks another.

Of all the novelties of a new land, that which was with us a matter of the greatest interest and curiosity, previous to our arrival in the colony, was the kind of people and the condition in which we should find the natives... With what avidity, from very childhood, had we read and heard of all strange people of all strange lands! And here we were going to come, for the first time, into contact with a race as strange and singular as any of them. In Melbourne they were first seen, and what a contrast did they present, so seen, with the European inhabitants! Already they were become, not only Gibeonites, hewers of wood and drawers of water, for the white strangers - they were beggars, and they swarmed about the newly-arrived with great earnestness, probably finding that their importunities had not yet produced the usual effect. Women in their dirty brown blanket mantles, with their hair in elf locks, and faces flaming like a sunset, reddened, especially about their eyes, with a similar coloured earth, with ornaments of cane-beads about one of their ankles [sic] and one on the wrist, and sometimes necklaces of the same...others we saw chopping wood in kitchen-yards, white women giving them directions how to do their work. The men were leisurely, more like holiday people, were stopping the settlers who rode through the street to shake hands, and very cordially did the settlers shake them by the hand, and gave them money - white money too. A vast deal of English and the native language we heard the first few days, chopped up together, and odd enough it sounded...

There is something in the corrobory unimaginably wild and grotesque; celebrated as it is by night in the present of vast fires; their dusky painted figures mingling oddly; their wild gesticulations and uncouth voices, modulated to suit savage ears, in the strong glaring light and the dense darkness. Movement and voice in most outlandish unison, sometimes slow

and solemn, then rapid and shrill, and as suddenly ended, and all hushed! ... Glimpses of what was seen will haunt the soul years after such exhibitions. You hear the wild songs; see the dusky figures moving...

I have never seen more graceful figures than many of the Australian blacks; the men some of them venerable-looking, with quite Roman-like nobility of contour; bold, strong, well-rounded limbs, and fine countenances. The lubras, as I have said, are not very beautiful... Anything more droll or ludicrous cannot be imagined than are some of them; large-bodied creatures with two very lean mop-stick like legs; then large flattish round heads, with bodies and legs like a pole; and with scarcely anything to hide their grim unshapeliness... There are, however, exceptions; there are, we must admit, some not exactly handsome, but pleasing-looking women. Both men and women, lords and their slaves, are, though lamentably situated, and low as human nature can descend, human creatures - of the same, I am convinced, origin with our race; firm as marble to retain their old freedom and habits, and soft as wax to take the impression of what there is degrading and demoralising amongst us. We have done them some good, and much harm...

Had they been in a more civilised state it would have been singular; for no country on the face of the earth yet discovered had been so destitute of the means of fixed residence, corn and fruits, for the localisation of a people. It is easy to call a native a fool for not providing himself with a house, but it is not so easy to furnish him with a fixed maintenance. It is not all at once that even Europeans can change their own fixed habits. The mode of life of the natives of New Holland is the natural result, age after age, of the one compelling necessity of roaming over the land in search of food. The blandness of the climate, too, tends to perpetuate such a kind of existence.

QUESTION

1 Compare this image with figure 23. Is Gill giving a different representation here? Explain.

FIGURE 24
'Scene at the Door' by S. T. Gill.
nla.pic-an2351777. National Library of Australia

Howitt included in his book a poem he wrote, which went in part:

The Native Woman's Lament

When he was weak and we were strong
The white man's soul was warmth and light;
With friendly smiles and gentle tongue
He talked of reason and of right.

He asked of us in language meek,
Where flocks and herds might well abide;
We led to river and to creek,
Fair streams and pastures, green and wide.

Now they are many- we are few,
Still brightly shines the sun and moon;
The white man wears an altered hue,
His soul, his face are dark at noon.

The white man tells us where to go,
he tells us where to turn and stand,
Where our own creeks and rivers flow,
In their old freedom, through the land.

His flocks and herds our forests fill;
A thousand woods we wander through;
And hunger - yet we may not kill
The white man's woolly kangaroo.

O, Sorrow! Weary little one!
O, helpless, and ill-fated child!
The food, the life, the land is gone-
And we must perish in the wild!

Richard Howitt, *Impressions of Australia Felix,* Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1845, pp. 86, 103, 185, 188-89, 196, 197, 173-74.

QUESTIONS

1. How did Howitt physically describe the Aborigines? Note and explain any complexities in his views.
2. Outline the position he gives them in relation to whites.
3. Discuss the reason(s) he gives for the Aborigines not being 'in a more civilised state'.
4. Consider his description of the corroboree, especially his view that its memory will 'haunt the soul'.
5. How do Howitt's views in his poem accord with his other statements?
6. Write a brief paragraph outlining and discussing the contradictions in Howitt's views.

Howitt's views were fairly typical of the time, and indeed, more liberal and fair-minded than most. The historian, Henry Reynolds, has written of prevailing ideas in early Australia:

DOCUMENT 3.7

The British were convinced that the Aborigines were savages even before the settlement of Australia, and they knew all about savages. For centuries a composite picture of the savage had been building up in the European imagination. When in the middle of the seventeenth century the English philosopher Thomas Hobbs described the primitive condition of man as 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short' he was summarising both 'a large body of literature and the existing state of informed opinion'... The image was impervious to experience; it was much the same in 1888, after a century of settlement, as it had been in the first few weeks at Sydney Cove....The Presbyterian clergyman J. D. Lang claimed that it was 'a damnable doctrine of some, at least, of the Australian squatters - that the black man of the forests of Australia is originally no better than the ourang-outang or monkey'...

The growth of scientific racism was a European rather than a purely Australian phenomenon. A small colonial society had little chance of resisting the most powerful intellectual currents of the age. But it is equally true that racism furthered the material interests of most settlers. It made it so much easier to take Aboriginal land without negotiation or purchase, to crush resistance to the dispossession and then keep the survivors 'in their place'... As long as the whites continued to believe the blacks were primitive savages it could all be done with a clear conscience... For compelling economic and psychological reasons the Aborigines had to remain underfoot. The development of ideas about the blacks was thus only partly due to broader intellectual movements. The central fact was not that the Aborigines were savage but that they occupied the land and were therefore in the way of progress and personal enrichment.

Henry Reynolds, *Frontier. Aborigines, Settlers and Land,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1987, pp. 108,111, 129-130.

QUESTIONS

1. According to Reynolds what were the external and internal origins of racism in Australia?
2. What does Reynolds mean by 'the image was impervious to experience'?
3. Compare the views of Memmi in document 3.1 and Reynolds in document 3.7. Explain any similarities or differences.

William Howitt in his poem, 'The Native Woman's Lament', suggested that relations followed a broad pattern, from friendliness to cooperation, then to control, indifference and destruction. We must now explore some patterns of culture contact.

ENCOUNTERS AND INCORPORATION

When two groups encounter each other, they both try to impose their ways on the other. Europeans imposed their economy and law on Aborigines and this created structures of dominance that changed the Aboriginal relationship to the land. The Europeans also attempted to impose their language, culture and religion on Aboriginal people as well.

However, Aborigines, especially on a local and individual level, were sometimes able to turn situations to their advantage. They attempted, and sometimes succeeded, in shaping the encounters with whites, as Annette Hamilton, an anthropologist, explained in 1972. Hamilton began by discussing why Aborigines in Northern

Australia and elsewhere often moved into white settlements. For instance, the Yarra banks in Melbourne were often host to up to 400 Aborigines in the late 1830s and early 1840s.

DOCUMENT 3.8

There was nothing external to force their movements; here, as in many places at other earlier times, they came as individuals and groups of their own free will. It seems clear that the values and norms of their own society forced them to do it. The twin principles which kept Aboriginal society functioning were the need to find food and the desire to limit effort in doing so - vital elements in a hunting and gathering economy. Put in ecological terms, it was a question of maintaining an energy input/output balance favourable to human survival. When the news came that the whites had abundant, if strange, food, more than they could possibly eat, this was like news of Eden - or a super waterhole, in Aboriginal terms. Hence, just as they had always moved to the sources of food- the ripening figs, the run of witchitties, so they moved to the whites, not in order to take part in white society, not in order to experience social change, but in order to eat the food.

Apart from the purely economic aspects of reciprocal relationships, generosity, framed within the kinship system, has a value in itself. It is the expression of the highest moral good. The best man is he who will give everything away; the worthiest, he who will go hungry himself in order to feed someone else who has a legitimate claim on him. This claim has nothing to do with relative need; it is not a charity, you do not give because someone is needy; you give because it is the right thing to do. Any claim to superiority, moral, spiritual, or secular, must be sanctioned by giving in this way.

When the Aboriginal people moved into the areas of white settlement it was with the intention of utilizing a new and abundant source of food, no more and no less. However in order for them to make claims on the whites they attempted to incorporate them into their own social system, a fact of which the whites were generally ignorant.

FIGURE 25

Collins Street, Town of Melbourne, New South Wales, 1839 by William Knight.

nla.pic-an5695310. National Library of Australia.

The simplest means of doing this was to give the white man an Aboriginal Woman... Concurrently, however, the people discovered that labour was desired, and they seized on this as the reciprocal relationship which would release the food supplies...

It is interesting to consider just what model the Aborigines were using to validate their relationship with the white man. The fact that they use the English word 'boss' for the leader of their ritual line, and that ritual leaders are expected to 'care for' their

ritual subordinates, suggests that this may be the approach they took in comprehending the white/ Aboriginal relationship. That is, they accepted the same status of subordination to and dependency on the white man as they expected to show towards the significant ritual leaders in their own culture...

Annette Hamilton, 'Blacks and Whites. The Relationships of Change', *Arena,* no. 30, 1972, pp. 41-43.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain Hamilton's ideas about Aboriginal movements in your own words.
2. Outline her views of Aboriginal reciprocity, (check your dictionary for the meaning of the word).
3. Using Hamilton and your own ideas, list the strategies that Aborigines used to incorporate whites.

The Assistant Aboriginal Protector, William Thomas, in 1839 wrote this in his journal about his relations with an Aboriginal man, Gellibrand (named by the whites, after an early settler).

DOCUMENT 3.9

1 May 1839

On going to Melbourne for the Chief Protector, when near the west part of the town, a black was bawling as loud as his lungs would allow. I turned round and who should it be but my sable brother Gellibrand. He had been out with a gentleman for a few weeks, and immediately on his return had been up to the camp where he had left me. Not finding my tent there, he asked me where I quombaed [slept]. I made him sensible and on my arrival at two o'clock I found him there. I had a fine piece of beef for dinner. He sat down to table as had been his habit ever since he claimed me his brother, and took his dinner. I made him handle knife and fork as usual, but he occasionally made a blunder and whipped up his meat with his fingers, which was immediately checked with a laugh from him: 'Stupid me'. He stopped for tea, &c., and at night quombaed by us, at my men's fire. I gave him pipe, &c.,

2 May 1839

My sable brother Gellibrand did not fail to honour us with his company at breakfast he said he was going to leave the settlement the next day. I attended the Chief Protector till night. On my return Gellibrand was there importuning for a blanket.

3 May 1839

A bitter cold night. At daybreak poor Gellibrand came with his arms full of wood, knocked at my tent door. I opened the door, he says 'Plenty cold you,' and put the wood in my hand. I said 'Good fellow, Mr Gellibrand.' He was coming in but I said my lubra [Mrs. Thomas] not up. He laughed heartily and went out. He breakfasted with us, his eyes all gazing round to see what to ask for. As he was going on a journey, I gave him some more tobacco and Mrs. T. filled his pockets full of potatoes (for he had a fine shooting coat on with two large pockets)....This poor fellow we have always made (and he would show

no wish to the contra) comfortable to our ways. He has bent his knee with us, shaved and washed himself, and one Sunday evening brought three other blacks to our evening service. Oh that I knew his language so as to lead him to the bleeding Saviour.

Journal of William Thomas, April-December 1839, in Cannon (ed.), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol. 2B, pp. 522-523.

QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the relationship between Thomas and Gellibrand?
2. How did Thomas make Gellibrand comfortable to our ways? Why was Thomas doing so?
3. In the light of Hamilton's ideas (document 3.8), consider whether Gellibrand had also shaped Thomas' actions. Explain.

VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE

The frontier in Australian History has of late been written as a story of the killing, massacre and dispossession of Aboriginal people. Historians disagree on the numbers of Aborigines killed in Victoria by whites. Beverley Nance, in her 1981 article, 'The Level of Violence', estimated from the records that about 400 Aborigines were killed by whites.[1] In *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria* (1979), Michael Christie made a broad guess not closely based on the records, and believed the Aboriginal death-toll at the hands of whites was more like 2,000. For various reasons that I have discussed elsewhere, the number is likely to be somewhere in between these two figures.[2] This is still a dreadful toll, representing a loss of perhaps ten per cent of the likely pre-contact population through white violence.

However, the images of white violence and black death have become so strong in our current political climate, that currently an image of Aboriginal helplessness prevails. Indeed, this view has always been present. For a fuller discussion of this you could consult my 1994 article, 'Aboriginal Victims and Voyagers'.[3] The next group of readings will explore this image of helplessness.

1 Beverley Nance, 'The Level of Violence. Europeans and Aborigines in Port Phillip 1835-1850', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 77, October 1981, p. 533.

2 See Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victoria. A History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005, pp. 80-82.

3 See Richard Broome, 'Aboriginal Victims and Voyagers: Confronting Frontier Myths', in *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 42, pp. 70-77.

TROUBLE AT THE BROKEN RIVER, 1838

In April 1838 a massacre occurred at the Broken River (the site of present-day Benalla). The following documents explore this incident. The first is Police Magistrate's George Stewart's report on the incident:

DOCUMENT 3.10

It would appear from the evidence obtained from some of the survivors of Mr Faithfull's men, that the outrage was committed solely for motives of plunder. Mr Faithfull's party, under the superintendence of Mr James Crossley, arrived at the Broken River on the night of Friday the 7th of April, and encamped there four days. On the morning after their arrival some of the blacks came to the drays, and a friendly intercourse was kept up until the morning of Tuesday, when all the blacks left, and none of them were again seen until the following morning, when the attack was made. On that morning Mr Crossley had given directions to his party to move on...when the shepherds were heard to call out that the blacks were upon them Mr Crossley and the other men took all the firearms from the drays (consisting only of four muskets) and

ran to their assistance.... The blacks were by this time close upon the party, and all of them fled, with the exception of one man, Thomas Bentley; and he, after defending himself for some time, was killed where he stood. Six others were killed while running away, and another was severely wounded, but has since recovered. The blacks then plundered the drays of property to the amount of about £200. It is evident that some of the blacks who headed the attack have been frequently among Europeans, as they spoke a little English. None of the females ever came near the drays, nor were any of them seen by any of Mr Faithfull's men, though these men state that the blacks were very anxious to get them to visit them and pointed out the place where they would find them encamped. I have not been able to learn that any of these or of the neighbouring tribes have ever in any way been molested by Europeans; but the information I have been able to get upon this point is not altogether to be depended upon.

George Stewart's Report, 20 June 1838, in Cannon (ed.), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol. 2A, p. 333.

Although the survivors and Stewart reported that the Aboriginal attackers numbered 200 to 300 warriors, a historian, Judith Bassett, through meticulous research has found that it is likely only about twenty Aborigines (not 200 or more) made the attack. Bassett also believes that the attack was in revenge for the illicit use of Aboriginal women by this same party several weeks before.[4]

4 Judith Bassett, 'The Faithful Massacre at the Broken at the Broken River, 1838'. *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 24, May 1989, pp. 18-34.

A settler, Dr George Mackay reported on the settlers' immediate response to the attack.

DOCUMENT 3.11

I have got back here after great labour. I brought away all the cattle and sheep and everything else of any value. I was very sorry to be obliged to leave my station; but it would have been certain death to remain with three men and one musket and no hut up.

Faithfull and Bowman have left their cattle running about wild and Colonel White buried his property in a hole dug in the ground. They fled and left me alone, after advising me to leave everything and fly too.

George Mackay, letter 15 May 1838 to W. Broughton, quoted in Cannon (ed.), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol. 2A, p. 330.

Reproduced here is the account of William's brother, George Faithfull, outlining his continuing trouble with Aborigines after moving to the Ovens River.

The country was left to us for some years in consequence of the hostility of the blacks, which became so unbearable that I could not keep shepherds, although well armed, without employing a horseman, in addition to myself, to keep continually perambulating the woods lest the natives might cut them off. During my employment in this way my cattle were destroyed in numbers within the short distance of only six miles from my hut. I once found fourteen head of slaughtered cattle in one pond of water. They had been driven in by the natives, it being an ana-branch of the river, and from the depth of the water and the boggy state of its banks they were destroyed with the tomahawk in endeavouring to get out. Thus I and my men were kept for years in a state of perpetual alarm. We dared not move to supply our huts with wood or water

without a gun, and many of my men absconded from my service, throwing away their firelocks, and in some cases destroying their locks and making them wholly useless from sheer terror of the blacks. This may appear too absurd for belief; nevertheless, it is a fact...

Faithfull described how he and two of his men were ambushed by a large party of Aborigines:

DOCUMENT 3.12

The natives rushed upon us like furies, with shouts and savage yells; it was no time for delay. I ordered my men to take deliberate aim, and to fire only with certainty of destruction to the individual aimed at. Unfortunately, the first shot from one of my men's carbines did not take effect; in a moment we were surrounded on all sides by the savages boldly coming up to us. It was my time now to endeavour to repel them. I fired my double- barrel right and left, and two of the most forward fell; this stopped the impetuosity of their career. I had time to reload, and the war thus began continued from about ten o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. We were slow to fire, which prolonged the battle, and 60 rounds were fired, and I trust and believe that many of the bravest of the savage warriors bit the dust....

I picked up a boy from under a log, took him home and tamed him, and he became very useful to me, and I think was the means of deterring his tribe from committing further wanton depredations upon my property; my neighbours, however, suffered much long after this.

William Faithfull's Reminiscences, Bride, *Letters From Victorian Pioneers,* pp. 151-152.

QUESTION

1 Discuss this representation of Aboriginal people.

FIGURE 26

Aboriginal ambush of a shepherd, *Illustrated Sydney News*, 29 September 1869.

Another early settler on the Ovens River, George Mackay, a ship's surgeon who arrived in Sydney in 1835, wrote this of his experiences in the post-massacre period. He remained a settler there until the 1860s.

DOCUMENT 3.13

The blacks were not very numerous, but very hostile. They murdered a number of white men and destroyed a great many cattle and horses. In May 1840, 21 of them, all armed with guns, besides their native weapons, attacked my station in my absence. They murdered one of my servants and burned my huts and stores, and all my wheat. Tea was worth at that time in Melbourne £20 per chest, and flour £100 per ton. Four horses, each worth £100, were killed and only seven head of cattle, out of nearly 3,000 were left alive on the run. One hundred and eighty head exclusive of those found dead were totally lost. The rest were recovered, at such an expense of money and of personal energy, as have left me an invalid for life, and to this day [1852] comparatively a poor man.

My demand for compensation was treated with contempt by the Governor of New South Wales; he said I had voluntarily placed myself beyond the boundaries of police, and must take the consequences, although I was then paying an assessment upon stock for the very purpose of securing police protection beyond the boundaries. Three special commissioners were sent one after another to examine into the matter, Major Lettsom, of the 80th Regiment, Mr. Bingham, Commissioner of Crown Lands for the district, and Chief Protector Robinson. The whole drift of their inquiries seemed to me to be an attempt to prove that the cause of the attack upon my station by the blacks was an improper treatment of the native women by my servants. This was shown to be totally without foundation, for the natives had no women with them, and it was their first visit to the station. It was also their last. I followed them for eighteen months, and apprehended seventeen of them, and, though they were discharged from Melbourne gaol almost as soon as they entered it, yet their capture had such a good effect that their depredations have since been confined to a few cattle for food. There have been none of their former wholesale slaughterings, and no murders of white men since then. These Sir, are the salient points of my experience as a squatter. I have lost my capital. I have lost my health. I have lost fifteen years of the best period of my life. I have undergone many hardships, exposed myself to many dangers, and am now a poorer man than I was when I became a squatter.

George Mackay's Reminiscences, Bride, *Letters From Victorian Pioneers,* pp. 187-188.

Captain Charles Hutton, an officer with the East India Company who emigrated to Sydney, took up a run in the area in 1838. He recalled this.

DOCUMENT 3.14

I only knew of two tribes of natives in that part of the country - one called the Goulburn blacks, who chiefly stopped on that river, but occasionally came as far as my station, a distance of about 55 miles, and were totally well behaved, only pilfering and sometimes frightening the shepherds; and the other tribe more particularly belonging to the Campaspe, who, from the first, appeared to have a dislike to the whites. I can hardly tell the numbers of these tribes, but think the Campaspe blacks might muster about 40 able-bodied men in all. They were rather fine men, but very mischievous, and did much damage, not only to myself, but to the settlers as far as Ebden's run, at Mount Macedon. No doubt, there was blame on both sides, and had the whites not been over-familiar with

them, for the sole purpose of getting their women, many of the outrages then perpetrated might have been avoided.

Charles Hutton's Reminiscences, Bride, *Letters From Victorian Pioneers,* pp. 205-206.

QUESTIONS

1. Why might the shepherds exaggerate the numbers of Aboriginal attackers as Bassett's work suggests?
2. Why might they tell Stewart they had not molested Aborigines in any way?
3. Does Hutton's evidence (document 3.14) support Bassett's research that the attack was provoked?
4. What impact did the Faithfull massacre have on white settlement in the area?
5. How does this incident accord with the views of Aborigines in documents 3.5 and 3.6?

OTHER ABORIGINAL ACTIONS

The killings of whites by Aborigines at the Broken River was unusual. In all, between 1835 and 1850, Nance has shown that Aborigines in Victoria killed only 59 Europeans.[5] However, this does not mean Aborigines were generally peaceful, as the following documents reveal.

5 Beverley Nance, 'The Level of Violence...' p. 533.

William J. T. Clarke, a Van Diemonian settler who became one of the biggest squatters and richest men in Victoria, recalled of Aboriginal actions on his property near Lake Learmonth in 1841.

DOCUMENT 3.15

I was unfortunate with my sheep the first two years in consequence of the scab and the difficulty of procuring labour, it then being considered so far back beyond all other settlers, and the natives being numerous soon became aware of their superiority in strength over my establishment and commenced their attacks on the shepherds, when the latter refused to take out their flocks alone; consequently I was obliged, at great cost, to send two shepherds with one flock. Nor was it safe to leave one man as hutkeeper. The blacks, seeing their superior strength, commenced driving off a number of sheep in defiance of the shepherds and destroying them wantonly, and slaughtering them for their support. On one occasion, one of my overseers and shepherds traced them to one of the high mountains, where they had a large quantity of my sheep slaughtered for use, and they drove off my people and retained their plunder. There was one native soon discovered to be more notorious than the rest. He was given the name of Billy Billy, who reigned several years. He, with the assistance of a number of the tribe, drove off a considerable number of my sheep and formed a station north of mine, at a place which is now well known as Billy Billy's Water Holes, where they made a bushyard and shepherded the sheep during the day and yarded them in the usual way at night, and when discovered the remaining sheep were recovered with considerable difficulty.

William Clarke's Reminiscences, Bride, *Letters From Victorian Pioneers,* p. 166.

Another settler, John Cox, a Western District squatter, described his rage at the Aboriginal tactics against him in 1839. The story is told by Rolf Boldrewood.

DOCUMENT 3.16

Their most flagrant robbery was committed on Mr John Cox's Mount Napier station, whence a flock of maiden ewes was driven, and the shepherd maltreated. These young sheep were worth nearly two pounds per head, besides being impossible to replace. Mr Cox told me himself that they constituted about a third of his stock in sheep at the time. He therefore armed a few retainers and followed hot on the trail.

He had unusual facilities for making successful pursuit. In his house lived a tame aboriginal named Sou'wester, who had a strong, personal attachment for Mr Cox. Like most of his race, he had the true bloodhound faculty when a man-hunt was in question...

Passing round an angular ridge of boulders, suddenly they came upon about a hundred young sheep, which had been left behind. 'But why are they all lying down?' said one of the party. The tracker paused, and, lifting a hindleg of one of the helpless brutes, showed without speech that the limb was useless.

The robbers had dislocated the hind-legs as a simple preventative of locomotion; to insure their being in the same place when it should please their captors to return and eat them.

'I never felt so wolfish in my life', said Mr Cox to me, afterwards, 'as when I saw the poor things turn up their eyes reproachfully as they lay, as if imploring our assistance.'

A few more miles brought them up with the main body. They opened fire upon the tolerably large body of blacks in possession directly they came within range.

'It was the first time I had ever levelled a gun at my fellowman,' John Cox remarked. 'I did so without regret or hesitation in this instance. I never remember having that feeling that I could not miss so strong in me- except in snipe shooting. I distinctly remember knocking over *three* blacks, two men and a boy, with one discharge of my double barrel.'

Sou'wester had a good innings that day, which he thoroughly enjoyed. He fired right and left, raging like a demoniac. ...A few of the front rankers were shot on this occasion; but most of the others saved themselves by precipitately taking to the lake.

Boldrewood, *Old Melbourne Memories,* pp. 51-53.

The historian, Henry Reynolds, in 1981 wrote this about the frontier struggle:

DOCUMENT 3.17

Anger about European possessiveness was clearly one of the motives behind the taking and destruction of their stock and other property. Aborigines acted to make the whites share their goods; the motivation was as much political as economic. It was not so much the possessions that mattered as affirmation of the principles of reciprocity. The great disparity of property merely exacerbated tensions inherent in the situation. Innumerable small skirmishes over European possessions appearing to be little better than unseemly brawls, were in reality manifestations of a fundamental clash of principle, the outward showing of one of the most significant moral and political struggles

in Australian history. The settlers were transplanting a policy of possessive individualism, hierarchy and inequality. Aboriginal society was reciprocal and materially egalitarian although there were important political and religious inequalities based on age and sex. Two such diametrically opposed societies could not merge without conflict. One or other had to prevail.

Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier,* History Department, James Cook University, Townsville, 1981, p. 57.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the Aborigines' motives and actions as revealed in documents 3.15 and 3.16.
2. What light does Reynolds throw on their actions?
3. Do you agree or not with Boldrewood's description of the Aborigines in document 3.16 as 'robbers'?
4. Discuss the actions of Sou'wester in document 3.16. Do you need to modify your model of black-white relations on the frontier?
5. Do documents 3.15 and 3.16 reveal Aboriginal restraint?

ABORIGINAL WORKERS

During the 1840s there was a gradual shift of Aborigines of Port Phillip from a total involvement in their traditional Aboriginal economy to a partial involvement in the European economy as well.[6] The next documents, voices from a select committee report of 1845, discuss the nature and reasons for this shift. Frederick Powlett, Commissioner of Crown Lands for Western Port, said of the Aborigines in his region:

6 See Richard Broome, 'Aboriginal Workers on the South Eastern Frontier', *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 103, October 1994, pp. 202-220.

DOCUMENT 3.18

Their condition and means of subsistence depends much on the country they inhabit, its distance from Melbourne, its Rivers, and the number of stations where provisions are given them; those natives within eighty or one hundred miles of Melbourne, frequently visit the town, much to the annoyance of the inhabitants, where they appear to get an ample supply of food, and occasionally, I am sorry to say, spirits; the distant tribes in the Mallay country, north of the Pyrenees, the lower Lodden, and the Boga natives, live chiefly by hunting and fishing, occasionally visiting the stations, where they are supplied with food in payment for stripping bark, or making themselves useful in any other way.

Their ordinary means of subsistence has diminished in the open located parts of the district, as game generally leaves the country where stock is depastured, and the sheep by clipping the grass make it more difficult to discover the yams; but the natives on the banks of rivers like the Goulburn and Murray have much the same means of subsistence as formerly; new tastes and wants have been created, and they prefer bread, potatoes, and mutton, to yams, kangaroos, and opposums.

Frederick Powlett's evidence to the 'Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines', *New South Wales Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings,* 1845, p. 42.

FIGURE 27 'Going to Work' by S. T. Gill. *nla.pic-an2381127. National Library of Australia*

George Robinson, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Port Phillip told the Committee:

DOCUMENT 3.19

> Their means of subsistence in the settled districts have, in part, been supplied at the government stations, and in some cases eleemosynary; their chief subsistence, however, has been from natural sources.
>
> Kangaroo and other forest animals, gum, roots, herbs, and fish, their ordinary means of subsistence, has diminished greatly since the occupation by Europeans, and the introduction of stock for breeding purposes; the wanton destruction of forest animals by white men, who keep dogs for hunting, has been complained of. Kangaroos and emus are now seldom seen, except in stony and wooded ranges; the latter are nearly extinct; the continued grazing of stock has rendered edible roots exceedingly scarce; the primitive inhabitants from some localities have been prohibited probably without reasonable cause; much depends, however, upon the disposition of the person in charge, whether friendly or otherwise, towards the natives; with some tribes the means of subsistence, especially from natural sources, is very precarious, being shut out from their own lands, and precluded, on account of some angry feud, from visiting their neighbours.

George Robinson's evidence to the 'Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines', 1845, p. 45.

The Assistant Protector, William Thomas, described the current economic activities of the Melbourne Aborigines for the Select Committee.

DOCUMENT 3.20

Morally speaking, wretched in the extreme; they have capabilities, but appear no way desirous of using them, as they find by asking and importuning they get their wants supplied; they may be said, strictly speaking, to live as mendicants; a few occasionally sally forth to get skins and birds to keep them in powder and shot; none, as I perceive, have any, the least desire to conform to civilized habits; in my charge of the blacks, visiting the precincts of Melbourne, I have had many opportunities of seeing and observing blacks from various parts, and whether from Geelong, the Goulburn, or Loddon stations, I have found them the same people as they were six years back; they can talk more English, but in filth, dress, and habits, they are precisely the same; I should say (independent of not being so diseased) in personal appearance they were better then than now.

William Thomas' evidence to the 'Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines', 1845, p. 55.

QUESTIONS

1. Examine documents 3.18 to 3.20 and list possible reasons for the decline of the Aborigines' traditional economy.
2. What did Robinson mean by 'eleemosynary'? (Check your dictionary.)
3. Re-read Hamilton (document 3.8) and decide whether it was appropriate that Thomas used the term 'mendicants' to describe the Aborigines of Melbourne. What term would you use to describe their activities?

During the 1840s white handouts dried up and some Aborigines were forced to work for their sustenance. Others may have chosen to work. George McCrae, who grew up on a Mornington Peninsula pastoral property, recalled this of Aboriginal workers:

DOCUMENT 3.21

We found the aborigines about us docile, tractable, and highly intelligent. Both the young men and women became efficient and willing station servants. The youths, always fearless riders and fond of horses, made good stock-keepers, and took great pride in their long, heavy whips and spurs. The young women washed and ironed well, sewing and mending also with great neatness. Men and women alike were perpetually honest. I have known them even after a day's fishing to cut the hooks off their lines and return them, under the impression that we had only lent them.

Being sober, they were the more to be trusted, and we found the boys very useful, not only in the management of cattle, but also in riding with messages to a distance, and quite to be depended upon in services of that nature.

McCrae, 'Early Settlement of the Eastern Shores of Port Phillip: With a Note on the Aborigines of the Coast', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. 1, no.1, 1911, pp. 24-25.

FIGURE 28 'Mounted stockmen talking to natives' by S. T. Gill.
nla.pic-an2377106. National Library of Australia.

George Robinson reported to the Select Committee of 1845:

DOCUMENT 3.22

> The Aborigines are employed chiefly as shepherds, bullock drivers and hut keepers, messengers, domestics, sheep washers, whalers, collectors of skins, police, and guides; in this latter capacity, they are, from their knowledge of the locality, quickness of perception, endurance of fatigue, their facility in procuring water and sustenance, found of infinite service to travellers generally, and have merited their approbation; females are occasionally employed, and as respectable settlers and their families are now removing to the bush, it is to be hoped this class of labour will be more encouraged. The natives receive in return for their labour, food, clothing, trifling articles of luxury, as tea, sugar, tobacco, and in some instances, money.

George Robinson's evidence to the 'Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines', 1845, p. 46.

QUESTIONS

1. What did McCrae and Robinson think of the abilities of Aboriginal workers?
2. From documents 3.21 and 3.22 and figure 27, discuss what these sources imply about Aboriginal attitudes to work for the Europeans.
3. From these same sources what do you think Aborigines thought of such work?

Many settlers were less than complimentary about Aboriginal workers. In an article in the journal *Australian Historical Studies* I discuss why this might have been so.

DOCUMENT 3.23

The preceding evidence of significant and skilful Aboriginal pastoral work was based on settlers' experiences of living with the Aborigines on a shared frontier. Many of the accounts were collected by the 1845 New South Wales Select Committee into the Condition of the Aborigines. The committee circularised magistrates, commissioners of crown lands and 'other gentlemen' too remote from Sydney to give evidence in person and published detailed replies from thirty-one respondents. Among its questions the committee asked: 'what habits have they [Aborigines] bearing upon their aptitude for employment?' It was a question of an entirely different order from their other questions concerning the nature of work, the availability of bush food, and Aboriginal health; in Greg Dening's terms, it was a request for 'set descriptions of the Other [not] the descriptions of being with the Other'. The respondents, almost without exception, abandoned anecdote and embraced generalisations, reaching for words such as 'lazy', 'indolent', 'slothful', 'erratic' and 'roving' to characterise the Aboriginal worker...

How much are these views a reflection of the reality of Aboriginal work experience and how much white ideological constructions?

Richard Broome, 'Aboriginal Workers on Southeastern Frontiers', *Australian Historical Studies*, no.103, October 1994, p. 216.

QUESTIONS

1 Explain in your own words the distinction which Dening makes in document 3.23 between various types of description in historical sources.

2 Answer the question posed at the end of document 3.23. Refer back to Albert Memmi (document 3.1) for help, as well as considering your own ideas as to whether Aboriginal people were inherently lazy or not.

CULTURAL RESISTANCE

With the coming of the Europeans, Aboriginal people of Port Phillip were confronted with a powerful culture. The following documents explore their responses to this new culture. William Thomas, an Assistant Protector in the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate (formed in 1838 out of the actions of humanitarians in London), journeyed to Arthur's Seat in August 1839 to begin the task of civilising and Christianising the Aborigines. Below are some extracts from his field journal.

DOCUMENT 3.24

28 August 1839

Early go to the encampment at Kangerrong. On the way meet a party of lubras coming with tomahawks to cut tea-tree for my house. I give them a paper to my son to get flour and tea. I return about two o'clock, just in time to see the workers come back. My son gave them a good character, said they had cut near bark and tea-tree enough. I gave them all a good feed. They lay down to sleep till the evening when I give them some flour and sugar to take to their miams.

29 August 1839

The blacks in numbers come to my tent. One, a widow and three children, particularly attractive. I put some beads on her and her three children. I give

them all some tea and damper. Afterwards I give five knives to five men and a hank of twine to be divided between the others. They then wanted thread and needles, but I had none. I find them all on the *qui vive.*

I brought a month's provisions, and a few days to spare, but it is all gone but my tea, and I have been forced to have a sheep, 27 pounds flour, seven pounds sugar and one and half of tea and one pound of tobacco to help out. How inconsistent and unmerciful. I am sent here to civilize, protect and see that their wants are supplied, and have not a bit of flour, rice or sugar to give them. One third of my income will unavoidably be spent upon these poor creatures. What influence can ever be obtained in the absence of means? I have a few beads, some string, knives, &c., but none of these will fill their bellies...

1 September 1839

Lubras and their families by the tent the whole of this day. Gave them breakfast. They watched me most particularly when I shaved, &c., My man gave them the horse comb, soap and brush and they made themselves look smart. Afterwards they washed and combed their children and I had service. Had a leg of mutton for dinner. The soup, with some kangaroo they had, filled their bellies. Visit blacks across the creek. Have service again in the evening. Several blacks present.

2 September 1839

Up before daybreak. Sent my dray to Melbourne for fresh supplies and forced to borrow more for myself. Sending me among people without any provisions is truly uncharitable. I fear to go to the encampment as I know the poor creatures, some of them will return for food, which my heart will not permit me to refuse, but three blacks visited me this day.

3 September 1839

Visited the encampment early. Found but six natives besides the old sick man there. They say, 'Black fellows go another white man's miam. You no flour.' I thus saw early the impossibility of doing good to these people in the absence of means. I tried to pacify them by saying 'We soon have more, no let black fellows go'. Passed the day with them...

4 September 1839

On visiting the encampment this morning was amused at seeing Burrenun's miam like a butcher shop, legs and parts of kangaroo hung round. He had returned with two others last night heavy laden. I gave two lubras a string of beads each. Some return with me to the tent and seemed surprised at the progress made in my hut. They all sit down and I give them what mutton I had left and a trifle of flour, which I could ill spare.

5 September 1839

Visit their encampment early, take a row a beads to a lubra I had promised. They had great abundance of game of all kinds, enough for a week. Some however accompany me to my tent, which I was sorry for having nought but what I borrowed. They fetch three pails full of mud for my wattle and received wages.

6 September 1839

Early visit encampment. A large party come to my tent, I give each of them a tomahawk. They sit down, make handles. I lend them tools, some find fault with the eyes. They certainly were the worst I had ever seen.

I lend them an iron pot and get them to boil some mutton and some of the tails of kangaroo. Impatient, greedy folks. Before they well boiled they lug a tail out of the pot, and one at each end begins to bite while two or three are lugging a piece from the middle.

Burrenun, who was a little my confidant, had told the others as he came up he saw a man take damper out of the fire. The impatience. So for a bit (though it was the last flour we had) I was forced to cut a small piece off for each. They sat, sung and slept remainder of the day. Oh that I had some employment for them.

Journal of William Thomas, April-December 1839, in Cannon (ed.), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol. 2B, pp. 539-541.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Aboriginal people were 'all on the *qui vive*'? (Consult a dictionary for the meaning of this term.)
2. Compare Thomas' and the Aborigines' intentions.
3. Who seemed in control of these encounters? Explain.
4. Does this modify your views of Colonialism? How?

Aboriginal people encountered many novel cultural items once the Europeans arrived. In 1839 the Reverend George Langhorne, Government Missionary in Melbourne, wrote this about guns and Aborigines:

DOCUMENT 3.25

With regard to the blacks having firearms in their possession. I have ever discouraged it in every way, and it had frequently been mentioned by the blacks as a reason for their not frequenting the Mission Station that I constantly refused them firearms, whereas the black police were so armed and the other natives could obtain muskets from the settlers whenever they required them.

In fact such is their passion for shooting that any person might command the attendance of a number of blacks for months together whenever he choose that they should accompany him, merely by supplying them with guns and ammunition.

George Langhorne to Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, 31 January 1839, in Cannon (ed.), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol. 2A, p. 235.

Peter Beveridge, a squatter on the Murray at Swan Hill recalled this reaction when Aboriginal people first sighted a steel tomahawk:

DOCUMENT 3.26

The news of the appearance of this most wonderful weapon spread far and wide in a very short time, and great was the Aboriginal muster in consequence.

> Friendly tribes from the remoter districts, flocked into the main camping ground, and single families from the furthermost nooks and corners joined the crowd, all intent upon viewing this marvellous axe; and when it was produced to their astonished gaze, much ejaculation and clucking with the tongue ensued. [it was then passed around for all to test its cutting power, and after debate, it was agreed to share it for cutting new canoes].
>
> Peter Beveridge, *The Aborigines of Victoria and Riverina*, Hutchinson, Melbourne, 1889, pp. 69-70.

QUESTION

1 Using documents 3.25 and 3.26, consider the degree of Aboriginal cultural curiosity and flexibility.

G. G. McCrae, who grew up on a station on the Mornington Peninsula wrote this of Aboriginal workers:

DOCUMENT 3.27

> We found it to our advantage in the beginning, as also later on, to take blacks with us on our hunting and fishing expeditions, for they not only guided us accurately, but taught us many lessons in bushcraft, and in the mode of approaching game, which perhaps we should never have picked up otherwise. They showed us the exact bait for different fish, as also how to spear them with good effect, and generally pulled a good oar in the boat, besides picking up the steering readily.
>
> G. G. McCrae, 'Early Settlement on Eastern Shores of Port Phillip Bay', p. 25.

When George Haydon was treking through Gippsland in 1844, one of his Aboriginal guides showed Haydon, to his dismay, white tracks and a white campsite that Haydon had not been able to discern. Haydon recorded the Aborigine's remarks:

DOCUMENT 3.28

> Now white man berry clever, no mistake, make him house, and flour, and tea, and sugar, and tobacco, and clothes, but white fellow no find out when another white man walk along a road - I believe sometimes white man berry stupid.
>
> George Mackaness, *George Augustus Robinson's Journey into South-Eastern Australia, 1844 with George Henry Haydon's Narrative of Part of the Same Journey,* published by the author, Sydney, 1941, pp. 50-51.

QUESTIONS

1 Consider the likely self-image of those Aborigines who mixed with whites in the bush.

2 How does that modify your understanding of black and white power relations?

In October 1839, Rev. George Langhorne wrote this about his experience of being a missionary at the first government mission of 1837-1839, on the present site of the Botanic Gardens.

DOCUMENT 3.29

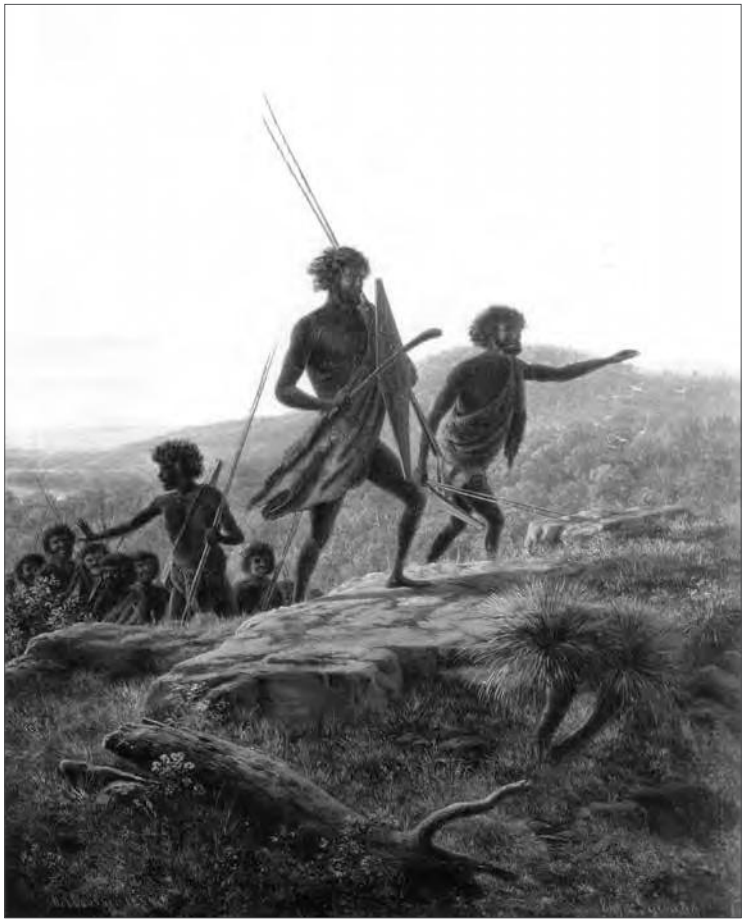
On arriving at Port Phillip in July 1837, the spot where I am at present resident was approved of by his Excellency Governor Bourke as suitable for missionary purposes, and although I have from time to time pointed out the unfitness of the situation from its vicinity to the township of Melbourne, and proposed removal, I never was able to obtain permission to that effect.

I do not indeed attribute the failure of the Mission to this cause, because I am now entirely of the opinion that a fixed Establishment for the civilization of the Aborigines in their native districts, where their wandering and unsettled habits are so diametrically opposed to civilized life, cannot possibly, humanly speaking, meet with success. That they have intellect, which when released from the shackles of a savage life is equally powerful with our own, few will deny...

FIGURE 29

'Natives chasing game' by Eugene von Guerard.

nla.pic-an2282444-1. National Library of Australia.



As soon as the novelty of the Mission Station wore away, the blacks of the Waworong tribe removed their children from school upon every frivolous pretext, and although the boys were invariably brought back after a short absence, it was only to abscond a second or a third time into the bush, until at length the school was entirely neglected and deserted.

As the town of Melbourne increased in the number of its inhabitants, the blacks found that as hewers of wood and drawers of water they could obtain better pay in the settlement, and therefore deserted the Mission Station, frequently reproaching me that they could obtain from the white men at the 'Big Miam Miam' (as they named the town) plenty of white bread, when I gave them only coarse flour and that in small quantities.

My situation having thus become one of no small embarrassment, I requested permission to resign...With regard to religion, my time amongst them was too short to be able to speak of any religious impression made upon the minds of any of them.

George Langehorne to Governor Charles La Trobe, 15 October 1839, in Cannon (ed.), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol. 2B, pp. 508-509.

QUESTION

1 Discuss why Langhorne's mission to the Aborigines failed.

Hugh Jamieson, a squatter at Mildura who had emigrated from Van Diemen's Land in 1839, recalled this of the Aborigines in 1853:

DOCUMENT 3.30

The past experience, of upwards of 60 years, has abundantly shown that the aboriginal natives of Australia are, even in the most uncultivated state of their faculties, possessed of a considerable amount of intelligence, observation, quickness of apprehension, and aptitude for instruction in both reading and writing. But, not withstanding all these natural advantages, and which they have been found in all parts of the colony to possess, I think it indisputably proved that there is a very clearly-defined limit to their civilization, amelioration of condition, and permanent improvement, either morally or physically...

On this station, they have always been managed upon a uniform and rational system; they have ever been, both to my brother and myself, objects of interest. We have for many years endeavoured to show them the advantages of permanent improvement and the general amelioration of their condition. We have exclusively employed them, and successfully, for some years in shepherding and in the usual routine of the management of sheep on a station, in sheep-washing, and also in sheep-shearing to a limited extent. Their services have, during the recent scarcity of labour consequent on the gold discoveries of Australia, been to us and other settlers on the Murray and Darling of great value. The proper principle of managing them is founded on consistency, kindness, firmness, and decision. Following out this plan, we continue to secure their services for shepherding and some other descriptions of work. The prospect, however, of a continuance of their services I consider doubtful. I think it probable we shall resume in part the employment of European shepherds as soon as the state of the supply of labour will allow. Every year's experience clearly shows that there is a certain limit to their usefulness and general improvement...

It unfortunately appears that we cannot impart to them a disposition for permanently improving their condition. They have now no more wish than formerly to adopt even the first elements of civilization, and abandon their unsettled and roving life. In these districts, during the summer months, nearly all, from the oldest to the youngest in the various tribes, have the greatest desire to abandon every employment, and indulge in the roving life of naked savages. The tribes on the Lower Murray and Darling are, generally speaking, on friendly terms; they not infrequently during their annual migrations travel over 200 or 300 miles of country, increasing in numbers as they proceed, alternately hunting, fishing, and levying contributions on both sheep and cattle, as they slowly and indolently saunter along the banks of the Murray and Darling. Such is the limited degree of civilization which even the best of our blacks have reached, that during these migrations we always experience considerable difficulty in retaining out of the whole tribe the necessary number for shepherding alone. All the present and future advantages offered fail to compensate the savage for the disappointment of not being able to join in these wild and roving excursions of the tribes...

Those submit to civilization with the greatest difficulty who habitually live by roving and hunting. Every one who understands the matter can easily foresee that the natives of Australia are most unlikely to conform to civilization; they are obstinately attached as ever to all the superstitious prejudices, passions, customs, and habits of their forefathers; they have always been found totally destitute of the most essential preliminary of civilization, and I fear they will never acquire it.

Hugh Jamieson, letter 10 October 1853 to Bishop Perry in Melbourne, Bride, *Letters From Victorian Pioneers,* pp. 269, 270-271, 273-274.

QUESTIONS

1 How did Jamieson rate the abilities of Aboriginal people?

2 What evidence did he have for these judgments?

3 What to him was essential for 'civilization'?

4 Discuss the Aborigines' own desires and their abilities to fulfill them from Jamieson's descriptions.

PASTORALISM'S IMPACT ON ABORIGINAL LAND AND RESOURCES

Colonisation not only changed the lives and cultures of Aboriginal people but it altered their land and introduced deadly diseases. This occurred in all places of European settlement. In most colonies there was a demographic [population] takeover, as the numbers of newcomers steadily rose, and the numbers of Indigenous peoples fell.

Alfred Crosby, the environmental historian, said this was not due primarily to the superiority of the newcomers or their technology. Rather it was because of a takeover process he called 'ecological imperialism', the title of his 1986 book. Crosby argued that colonisers were not all powerful, but introduced powerful forces in the form of new animals, plants and microbes or pathogens. Read what Crosby has written:

DOCUMENT 3.31

> European and Old World human beings, domesticated animals, varmints, pathogens, and weeds all accomplished demographic takeovers of their own in the temperate, well-watered regions of North and South America, Australia and New Zealand. They crossed oceans and Europeanized vast territories, often in informal cooperation with each other – the farmer and his animal destroying native plant cover, making way for imported grasses and forbs [herbaceous plant], many of which proved more nourishing to domesticated animals that the native equivalents; Old World pathogens, sometimes carried on Old World varmints, wiping out vast numbers of Aborigines, opening the way for the advance of the European frontier, exposing more and more native peoples to more and more pathogens....
>
> The demographic triumph of Europeans in the temperate colonies is one part of a biological and ecological takeover that could not have been accomplished by human beings alone, gunpowder notwithstanding. We must at least try to analyze the impact and success of often mutually supportive plants, animals, and microlife, which in their entirety can be accurately described as aggressive and opportunistic ...
>
> Alfred Crosby, *Germs, Seeds and Animals. Studies in Ecological History*, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 1994, pp. 40-41.

This section will indicate some of the ways this takeover by diseases, plants and animals occurred.

NEW DISEASES & PATHOGENS

The disease invasion began with the human invasion. Smallpox spread into Port Phillip and killed perhaps half of the Aboriginal population of central Victoria before Europeans even settled in Port Phillip. It origins are hotly debated still. Did it spread from the far north of Australia due to contact with Macassan fishermen after 1720 or from the First Fleet in Sydney in 1788 – or from both sources? The answer may never be known, and is not important here as either way, smallpox spread to Victoria, leaving its tell-tale pock marks on the faces of people, later seen by the first European observers.

In my book *Aboriginal Victorians* (2005), I wrote this of Aboriginal population changes following the impact of diseases and other factors from colonisation.

DOCUMENT 3.32

Multiple population shocks hit Aboriginal people. The Victorian Aboriginal population, which had survived for at least 40,000 years, was suddenly and dramatically reduced over several generations due to colonisation. It is a complex and imprecise matter as to what exactly occurred, why and with what population impact. ...

The Macassans brought smallpox to northern Australia in the eighteenth century (and perhaps respiratory diseases), that survived the voyage of several weeks to the north coast. European-borne diseases after 1788 also impacted significantly on a disease-inexperienced Aboriginal population. These included respiratory diseases, such as tuberculosis and influenza, common European childhood diseases such as measles and whooping cough, scarlet fever and typhus, water-borne diseases such as dysentery, and also the venereal diseases, gonorrhoea and syphilis. In contacting new diseases, people can experience exaggerated symptoms and outcomes, compared with those experienced by peoples with genetic immunities. Protector Parker wrote of one Aboriginal man's death from respiratory disease on the Loddon in June 1841: 'He was ill but a few days, but did not, till the previous morning, show any symptoms of internal inflammation. The progress of the disease was, however, so rapid, that in 24 hours his cause became hopeless'. ...

Why did a population of at least 10,000 at contact decline by approximately 8,000 or 80 per cent in two decades of white settlement? It seems between 1,500 and 2,000 died violently at white *and* black hands; perhaps a further 1,000 to 1,500 died of natural causes over two decades; leaving 4-5,000 who fell to diseases and debility due to disruption of food supplies and to the impact of cultural disruption. William Thomas in 1858 said the young died two to one in proportion with adults. Edward Parker listed dysentery, liver disease, chest infections, fevers as most prominent, while William Thomas emphasised pulmonary diseases, specifically 'endemic influenza', exacerbated by sleeping outside while intoxicated: 'cold comes on, and as soon as disease touches a black's chest you cannot save him'. In an 1860 report on Aboriginal health, the common causes of death listed by 29 settlers were influenza and chest diseases, venereal disease and intemperance, often in combination. Of the six Aboriginal patients in the Melbourne Hospital in 1860, five were admitted for chest diseases and one for burns.

The related tragedy was that low birth rates prevented population recovery. William Thomas' journal from 1839 to 1859 recorded 135 deaths from all causes among the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung, 29 occurring after 1850. During this period Thomas listed only 28 births, 20 before and 8 after 1850. Deaths outmatched births by almost five to one, leading to a population disaster. The

low birth rate had many causes: poor nutrition; venereal disease; loss of land; and loss of faith in the future.

Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians. A History Since 1800*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005, pp. 90-92.

QUESTIONS

1 List the factors that led to the rapid decline of the Aboriginal population of Port Phillip.

2 Number them in order of significance. Discuss the reasons for your order of priority.

CASE STUDY1: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE YAM DAISY?

William Thomas noted this about the yam daisy or murrnong (also called param), the staple food source of the Aborigines in Port Phillip:

DOCUMENT 3.33

In the isolated parts of the country and such other places as have not been visited by the flocks and herds of the settler these roots are obtained in great abundance but like other natural supplies of the Aborigines they diminish and soon disappear when sheep and cattle are depastured. Nor are the natives insensible of the cause of such diminution - conversing with one of them respecting this kind of food in the neighbourhood of Melbourne, he said in the best English he was master of, 'Boras Param, Borak Tarook, Port Phillip; too much big one Bulgann, I...mbuk white fellow gone Param -', which being interpreted as 'no murnong, no yam at Port Phillip too much by one white man bullock and sheep, all gone murnong'.

William Thomas' notebook in Brough Smyth Papers, State Library of Victoria, p. 97.

FIGURE 30
Yam Daisy / Murnong plant

James Malcolm, a pastoralist who ran sheep thirty kilometres north of Melbourne, gave this evidence to a government inquiry in 1845 about the yam daisy or murrnong. He described it as a small nutritious root like a radish, that when squeezed, exuded a 'sort of milk or creamy substance':

DOCUMENT 3.34

[asked about the food supply of Aboriginal people, Malcolm replied]:

They frequently call at my station as they pass, and I generally observe they have a great many opossums, kangaroo rats, bandicoots, or other animals of that description. I have been to their camps too, and seen dozens of these animals which they had caught for food. They sometimes stop two or three weeks in our vicinity, on their way down to Melbourne and sometimes as they are returning.

[Asked if their food supply was diminishing, he replied]

I should say they have diminished. There is a nutritious root which they eat and are fond of; and that, I think, has greatly diminished, from the grazing of sheep and cattle over the land, because I have not seen so many of the flowers of it in the spring as I used to see. It bears a beautiful yellow flower. The native name of this root is 'murnong'. ... I have eaten of it many a time...I have eaten it roasted, but I prefer it raw.

James Malcolm, evidence to the 'Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines', *New South Wales Legislative Council Papers*, 1845, p. 13.

Edward Curr who pioneered the area near Echuca in the 1840s later wrote:

DOCUMENT 3.35

Yams were so abundant, and so easily procured, that one might have collected in an hour, with a pointed stick, as many as would have served a family the day. The wheels of our dray used to turn them up by the bushel as it went over the loose ground. Indeed, several thousand sheep, which I had at Colbinabinn, not only learnt to root up these vegetables with their noses, but for the most part lived on them for the first year, after which the root began gradually to get scarce.

E. M. Curr, *The Australian Race*, vol. 1, Melbourne 1886, p. 240.

James Batey, a settler in the 1840s, recalled this in his reminiscences written sixty years later, that murrnong was a yellow flower on a single stem with stoutish roots the length of a little finger. When washed they were white and agreeable in taste - crisp but watery. He remembered seeing Aboriginal women carrying large bunches of washed murnong at Glen Junction. However, upon settling in the Sunbury area, he recalled:

DOCUMENT 3.36

On arriving in 1846, and thereafter, murnong digging was unknown to us, for the all-sufficient reason that livestock seemingly had eaten out that form of vegetation. ...yet there was another factor of destruction in the soil becoming hardened with the continuous trampling of sheep, cattle or horses. In proof of that, Mr Edward Page said 'when we first came here I started a vegetable garden, the soil dug like ashes... [it was] a spot free of timber or scrub of any description, the soil a reddish loam and of great depth. Nowadays with winter rains beyond the average this same plot to turn it over would require a digging fork, a common spade would be useless.

James Batey, quoted in David Frankel, 'An Account of Aboriginal Use of the Yam-Daisy', *Artefact*, vol. 7, no. 1-2, 1982, p. 44.

Beth Gott an ethno-botanist concluded in her 1983 study of murrnong:

DOCUMENT 3.37

> The abundance of murnong had been maintained by Aboriginal gathering practices, but due to the changes brought about by European settlement and the importation of sheep and cattle, it rapidly became scarce. The decline of this important staple vegetable food exemplifies the drastic dietary changes which must have contributed to the high mortality amongst Victorian Aborigines. ... [by 1983] murnong is almost entirely absent from the western and northern plains of Victoria, and in the open forest areas is found only where grazing is not continuous, often alongside roadsides and in small separated patches.
>
> Beth Gott, 'Murnong – *Microseris scapigera*: A Study of a Staple Food of Victorian Aborigines', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, 1983, p. 13.

QUESTION

1 After reading these documents, write your own story of the yam daisy as a food in the first years of European settlement.

CASE STUDY 2: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LAND?

Some pastoralists, especially those who stayed on their runs for some time, were keen observers of changes to the land. Let us see what two men, John Robertson and Alfred Joyce, observed.

John G. Robertson who settled on 'Wando Vale' of 5,000 hectares near Casterton in 1840 recalled his pioneering in 1853.

DOCUMENT 3.38

> When I arrived ...the grasses were about four inches [1.5 cms] high, of that lovely dark green; the sheep had no trouble to fill their bellies; all was eatable; nothing had trodden the grass before them. I could neither think nor sleep for admiring this new world to me who was fond of sheep. ...The few sheep at first made little impression on the face of the country for three or four years;... [after that]...
>
> Many of our herbaceous plants began to disappear from the pasture land; the silk-grass began to show itself in the edge of the bush track, and in patches here and there on the hill. The patches have grown larger every year; herbaceous plants and grasses give way for the silk-grass and the little annuals, beneath which are annual peas, and die in our deep clay soil with a few hot days in spring, and nothing returns to supply their place until late in the winter following. The consequence is that the long deep-rooted grasses that held our strong clay hill together have died out; the ground is now exposed to the sun, and it has cracked in all directions, and the clay hills are slipping in all directions; also the sides of precipitous creeks- long slips, taking trees and all with them. When I first came here, I knew of but two landslips, both of which I went to see; now there are hundreds found within the last three years....
>
> Over Wannon country is now as difficult a ride as if it were fenced. Ruts, seven, eight, and ten feet deep, and as wide, are found for miles, where two years ago

it was covered with tussocky grass like a land marsh. And for pastoral purposes the lands here are getting of less value every day, that is, with the kind of grass that is growing in them, and will carry less sheep and far less cattle.

John G. Robertson in Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* (1898), pp. 167-169.

In 1843 Alfred and George Joyce purchased an existing leasehold 25 km west of Castlemaine which they called 'Plaistow'. He wrote this of his second year there:

DOCUMENT 3.39

The indigenous kangaroo grass had not then been displaced by the numerous weedy successors, but was in full vigour and luxuriance, and was the most fattening grass we had. When in full growth and ripe it was more like a field of corn than grass, with its dark brown seeds waving in the wind and its rich green leaves at the bottom. Its disappearance is to be attributed chiefly to the strong partiality the sheep had for it, so that the heavy stocking gave the grass no chance of continued and permanent growth.

This summer, 1845, was extremely hot and dry. Incredible as it may seem, I have it noted as being as high on one occasion as 120 degrees [Fahrenheit or 48.9 Celsius] in the shade in Melbourne, a hot wind no doubt. The dry weather continued with us for three months, the result of which was that fires sprang up in every direction, travelling over the plains like a racehorse and sweeping everything before them. Our neighbour lost sheep in considerable numbers. We were fortunate in that we lost no sheep, but three-fourths of our grass went.

G. F. James, (ed.), *A Homestead History. Reminiscences & Letters of Alfred Joyce of Plaistow & Norwood, Port Phillip, 1843-1864* (Melbourne. Melbourne University Press, 1969), pp. 65-66.

QUESTIONS

1. List the changes in the land that Robertson and Joyce observed.
2. How quickly did these appear?
3. What were the causes and implications of these changes?.

One thing that happened after Europeans occupied the land was that Aboriginal land management practices largely ended as people lost their lives, and were pushed off pastoral runs, which Europeans considered their land over which they had an absolute right. These practices included the all-important use of fire to create liveable country as explained in Investigation 1 above.

Europeans saw fire as a threat to their properties, not as an ally. Bill Gammage has written much of this in his *The Biggest Estate on Earth* referred to in Investigation 1.

DOCUMENT 3.40

William Strutt painted a famous picture in 1864 of the Black Thursday fire of 1851. See it depicted at:
http://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/image/black-thursday-february-6th-1851

It can be viewed at the State Library of Victoria.

QUESTIONS

1 Consider why the fire of 1851 might have occurred.

2 Do you think Alfred Joyce's property burned in 1845 for the same reason?

HOW DID ABORIGINAL PEOPLE RESPOND TO THE LOSS OF THEIR LAND?

Besides violent resistance Aboriginal people used other strategies to regain land. In October 1843 William Thomas recorded a discussion he had with his friend Billibellary, the most important elder of the Woiwurrung, whose family owned the Mount William stone axe head quarry as revealed in Investigation 1. During their conversation Billibellary exclaimed:

DOCUMENT 3.41

If Yarra blackfellows had a country on the Yarra that they would stop on it and cultivate the ground.

William Thomas 'Quarterly Reports, 1 September -1 December 1843', Victorian Public Records Office, Series 4410, unit 3.

Requests for country increased in the late 1840s. William Thomas recorded in his journal in early 1849 the words and actions of many Aboriginal people who plied him on this subject:

DOCUMENT 3.42

4 January 1849

get us a country

28 February 1849

they press me very hard for a country to locate themselves upon.

20 March 1849

Benbow [an elder of the Boon Wurrung] informs me that he means to see the Governor [Fitzroy] this day & ask him for a country for Western Port Blks,... saw Benbow as good as his word Standing well trimmed up in Commissariat uniform standing at the entrance of Royal Hotel awaiting his turn to be called to see the Governor, I endeavord (sic) to dissuade him from troubling his Excellency & gave him 6d [perhaps equivalent to ten or twenty dollars today] to go his way but he coolly pocketed the 6d and & said that he would send up his brass plate (meaning as a [calling] card)... I observed 3 Black fellows on the opposite side of the way awaiting the result of Benbow's interview, seeing me parley with him, they came to meet me I tried to bribe them to get Benbow away from the Hotel but to no purpose. At the Close of office Hours he still stood before the door nor could I prevail upon him to stir.

21 March 1849

find that Benbow was not successful the past day & and he was not admitted. I told him if he had consulted me & had giving me instruction what he was upon I would have endeavord (sic) to have gain'd him an interview...

The Journal of William Thomas, Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip & Guardian of the Aborigines of Victoria 1839-1867, Marguerita Stephens (ed.), volume two: 1844 to 1853, Victorian Aboriginal Corporation of Languages, Melbourne, 2014, p. 370.

QUESTIONS

1 Regarding Billibellary's request for land in 1843 (document 3.41), consider the meaning of his aims for it. What traits does it reveal?

2 Read document 3.42 and discuss Benbow's actions. What does it say about the ongoing importance of land to Aboriginal people?

Attempts to regain land continued into the 1850s and beyond, see Investigation 4.

THE CHALLENGE OF COLONISATION

By the late 1840s the impact of just fifteen years of pastoral settlement on Aboriginal people in Port Phillip was clearly evident. Aboriginal people had been forced off their lands in many cases, including being kept out of Melbourne from 1840, and only in some cases were allowed to access their traditional lands by tolerant settlers in return for work. The Woiworrung or Melbourne tribal elder, Billibellari, had asked for land for his people in 1843 on which to settle down and farm like white men. Pressure on Aboriginal people increased in the 1850s in the face of massive immigration. From 1850 they numbered less than one per cent of the population in their traditional lands.

The situation of Aboriginal people also exercised the minds of policy makers, humanitarians at home and in the colony, and of course those settlers intent on completing the process of dispossession. Assessments of the situation in the late 1840s led to a policy vacuum for most of the 1850s. But despite this lack of help and the accelerating pace of change in a gold rush society, Aboriginal people attempted to forge a new life in a changing world. In that sense they began to develop a new vision of their possibilities and identities.

ABORIGINAL POLICY

In 1848 Earl Grey discussed the performance of the Chief Protector, George Augustus Robinson, whom most colonists disliked and about whom even Governor Fitzroy and Superintendent La Trobe had reservations. He urged that any failures on Robinson's part should not reflect on the Office of the Chief Protector itself.

Grey then discussed Robinson's concern that:

DOCUMENT 3.43

> '...unless suitable reserves are immediately formed for their [the Aborigines'] benefit every acre of their native soil will be leased out and occupied as to leave them, in a legal view, no place for the soles of their feet. If the occupation of Crown Lands is to be settled by the Crown granting Leases for years, the Native will be deprived of all legal right to hunt over their own lands, and according to the dicta of certain high legal authorities may be forcibly excluded by the Leasee from the tract of Country so leased'.

Grey stated that due to the speed of pastoral settlement as opposed to the usual slow spread of agriculture, the method of settling Indigenous people on large remote tracts of land would not work. Besides, Grey stated this means was not necessary given the nature of the new pastoral lease system just put into place under the Waste Land Act. As he explained:

> I think it is essential that it should be generally understood that Leases granted for this purpose give the grantees only an exclusive right of pasturage for their cattle, and of cultivating such Land as they may require within the large limits thus assigned for them, but that these leases are not intended to deprive the Natives of their former right to hunt over these Districts, or to wander over them in search of subsistence in the manner to which they have been heretofore accustomed, from the spontaneous produce of the soil: except over land actually cultivated or fenced in for that purpose. This is a subject to which I wish to turn your attention. The evil of occasional depredations of acts of violence between Settlers and Natives in these out lying Districts is one which it is vain to expect can be wholly prevented. But a distinct understanding of the extent of their mutual rights is one step at last towards the maintenance of order and mutual forbearance between the parties. If therefore, the limitation which I have mentioned above on the right of exclusive occupation granted by Crown Leases is not, in your opinion, fully recognized in the Colony, I think it is advisable that you should enforce it by some public declaration, or if necessary by passing a declaratory enactment.
>
> Reserves should be established where they do not exist; particularly in Districts recently brought within the range of occupation and those already set apart for this purpose should be turned to account with all speed...
>
> [On the reserves there should be] the formation of Schools, both for the adults an young persons, but especially the latter who are more open to receive and to retain the impressions made upon them. These Schools should be formed as much as possible on the principle of combining the Arts of Industry with the elements of ordinary and Religious

FIGURE 31
'Earl Grey' by W. H. Lizars.
nla.pic-an9594840. National Library of Australia.

> Education. To the omission to instruct the Natives in those Arts I attribute, in a great degree, the general failure of the experiments in their education which have hitherto been made. Although some portion of each day should be devoted to the purposes of Instruction, the Scholars should also be trained as early as possible in the Mechanical employments and in those of Agriculture. Such occupations and the advantages which they would be taught to appreciate from a knowledge of them, would constitute the chief inducement to remain, as they advance in life; in a state of Civilization and would tend to destroy that desire to return to a wild and roving life...
>
> Despatch from the Right Honorable Earl Grey, Downing Street London, 11 February 1848 to Governor Sir Charles A. Fitzroy.

QUESTIONS

1. What was Robinson's concern alluded to in Grey's despatch?
2. Why did Grey think it unsuitable to form a separate territory for Aboriginal people?
3. What were the 'mutual rights' to which Grey referred? What guarantees might they have given?
4. What two policies had the British Government put in its place to recognise Aboriginal rights to and need for land?
5. What were Aboriginal people to be taught? Why?
6. What conclusions might one draw about the impact that colonization had upon Aboriginal communities after reading this document?

FIGURE 32 Aboriginal Farmers at Parker's Protectorate Station, Mount Franklin, 1858. *Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.*

Earl Grey wanted the work of the Port Phillip Chief Aboriginal Protector, George Augustus Robinson, reviewed. However, a Select Committee of the Legislative Council of New South Wales instead investigated the Port Phillip Protectorate itself. This Select Committee sought the views of Superintendent La Trobe, who judged Aboriginal policy largely a failure so far, except for the Native Police. The Committee also sought the views of Magistrates from Port Phillip.

The Select Committee stated in its brief report:

DOCUMENT 3.44

Your Committee have come to the conclusion, that the present system of protection of the Aborigines has totally failed in its object. Some of the evidence shows it to have been useless; while other witnesses state its effect has been prejudicial to the object of its care.

Your Committee regret that although they are compelled to advise the abolition of the present system, they are unable to recommend any other as a substitute. They cannot express any sanguine hopes as to the prospects of the adult population; and the education of the children although proved to be practicable by success in isolated cases, is accompanied by difficulties, admitted by all acquainted with the subject, but which none have been able to surmount. The total separation of the parents from the children seems to be essential to the success of any plan, and your Committee believes that to effect this object compulsory measures would be required.

Your Committee observe in a Despatch of Earl Grey's, dated 11th February, 1848 [document 4.1], that the formation of new reserves is recommended for the use of the Aborigines.The utility of this step they are inclined to doubt, inasmuch as reserves do exist at present, which have totally failed in their object, and it is clear that any multiplication of similar institutions would only increase both the difficulty and expense of their management, but would also prove prejudicial to those settlers who would be ousted of portions of their runs, and thus, perhaps, interfere with the good feeling which your Committee are happy to notice has sprung up between the white and black population of the Colony.

The total failure of all plans heretofore attempted and the great expense already incurred, amounting in thirteen years, to £61,000, induce your Committee to recommend that no hasty steps should be taken towards the introduction of a new system, until more mature consideration can be given to the subject, which they hope will be resumed in the next Session of the Legislative Council.

In conclusion, your Committee wish to express their opinion that, without underrating the philanthropic motives of Her Majesty's Government in attempting the improvement of the Aborigines, much more real good would be effected by similar exertions to promote the interest of religion and education among the white population in the interior of this Colony, the improvement of whose condition would, doubtless, tend to the benefit of the Aborigines.

John Leslie Foster, Chairman, 30 August 1849.

Report from the Select Committee on the Aborigines and Protectorate, with Appendix, Minutes of Evidence, *New South Wales Legislative Council Papers*, 1849, pp. 1-2.

QUESTIONS

1 What did the Committee recommend concerning the Port Phillip Protectorate and how was this justified?

2 What was needed in its opinion for the success of any plan for the Aborigines?

3 Why did it oppose Earl Grey's proposals about reserves?

4 What did it suggest should be done for Aboriginal people in Port Phillip?

The Select Committee's report, which condemned the Aboriginal Protectorate, led to its demise. The Protector William Thomas was kept on as 'Guardian of the Aborigines' in the Melbourne region. His main function was to keep the people out of Melbourne, but he also looked to their welfare as best he could with limited resources, spoke for them in court, and generally remained their trusted friend. In 1852 Thomas made the following suggestions as to their future:

DOCUMENT 3.45

The only means I can recommend for improving the condition of the two Melbourne tribes is to encourage their employment in the Native Police, or among settlers and farmers in their locality for stated and understood periods, to prevent them from coming within the precincts of Melbourne, and to attend to their bodily and physical wants. Education has been tried among them and proved more detrimental than profitable.

If I may be permitted to offer suggestions for the improvement of the inland tribes, not [di]minished through temperance or deteriorated from bad connection, who have offspring and in some tribes numerous, I would decidedly recommend that schools be established for each sex throughout the immediate and remote districts, the children as early as possible removed from the district schools to one at Melbourne. This may appear the suggestion of a misanthrope; but, whosoever reflects seriously upon the results of all previous efforts to restrain the rising generation, after they have been educated, from returning to the wilderness, must be convinced that nothing short of removing them a considerable distance for their tribe can permanently improve their condition and avert the extinction of their race: this head school receiving children from all localities, will amalgamate the tribes unconsciously, being young, they cannot have any prejudice: the head school, if conducted on the plan of the Philanthropic Schools in England, where simple trades are taught, would infuse industry with education. ...A solitary youth here and there being civilized has no effect on the mass... But the case would be widely different when taken young from their locality, and enabled at years of discretion to contract and enter into marriage with their own race upon the same footing of equal advancement. Encouraged under the guardianship of the Government, I would

FIGURE 33
'Billy, native of Port Fairy' by Ludwig Becker.
Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

venture to assert that in the next generation their proneness to the wilds, and in a great measure their indolence, would be thoroughly eradicated.

However unfeeling the separating the children from their parents and their native place may seem, yet when we reflect upon the wretched way these children are brought up and the obstinate degradation of their parents, humanity should guide us; the removing them early cannot be felt by the children, and to take them from the lap of their miserable parents would be a deed of mercy. We have two Aboriginal orphans now under training who know not a syllable of their native tongue, as happy and cheerful as any of their schoolfellows; but what is to become of them unless some strenuous efforts are made to increase the number, so there may be a community of the race?

It is more urgently required as there is every possibility that the length and breadth of Victoria will be in a few years located and townships formed. Ere it be too late decided steps should be taken to provide for the aboriginal race; let the old be supplied with the necessities of life, a spot set expressly apart indifferent localities for them, the children be secured and that early, then the race may be preserved. My impression is, if the parents were more studied, the difficulty of obtaining the children would not be so great.

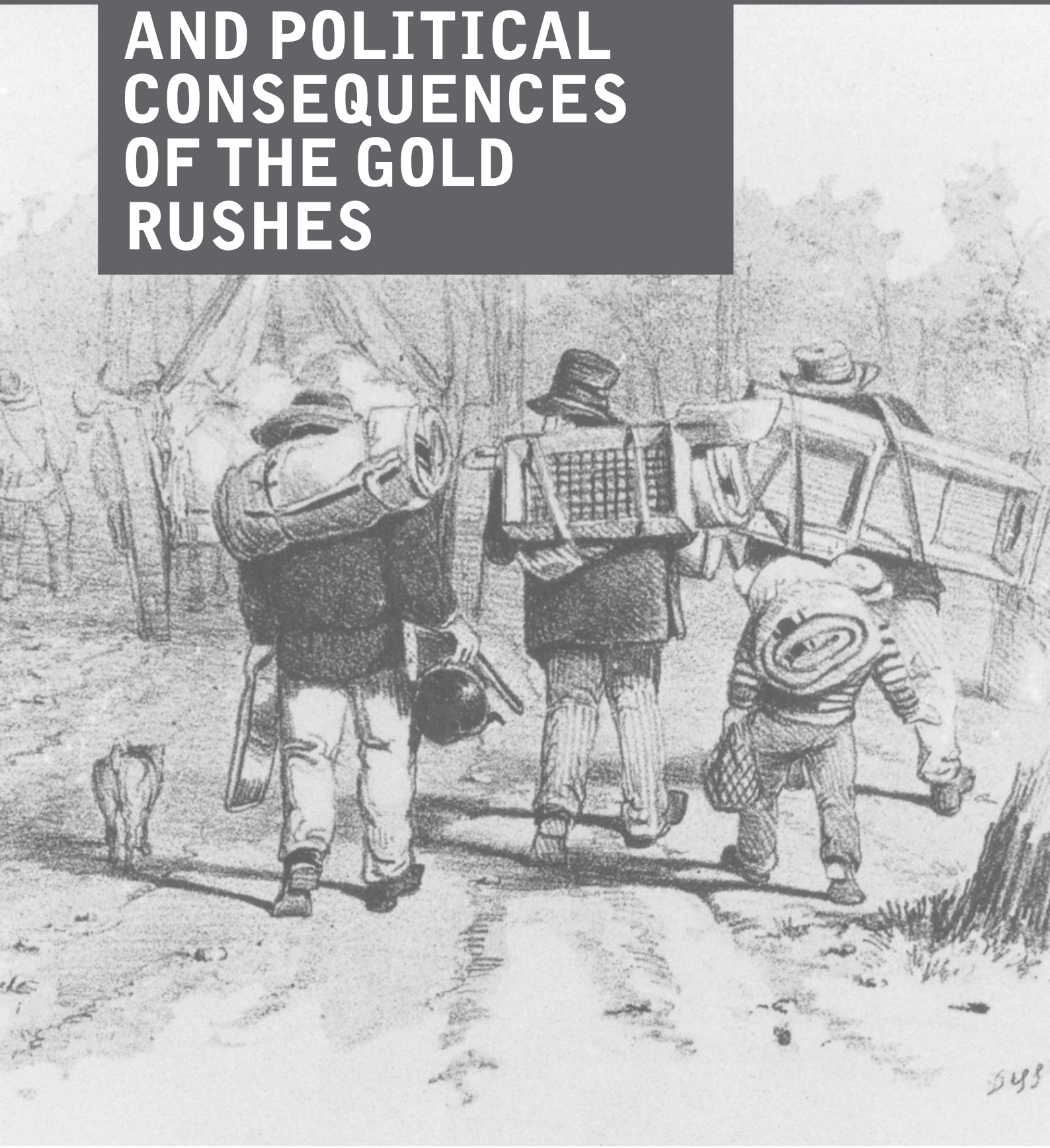
Due prudence, however, should be exercised in procuring the parents[']consent by persuasion, presents, or purchase, otherwise their present peaceable demeanour towards the white population might be broken and be the cause of direful results to both parties, which should be most studiously guarded against.

Guardian of Aborigines William Thomas to the Colonial Secretary, Melbourne, 14 September 1852, 'Aborigines, Return to Address 24 October 1854', *Victorian Legislative Council Papers*, C-No.33a.

QUESTIONS

1. What was Thomas proposing about Aboriginal schooling?
2. Why did he recommend that Aboriginal children living in the country be removed to Melbourne?
3. Discuss whether Thomas' comments about the impact of removal on the children and their parents seem sound or not?
4. Was removal to the school justified in terms of his overall aims for Aboriginal people? Discuss.
5. Explore the fate of the two orphan boys to which Thomas referred, by examining the end of chapters 3 and 6 in *Aboriginal Victorians. A History Since 1800*. Does this change your views of Thomas' comments? Why/Why not?

EVALUATING THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE GOLD RUSHES



ABOVE: 'Diggers on their way to Bendigo' by S. T. Gill. *Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.*

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A SOCIETY

Rarely is a society so radically transformed as was Port Phillip by the discovery in mid-1851 of the high value, easily transportable commodity called 'gold'. The how, when and why of its discovery does not concern us here. Rather we are focused on the impact that this golden find had on Port Phillip and how it shaped new visions of a future society.

In a matter of a few months it became clear that the old hierarchical world of the squatters, the sheep kings of Port Phillip, would be shaken. As the months changed into years; as the words 'Ballarat' and 'Bendigo' fell easily from the lips of people across the world, and as a seemingly endless flow of people entered the newly formed colony of Victoria; it was clear that a new society with new aspirations was dawning.

These aspirations were summed up in the phrase used by Rev. J. D. Lang, in his book titled *Freedom and Independence for the Golden Lands of Australia*: a desired escape from the Old World dominated by the wealthy, landed few, structured by class, and ranked by birth not merit. That dangerous word 'democracy' began to be whispered as well, as people desired to make the Old World anew.

GOLD RUSH IMMIGRATION

The statistics below indicate some of the demographic (checked your dictionary) impact of gold.

DOCUMENT 4.1

Year	NSW	Port Phillip /Victoria	Vic. Masculinity
1840	110,000c	10, 291	238.85
1850	189,341	76,162	148.35
1860	348,546	538,234	158.85

Source: *Victorian Year Book, 1973, Centenary Edition*, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Melbourne, 1973, pp. 32, 106.

QUESTIONS

1. Calculate in percentage terms how the discovery of gold changed Victoria's population.
2. In percentage terms reveal how gold changed the relationship between NSW and Victoria.
3. What is masculinity as a demographic measure? What do the figures in the right hand column signify about Victorian society?

The statistics in document 4.1 only begin to explain the demographic impact of gold. To deepen your understanding read the following section from my book, *Arriving*:

DOCUMENT 4.2

Approximately 584,000 persons emigrated to Victoria from July 1851 until the end of December 1861. Tens of thousands more overlanded from the adjoining colonies. Of those who arrived by sea, 300,000 or just fifty-one per cent came

FIGURE 34 'Queens Wharf, Melbourne, West End' by J. Tingle.
Rare Books Collection, State Library of Victoria.

from the United Kingdom, 45,000 or nearly eight per cent arrived from foreign ports and 8,000 or just over one per cent came from New Zealand and the South Seas. The remaining 229,000 or forty per cent came by sea from the other Australian colonies. Many of the latter were old hands or ex-convicts, although others were fresh arrivals from overseas who then headed for Victoria. About ten per cent of the immigrants were neither British or Irish.

About 90,000 of the 300,000 people who came from the United Kingdom were assisted: the largest sponsored inflow in any decade before the 1940s... Nearly two-thirds of them were female, for the Victorian Government encouraged married couples and single women to counteract the predominance of single men among the unassisted immigrants. Over half the assisted were domestic servants, a third were agricultural labourers, a tenth were mechanics and a small number were tradespeople. Forty-two per cent of them were English and Welsh, thirty-three per cent were Irish and twenty-five per cent were Scottish, although the percentages of these nationalities in the United Kingdom were sixty-five, twenty-four and eleven respectively. The Irish were over-represented by about a third and the Scots were more than double their expected percentage.

Detailed figures of place of origin gathered from the passenger lists exist for the years 1850 to 1856. In the seven years to December 1856, 65,000 persons were assisted to Victoria, at the rate of thirty-eight in every 10,000 people in the United Kingdom. However the spread was uneven, for only thirty-three out of the 118 United Kingdom counties had assisted emigration rates equal

to or above the United Kingdom average. Only six were counties in England, seven were in Ireland and twenty were in Scotland (although Scotland only has thirty-three counties). As in the 1840s, the southern Irish were over-represented, Country Clare having the heaviest emigration rate, five times the United Kingdom average. Most notable was the heavy emigration from the highlands of Scotland, which partly reflected the activities of the Highland and Island Emigration Society in clearing the paupers from many highland estates. Most of the Scottish counties with an above average rate of assisted emigration were highland counties. The highest rates were from Sutherland which produced six times the average, Argyleshire and the Islands which had a rate eight times the average, and Inverness-shire which contributed nine times the average rate of United Kingdom assisted emigrants.

This uneven distribution brought grumbles from both officials and colonists. The Victorian Immigration Agent, Edward Grimes, claimed that many of the highlanders were 'in a most deplorable state of ignorance, and quite unacquainted with the English language'. Unfortunately we know little about their problems of adjustment in Victoria. Grimes added that they were not an acquisition to the colony as few were acquainted with agricultural and pastoral employment and they were imbued with 'indolent habits'.

The familiar complaints against the southern Irish were repeated. Edward Bell, the Immigration Agent in 1854, claimed that most married couples were 'idle, uneducated and dirty' and that the single women were generally 'unaccustomed to domestic service'. The civil servant, G. W. Rusden, feared that the southern Irish might lower education standards and raise the crime rate for, while a third of English and Scottish assisted immigrants were illiterate, two-thirds of the Irish were unable to read or write. Complaints about southern Irish servant girls were persistent. Hugh Childers, the Immigration Agent in 1852, when closely questioned about this by the Irish Catholic parliamentarian, John O'Shanassy, claimed Irish servant girls were 'utterly ignorant of the duties of household service' and at best could cook potatoes and scrub floors. Despite the protests, many southern Irish continued to come under the assisted scheme, as the emigration commissioners could not obtain sufficient single women from other parts of the United Kingdom.

The London needlewomen sent out by the philanthropist Sidney Herbert were also unpopular. One goldfield storekeeper, William Probert, alleged that these English women were 'indecent and disorderly' types who earned their living on the streets. Edward Grimes was more temperate, but he believed that a minority of them were from 'the very dregs of society' and pointed out that the colonists paid them a rate of wages less than other women workers.

The remarks about highlanders, the southern Irish and needlewomen reveal the prejudice of 'decent' people against assisted immigrants and the mistaken concern that Victoria receive the best educated and most skilled immigrants. It was a mistaken concern, shared by some recent historians, because the colony's development in the 1850s depended as much on muscle as on education. William Westgarth recognized this when he lamented that 'amongst the unsuitable multitude that streams into the colony are many young men of good education but untrained to any particular vocation'. Also, the assisted generally came to stay, while many of the unassisted arrived to make a killing and leave. Most of the assisted immigrants were to live decent and useful lives in the colony.

Over a quarter of a million immigrants from overseas paid their own fares – about £25 for steerage and £50 for a cabin on British ships – and brought a small stake as well. In 1859 the amounts carried by those without a will who

died on the voyage were made public. The forty-five unassisted passengers whose assets were listed carried £546 in cash and £329 in money orders and, if the one who owned £350 is omitted, the average for the rest is £12 – hardly a fortune. Yet, as many of the unassisted had skilled jobs or better, it is likely that some had other assets at home or deposits in colonial banks. Only sixty-two per cent of the British and Irish unassisted were labourers (as opposed to ninety per cent of the assisted), twenty-three per cent were skilled tradesmen and ten per cent professionals. Only a third of the unassisted (from all places) were women. A sample of the unassisted passenger lists of British ships revealed that the Irish were under-represented, probably owing to the high cost of the fare, and that only a quarter of the Irish came with their family, whereas half the English and Scots did so. The most common age group among those sampled was between twenty and twenty-four years.

Richard Broome on the 'Origins of the Diggers' in his *Arriving*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1984, pp. 72-74.

The next document is composed of two tables containing census returns for the goldfields in 1857:

DOCUMENT 4.3

Overseas-born (Excluding those from the United Kingdom) on the Victorian Goldfields in November 1857

	Total Goldfields		
Birthplace	**Persons**	**Males**	**Females**
France	905	777	128
Germany	4,761	4,046	715
Other Europe	3,536	3,431	105
United States	1,817	1,702	115
China	23,623	23,621	2
Other	248	228	20
Total Pop.	**169,980**	**125,836**	**44,144**

	Particular Goldfields					
Birthplace	**Ballarat**	**Castlemaine**	**Avoca**	**Bendigo**	**Beechworth**	**Other**
France	219	188	226	118	133	21
Germany	1123	707	1075	1266	492	98
Other Europe	653	795	694	945	378	71
United States	392	223	522	253	385	42
China	7532	4668	3096	3629	4695	1
Other	48	39	68	67	21	5
Total Pop.	47,653	31,237	35,823	32,544	18,592	4,131

Broome, *Arriving*, 1984, p. 81.

FIGURE 35 'Canvas Town, between Princess Bridge and South Melbourne in 1850's' by De Gruchy and Leigh. *Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.*

QUESTION

1 After examining documents 4.2 and 4.3, make a list of dot points about the range and complexity of the gold rush immigration to create an understanding of those who entered Victoria in the 1850s.

The large inflow of people and the lure of gold had diverse impacts on Victoria. Following are just a few outcomes.

Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe wrote to his superiors in London in October 1851, just three months after the discovery of gold at Clunes and Warrandyte:

DOCUMENT 4.4

Within the last three weeks the towns of Melbourne and Geelong and their large suburbs have been in appearance almost emptied of many classes of their male inhabitants; the streets which for a week and ten days were crowded by drays loading with the outfit for the workings are now seemingly deserted. ... Cottages are deserted, houses to let, business is at a stand-still, and even schools are closed. In some of the suburbs not a man is left, and the women are known for self-protection to forget neighbours jars, and to group together to keep house. The ships in the harbour are, in a great measure, deserted... drained of its labouring population, the price of provisions in the towns is naturally on the increase, for although there may be abundant supply within reach, there is not sufficient hands to turn it to account. Both here and at Geelong all buildings and contract works, public and private, almost without exception, area at a stand-still.

In the country your Lordship will easily conceive that, viewing the season at which these circumstances have occurred, and the agricultural and particularly the pastoral interests at stake, that this is the commencement of the shearing season, and that shortly the harvest will call for labour, great

embarrassment and anxiety prevail. ... Some would wish to see Government decline to sanction the issue of gold licences, and to forbid the working at this season of the year till the shearing and harvest are over. Your Lordship may, however, readily conceive that, even if really held expedient, it would be quite impossible to withstand such a general popular movement, excited by such a cause, by any practicable means whatever. There is but one way, and that is, to let the current expend itself, and meanwhile see that as far as possible it is kept within proper bounds.

C. J. La Trobe to Earl Grey, 10 October 1851, *Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers*, 1852, vol. XXXIV, paper no. 1508, pp. 45-46.

John Chandler who immigrated as a boy to Melbourne gave this account of Melbourne in 1852:

DOCUMENT 4.5

Emigrants for England were coming in very fast, and there were no houses to be got at any price. It was a harvest to the landlords. The Government laid out a piece of land between St Kilda and Emerald Hill [South Melbourne] for the new chums to fix tents on. ... There was soon more than a thousand tents of every sort and size, and every kind of trade was carried on amongst them; it was called Canvas Town. It stretched along the St. Kilda Road for nearly a mile, and all along the wharf this side of the river. The emigrants began to sell their surplus clothes and every description of articles – books, accordions, watches, guns and pistols, from a needle to an anchor; this was called Rag Fair. This got to be such a rowdy place, and so much cheating, gambling and vice existed that it had to be stopped.

John Chandler, *Forty Years in the Wilderness*, Loch Haven Books, Melbourne, 1990, p. 61.

As people streamed into Victoria the crime rate rose. The government passed the Convicts Prevention Act of 1852, which prevented ex-convicts with conditional pardons from entering from Van Diemen's Land [Tasmania]. The British Government disallowed the Act on grounds of curbing the rights of freed men, which the colonists refused to accept. George Train, an American merchant living in Melbourne in 1853 to 1855 remarked:

DOCUMENT 4.6

I say I have never before realized the startling truth that I am living in a country filled with the scum of all the jails in England – the homicide, the burglar, the forger, and the blackest villains that the world can produce; men so hardened in their damnable crimes that it were a folly to believe for a moment that they were ever touched with the celestial want of repentance.

I have not thought it worthy my while when writing you to notice the occasional 'sticking up' of some unfortunate traveller, or the brutal murder of a poor digger – so many instances of which occur, but never come to light, and even passed by without remark... [he then recounted some desperate and violent crimes] ...On Monday morning last three of the 'lags' who shot into the [gold] escort were hung at the Melbourne jail, in the presence of thousands of the lower classes, making some eight or nine individuals that have been strung up since I have been in the colony, less than five months.

A short time after the execution on Monday, while passing down Great Bank street, what should I see but one of the dead bodies in the show window of a

drinking saloon, decorated with flowers and ribbons! What a disgusting sight! Oh, ye people of Victoria, how passing strange are some of your doings!

E. Daniel and Annette Potts (eds), *A Yankee Merchant in Goldrush Australia, The Letters of George Francis Train, 1853-1855*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1970, pp. 68, 71.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the situation facing La Trobe due to the discovery of gold as outlined in document 4.4. Is he in control of the situation? Explain.
2. Read the accounts of Chandler and Train and consider the impacts of the gold discovery on Melbourne and its society. List them under different headings: social, political and economic.
3. Examine figure 36. Who is Mr Punch and what does he represent?
4. What are the representations of the gold rushes in figure 36?

THE DIGGERS' LIFE

Geoffrey Serle remarked in his 'Conclusion' to *The Golden Age*, that: 'most of the men who came to Victoria worked for some period on the diggings'.[1] If this is the case it is important to get some sense of their experience.

1 Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age, A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1851-1861*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1963, p. 376.

The next five documents, 4.7 to 4.11, will deepen your understanding of those who came to dig for gold and how that experience might have shaped them.

Englishman John Sherer arrived in Victoria in 1852 and after striking it lucky returned home and wrote an account of his adventures. He described his fellow gold seekers on the road to Mount Alexander [Castlemaine]:

DOCUMENT 4.7

Hundreds of drays and carts were tearing and toiling through the deeply-rutted track; horses and bullocks smoking and sweltering beneath a broiling sun; drivers shouting and cracking their whips to the loudness of pistol-report, tradesmen of every kind and degree; women of every size and age between twenty and forty-five; clerks, shopmen, doctors, lawyers, shepherds, and sailors from all countries; German and Swiss wine-growers, broken-down army-lieutenants and ruined gentlemen's sons of the old country, might all have been found upon that road wending to Forest Creek, Mount Alexander or Bendigo, to seek for 'the root of all evil'. All except the women were armed with weapons of some kind or other, for the Irish shililah up to a six-barrelled revolving pistol. Verily, I believe, there was never seen, in any part of the world before, such a heterogeneous stream of human prodigality, pouring itself along a single line of road, with such golden prospects in view. Every face was radiant with hope and every one was sure of his fortune.

John Sherer, *The Gold-Finder of Australia*, 1853, reprinted Penguin, Melbourne, 1973, p. 21.

FIGURE 36
'Mr Punch pays a visit to the diggings' by Frederick Grosse, 1855
Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

A Polish digger, Seweryn Korzelinski was a gold seeker between 1852 and 1856. Korzelinski published his memoirs in Cracow, Poland in 1858 and Stan Robe translated them in 1979. Korzelinski also gave an account of those on the diggings:

DOCUMENT 4.8

...this very large society comprises men from all parts of the world, all countries and religions, varying dispositions and education, all types of artisans, artists, literary men, priests, pastors, and soldiers, sailors, wild tribesmen with tattoo markings and those deported for crimes – all mixed into one society, all dressed similarly, all forced to forget their previous habits, leanings, customs, manners and occupations. All forced to follow their new occupation and to live the monotonous lives of the miners.

As they dig shafts next to one another, their outward appearance does not signify their previous importance, worth or mental attainments. A colonel pulls up the earth for a sailor, a lawyer wields not a pen but a spade; a priest lends a match to a Negro's pipe; a doctor rests on the same heap of earth with a Chinaman; a man of letters carries a bag of earth; many a baron or count has a drink with a Hindu, and all of them hirsute, dusty and muddy, so that their own mothers would not be able to recognize them. Many a one would not, a short while before, bother to look at a fellow with whom he now works. Here we are all joined by a common designation: 'Digger'. Only various shades of skin colour and speech denote nationally and origin, but it is impossible to guess previous station in life or background.

Seweryn Korzelinski, *Memoirs of Gold-Digging in Australia*, 1858, translated by Stanley Robe, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1979, p. 55.

QUESTIONS

1 Compare the accounts by Sherer and Korselinski, noting the additional perspective Korzelinski provides about the social attitudes of the diggers.

2 What does he imply caused the development of this additional perspective?

A missionary Robert Young visited the Ballarat and Bendigo diggings and had this to say about the diggers:

DOCUMENT 4.9

> The fortunate digger, as he is seen squandering his money in Melbourne, or in other places, may inspire those around him with enthusiasm. But things as seen in the gold-fields, are very different: four or five diggers are generally huddled together in one small tent, often not more than ten feet square, made of a single ply of cotton cloth, and wholly incapable of keeping out the rain, which pours through as from a sieve; and the heat at this season of the year, scorches up everything inside the tent; whilst myriads of large flies are continually annoying everybody, and destroying everything; and , above all, the very dust seems to be alive with fleas. The digger having finished a hard day's work in a narrow confined hole, half covered in water, (sometimes for weeks and months not getting a speck of gold,) at night retires, with four or five weary companions, to rest upon the bare ground of the tent, covering himself with a soiled blanket. His food is constantly fat mutton and bread, with a pint of bitter-tea. No wonder that so many look sickly and haggard, and that thousands are constantly wandering from one section of the gold-fields to another...
>
> Robert Young, *The Southern World: Journal of a Deputation from the Wesleyan Conference to Australia and Polynesia*, London, 1854, p. 359.

FIGURE 37 'Diggers on their way to Bendigo' by S. T. Gill. *Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.*

Mrs Charles Clacy wrote of her visits to the Bendigo diggings in 1852-53:

DOCUMENT 4.10

Sunday is kept at the diggings in a very orderly manner; and among the actual diggers themselves, the day of rest is taken in a *verbatim sense*... But night at the diggings is the characteristic time: murder here – murder there – revolvers cracking – blunderbusses bombing – rifles going off – balls whistling – one man groaning with a broken leg – another shouting because he couldn't find the way to his hole, and a third equally vociferous because he has tumbled into one - this man swearing – another praying – a party of bacchanals chanting various ditties to different time and tune, or rather minus both. Here is one man grumbling because he has brought his wife with him, another ditto because he has left his behind, or sold her for an ounce of gold or a bottle of rum. Donny-brook Fair is not to be compared to an evening in Bendigo.

Mrs Charles Clacy, *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia in 1852-53*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1963, p. 56.

Geoffrey Serle has tried to generalise about the economic outcomes of gold finding. He wrote:

DOCUMENT 4.11

No precise estimates are possible. But it is probable that from mid-1852, of all those who tried the diggings, eight out of ten made no more than the equivalent of reasonable wages, paid their way, or lost money. Another one in ten earned high wages over a long period of time and the remaining 10 per cent at the end of their digging may have been able to clear £100 or more – sometimes much more. However, there was a quick turnover of diggers: probably about half of all those who tried their luck gave up after a few weeks. Of those who stuck at it for a long period, say six months or more, perhaps two out of the three did not profit, while one third were successful in varying degree. ... those who prospered most from the diggings, many of them as much or more than the most fortunate diggers, were gold-buyers, storekeepers on the field, and property-owners, merchants and publicans.

When all is said and done, probably less than one hundred men won enough from individual mining, say £10,000, to retire and live in comfort.

Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age. A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1851-1861*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1963, pp. 85-86.

QUESTIONS

1. Using documents 4.7 to 4.11, write a short account about the experience of those who dug for gold and how it might have shaped them.
2. What do these documents suggest about the type of person drawn to the Victorian gold rushes?

IMMIGRANT LETTERS HOME

John Green who was born in 1827 in Rutland shire emigrated to Victoria in 1852 where he later married and had a family of seven children with his wife Elizabeth (nee Kidgell), before being killed by a train in 1866.

On 22 July 1853 he wrote to his sister Eliza Green, from the diggings at Bendigo where he reported that he has been digging unsuccessfully with a Mr S:

DOCUMENT 4.12

> The diggers are at present in a very excited state. They, the day before yesterday, rescued some prisoners and drove all the police and troopers back to their barracks. I expect there will be fearful work in a month or so if the government don't reduce the licence. Never recommend any to come to Australia to dig for gold it is a complete lottery. Above all no young gentleman or young lady, labourer and mechanics may do so, but shopmen, clerks, and such rubbish had better drown themselves. No man should come to dig with less than £100 as a standby (now to return to our subject) Its dig, dig, dig till one morning Mr S., who is cash keeper wakes and tells me there is no food in the tent , and no money. He is in a terrible funk. I have often been so in England so I don't care about it, which strange conduct on my part, alarms, astonishes, and horrifies him. I laugh him into a more cheerful humour.

They sold some pistols and a looking glass to raise some funds, then took jobs cutting posts until they could dig again.

> A man may get 20lb weight out of a hole, and men digging all round him within a few inches won't get a grain. In digging the bottom as it is called is only a foot from the surface, sometimes upwards of 50 feet, when you reach the bottom you wash all the earth for 6 to 8 inches above it or 1 or 2 inches of the bottom itself which is sometimes pipe clay, sometimes mullock. Well, then if you find gold in the stuff you wash your drive as it is called, that is you leave an arch over your head and go burrowing along 12 to 14 feet, or as far as you can without driving into anyone else's hole.
>
> John Green to Eliza Green, 22 July 1985, State Library of Victoria, ms 10619.

Charles and Elizabeth Osborne, a newly married couple emigrated to Melbourne in mid 1855, where Charles commenced work as a carpenter. Several of his letters home to Berkshire survive from 1857. He was then working on the new Parliament houses until he suffered an injury lifting heavy timber.

He wrote to his mother:

DOCUMENT 4.13

> I hope before this that you have received my last letter so that you will see I had heard of the Death of my poor brother [Edwin] some time before I heard from you. I was very much surprised and could scarcely bring myself to believe it as I did not hear from you for some time and after I first heard of it. I try to persuad [sic] myself that it was a mistake and lived in hopes that it might be false until I received G. letter [his brother George] previous to hearing from you then could scarcely believe it, it appeared like a dream it was uppermost in my mind night and day it made me feel very uncomfortable, I think I feel it more than what I should, had I been in England but being here by myself I feel at times almost like being out of the world for I have not a friend here that I can speak to... it have made me wish myself at home hundreds of times but I can never think of coming to England to work for 4 or 5 shillings per day when I can get three times as much here . I was in hopes you would have sent me some of poor Edwin's hair as I should very much like to have some put in a locket for my little Bess as he was her Godfather...

I have been wanting to send you £5 but I cannot manage it very well just now. It is not because I have not got it for I'm pleased to say that I have £22 but as I have not enjoyed very good health and doctors are very expensive and I am trying to get into some little business I might want the money I have at present but if nothing more happens than common I will send you £5 when I write again. Since I wrote to you I have left the parliament houses where I had been working; some time we was getting 15 shillings per day their [sic] but I was not out long but I am only getting 13 where I am now there is a great deal of trade going on in Melbourne but their [sic] are a great many mechanics out of work for the parliament houses being a large job it brought a great many men of all Trades in the town from the diggings and the other colonies but now the houses are finished they will go back again.

Charles Osborne letters in the possession of N. B. Carter, Surrey Hills, with permission.

Mrs E. Wilson, a widow and teacher in Pentridge, now Coburg, wrote unsuccessfully to the Commissioners of National Education in September 1856 asking for her fare home to England:

DOCUMENT 4.14

My husband was a saddler and harness-maker here in Pentridge. He died two years ago last month with the colonial fever leaving me with three children. It has pleased the lord to take my Baby since his death. I have a little boy and girl both under eight years old. Gentlemen, I have strove to do my best for my little family in every way. The only friend I had left in this part of the world was a brother, he died on the fifth of July last in a fit. I am now bereaved of all but my dear children. And my fears are should anything happen to me they would be left alone in this colony without a relative and unprotected. I have good and respected friends at home if I can get there.

E. Wilson, 19 September 1856, Board of National Education, *Victoria Public Record Office Series* 880, unit 29, 56/1704.

A digger, Tranquillo Pata, from the village of Sonogno in Ticino on the Swiss-Italian border, wrote home to his brothers in April 1856. After describing his five days walk to the goldfields at Bendigo and his three months of work for little pay, he fell ill (probably with typhoid fever or dysentery) while digging with fellow Ticinese from his own region:

DOCUMENT 4.15

I became sick with a stomach ache and a headache. ... I was so bad that I could hardly stand up. I didn't have the strength to go and get the water for boiling and to light the fire. Anyway for three weeks you could say I didn't eat an ounce of food apart from boiled water. For three weeks it seemed I was getting better and then for three weeks quite the opposite, and it came to two months. And I will tell you the truth. I never thought that certain people in Australia were so hard hearted. I was with Lorenzo ... as my partner and he would never ask me if I needed something. I was near Giuseppe ... and he only came because he wanted to [indecipherable] me, I was near Giuseppe and he never asked me anything. The only people nearby who came to ask me anything were Francesco ... who came to ask me occasionally about something and Giuseppe... who often helped to get firewood and boil me water. But as far as Martino... was concerned I could have died, and he was the nearest.

He then moved and found four countrymen who helped.

> If I hadn't gone where these good friends were I would have died because I wasn't able to do anything anymore, neither get any water not light the fire. And they did everything for me until I recovered and I can't speak well enough of those who helped me and more.

Letter of Tranquillo Pata, 13 April 1856, translated by Anthony Pagliaro, La Trobe University, from the original in Giorgio Cheda, *L' Emigrazion Ticinese in Australia,* Dado, Locarno, 1976, vol. 2, letter 135.

Another Ticinese migrant, Giovana Maria Filippini, wrote home from the Jim Crow Diggings in May 1857 with the aid of a scribe, Allessandro Pozzi:

DOCUMENT 4.16

> I would have left even if I had to cross the sea on foot. What was decided was destined and I wished to follow my destiny with the help of the good God who has helped me until now. Since everyone in general was against me, a woman, going to such a country and certainly you were frightened too since you gave me friendly advice which frightened me rather than encouraged me; as everyone thought I would be lost at the end of the world, still, since I had decided on it, I wanted to go and I am happy. If other women had started off without fear to come to Australia, perhaps they would be happy too. Now I get by as I can, I lead a hard life of hard work, there are no fine clothes for the holidays, but this won't last forever. At least I see a few more shillings than at home where a woman can work labour, wash, be employed by the day and do what she likes to earn money but will never earn as much as here unless she lives to be 200 and even so she would only have tiny dowry. The earnings in a month are better than for fifty years at home.

Giovana Maria Filippini, 21 May 1857, translated by Anthony Pagliaro, from Giorgio Cheda, *L' Emigrazion Ticinese in Australia*, vol. 2, letter 50.

QUESTIONS

1. Make a list of dot points of the key immigrant experiences of life in Victoria as expressed in the five letters in documents 4.12 to 4.16.
2. What experiences do they have in common? What are unique to each?

GOLD RUSH SOCIAL IDEAS

People sensed that the impact of gold was changing the world around them socially. The following documents will explore these views further.

Gavan Duffy an Irish patriot and defender of Irish tenants immigrated to Victoria in late 1855 and entered parliament a year later, rising to a cabinet post and eventually Premier. He wrote to a friend Henry Moore in May 1856:

FIGURE 38

'Digger's wedding in Melbourne' by S. T. Gill.

nla.pic-an7537673. National Library of Australia.

DOCUMENT 4.17

We are making a new and better America. All is growth and progress and sense of life that imparts itself to all who are handling public affairs. The seed is sown and grown and reaped in a span. You propose work and it is done. You expose an abuse and it is abandoned. I am not idealizing but reporting nakedly my experience - a sort of experience that belongs only to new countries.

Joy Parnaby, 'Gavan Duffy in Australia' typescript.

R. Caldwell wrote of the diggers in 1855:

DOCUMENT 4.18

The honest independence of these fellows, I confess, I liked exceedingly. I never got a saucy answer from one of them; but not one of them will touch his hat to you. The gold-digger feels himself free and independent; and, although inclined to be civil and good natured, he is not the least disposed to admit of any superiority, or to be servile to anybody. I confess, to a new comer, the diggers' general aspect is rather of the banditti order. With their long beards and rough exterior, and sometimes with fowling pieces over their shoulders, they look rather threatening...I am of opinion that, taking into account the very heterogeneous character of the population of the gold fields, the diggers are a well-behaved, sober, industrious class of men, and that they form most desirable pioneers of civilization in a new country like Australia.

R. Caldwell, *The Gold Era of Victoria*, London, 1855, pp. 101, 103.

John Sherer, gold seeker, found upon his arrival in late 1851 that prices and wages were sky rocketing and employers were unable to hire labourers who were now in a privileged position:

DOCUMENT 4.19

All the aristocratic feelings and associations of the old country are at once annihilated. Plebeianism of the rankest, and, in many instances, of the lowest kind, at present dwells in Australia; and as riches are now becoming the test of a man's position, it is vain to have any pretensions whatever unless you are supported by that powerful auxiliary. It is not what you were, but what you are that is the criterion – as, indeed, it ought to be – by which you are judged; and although your father might have been my Lord of England-all-over, it goes for nothing in this equalising colony of gold and beef and mutton. Work is the word, and if you cannot do this, you are of no use here. ... If he [an emigrant] cannot work for himself, he must as infallibly sink in the social scale there, as he will everywhere else where physical activity and industry are made the highest standards of a man's abilities for getting on in the world.

John Sherer, *The Gold-Finder of Australia*, 1853, reprinted Penguin, Melbourne, 1973, p. 10.

Rev. J. D. Merewether expressed this view in his diary in October 1852:

DOCUMENT 4.20

This colony [of Victoria] was the most desirable of all which the Crown possesses. How changed now! No more tranquility and good fellowship between the grades of society. All is confusion, selfishness, license, and subversion of all respect for worth, talent, and education. Brawn and muscle are now the aristocracy, and insolently bear their newly-assumed honours. In fact, we have here the French Revolution without the guillotine. When I arrived in Melbourne, I found the street full of dirty, disorderly mob of people, many of them tipsy, who seemed to take a delight in setting the laws of decent behaviour at defiance.

J. D. Merewether, *Diary of a Working Clergyman in Australia and Tasmania kept during the years 1850-1853*, London, 1859, p.214.

William Westgarth, a Melbourne merchant, wrote in 1853:

DOCUMENT 4.21

Colonial society is preeminently practical and utilitarian. This must be expected where no ancient local usages or institutions influence another course. It is the course of common sense, and one altogether unavoidable among the intelligent masses in a new sphere...

The independent bearing of the colonial labouring population, in short of the whole of the employed class, is often commented upon. A labourer in Australia is indeed a very different personage from one in the mother country, and he is not long in knowing the fact. An English gentleman, therefore, might be disposed to regard the license and bearing of the mechanic and labouring classes of colonies as somewhat subversive of social landmarks, and a feature altogether disagreeable in the colonial landscape. This feeling gradually gives way with the effect of habit and of a less prejudiced view, and the independent position of such classes then assumes a more advantageous light.

William Westgarth, *Victoria, Late Australia Felix*, Edinburgh, 1853, pp. 359, 361.

A pastoralist, John Hunter Kerr, visited Melbourne in December 1851 and wrote of successful diggers:

DOCUMENT 4.22

A season of reckless extravagance ensued, and the gold of the diggers was scattered with wild profusion, and was spent even more quickly than it had been amassed. Every conceivable folly was perpetrated by the rough men with unwashed faces, who paraded the streets arrayed in the finest of broadcloth, and with huge rings glittering on their dingy toil-worn hands. With them might be seen women decked out in the richest and brightest of silks and satins, below which not infrequently peeped bare red feet, while long tawny locks hung uncombed over their shoulders. The utter incongruity of their conduct and appearance defies all description, and they seemed uneasy till all their quickly won wealth has been dissipated...

There were at that time barely half-a-dozen carriages to be had on hire, and these were daily engaged by some of the lucky diggers, who drove about accompanied by their fair companions. Weddings among them were daily occurrence, and were celebrated with fantastic pomp and splendour, extending to the favours and nosegays, which were of unusual dimensions, and to their own costume, which was refulgent in brilliancy of colour. In exultation they drove through the streets in their showy plumage, while their superiors in station walked humbly to their sober array. 'It is our turn to be masters now', was their taunting exclamation: 'you will have to be our servants yet'.

Marguerite Hancock (ed.), *Glimpses of Life in Victoria, by a 'Resident'* [John Hunter Kerr], 1876, reprinted The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 94-95.

QUESTIONS

1. Study each of the documents 4.17 to 4.22, use your dictionary where necessary, and list what social changes the writers detected from the impact of gold.
2. Identify key words or actions that capture these changes?
3. Did each writer approve of these changes or not? How can you tell?
4. What caused these new social attitudes?
5. Does figure 38 parallel the views of John Hunter Kerr? Explain.

ORIGINS OF THE NEW GOLD RUSH SOCIAL IDEAS

The gold discoveries created new attitudes, but social and political movements in Britain also meant most gold rush migrants came with a strong vision for the future. This section will explore some of those ideas.

E. P. Thompson, the historian of the English working class, wrote of the ideas of freedom shared by most English people at this time.

DOCUMENT 4.23

What, then, did the common Englishman's 'birthright' consist in? 'Security of property!' answered Mary Wollestonecraft... and yet the rhetoric of liberty means much more – first of all, of course, freedom from foreign domination....

FIGURE 39
'Diggers of high degree' by S. T. Gill.
nla.pic-an7537633-1. National Library of Australia.

QUESTIONS

1 Examine figures 39 and 40. What arguments are being made by the cartoonist in juxtaposing these two cartoons?

2 Examine figures 39 to 42. Write a paragraph on each of the following elements of these images:

- content
- context
- function

3 To what extent do these images help you understand the impact that the discovery of gold had on Victorian society?

FIGURE 40
'Diggers of low degree' by S. T. Gill.
nla.pic-an7537628. National Library of Australia.

FIGURE 41

'An English Gold Field.' *London Punch, vol. XXIII, 31 July 1852, pp. 58-9.*

AN ENGLISH GOLD FIELD.

A GOLD FIELD IN THE "DIGGINS."

FIGURE 42

'A Gold Field in the "Diggins".' *London Punch, vol. XXIII, 31 July 1852, pp. 58-9.*

> Freedom from absolutism (the constitutional monarchy), freedom from arbitrary arrest, trial by jury, equality before the law, the freedom of the home from arbitrary entrance and search, some limited liberty of thought, of speech, and of conscience... Nor were any of these freedoms insignificant; taken together, they both embody and reflect a moral consensus in which authority at times shared, and of which at all times it was bound to take account.
>
> Indefinite as such a notion as 'moral consensus' may be, this question of the *limits* beyond which the Englishman was not prepared to be 'pushed around', and the limits beyond which authority did not dare to go, is crucial to an understanding of the period. The stance of the common Englishman was not so much democratic, in any positive sense, as anti-absolutist. He felt himself to be an individualist, with few affirmative rights, but protected by the laws against the intrusion of arbitrary power. More obscurely, he felt that the Glorious Revolution afforded a constitutional precedent for the right to riot in resistance to oppression.
>
> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, London, 1968, pp. 86-87.

The English working classes which developed a consciousness after 1820 began to form associations and unions and push for political rights.

In 1838 some working men created the People's Charter a list of key political aspirations. Monster meetings were held in support of the Charter and a number of huge petitions were presented to Parliament, the last one in 1848 with over 2 million signatures.

The six points of the Charter were:

- Manhood suffrage for those over 21
- Vote by secret ballot
- No property qualification for the vote
- Equal-sized electoral districts
- Annual parliaments
- Payment of members

Parliament refused to act on the petition, claiming many signatures were fraudulent - and some clearly were – Queen Victoria being one of the alleged signatories! The movement failed as the Chartists did not push onto violent means, as did workers in other parts of Europe in the revolutions of 1848. Still, Chartism was a vital step in forging a vision of reform in England.

One early historian of the Chartist movement, M. Hovell, called the movement 'a passionate negation'.[2] This meant Chartism rejected the current system that favoured the rich and propertied, and negated individual rights. They wanted to be equally represented in parliament by people of their own choosing – the first five dot points - and for all [men] to have the right to enter parliament and the ability to do – the last dot point.

2 Quoted in R. Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics. A Study of Eastern Australia 1850-1910*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1960, p.15.

One of the most influential nineteenth century writers was Samuel Smiles. He was a Scottish journalist, and a parliamentary reformer, who after the excesses of Chartism wrote a series of books beginning in 1859 with the best seller, *Self-Help*. His ideas built on the individualism that was present, even in the working class movement, but turned to reform of the individual from within, not social reform from without.

DOCUMENT 4.24

'Heaven helps those who help themselves' is a well-tried maxim, embodying in a small compass the results of vast human experience. The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength. Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates. ...national progress is the sum of individual industry, energy and uprightness, as national decay is of individual idleness, selfishness and vice.

Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help with Illustrations of Conduct & Perseverance*, London, pp. 35-36.

QUESTIONS

1 What is Smiles' main argument as to how personal and national growth occurs?

2 How do you think this outlook manifested itself on the goldfields?

In 1971 an historian, Trygve Tholfsen, published an influential article about social values in Britain around 1850, explaining in his view why working people in Britain had not become revolutionaries in 1848, like those in other parts of Europe.

DOCUMENT 4.25

Workingmen [through Chartism] were questioning with impressive intellectual and moral force the legitimacy of the system. The danger [in Britain] was not revolution, but endemic discord and festering discontent, fed by a deep sense of injustice.

Even during the turbulent early Victorian decades [1840s-1850s] however, England was moving towards a resolution of this crisis through the creation of a cohesive culture whose basic values were accepted by the working classes. ... Workingmen gave their unqualified allegiance to an ethic of improvement which exalted the intellectual and moral development of the individual as the highest good. Secondly, workingmen became involved in a network of institutions, ostentatiously dedicated to the goals proclaimed from platform and pulpit.

The mid-Victorian [British] cities were honeycombed with institutions which, in one way or another, subserved and reinforced the values of the ethic of improvement: elementary schools, Sunday schools, Mechanics Institutes, mutual improvement societies, readings rooms, libraries, temperance societies, friendly societies, cooperatives, savings banks, churches, and chapels. To a striking degree, implicitly and explicitly, in ritual and litany, these institutions celebrated the ideal of improvement in all its forms. They continually confirmed the claim that legitimated the social and economic order – that this society contributed directly to the highest good, the moral and intellectual improvement of the individual. When a group of Newcastle workingmen drafted rules for a club in 1865, their words emerged automatically as a sort of precipitate of the culture as a whole, incapsulating [sic] values and patterns of self-evident validity: 'The Club shall have as its objects the social intercourse, mutual help, mental and moral improvement, rational recreation and amusement of its members...

The working classes had every reason to accept this value system, even apart from the fact that it was sweetened by the prospect of economic advancement and social mobility, for it promised them so much that they had always been denied...

The middle class preached the same values and spoke the same language, but from a different social perspective and with a different emphasis. Their belief in progress for the working classes was balanced by the hope that rationality and morality would produce men capable of understanding the arguments of their betters and eager to accept leadership from above. And their notion of improvement for all did not involve any blurring of class lines. They assumed a stratified and static society which encouraged movement within separate social classes...

While rejecting the effusions of middle-class propaganda, however, workingmen remained committed to the fundamental values of the culture [of self improvement] and became increasingly involved in attempts to achieve them through existing institutions...

Trygve Tholfsen, 'The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability', in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. LXXXVI, no. 1, March, 1971, pp. 63, 65, 69.

QUESTIONS

1 According to Tholfsen, why did Britain avoid discontent around 1850?

2 What were the dominant social ideals identified by Tholfsen?

3 Explain the concrete cultural expression of these ideals.

4 Were they widely shared or not? Explain your answer.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE GOLD RUSHES

The impact of the gold rushes on Victorian society was profound and it can be detected in many ways – economically, socially, politically and demographically. Consider for instance just the impact of the inflow of people evidence in document 4.1 and the document below, even though it takes us beyond 1860.

DOCUMENT 4.26

	Goldfields Fertility, 1861-1901					
	Total Female Fertility (all women)			Total Marital Fertility (only married women)		
	Bendigo	Ballarat	Melbourne	Bendigo	Ballarat	Melbourne
1861	6.9	6.8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1871	7.2	5.8	4.6	8.8	7.9	6.9
1881	6.5	5.2	4.0	9.5	9.0	6.9
1891	5.0	3.7	3.9	8.6	5.7	6.4
1901	4.6	2.5	2.7	N/A	N/A	5.4

Sources: Birth Registers, Bendigo and Ballarat; Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, Melbourne.

The Melbourne figures were calculated from Ann Larson, *Growing Up in Melbourne*, pp. 39-40.

QUESTIONS

1. Refer to document 4.1 and consider what demands population inflows place on a society and its economy. Make a list.
2. What do the statistics for 1861 in document 4.26 tell us about the changing nature of the goldfields?
3. Consider what other demands might be placed on society by this demographic statistic.

Geoffrey Serle is the most eminent historian of Gold Rush Victoria. We must see where he stands on the question of the impact of the gold rushes in Victoria.

Serle uses the term 'gold-migrants' and 'diggers' interchangeably, for as he points out, 'perhaps nine out of ten of the men in Victoria during the fifties were at some stage diggers, however briefly'.[3]

3 Serle, *The Golden Age*, Melbourne, 1963, p. 380.

DOCUMENT 4.27

Read the 'Conclusion' to *The Golden Age. A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1851-1861* (1963), pp. 369-381. (Or you might instead choose to read his article, 'The Gold Generation' in *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. 41, no. 1, February, 1970, pp. 265-272.)

QUESTIONS

1. Serle outlined the qualities of gold migrants both in his book (pp. 371-374) and in his article. List the qualities he ascribes to the gold rush immigrants.
2. Does he argue they were a unique group and on what grounds?
3. Serle identified what he believed were the distinctive impacts of the gold rushes on Victorian society on pp. 375-381 of his book. List them and compare your list with those of your classmates.

Keep this list in a prominent place to use as a point of reference when working though the documents in the remainder of this investigation of 1850s Victorian society.

You should also note that your analysis of Geoffrey Serle's 'Conclusion' reveals that implicitly Serle proposes the two following propositions:

1 THE VICTORIAN GOLD RUSHES WERE EXCEPTIONAL

In his 'Conclusion' that you have now read, Serle argued that while the gold rushes might have had a lesser impact than the Squatting Age in most colonies [4], this 'is certainly not true of Victoria' (p. 380).

4 This view has been suggested by Ian McNaughton in Greenwood's *Australia*, 1955, p. 107.

Serle pointed out that there was a fundamental shift from the old Port Phillip society caused by the discovery of gold, which 'swamped' Port Phillip. He stated that 'Victoria provides an almost unique case of masses of migrants over a short period swamping a small existing society' (p. 380). This caused a shift marked by 'the lifting of Victoria from obscurity to numerical and economic predominance, and its peopling by migrants with a more modern and progressive outlook, than other colonists' (p. 380). Victoria's gold rush experience was in his view exceptional in the Australian story.

2 THE DIGGER'S ASPIRATIONS WERE MORE THAN MATERIAL

The historian Manning Clark once argued of the gold rushes that the diggers were above all wealth seekers and 'began a tradition that Australia was a land in which to improve one's worldly fortunes, not a land for reflection, for contemplation, or the pursuit of other-worldly objectives'.[5]

Serle seems to agree when he says of Victoria that 'this was a society in which material values were almost unchallenged and the speculative instinct was almost unbridled' (pp. 373-74). However, Serle also argues in his 'Conclusion' that the diggers were "evangelists for Chartism" as well as "men in pursuit of material gain" (p. 380).

5 Manning Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History, 1851-1900*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1955, p. 2.

6 Ibid, p.63.

VISIONS OF VICTORIA'S FUTURE

We will now turn our attention to four aspirations of the gold rush immigrants:

- freedom;
- independence;
- a better life in the new colony;
- citizenship of Victoria.

These aspirations were acted out in the movements for democracy; for land reform; for the Eight Hour Day; and to create a new British world in the Antipodes by excluding such as Chinese immigrants from the Colony and Aboriginal people from public life in Victoria.

Aboriginal people had their own visions of the future, and for some of these refer to documents 2.50 to 2.52. Chinese diggers had visions as well, but they are less well known.

Many others movements, ideas and actions also demonstrate Victorian aspirations and you should consider other possibilities. For instance, many institutions were created in the gold rush years, notably the National Herbarium (1853); National Gallery (1853); the University of Melbourne (1853), the *Age* newspaper (1854); the State Library (1856); Parliament House (1856); the forerunner of the Melbourne Zoo (1857) – what were the aspirations which these bodies reflected?

FREEDOM THROUGH DEMOCRACY

When the British Government passed the Australian Colonies Government Act of 1850 it paved the way for responsible government. However, the British Government only set the process in motion in December 1852 after the stimulus to population and wealth from the gold discoveries. The colonies were invited to make constitutions, and this process was dominated by the squatters, land holders and government officials who held power. Victoria's first Constitution in 1854 was created by property holders for property holders. It was a conservative instrument that over the decade was gradually modified to become more, but not fully, democratic.

While we must heed Manning Clark's warning in 1955 that 'Students should beware of attributing every event after 1851 to the discovery of gold'[6] , the popular pressure applied to Parliament to become more democratic was to a great extent directly or indirectly a product of the gold rush immigrants. Geoffery Serle tells this story in detail in his *The Golden Age*.

The Eureka rebellion was one of the key moments of this pressure for change. It is a complex event with much debate on its causes and outcomes. See the entry by

FIGURE 43 Eureka.

David Goodman in the *Oxford Companion to Australian History*[7] for an account of the Rebellion and ideas about it. See also Manning Clark's set of documents on the lead up to the rebellion in his *Select Documents in Australian History, 1851-1900*, pp. 52-64. Geoffrey Serle has a full account in his *The Golden Age*, which you can find by checking his index, as has Weston Bate in his *Lucky City*, Melbourne University Press, 1978.

No doubt there was a diversity of motives expressed by those within the Stockade and a great number of supporters of various intensities of commitment, on and off the goldfields. But the gold licences, which the diggers thought unjust, and the behaviour of the police, which the diggers thought tyrannical, are key elements.

We would do well to listen to what the diggers themselves had to say about the situation at Bakery Hill on the eve of the rebellion. The ideas expressed there were widely shared and remained in the minds of the majority of gold rush immigrants to be expressed on other occasions. Some historians have called this set of ideas the 'great negation' – the determination to make society in the New World different to that of the Old.

Ten thousand diggers meet at Bakery Hill on 11 November 1854 and adopted the following resolutions and principles of the Ballarat Reform League:

DOCUMENT 4.28

That it is the inalienable right of every citizen to have a voice in making the laws he is called upon to obey. That taxation without representation is tyranny.

That, being as the people have been hitherto, unrepresented in the Legislative Council of the Colony of Victoria, they have been tyrannized over, and it becomes their duty as well as interest to resist, and, if necessary to remove the irresponsible power which so tyrannized over them.

7 Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart McIntyre (eds), *Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 227-28.

FIGURE 44

'The diggers, after giving 3 cheers for the Argus, 3 for the Daily News and three groans for the Herald, then separated', 1854.

nla.pic-an6617944. National Library of Australia.

That this colony has hitherto been governed by paid officials, upon the false assumption that law is greater than justice, because, forsooth, it was made by them and their friends, and admirably suits their selfish ends and narrow minded views.

It is the object of the league to place the power in the hands of responsible representatives of the people to frame wholesome laws and carry on an honest Government.

That it is not the wish of the league to effect an immediate separation of this colony from the parent country, if equal laws and equal rights are dealt out to the whole free community; but that, if Queen Victoria continues to act upon the ill advice of dishonest ministers, an insists upon indirectly dictating obnoxious laws for the colony, under the assumed authority of the Royal prerogative, the Reform League will endeavour to supersede such Royal prerogative by asserting that of the people, which is the most royal of prerogatives, as the people are the only source of all political power.

Political changes contemplated by the Reform League:-

A full and fair representation

Manhood suffrage

No property qualification of members for the Legislative Council

Payment of members

Short duration of Parliament

Immediate Objects of the reform League:-

An immediate change in the management of the gold fields, by disbanding the Commissioners. The total abolition of the diggers' and storekeepers' licence tax, and a thorough and organized agitation of the gold fields and the towns.

...

That this meeting condemns the insolent language used by the Colonial Secretary, the Surveyor General, the Chief Commissioner of the Gold Fields, and the Chairman of Committees, for their unwarrantable assertions respecting the veracity of the diggers, and the respectability of the representatives of the public press on the gold fields and their sneering contempt at an appeal for an investigation into the malpractices of the corrupt [police] camp at Ballarat.

Enc. no. 2 in Governor Hotham to Earl Grey, 20 December 1854, Further Papers Relative to the Discovery of Gold in Australia, pp. 70-71, *British Parliamentary papers*,1854-55, vol. XXXVIII.

QUESTIONS

1. List the general principles about government and freedom to which the diggers were appealing in their resolution.
2. With whom did they think power should reside, and with whom did they think it currently lay?
3. Was there a moral argument behind their claims as well? Explain after re-reading document 4.23.
4. Compare their list of political claims with those of the Chartists listed after document 4.23. Discuss your findings.

INDEPENDENCE THROUGH LAND

'Independence' to those in the mid-nineteenth century meant freedom from 'wage slavery' and the ability to be self-employed and to follow one's own path to individual self-fulfillment and economic prosperity. Coming as they did from England, where wealth and status was intimately tied with the ownership of land, the gold rush immigrants pushed for the opening up of land then controlled by squatters under lease. Some land around the gold fields was opened up for sale, but prices at auction were high. A Land League was formed which held a convention to devise a land reform policy and pressure was applied for change. The pressure from the Land League and others eventually led to a series of land acts, which although not always successful in putting people on the land, did lead to the end of the squatters' land monopoly in parts of Victoria.

See Geoffrey Serle's *The Golden Age* for an account of the land reform movement, especially the activities of the Land League on pp. 268-71, 287-88.

The following documents focus on the vision of the future expressed in the land reform movement.

Popular ballads sung in the 1850s often reflected the themes of the day. Charles Thatcher was the most notable ballad singer of the gold rush years. Reprinted here are the lyrics of several popular songs of the time, one written by Thatcher, on the theme of land reform.

DOCUMENT 4.29

'Unlock the Lands'

Why in this sunny land of gold
Rich soil and wealth containing,
Should we from day to day behold
The unemployed complaining?

What is the cause that honest skill
Finds here no scope to ply it?
While ready hands the earth would till
Why lack they room to try it?

O rulers wise! 'tis justice cries,
That all may share the soil;
Unlock the lands – there's willing hands
That want but room to toil.

The peasant, poor, came here to seek
A spot where hope might cheer him;
Where he might find each closing week,
His toil's reward more near him;

Where he should find, when work oppress'd,
And wintry age steals o'er him,
His life's last stage with plenty blest,
A calm repose before him.

O, rulers wise! 'tis justice cries
That these may share the soil;
Unlock the lands – their willing hands
Should reap the fruits of toil.

Not squatters rich or mines of gold,
Can make Australia flourish;
But horny hands the plough that hold,
Its surest wealth can nourish:

For they would crown her sandy plains
With harvest's golden treasure;
But 'tis with those who rule remains
To grant the needful measure.

The rulers wise, regard the cries
Of thousands seeking toil;
Unlock the lands – and thriving hands
Shall dress a happy soil.

The Victorian Songster, containing new and original colonial songs, together with a choice selection of the most popular songs of the day, from the best authors, price one shilling, Melbourne, 1855.

DOCUMENT 4.30

'Hurrah for Australia'

Hurrah for Australia the golden,
Where men of all nations now toil,
To none will we e'er be beholden
Whilst we've strength to turn up the soil;

There's no poverty here to distress us,
'Tis the country of true liberty,

No proud lords ever can oppress us,
But here we're untrammelled and free.

Then hurrah for Australia etc... [chorus]

Oh, government hear our petition,
Find work for the strong willing hand,
Our dearest and greatest ambition
Is to settle and cultivate land:

Australia's thousands are crying
For a home in the vast wilderness,
Whilst millions of acres are lying
In their primitive wild uselessness.

Then hurrah for Australia, etc... [chorus]

Upset squatterdom's domination,
Give every poor man a home,
Encourage our great population,
And like wanderers no more we'll roam;

Then hurrah for Australia, etc... [chorus]

Give, in mercy, a free scope to labor,
Uphold honest bold industry,
Then no one will envy his neighbour,
But contented and happy will be.

Then hurrah for Australia, etc. [chorus]

Charles Thatcher, *The Colonial Ministrel*, Melbourne, 1964, p. 24.

QUESTIONS

Read the two ballads above and consider:

1. What heroes and villains are being constructed here?
2. Why according to the songs should the land be unlocked?
3. What future visions do these songs project?
4. Compare the ideas expressed in these ballads with those expressed before 1850. Do you think visions for the colony had changed? Explain how.
5. How important are these songs as historical documents? Explain.
6. Would songs you listen to today be good historical documents in the future? Why/Why not?

In 1855 'Peter Papineau' a digger of Bendigo, of whom we know very little else, authored a pamphlet called 'Homesteads for the People and Manhood Suffrage'. Here is some of what he wrote:

DOCUMENT 4.31

Representative rights – good Government – a just system of taxation – security – independence – prosperity – comfort – happiness, all these would be ours if we had our rightful share of the LAND; and if instead of leaving your holes to attend tumultuous meetings assembled on the narrow ground of a repeal of the License Tax, you and all our brother diggers and brother labourers, throughout the length and breadth of the Colony, would unite for a better

and nobler object, and adopt the cry 'HOMESTEADS FOR THE PEOPLE AND MANHOOD SUFFRAGE', there would soon be an end to the present delusive system of Sales by Auction and Cabbage Garden patches, and Victoria would be for the Victorians, and we should at last be A PEOPLE. For is it not a fact, and a most lamentable fact, that with our population, of some 300,000 souls, we are not A PEOPLE in the true sense of the word, but a mere accidental fluctuating aggregation of individual atoms, wanting some strong principles of cohesion to bind us into a mass – each of us actuated only by his own selfish motives – without homes - without ties or attachments to the soil, anxious only to get as much as possible, and as quickly as possible, out of the Colony and each other, and then to leave if for some better governed country, where the hard working industrious man of small capital can acquire land, BY SELECTION, in a locality that suits him, at a low fixed price, and a sufficient quantity to ensure due reward of his industry – a peaceful and prosperous home, and the permanent establishment of his family.

...

We are the bone and sinew of the Colony, whose energy and labour have created and can alone maintain the present importance of Victoria – physically worthy to be the fathers of a nation of MEN – of a race not of stunted growths, with sordid minds and animal developments such a may pass muster in a provincial Town Hall or a Colonial Council. Are they aware... that a large infusion of the best blood of England is now pulsating in the Colony? Are they aware that a vast proportion of us are better educated, gifted with higher intelligence, with more enlarged experience, and animated by more exalted motives than can be expected to actuate an Assembly, which represents indeed, usury, grocery, and the like – cattle, sheep, 'ardent spirits' – anything but MEN...

'... the time has now come, John, for us, by a great moral force organization, to show our strength, and to demand the recognition of our existence and of our rights – our rights to a share in the Representation, and to a permanent settlement in the country – not by dribbling out to us paltry Cabbage gardens, not by tantalizing us with land auction, for the benefit of the capitalist - but by enabling us to obtain our rightful share of the lands – OUR LANDS, *by selection at a fixed and moderate price.*

The New Constitution bill ... ought to have been entitled 'An Act to deprive three-fourths of the People of Victoria of the franchise and to throw their Lands into the hands of the Monied Interest'... Money and Property – Property and Money, – these are the only things to be represented. *Men* are to be excluded.

... We the founders of a nation, in which all ought to possess equal rights, must look not to the old world, but to the new for the models of our institutions, ... Lets us adopt the one great principle.. a franchise placed on the broadest basis, Manhood Suffrage qualified by citizenship, and a limited residence, but no property qualifications... We want OUR LANDS, we want a free Electoral System, Manhood Suffrage, and the Ballot...

'Peter Papineau', 'Homesteads for the People and Manhood Suffrage', Bendigo, 1855, reprinted in Ian Turner (ed.), *The Australian Dream. A Collection of Anticipations from Captain Cook to the Present Day*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1968, pp. 64-67.

QUESTIONS

1. Outline Papineau's plan for reform, indicating his priorities.
2. Why does he call land policy in 1855 a 'delusive system'?
3. Who are the heroes and villains of his account? Explain your answer by discussing his descriptions of types of people.
4. Why does he criticise the population for being 'a mere accidental fluctuating aggregation of individual atoms'? Discuss his aspiration here.
5. Despite his calls for freedom, who are excluded from his vision for Victoria?

The calls of 'Papineau' and many others led to the formation of a Land League which organised delegates to be sent to a people's land convention. Eighty-nine delegates met in Keeley's Hotel in Melbourne, among them eleven local government officials, ten gold fields court officers, six lawyers, three trade union officials, two members of parliament, and 21 citizens who would become members of parliament in the future, one of them a future Premier, Duncan Gillies. It was a people's parliament elected not on property and other exclusive qualifications like that of the Parliament of Victoria, but by citizens in assembly. The delegates brought petitions and resolutions from their local meetings of an impressive nature.

Below is a section of just one of these, which was presented to the Convention by a Mr Mooney, a publican from Sebastopol in the Ovens District.

Mooney conveyed the resolutions of a public meeting and a committee meeting of 34 people at his hotel. But before he did so, he described his trip to Melbourne in which he passed by land held by squatters containing few people, but which 'beautiful land was fully capable of supporting thousands of inhabitants'.

Before he read the Sebastopol resolution he stated:

DOCUMENT 4.32

> He had been asked what was the meaning of the Convention? In reply, he referred to the Convention at Runnymede, which wrung from an unwilling monarch, concessions to popular rights. He also pointed to the Convention of 1640, the disregard of which, had lost a monarch his head – to the Convention which led to American independence, - to the Convention organized by Wilberforce, which established the freedom of the slave, - to that which O'Connell obtained freedom of conscience for Ireland, - and to that which Cobden emancipated trade. And this Convention, he affirmed, would lay the foundation of the future empire, and be the first step towards introducing freedom and prosperity into this great country.

Mooney then read the resolution of public meeting at Sebastopol.

> We believe that the time has arrived when the people of this Colony shall take possession of the lands. The inheritance conceded to them in good faith and sound policy by the Queen of England, for the purpose of founding an empire of great numbers and opulence, who speaking the English language, and dealing with English merchants, would become a source at once of honour, profit, and power to the mother country;...
>
> The present parliament of Victoria in its upper and its Lower Chamber, is a class compilation; the majority of the members having in view in their

> legislation only one interest, one object, namely – the exclusive possession of the lands, mines, government, revenue, and patronage of the colony; which, rightly belong to the people. They have become powerful from long and friendly association, by possessing for years the enormous profits derivable for fifty millions of acres of the public lands without taxation or rent, by the returns and produce of live stock, greatly enhanced by the unprecedented yield of the gold mines. A large proportion of the wealth thus realized they still retain amounting we should say, for the past five years to fifteen million sterling, all of which had been realised by a new-work of cunningly contrived monopolies. They still possess this vast treasure....Incomes such as these will not be yielded up by those eight hundred shepherd princes without a vigorous struggle.

The meeting resolved the following aims for land:

- Farms be 160-320 acres
- Be open to selection
- Be priced at ten shillings an acre, half on possession, and half payable in three years
- fraudulent land holdings could be claimed by others
- land sales be taxed
- public land be open to all for grazing at a 'suitable' price
- Mineral rights to be for the benefit of the people
- Mining to be allowed on private land with compensation paid for surface damaged

Then followed their ideas on parliamentary reform, which included annual parliaments, manhood suffrage, one man-one vote, and vote by secret ballot.

Their petition ended:

> In conclusion, your proceedings will affect the great future, and, indeed, the human family – for we are the beginning of a great empire. Therefore, remember the old aristocratic yoke of Europe from which we have escaped and stand between us with your honor and your lives against the establishment upon this virgin land of an aristocracy still more odious and abhorrent to our feelings than those we have escaped...
>
> Henry Bussell, Chairman, Sebastopol, 11 July 1857, reprinted in *Age*, 17 July 1857.

QUESTIONS

1. Do some quick research to find out what happened at Runnymede to gauge the meaning of Runnymede and the other historical references to which Mooney refers.
2. Why is he making these historical references?
3. Who do the Sebastopol petitioners wish to resist?
4. What do they wish to prevent?
5. What do they want to implement?
6. Summarise their vision of the future.

A BETTER LIFE THROUGH SHORTER HOURS

In 1855 artisans James Stephen and James Galloway arrived in the colony and joined the Stonemason's Union, founded in 1850 by Thomas Smith. In February 1856 the members of the union resolved not to work more than eight hours per day due to the enervating effects of the climate; among other reasons. Several public meetings were held in which the cause was supported by most employers, some of who had only recently risen from the status of workers.

At a public meeting on 26 March 1856, these statements were made:

DOCUMENT 4.33

EIGHT HOURS DAY.—THE CROWD AT THE CORNER OF BOURKE-STREET.

FIGURE 45
Eight hours day - the crowd at the corner of Bourke-street, 1896.
Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Mr Thomas Smith (operative mason): the masons' was a very laborious trade in this climate. (Hear, hear) Eight hours here is fully equal to ten hours in England to the working man. (Hear, hear) He was anxious that working men should have more time for pleasure and recreation. They ought to benefit as well as others by public libraries and other places of instruction and amusement. Now they could not do so for their mental powers were tired out by excessive labor (Cheers).

Mr Best, carpenter: he thought the building trade here was overstocked, therefore something should be done to shorten the hours of labor. (Hear, hear) He denounced the theory of the *Argus* upon the necessity of a larger supply of labor as infamous. (Loud Applause and 'Down with the *Argus*') By reducing the hours of labour they would give the chance of employment to a larger number. The wages of carpenters on an average of the last eighteen months had not been more than four and six pence per day. The eight hours question, if carried, would give everyman a crust at least (Loud cheers).

Age, 27 March 1856.

At a subsequent meeting on 11 April 1856, a number of resolutions were passed.

Dr Embling MLC proposed the following resolution which was passed unanimously:

DOCUMENT 4.34

That this meeting is of the opinion that the enervating effects of this climate, the advanced state of civilization, the progress of the arts and sciences, and the demand for intellectual gratification and improvement, call for an abridgement of the hours of labour.

In proposing this Embling stated:

> He condemned the late hour system as being destructive of bodily health, and unfavourable to the development of man's nobler powers. No man should draw on his capital of health: this was a most important consideration. If ten hours were enough for a man to work in England, eight hours was more than enough here. (Applause) They ought to take a stand tonight upon this question. They might give a portion of the day to labour, a portion to recreation, and a portion to repose: eight hours to each (Applause). Why should not the labourer have his hours of recreation as well as the rich man? There was no occasion of the men to quarrel with the employers; the matter might be arranged amicably between master and man. The mass of those who had gained wealth were once workmen, and the mass of those who were now labourers would one day become employers. If they wished the colony to progress, they must endeavour to carry this question.

Mr Burtt a temperance lecturer, who said he had been an apprentice, a labourer, an employer, and also an advocate of eight hours back in England, moved the next resolution, and that stated:

> That the moral and physical condition, and requirements and future advancement and prosperity of the Australian colonies and colonists, imperatively demand the abridgement of the hours of labor to eight per day; and that the question of wages be left to rule by supply and demand as heretofore.

Burtt commented in support:

> He hoped the time had come when the master respected the journeyman, and the journeyman felt bound to do a fair day's work for the master, and the master felt bound to pay a proper remuneration for the work done. He asked what was to be the result of this movement and how it would affect compositors, shopmen, and those trades whose hours of labor were such as did not permit them to enter into this movement. Of what use was a public library or a reading room to a shopman who could only behold the building from behind the shop window, and never leave his counter to enter it the sympathy of everyone should be enlisted on behalf of the shopmen; let no one encourage those shopkeepers who kept open late. (Hear, hear)The peasants mind was as capacious as royalty. And therefore should be cultivated. A man's intellect would indicate for him the course to be taken to effect his own improvement if only he had the time.

Age, 12 April 1856.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did working men in document 4.33 want reduced hours?
2. What reasons did Dr Embling in document 4.34 give for the eight hour day?
3. Were Mr Burtt's reasons the same?
4. Check document 4.25 and your answers given there, and see if your can see a cohesive culture emerging in Melbourne based on the doctrine of self improvement. Explain your view.

The eight hours was achieved by the masons and a celebratory festival was held at Cremorne Gardens in Richmond. Twelve hundred workingmen in their best dress marched to band music from the Carlton Gardens behind a large crimson banner which read: 'Eight Hours' Labor, Eight Hours' Recreation, Eight Hours' Rest'. Once at the Cremorne Gardens the people paraded around the gardens, had dinner, heard speeches from Dr Embling, Mr Burtt and others, watched a display on the Siege of Sebastopol in the Crimea War, saw fireworks and then danced.

A celebratory march was held in April 1857 and every year afterwards. At the 1858 celebration James Galloway made this comment of the Eight Hours Day:

DOCUMENT 4.35

> We have come 16,000 miles to better our condition, and not to act the mere part of machinery; and it is neither right nor just that we should cross the trackless region of immensity between us and our father land, to be rewarded with excessive toil, a bare existence, and a premature grave.

Age, 31 March 1858.

In 1857, a Trades Hall Committee was formed to build a trades hall to provide a focal point for the union movement. It would also provide a place for temperance unionists to hold their union meetings, instead of in hotels where most organisations at that time met.

At the opening of the building in May 1859, in the presence of 800 people, Mr Eves, the President of the Trades Hall Committee, had this to say:

DOCUMENT 4.36

> ...The trades' hall in which they were there assembled, although it was but a temporary one, was the first that had ever been erected. Their brethren in the old country had, for a long time, been struggling to get one, but they had never been able to obtain it, and why was it? How was it, that it was so difficult to get there, what was so comparatively easily obtained here? It was because they had been enabled to obtain a shortening of the hours of labor. If a man was constantly kept at laborious employment for an undue number of hours he became so wearied as to be both physically and mentally incapable of attending to anything else. At home, in the old country, they had been content, like poor docile British subjects, to leave all these matters to the educated classes, to let them think and legislate for them. ...there had been many members of those classes that had done their utmost to ameliorate and improve the condition of the working man. But the working man there did not know who was their real friend; here, however, the working classes had found out that their only real friend, the only one they could thoroughly depend on, was the workingman himself. (Cheers)... the working men in Victoria had found the finances to erect their trades' hall ,but that was but a stepping stone to a better and a permanent one...

Eves then proposed the holding of lectures in the hall, the erection of a library and the hosting of music concerts,

> ...very different from those at public houses. Music exercised a softening and refining influence on the human condition.... He would like to remind them that the whole world was looking at this colony, as the arena where the eight hours' system was being tried. It was considered in great measure an experiment. In England at the present time, they were negotiating to reduce the number of hours allotted to labor to nine. The erection of the Hall in which they were then met was an example of the beneficial reduction of the hours of labor. They should use their best endeavors to benefit the country generally...
>
> *Age*, 25 May 1859.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Eves call English workingmen 'docile'?
2. What was his vision for the Trades Hall?
3. Does it parallel Serle's view of the diggers that they aspired to more than the mere material? Explain your answer.
4. In the light of documents 4.35 and 4.36, do you wish to modify you answer to question four under document 4.34 about a cohesive vision for the future?

Read Geoffrey Serle's assessment of the Eight Hour Day movement on p. 215 of *The Golden Age*, and study the picture of the Eight Hours' Day Committee, in Serle's book, opposite p. 211. What Serle does *not* mention in his account, is that the Sydney masons also called for an eight hour day in February 1856, the same month as in Melbourne.

QUESTIONS

1. Taking what Serle writes, does the Eight Hour Day movement prove or not Victorian exceptionalism? Explain.
2. Does it prove or not his claim of Victorian society aspiring to more than just acquisitiveness? Why/Why not?
3. Does the picture of the Eight Hours' Day Committee in Serle demonstrate Tholfsen's argument in document 4.25? How?

CITIZENSHIP OF VICTORIA

Part of the move for shorter working hours was the sense that Victorian was giving colonists a better life than at home. A milder climate, more abundance food, more employment opportunities at higher wages, and freedoms due the vast spaces of public lands, and even such freedoms as a lack of fences.

William Howitt, a British author, came gold seeking with two sons. On one goldfield they became annoyed by a hawk nesting near their tent and decided to take action.

DOCUMENT 4.37

Alfred shot at the young ones as they sat on the side of the nest. One of them fell, and hung by a leg, but in a few minutes to our surprise, recovered itself, regained the nest, and sat upon its edge, as blithe as ever. Alfred fired at them repeatedly, but, so far as we could see, they only retreated into the nest. He sent two rifle bullets through the nest, with as little effect...We, therefore, felled the tree. When the tree fell, which was 150 feet long, we went to the nest, expecting to see the young ones all killed; but, with the exception of one, which had its legs broken, and which we destroyed, all the rest – although flung far out of the nest by the shock of the fall – were lively as possible, and are now sitting all-arow on a pole before the tent of the miller.

William Howitt, *Land, Labour and Gold*, 1855, reprinted, Kilmore. Lowden Press, p.112.

QUESTION

1 Why did the Howitts do such a grisly thing?

Most of the 1850s gold rush population had been in Victoria but a few years. Indeed many did not stay on. Serle believes that compared to the Port Philip experience of the movement against transportation and that for Separation from New South Wales, the gold migrants 'held back the development of patriotic feeling' (p. 381).

Yet a sense of loyalty emerged towards Victoria that offered them so much, and which promised to meet many of their visions for the future.

In November 1856 the editor of the Melbourne *Leader* wrote:

DOCUMENT 4.38

Why should there not be a loyalty to this land... Why should we ever continue to cast longing, lingering looks towards the old country, at the other side of the globe, as if that alone were home to us?

Leader, November 1856.

This feeling was reflected at public occasions such as the Burke and Wills' expedition sponsored by the Royal Society of Victoria, which hoped to be the first to cross the continent. Its departure from Royal Park in August 1860 before a massed crown was a huge affair and a plaque is there to this day. The Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly, who was also President of the Royal Society, had this to say on the day:

DOCUMENT 4.39

It seems but right, then, that this, the wealthiest and most civilized of the communities which have hence spring into existence, should make some effort to advance the cause to which it owes its origin. Nor will that effort, I am persuaded, prove fruitless. We can gain, it is true, no extension of territory by the discoveries we may make, yet no inconsiderable commercial advantages must ultimately accrue to the possessors of the only great haven on the south coast , from the progress of internal settlement, and from the opening up of a practicable route to the northern shores of this vast continent.

Frank Crowley (ed.), *A Documentary History of Australia, 2: Colonial Australia, 1841-1874*, Nelson, Sydney, 1980, p. 430.

William Westgarth, an immigrant who became a merchant and Member of the Legislative Council, was one of the many who decided to stay in Victoria.[8] He wrote a number of histories of his adopted place, including a history of Victoria in 1864. In his preface he wrote of Victoria at the end of its golden decade:

8 See *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 6, pp. 379-83.

DOCUMENT 4.40

> For more than ten years past Victoria has been the most conspicuous of all our colonies; and with reference to the magnitude and character of its commerce, it has been also, perhaps, throughout that interval, the most important of them. And yet but twenty-eight years have elapsed since the first handful of settlers...
>
> Upon the site thus selected has since arisen a substantial and handsome city, the capital of a self-supporting and self-governed province of the Empire. Melbourne contains more than one hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants; it is lighted by gas, and artificially supplied with fresh water; its palace of legislation, an edifice worthy of the colony's ambition, is second, perhaps, only to the great edifice of Westminster; and in point of population, wealth, and commerce it occupies already, within our empire, the position of the London of the southern hemisphere.

William Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria, Its History, Commerce, and Gold Mining, its Social and Political Institutions, Down to the End of 1963*, London, Sampson Low and Son, 1864, p. 2.

QUESTIONS

1. After reading documents 4.37 to 4.40 do you detect new loyalties emerging in Victoria? How?
2. What were they based upon and how might they be complex?
3. What does it tell us of new visions of the future that Westgarth called Melbourne the 'London of the southern hemisphere'?

While a local patriotism might have emerged, built on the promise of Victoria, the huge stream of British migrants who arrived in the 1850s also strengthened the dual loyalties of many colonists to home and the new land.

This British patriotism found expression in many things as colonists built their society along British institutional (English, Scottish and Irish) ways. This included the law, education, political institutions and so forth. This was natural as over 90 per cent of the colonists derived from Britain and Ireland.

It also encouraged colonists to imagine their future community and who might be included in it and who might not. This imagining led them to take action against Aboriginal people (see the policy of exclusion from Melbourne and separation on reserves in Investigation 2) and also against non-Europeans entering Victoria – to which we now turn.

From the discovery of gold in 1851, gold seekers from many parts of the world - particularly from Britain, Europe and North America – headed for Victoria. Chinese workers from southern China, who has been used to travelling overseas as immigrant workers, were among those who came. Indeed pastoralists had brought some Chinese workers in the late 1840s to work as shepherds.[9]

9 See Kathryn Cronin, *Colonial Casualties. Chinese in Early Victoria*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1982.

In the census of April 1854, there were about 2,300 Chinese recorded in Victoria. But in late 1854 there was a large migration from China attracted by gold, and by 1855

FIGURE 46 A Flood of Celestial Light pouring in upon the Diggings.
From Melbourne Punch, Almanack, January 1857.

there were 17,000 Chinese immigrants, almost all men, in Victoria. This raised public concerns which we need to explore.

Following a meeting in Melbourne in April 1855 to protest at the Chinese arrivals, the *Age* reported:

DOCUMENT 4.41

The last thing to be settled in our minds is, whether this country is to be a British *colony* or a British *plantation*...

If Australia is to be laid out in plantations, and its European inhabitants to become planters, it would be unwise to exclude the Chinese, as they are the very people that will be wanted. But, on the other hand, if our object be to found here a nation composed principally of Englishmen, and modeled after the British type, it is unnecessary for us to trouble our minds about the harshness and inconsistency of excluding a set of people, who are likely to thwart, rather than advance, that object. Any palaver about the absolute equality of man is although out of place, in such circumstances; for the utmost extravagance even of 'extreme democracy' goes no further than asserting equality among those who are of the same nation, and trained under the same institutions. Democrats are generally great sticklers for nationality. Hence their watch-words generally are, 'America for the Americans'...For ourselves, our 'extreme democracy' consists of claiming 'Victoria for the Victorians', and in contending that those Victorians should continue to be, what they are now – composed principally of Europeans. So long, therefore, as we are willing, on

> the same grounds, to concede 'China to the Chinese, 'we feel ourselves bound by no principle of supposed consistency to admit them here, *except in so far as it suits ourselves.*
>
> Here lies the gist of the question:- Politically, we are in no difficulty. We are not obliged to admit them either within the country, or within the pale of the constitution. The question, therefore, is reduced to one of expediency. In this respect, there are only two points which require to be carefully considered – first, as it bears upon the industrial, and, secondly, as it bears upon the moral, prospects of the country.

The *Age* argued if the colony chooses development then they should be allowed to come as their labour will be needed. But then the *Age* considered the moral question.

> And here our first law is that of self-preservation. Philanthropy may say:- Let them come here, and it will gives us an opportunity of lifting them out of the ditch of heathenism in which they are wallowing. Very charitable; but it is worth while considering whether we shall lift them out, or whether they may not as likely drag us in. If we are confident of the former, by all means let them come; but if we have a misgiving, it may prove an act of prudence, on our part, to adopt a protective policy for time.

Age, 16 April 1955.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between a British colony and a British plantation?
2. Why does the *Age* think that the government has the right to exclude Chinese from Victoria? Do you agree?
3. Does the *Age*'s discussion of the moral dimension modify your view? Why/Why Not?
4. Was the *Age* right to consider the possibility that Chinese immigrants may 'drag us in'? And what did it mean by this claim?

In June 1855 a heavy tax of £10 (equal to six months of gold-finding licence fees) was imposed on every Chinese arriving into the colony – the first discriminatory immigration law in Australia's history. Chinese arrivals then came via South Australia where there was no tax and then they walked overland hundreds of kilometres into Victoria. Figure 46 is a cartoon reaction to this movement of people.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of the caption in figure 46?
2. Examine figure 46 carefully and discuss what are the meanings being conveyed and how this is done.

Once here the Chinese were also confined by legislation to certain parts of the fields in what were called 'Protectorates', but which were really places of control. They were charged for the 'pleasure' of being there.[10]

10 For more on this see Kathryn Cronin, *Colonial Casualties*, chapter 5.

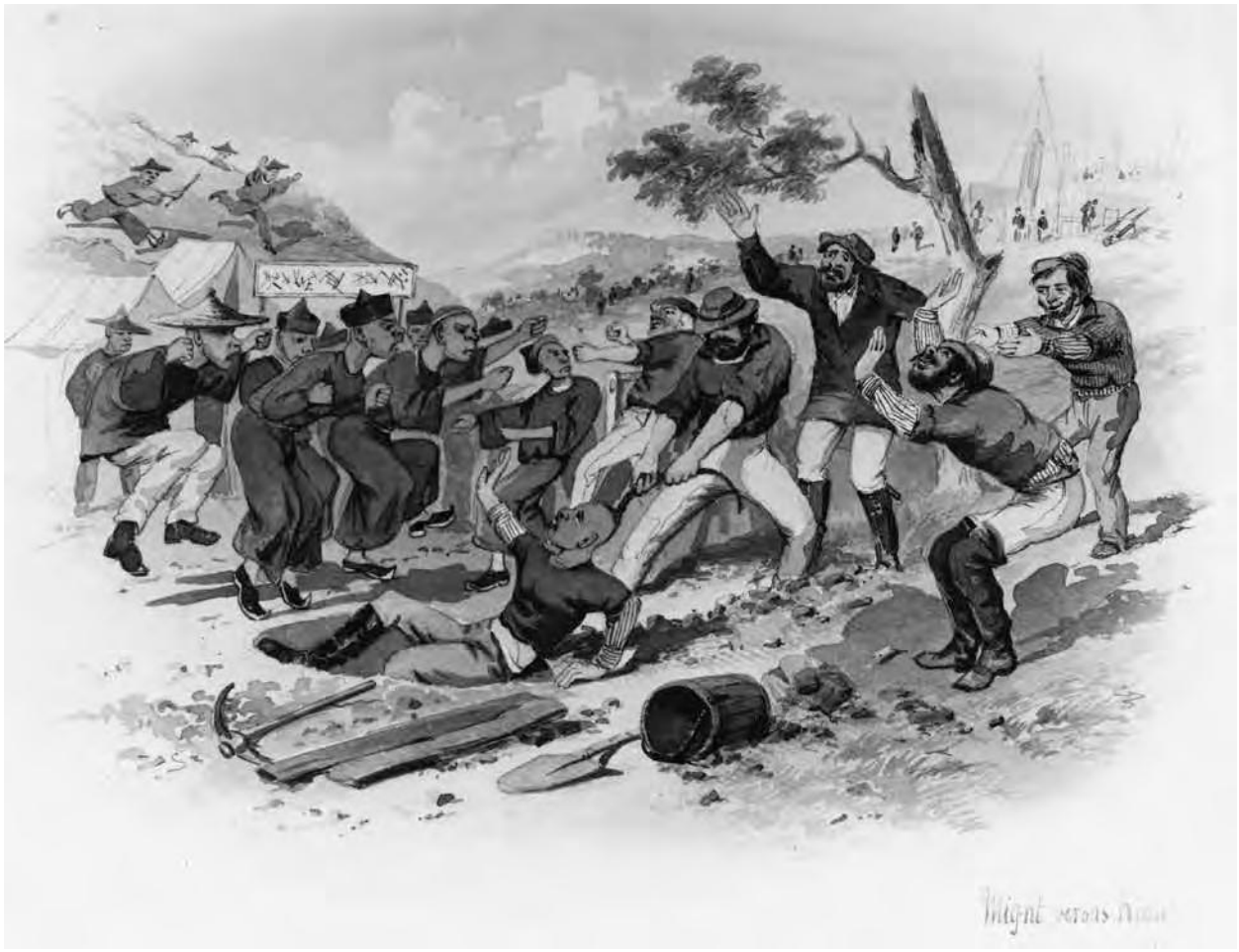


FIGURE 47 Might versus Right by S. T. Gill.
Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, PXA 1983.

In 1857 as the number of Chinese immigrants rose to about 25,000, almost all of them males, they formed about ten per cent of the male population and almost 20 per cent of the male goldfields' population. On some fields they were more concentrated than that – which led to resentments from other diggers - and trouble.

In May 1957 violence erupted on the Buckland River goldfield where 500 European diggers and 2,000 Chinese diggers were at work.

DOCUMENT 4.42

The presence of so many hundreds of Chinese on the Buckland has long been a source of great annoyance to the European population, and the recent unprecedented increase to the number of celestials have been gradually creating a feverish and dangerous state of excitement among out own countrymen. On all sides the European miners find themselves cramped by the ubiquity of the long tailed Asiatics, who do not confine their operations to merely fossicking and cradling, but are sinking [shafts] after the most improved European fashion. As five-sixths of the barbarians are not merely without their protective tickets, but have not even purchased the miner's right, the Europeans feel perhaps more aggrieved than they would do if they met on equal terms. This feeling of hostility has increased until it has broken out into acts of open violence. A fortnight since one or two Chinamen were assaulted by a party of Europeans, and deprived of their caudal appendages. This was but the prelude of a more deliberate attack. On Thursday last, about

ten in the evening, a party of ten or a dozen men suddenly rushed a small outlying picket of twenty or thirty Chinamen, who had just commenced sinking on a new piece of tolerably good ground. The slight huts of the Celestials were demolished in a trice, causing the owners to fly like so many sheep, pelted in their hasty retreat by a shower of stones. We regret to hear of such acts of violence, and we are sorry to add that four of the Chinamen were more or less seriously injured. Having routed the enemy, the rowdy mob in possession of the field celebrated their victory by making a bonfire of the windlasses, buckets, tools etc, which remained as trophies. Since then the Chinamen have been too frightened to return to the plot of ground in question, which is now worked by Europeans.

Ovens and Murray Advertiser, reported in the *Age*, 20 May 1857.

QUESTIONS

1. What words were used to describe the Chinese diggers? What meanings do they suggest?
2. Is this an impartial news report? Why/Why Not?
3. What are 'caudal appendages' and what meanings do you give to their taking?
4. Were the actions of the Europeans lawful?

The European diggers met at the Buckland River on 4 July 1857 to protest the presence of the Chinese. We need to investigate their claims against the Chinese.

DOCUMENT 4.43

That we, the white miners of the Buckland...

...condemn in the strongest terms the impolicy and injustice of our government, although frequently warned to the contrary, in maintaining those laws which have allowed the Chinese to come into this country in such vast numbers, and upon this gold-field specially, where they have left the European population in a small minority. Be it resolved, that should we in self-preservation be at any time compelled to use forcible means to eject the Chinese from this gold-field, the responsibility rests entirely with the Government, who refuse to give us even the semblance of protection.

That we consider it an imperative duty which we owe to ourselves, likewise to our adopted country and our families, to use the most strenuous measures in our power, which the law admits, for the total expulsion of a race whose vile and beastly practices we look upon with the utmost abhorrence. Be it therefore resolved, that, in the open face of day, we herby publicly avow, our earnest determination to carry the above measures into full effect, for the total expulsion from this colony of a race which an iniquitous law has placed socially upon an equal footing with ourselves, - a law impolitic and unjust, inasmuch a it openly countenances, and encourages a gross violation of every principle of morality, and to the last degree insulting to our manhood and free-born citizens and British subjects...

Argus, 13 July 1857.

QUESTIONS

1. Were the European diggers justified in posing themselves as victims without 'the semblance of protection'? Discuss.
2. What in their minds were they victims of? That is, who or what did they fear?
3. What words do they use to describe themselves and what does that indicate?
4. Why do they feel insulted and is this reasonable or not?

FIGURE 48
'The Duke of Edinburgh's welcome by the natives' by W. Wyatt.
nla.pic-an6016596 National Library of Australia.

SUMMARY AND ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. What ideas from Britain and elsewhere shaped the actions of the gold rush immigrants?
2. What local experiences shaped the ideas and actions of the diggers?
3. By using headings and dot points, plan and then answer the question: 'In what ways did gold rush migrants imagine the future of Victoria and how did they put this imagining into practice?'

ABORIGINES AND GOLD RUSH SOCIETY

The following eight documents, 2.34 to 2.41, reveal how Aboriginal people, particularly of the Melbourne area, survived and adapted to the hegemony [social, economic and political power] of the Europeans in the golden decade.

In June 1852 Thomas reported:

DOCUMENT 4.44

The present condition of the Aborigines has no way improved, but lamentably deteriorated; the discovery of gold has greatly affected their moral condition... [of those three hundred in the Melbourne region] all except those for the east, generally speaking, appear to have become habitual drunkards, male and female (I allude to the young) and in consequence are with great difficulty kept from the town. When there, they no longer ply with their tomahawks to cut wood for the inhabitants, but prowl about the public houses and vile avenues where they are encouraged by the improvident gold diggers in drinking, even to rewarding them for so doing. On various occasions they have been so drunk as to be found lying on the highways during the night; their thirst for and propensity for ardent spirits are so great, that I have know them recently to go thirty miles to indulge their appetites. They are now brought to an awful and dangerous state of degradation, so that the speedy extinction of the Melbourne and Barrabool [Geelong] tribes is inevitable. Although the law is stringent upon those who supply blacks with liquor, it is now craftily evaded by them wherever a public house is. In town or bush they will get drink; at Brighton they will give any child they see playing about, a few pence to get them a bottle of rum: in town they are so crafty that if they see an idle fellow about, they will give him sixpence or more to purchase them the same, nor are they destitute of means: one black shewed me three half crowns and some smaller silver, that he and another had got for two day's drinking. The consequence is, that their frames are enervated in the absence of regular exercise, and their blood corrupted through continued dissipation, so much so, that when seized with a violent cold, inflammation follows so rapid that it is impossible in most cases to save them. The old and middle aged do not die in any proportion to the young, who 'do not live out half their days', those who die by the visitation of the devil are double the number of those who die by the visitation of God.

William Thomas the Guardian of Aborigines to the Honorable the Colonial Secretary, containing half-yearly report to the 30 June 1852.

QUESTIONS

1. Outline Thomas's claims about the impact of gold on the Melbourne people.
2. Which group in particular was affected most? Why do you think this was the case?
3. What part did the Government and the diggers play in this?

The following documents refer to how Aboriginal people connected to Victoria's new gold economy. More material can be found in chapter 6 of my *Aboriginal Victorians. A History Since 1800*, and Fred Cahir, 'Dallong – Possums Skin Rugs. A Study of an Inter-Cultural Trade Item in Victoria' in *Provenance: the Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, September 2005, no. 4. ISSN 1832-2522 URL http://prov.vic.gov.au/publications/provenance/provenance2005/dallong-possum-skin-rugs or search for 'Dallong – Possum Skin Rugs' from the Public Record Office Victoria homepage http://prov.vic.gov.au

Gippsland's Crown Lands Commissioner Charles Tyers had this to say about Aboriginal labour in 1852:

DOCUMENT 4.45

The dearth of European labor occasioned by the discovery of the Gold Fields has no doubt led to an improvement in their [the Aborigines'] position in relation to the Europeans, inasmuch as a portion of the labor thus withdrawn

has been replaced by the Aborigines, and the intercourse between the two races consequently increased. Their services have been requisition as sheep-washers, stockmen, shepherds and reapers, and in two or three instances as house servants.

In a letter to me from Mr W.O. Raymond a large stock holder in this district, who employed the Dergo tribe in sheep washing (I believe 12,000 sheep), that gentleman states 'I have found them most useful, indeed I could not have washed my sheep without them, I paid them for each day's wages one shilling each'.

Tyers listed the names of another eight settlers at various localities who have employed Aboriginal people. He himself employed 'one as cook and waiter and the other as messenger'.

Report of Charles Tyers, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Gippsland, 15 January 1852, 'Aborigines, Return to Address 24 October 1854', *Victorian Legislative Council Papers*, C-No.33a.

In January 1853, Thomas wrote to his superiors:

DOCUMENT 4.46

The Yarra blacks have the whole of the past six months been comparatively speaking as industrious as Europeans, which in these times of scarcity of labor had been most opportune for the squatter, sheep farmer, and agriculturist; five or six of them were engaged for three weeks at ten shillings per week and rations at one station, performed their work well, remaining as agreed upon till the washing over; from this station they went to another and so on, to my knowledge, at four sheep stations near the source of the Plenty. At the last an altercation had nearly taken place; the blacks came to me on my having said they would not go to the next station under twenty-five shillings per week,: I was displeased with them, saying they had worked for ten and fifteen shillings at the other stations, that they must not deceive Mr Cameron. I found that the blacks had been put up to this by a white man: they in consequence went at fifteen shillings and finished their work. The middle-aged blacks remained during November and December at the foot of Mount Disappointment, where are, south-east of the marshes, some extensive farms. They were engaged cutting bark, repairing barn roofs, weeding the wheat and oats from thistles, etc. This tribe are all now together gathering in the harvest, reaping etc. An experienced farmer gave me to understand that most of them were engaged on his and the surrounding farms; he had several reaping, two of them cut each half an acre per day. All were not so ready, the middle-aged generally reap sitting, working themselves forward as they go.

The Guardian of the Aborigines to the Honorable the Colonial Secretary, 15 January 1853, 'Aborigines, Return to Address 24 October 1854', *Victorian Legislative Council Papers*, C-No.33a.

The Crown Lands Commissioner of the Wimmera, Edward Bell, commented of Aboriginal labour in 1853:

DOCUMENT 4.47

Their usefulness to the white population had been very much increased during the present dearth of labor, produced by the attractions of the Gold Fields. There is scarcely a station which the natives are in the habit of frequenting, where they have not been more or less employed. The system of turning sheep

adrift, and herding them like cattle, which has been forced upon the settlers to a degree, by the impossibility of procuring shepherds, is one for which their knowledge of the country, and the facility in tracking, renders them particularly adapted, and they have been found of great service in this way.

They appear to be gradually acquiring a knowledge of the value of money, and have been temporarily engaged at rates of wages which, in ordinary times, would be considered high for emigrant labor. Their migratory propensities are not however, diminished, and even those who have been longest employed on stations, and appear to have acquired a degree of European civilization in dress and habits of living, are not to be debarred the luxury of occasionally throwing off the restraints and civilized life and visiting their accustomed haunts, and joining in the sports and savage (though generally harmless) warfare of their respective tribes. Very few of them have engaged in the search for Gold.

Report of Edward Bell, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Wimmera, 10 January 1853, 'Aborigines, Return to Address 24 October 1854', *Victorian Legislative Council Papers*, C-No.33a.

William Thomas reported in mid 1856 of Aboriginal workers:

DOCUMENT 4.48

[Monday]

Early visit [to] the six blacks at Richmond, accompany two of them to a Publican who had employed four of them at the Anderson's Creek Diggings, the blacks bring me a stick on which was cut the notches the number of large sheets of bark they cut to cover a large kitchen and stable, they had also cut saplings for the roofs for which they were to have £5 and had received but £1, hence the blacks complaint. The publican I found was at the Diggings and would not return till Thursday...

[Tuesday]

Early with the blacks, endeavour to get them off (as I would see them righted) but would not leave till they got their money.

[Thursday]

...then to the blacks and to the publican for the blacks wages, he had not returned and 2 blacks said they would go to the Anderson Creek diggings to him, I send a letter by them, shook hands with the other blacks who leave for the ranges...

[Monday 2nd]

Early at Richmond, see the publican touching the blacks wages, he states 'that he had given them £1 and sent up another pound all that was due to them and that they were satisfied'. 'I said that that was short by £2 of their account' he assured me he had made all right with them.

William Thomas, Guardian of the Aborigines, Weekly Reports 26 May-1 June and 2 -8 June 1856, to the Surveyor General of Lands, *Victorian Public Record Office Series* 2894, unit 1, 1856/2905.

Again in December 1856, Thomas took up the matter of Aboriginal labour:

DOCUMENT 4.49

The good feeling among the settlers and farmers in these counties [about Melbourne - Bourke, Evelyn, Mornington] towards the Aborigines still I am happy to state continued and a growing friendship is manifestly evident... now they are hailed by the settlers and work for them and I may add are generously and uprightly paid [he having to settle only one dispute between them in two years].

[January 1856] six Yarra blacks engaged for six nights at the Queen's Theatre, corroboring and showing the native habits, to their credit they kept sober to the end of their arrangement.

[February 1856] Peter the civilized Yarra Black died at the Aboriginal Depot by Mt Disappointment, he could read and write well, had been for years under regular servitude [employment contract] at one time had a watch, money in hand, and a horse but after all got unsettled rambling from one farm to another, breaking in horses, had a fall from a horse which terminated his life.

[August 1856] The Yarra blacks came from the ranges with their annual catch of bulleen bulleen or lyre bird tails and camped by the Darebin. The six Yarra blacks who were vending their lyre tails attended an election meeting at Pentridge [village, now Coburg] to the amusement of the public.

I have know provisions to have been at one of my depots [either Warrandyte or Mordialloc] for ten months and not 30lbs of flour consumed, the blacks have been at work around, would occasionally call have a chat, ask for a stick of tobacco then wend their way to their employment.

William Thomas, Guardian of the Aborigines, Annual Report 31 December 1856, to the Surveyor General of Lands, *Victorian Public Record Office Series* 44, box 639.

In August 1857, Thomas met some Aboriginal people near Dandenong:

DOCUMENT 4.50

[I] ...find them well, they were getting their living by shooting game and fishing, most of which they sell to the white population in the neighbourhood. A good number of blacks [in Melbourne] but all from a great distance with stock, they are sober and well clad...[he sees a Yarra black on the Plenty road] comfortably clad on horse back shook hands and said was going to Mr Castella [a pastoralist and wine grower] by the Ranges, the Yarra blacks almost all support themselves.

[He sees a black from New England and others from the interior in Melbourne] ...these blacks are good stock men and very useful to settlers in bringing up stock.

[Thomas remarks that some Aborigines are fencing. He states one of the Coast tribe, that is Boonwurrung, is a good bullock driver. Thomas also sees] 6 Yarra blacks from the Ranges, well stocked with Bullen Bullen or lyre bird tails. July and August is their season for catching them. ...they had bought several useful things, and said they are only wanting to get 2 guns which were repairing.

William Thomas, Guardian of the Aborigines, weekly reports to the Surveyor General of Lands for June to August 1857, *Victorian Public Record Office Series* 44, box 639.

Crown Land Commissioner F. Powlett reported that only 30-40 Aboriginal people survive around Melbourne, chiefly on or near the Plenty River or along the borders of Port Phillip Bay. They were employed by settlers, but few permanently. He added:

DOCUMENT 4.51

They are quiet and inoffensive, when sober, but I am sorry to say that most of the few remaining male natives drink to excess whenever opportunity offers.

F. A. Powlett, Commissioner of Crown Lands to Surveyor General of Lands, 25 February 1857, *Victorian Public Record Office Series* 44, box 639.

QUESTIONS

1. Examine the above seven documents, 4.45 to 4.51, and list the jobs held by Aboriginal people.
2. What contribution did they make to the gold rush economy?
3. Were they subservient in this new economy or not? Please explain.
4. List the continuities and changes that occurred to their lives.
5. Write several paragraphs on the ways in which Aboriginal people survived during the gold rushes and what assistance they had.
6. What negative impacts can you detect that gold society had on Aboriginal people?

ABORIGINAL POPULATION CHANGES

One of the major impacts of Colonialism wherever it has occurred throughout the world is the decline of indigenous populations. The following documents will assist you to extend your knowledge of this decline and to further your thinking on what might have been its causes.

In 1852 William Thomas listed those Aboriginal people he met in Melbourne. The first two groups listed, the Wawooring (Woiwurrung or Yarra tribe) and Boorrooorong (Boonwurrung or Western Port tribe), comprised local people. The other four groups listed were visiting the Melbourne area, and thus were not the total of those peoples, as some were still back in their home country.

DOCUMENT 4.52

Tribes frequenting the Counties of Bourke and Mornington [The Melbourne Region]:			
Wawooring or Yarra Tribe	23 men	11 women	1 child
Boorroorong or Coast Tribe	52 men	10 women	0 children
Barrabool or Geelong	23 men	6 women	1 child
Goulburn River	52 men	30 women	2 children
From NW country	95 men	37 women	2 children
Gipps' Land	29 men	12 women	1 child

William Thomas, Half-Yearly General Return Aborigines in Counties of Bourke and Mornington, 30 June 1852 in 'Aborigines, Return to Address 24 October 1854', *Victorian Legislative Council Papers*, C-No.33a.

FIGURE 49 'Native encampment' by John Skinner Prout.
Dixson Galleries, State Library of NSW, DGD 16.

DOCUMENT 4.53

'Return Showing the Number of Aboriginal Natives who have died in the Yarra and Western Port District, from the 1st April 1839 to the 31st December 1859'.

Yarra Tribe	38 males	33 females
Western Port Tribe	38 males	26 females

'Return Showing the Number of Aboriginal Natives Born in the Yarra and Western Port District, from the 1st April 1839 to the 31st December 1859'.

Yarra Tribe	8 males	9 females
Western Port Tribe	1 male	3 females

Annual Report of the Central Board for Aborigines in Victoria 1860-61, Appendix 3.

In 1860 Robert Brough Smyth, Secretary of the Central Board for the Aborigines listed the following Aboriginal population of Victoria for 1860:

DOCUMENT 4.54

'Aboriginal Population in 1860' supplied by R. Brough Smyth, Secretary Central Board for Aborigines, September 22 1860, reprinted in the *Argus*, 5 October 1860.

District	Congregate at	Tribes	Total including men, women, and children
Melbourne	Mordialloc, Brighton, &c.	Wawoorong or Yarra, and Boonoorong or Coast Tribe	35
Geelong	Geelong, Winchelsea, &c.	Barrabool and Colac	20
Central Western	Burrumbeet, &c.	Charcourt	20
Ballarat	Ballarat, Bald Hill, Mount Emu, Bacchus Marsh, &c.	Bereberra or Mount Emu, Murrutchuloo or Bald Hill, Buninyong, and Bacchus Marsh	255
Upper Loddon	Mount Franklin, &c.	Upper Loddon	8
Lower Loddon	Boort, &c.	Lower Loddon	40
Richardson River	Rich Avon, &c.	Richardson	20
Northern Wimmera	Lake Boga, Swan Hill, Banks of the Murray	Wampa Wampa, Watty Watty, and Malka Malka	200
Central Wimmera	Moravian Mission Station, Veetis's Station, and Upper Regions	Pine Peain, Lake Hindmarsh, Mackenzie, Tatiara	300
South-eastern Wimmera	Harrow and Apsley	Names lost	90
Portland Bay	Glenelg, Wannon, Lake Condah, Mount Rouse, Portland, &c.	Names lost	142
Warrnambool	Tooram, Terang, Warrnambool, &c.	Tooram, Merri, Wyete, Yallock, Terang	207
Rodney	Banks of Goulburn, Campaspe, Townships, &c.	Campaspe and Lower Goulburn	66
Wangaratta	Waygunyah, Wangaratta, Wodonga, Yackandandah, &c.	Weeroo, Gelematong, Kiewa, Unorring, &c.	60
Mitta Mitta	On banks of Mitta, &c.	Thurumatong or Little River, and Omeo	28
Upper Goulburn	Mohican Station, towns, &c.	Goulburn, Delatite or Bealite, Seymour, and Yarra	96
Port Albert	Port Albert, Tarraville		23
Sale	Banks of rivers, towns, &c.	Eight tribes – names not received	250
			[1860]

Total number, 1,860.
Note – The numbers in the above table are only approximate. The wandering habits of the aborigines render it difficult to obtain accurate returns.
R. BROUGH SMYTH, Secretary. Central Board for Aborigines, September 22.

'Aboriginal Population in 1860' supplied by R. Brough Smyth, Secretary Central Board for Aborigines, September 22 1860, reprinted in the *Argus*, 5 October 1860.

QUESTIONS

1 After reviewing documents 4.52 to 4.54 track what happened to the Aboriginal population levels of the two Melbourne tribes during the 1850s.

2 What explanations would you give to explain the trends.

3 Where was the Aboriginal population the densest? Why?

SETTLER VIEWS OF THE ABORIGINAL DECLINE

Settlers had very definite views on the Aboriginal decline. They *were* eye-witnesses, but we need to consider whether their views gave an accurate assessment of the situation – and why or why not. Every writer, every historical source, has a point of view, so you should listen for: not only what is said; but consider what ideas and contexts might have shaped those views.

In 1848, William Westgarth, a Melbourne merchant, devoted fifty-three pages to Aboriginal people in his book, *Australia Felix*. Here are some extracts from that work, beginning with his opening remarks on Victoria itself:

DOCUMENT 4.55

> The extension of commerce forms the conspicuous feature of our age and of our country. Its importance is equally pre-eminent. Compared to the past, the present attainments of human industry afford an astonishing spectacle. But even these are inconceivable when weighed against the estimates of the future. The progress is in a geometrical ratio, and repeated experience warrants the most enlarged expectations.
>
> ...Britain may now be regarded as possessing the entire extent of Australia. Our enterprising countrymen are already, with extraordinary rapidity, overspreading this ample territory.

Westgarth was appalled that Aborigines practised infanticide and allegedly cannibalism, and wrote at length about such matters, which was, he claimed, to be 'the extreme of barbarism and cruelty'. These two matters - which are controversial and partly representative of colonial gossip, aimed at depreciating Aborigines – are not included here. [It is discussed in R. Broome, Aboriginal Victorians. A History since 1800, pp. 63-68.]

Westgarth continued:

> The Australian native does not appear to have ever attained, even in the lowest degree, to any cultivation of the soil. Year after year he has roamed over the wide expense of his ancestral territory, picking up the uncertain offerings of nature, without any effort of his own ingenuity to adapt her laws to a more regular supply of his wants. In some few localities a slight advance has indeed been affected beyond the general zero of these attainments, by the practice of preparing, after some rude and simple fashion, several seeds and fruits of the spontaneous vegetation of the country.
>
> The Australian savage forms no permanent residence, has no individual appropriation of the soil, and possesses no structure that can receive the denomination of a dwelling.

A preference for the better to the worse in the conditions of life, as a steady and continuous principle of action, appears to be intimately connected with the basis of civilisation. Two are preferable to one, a greater is before a lesser value; and as we proceed in the natural ascent; a house becomes superior to a hovel, clothing to nakedness, and the elegancies of life to rusticity and poverty. It is one stage for civilisation that these superiorities should be simply preferred; it is another and still higher that they should not only be preferred, but should stimulate exertion in order to their attainment. We are familiar with the first two stages. The Chinese and the British will respectively occupy these seats. The latter march forward with a continuous pace; the former are stationary when left to their own resources, but have a capacity for the helm when borne along by an extraneous current. But in savage life we have a new feature of a stunted perfection which emits a semi-lustre of its own. The will or desire to advance is no less necessary than the capacity. The Australian native refuses to proceed.

By the irresistible prevalence of European institutions, by the grasping wants of European commerce, the aboriginal customs and modes of life are gradually checked and finally subverted; and the wretched outcasts of the soil linger out a listless and apathetic existence, without object or motive or enjoyment, a prey to filth, intemperance and miserable disease. The law of their disappearance, if we may so speak, is doubtless a wise and merciful ordination. It cannot be desirable to prolong a race which has always sunk into circumstances of unhappiness and degradation.

Let the great fact of their final destiny stimulate our compassion and forbearance for the interesting remnant of these races, now so rapidly disappearing from the earth under the spread of civilisation, and the evident development of a new and unprecedented era in the history of mankind. In their own limited sphere they have enjoyed a happiness until disturbed by our resistless progress. To these aborigines no calamity of their own mutual wars, or outrageous cruelty of customs and superstitions, can in any degree be compared with that of the advent and admixture of European population. It is now our duty to save and assist the wrecks which our colonizing enterprise has created.

William Westgarth, *Australia Felix, or, A Historical and Descriptive Account of the Settlement of Port Phillip, New South Wales...*, Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1848, pp. v, 12, 72, 87, 120-21, 122-23, 123.

Westgarth wrote a second book in 1864 entitled *The Colony of Victoria*. In this book he devoted only eight pages to Aboriginal people of Victoria. On the matter of the Aboriginal decline he wrote:

DOCUMENT 4.56

The case of the aborigines of Victoria confirms the conclusion derived from other sources, by which it would seem almost an immutable law of nature that such inferior dark races should disappear – people hardly see how – before the white colonist.

In Victoria, the blacks have ceased to be dangerous to the colonists, but, on the other hand, they are very little available in the colony's industrial life. Success in this way, as indeed in any other, towards civilizing the native, and putting him to use, have been slender and discouraging.

What is the destiny of this unimprovable savage? The invading colonists will gradually overspread Australia, and we can as little doubt that the aboriginal

race will entirely disappear. This twofold process may occupy a much less time than a casual observer would suppose, who remarks the vast areas that are still a blank upon our maps of Australia. But these spaces are at this moment being occupied at a pace that has had little example in colonization. Pastoral occupation is the earliest mode of Australian settlement, and it may be described as colonization at the gallop. The area of an English county is taken up today, and tomorrow there are several more of such areas appropriated and occupied on the outskirts of the last. Nor can the savage find room in the vast country alongside of his civilized brother. He comes in the way only to be but too easily elbowed out of his ancient domain. He dies off before the white man from a combination of causes, not the least effective of which is that his accustomed mode of life is interfered with – a mode he cannot change from any other; so that the motives, objects, and daily stimulus of his very existence are gone.

And yet, in his day, the Australian savage was the undisputed head of the vast living world around him. In ceding that portion he closes a long-held dominion. If events threaten him still more adversely, and he is soon entirely to disappear, we should hardly be indifferent to the extinction of the widely-spread Australian race, which has inherited from long past time so noble and important a region of the globe.

Judged by the scale of commerce, Victoria rose, through her gold-fields, to be the greatest of colonies. The rise was rapid beyond all precedent. Suddenly the modest settlement, one of the very youngest of the empire's children, became aware that, outside of old England, she was at the head of the empire family.

William Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria, Its History, Commerce, and Gold Mining, its Social and Political Institutions, Down to the End of 1963*, London, Sampson Low and Son, 1864, pp. 226, 228, 231, 233-34, 235.

A settler resident near Kyneton, Alfred Joyce, recalled of the gold rush years:

DOCUMENT 4.57

The blacks did not show any signs of serious diminution till the breaking out of the diggings, but their demoralization had been going on all the time previously. Debauchery and drink was doing its work. When bush inns became numerous the blacks congregated about them and took all the drink that was offered them, and purchased it whenever they could get a coin or two by begging or otherwise. All this was bad enough when the white inhabitants were few and far between, but the outbreak of the diggings, with greater temptations and facilities, swept them off rapidly. Often in passing through the diggings townships near us, I have seen them squatting about the streets or near the public house, when they generally shouted out my name as I passed, as recognizing an old acquaintance, followed by the usual appeal to 'Give it sixpence' that they might get something to eat, but more likely something to drink. For a few years after this a few of them would occasionally visit the station I was on, but they soon disappeared altogether, and now there are but a few on the one or two missions stations, and many of them are half-castes. It is not so very surprising that these poor creatures, so very low in the scale of civilization or rather in the entire absence of it, should succumb to the inundation of the white population, when we see the half- civilized Maoris of New Zealand gradually receding under the same influence.

Alfred Joyce, *A Homestead History, being the Reminiscences and Letters of Alfred Joyce of Plaistow & Norwood, Port Phillip, 1843-1864*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, third edition, 1969, pp. 78-79.

QUESTIONS

1. Write a short essay or a series of dot points on William Westgarth's explanation for the Aboriginal decline in documents 4.55 and 4.56.
2. Do you detect a change in his views between his 1848 and 1864 book? How might you account for these differences?
3. How does Alfred Joyce, in document 4.57, explain the decline?

TRADITIONAL LIFE

Since 1840 William Thomas had been ordered by Superintendent La Trobe to keep Aboriginal people out of Melbourne. However, the people continued to visit Melbourne, on occasion, causing Thomas much consternation and cause to reflect on Aboriginal actions.

DOCUMENT 4.58

[Monday]

See three blacks who had come in with a settlers dray for Western Port...

[Tuesday]

...hearing of some hanging about, find a few NE of the Merri Creek. They beg to stop a few days...

[Wednesday at this camp]

...more blacks had returned for the Yarra. I let them remain on the understanding that they would leave on Saturday...

[Thursday visit camp NE Melbourne]

...in consequence of a complaint of their dogs, I press them to hasten again to the bush...

[Friday]

...hear of another party between the Darrabean and Plenty, visit that Encampt, beg of them not to join the other Encampt nearer town as they were going to leave for the bush tomorrow, they agree...

[Saturday]

...early at the encampt have some altercation with them this being the day they were to leave. They assure me they will leave this afternoon... I find a few from the Encampt in town. Return home by way of the Encampt they had not left all not having arrived from town. I state from the lateness that they had better not shift, that I would be very early with them tomorrow...

[Sunday]

Early by ½ past 8 in the Encampt. The blacks were preparing to leave, after explaining to me the route they were going. I addressed them from 8:32 Psalm (?) After services they shook hands with me. By 11 o'clock the Encampt was deserted.

William Thomas, the Guardian of the Aborigines, weekly report, 5-11 May 1851, *Victorian Public Record Office Series* 2893, unit 1, 1851/26.

In 1853, Thomas also commented in a report:

DOCUMENT 4.59

All efforts, however, to further improve their condition, have been tried without avail. I have pressed, and the farmers and others also have urged their becoming as we are, and not merely in work and diet; but to stop in houses and open convenient places at night, comfortably clad and stretched, is what they will not hear of; the hook, axe, or bridle down, and all further of civilization for the day is over; off goes apparel, and they bask under the canopy of heaven as in their primitive wildness, evidently enjoying their freedom from encumbrance; nor do I conceive any further advancement beyond what they have obtained practicable to those in the settled districts, nor have they desire to be meddled with further. Such is their wandering propensity, that all kindness, entreaty, or persuasion cannot secure them one day beyond their determination; and they have lately been particularly cautious how they make bargains for labour on this account.

The Guardian of the Aborigines to the Honorable the Colonial Secretary, 15 January 1853, 'Aborigines, Return to Address 24 October 1854', *Victorian Legislative Council Papers*, C-No.33a.

QUESTIONS

1 What elements of traditional life can you detect in Thomas' descriptions of Aboriginal people in documents 4.58 and 4.59?

2 Did the gold rush decade increase white controls over Aborigines or not? Explain.

NEW VISIONS FOR AN ABORIGINAL FUTURE

In 1850 Aborigines of the Melbourne region again asked for land to be reserved for them at Bulleen. This request was relayed to Superintendent La Trobe by William Thomas. Two small reserves were granted in 1851 but further from Melbourne; one was formed at Warrandyte and the other at Mordiyallook (Mordialloc). These served as ration depots rather than permanent reserves.

No other policy initiatives were made until Thomas McCombie, a journalist and member for the Legislative Council, pushed for the end to the policy vacuum in Victoria and gained an inquiry into the condition of Aboriginal people in Victoria.

DOCUMENT 4.60

From the evidence which the Committee have obtained, it appears that at the first settlement of the Colony in 1836 there were from six to seven thousand Aborigines distributed over its area. So great has been the mortality amongst them, however, that so far as can be ascertained, there are not more than a few hundreds remaining, who are in abject want...[in fact it was over 10,000 at first settlement and just under 2,000 by 1860, still a disastrous decline.]

The great and almost unprecedented reduction in the number of the Aborigines is to be attributed to the general occupation of the country by the white population; to vices acquired by contact with a civilized race, more scarcity of game since the settlement of the Colony; and, also in some cases to cruelty and ill-treatment. The great cause, however, is apparently the inveterate propensity of the race to excessive indulgence in spirits, which it seems utterly impossible to eradicate. The vice is not only fatal, but leads to other causes which tend to shorten life.

Your Committee is of the opinion that great injustice has been perpetrated upon the Aborigines – that, when the Government of the Colony found it necessary to take from them their hunting grounds and their means of living, proper provisions should have been made for them. Had they been a strong race, like the New Zealanders, they would have forced the new occupiers of their country to provide for them; but being weak and ignorant, even for savages, they have been treated with almost utter neglect.

With the exemption of the Protectorate, which was an emanation of the Imperial Government, and which seemed to have been only partially successful, little or nothing has been done for the black denizens of the country. Victoria is now entirely occupied by a superior race, and there is scarcely a spot, excepting in the remote mountain ranges, or dense scrubs on which the Aborigine can rest his weary feet. To allow this to continue would be to tolerate and perpetuate a great moral wrong; and your Committee are of the opinion that, even at this late period, a vigorous effort should be made to provide for the remnants of the various tribes so that they may be maintained in comparative plenty. This is a duty incumbent upon the community, and clearly in accordance with the principles of advanced civilization and Christianity...

The only practical method of accomplishing the desired object, and the one most likely under all the circumstances of the case to succeed, would, in the opinion of your Committee, be to form reserves for the various tribes, on their own hunting grounds. These ought to be of such a size as would enable each tribe to combine agricultural and gardening operations with the depasturing of a moderate number of cattle and sheep (such reserves in agricultural districts not to exceed 500 acres; but where the land is capable of being used for agriculture, then the reserve to be materially extended, in order that it might unite pastoral with agricultural pursuits) and every effort should be made to induce the Aborigines to take an interest in the occupations of civilized life and give them aid in carrying out the various branches of industry. Those establishments ought to be under the charge of missionaries, clerical or lay, whose duty it would be to endeavor to teach the Aborigines the great principles of Christianity, as well as the elemental branches of secular education; and it is the opinion of the Committee, that ample supplies of provisions and blankets should be provided for these establishments until they could be made self-supporting, which your Committee trust might ultimately be the case.

In cases where grants for this object are made, the sites should be chosen in retired localities and no licensed taverns should be permitted in their vicinity.

> Your Committee hope that, in some measure, under the plan which they have suggested, the remnants of the Aborigines may be both civilized and Christianized. They find upon a thorough investigation of this part of the subject, that the Aborigines are possessed of mental power on a par with their brethren of the other races of man; and that they are perhaps superior to the Negro, and some of the more inferior divisions of the great human family ... Their perceptive faculties are particularly acute, they are apt learners, and possess the most intense desire to imitate their more civilized brethren in almost everything. ...while the Aborigines are embued [sic] with keen perceptive faculties, there is a considerable deficiency in their reflective faculties, and a certain want of steadiness of purpose in their characters, which appear the great obstacle to be overcome in reclaiming them, and bringing them within the pale of civilization and Christianity.
>
> Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines, *Victorian Legislative Council Papers*, 1858-9, pp. iii-v.

QUESTIONS

1. How did the report explain the demise of Aboriginal people? Does this accord with the other evidence and opinions you have read, and your own conclusions? Why/why not?
2. How did the Committee's report represent Aboriginal people and their abilities? Were these views ambiguous? Explain?
3. How did the Committee justify actions to assist Aborigines?
4. What was proposed in 1859?

While the Victorian Government was deliberating over the report, Aboriginal groups from central Victoria, known collectively as Kulin people, made their own push for a new vision of their future, and requested land. They then took action to gain it.

The *Argus* newspaper in Melbourne reported in March 1859 that a deputation of seven men was introduced by William Thomas, the Guardian of the Aborigines, to Gavin Duffy, the Minister for Lands, to request land. The men were Beaning, Wonga (Billibellari's son), Munnarin, Murin Murrin, Parngean, Barruppin and Koo-gurrin.

They were described in this way by the *Argus*:

DOCUMENT 4.61

> These men were attired much in the same manner as sailors or laborers of an inferior class. They wore coarse jumpers and trousers: three of them had coats, and the remainder were without this article of dress. They were all robust and well made men, apparently equal in physical power to the average of Europeans, and very different in appearance from the emaciated-looking native who haunt the outskirts of townships, and who are mostly reduced by drink and the disease it entails. One of the men was upwards of 6 feet in height, and none of them were below 5 feet 8 inches. Their countenances were intelligent and animated. Their entrance into the Board room was made in an unembarrassed and quiet manner and at a sign from Mr Duffy they seated themselves with an air of grave courtesy, and listened attentively to what went forward and the interpretations of Mr W. Thomas.

Thomas explained to Duffy that a deputation of the Goulburn people had waited on him the previous month to request his help in gaining land. He had led a deputation of them on the 4 March to meet with the Surveyor-General of Land. Thomas indicated that:

> The chief of the Goulburn tribe explicitly made known their request, that the tribe were anxious to secure a tract of land on both sides of a creek which falls into the Goulburn River, named Nak-krom, which the blacks stated was of little use to white people, but kangaroos and opossums were abundant there.

This land adjoined that of Messrs Snodgrass and Kerr, and also the Rubicon Creek, Goulburn River and the Great Dividing Range. When asked by the Surveyor-General would they cultivate the land, they replied in their own language through Thomas:

> That blackfellows and lubras go look out food, but some always stop and turn up ground, and plant potatoes and corn.

FIGURE 50

'Deputation of Victorian Aborigines at the Governor's Levee', 1863.

Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Thomas recommended:

> As there are 32 aborigines in the number desirous to locate, I would recommend at least 150 acres each, not to be divided into 150 acre allotments, but for the chief and his tribe 4,800 acres, and the dividing range in the south would give them an unlimited range in that direction. The aborigines would require assistance in provisions, implements... A steady, sober, agricultural family on their estate would be desirable, to instruct and encourage them.

Mr Duffy responded favourably to this request as he had the power to dispose of land to assist Aboriginal people. Duffy ordered that this land be given to them as long as arrangements can be made with their neighbours. He thought it:

> In the highest degree desirable to give to the aborigines some chance of escaping the ruin and destruction which have fallen on so many of their race. [Duffy then added] I question the propriety of allowing this land to be invested in the chief, which I understand it is proposed to do. It would place the natives too much under an arbitrary contract.

However, Thomas replied:

> The aborigines of this country are very different in their habits from the aborigines in others. There is no difference between the chief and the rest of the tribe as far as labor is concerned, all work for themselves and seek their food alike.

'Deputation by Seven Aborigines of the Goulburn District', *Argus*, 8 March 1859.

QUESTIONS

1. How were Aboriginal people represented by the *Argus*? Note key words used to describe them and discuss their significance.
2. What were the Aborigines' demands?
3. Is it possible that Thomas and the *Argus* were likely to know the full extent of these demands? Why/Why not?
4. How were these Aboriginal demands received by Duffy?

A Central Board for the Aborigines was established along with a system of reserves after the 1858-59 Select Committee. The Kulin's efforts to gain land eventually led to the creation of the Coranderrk reserve near Healesville which was ratified by the Central Board. See chapter 7 of *Aboriginal Victorians. A History since 1800* for more on this.

One of the local guardians appointed by the Central Board, P. Chauncey reported in 1860:

DOCUMENT 4.62

> A native of the Moira tribe, who rode up the Murray with me last November, informed me of the intention of himself and five other aborigines to proceed as a deputation to his Excellency the Governor to request him to impose a tax of £10 on each steamer passing up and down the Murray to be expended in supplying food to the natives in lieu of the fish which have been driven away.

Annual Report of the Central Board for Aborigines in Victoria 1860-61, p. 19.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss this demand and how it was made.
2. How would you characterise those who made it?
3. What does this tell you about Aboriginal people in Victoria by 1860?

DESTRUCTION AND GENOCIDE

In the recent history wars, the violence of the frontier has been openly discussed[11]. Often the word 'genocide' has been freely used. The following documents explore the appropriateness of this term for interpreting the Port Phillip/Victorian frontier. The first document is my summary of the Aboriginal loss of life on the Port Phillip frontier. For a more extended analysis see Beverley Nance's work[12].

> Quite accurate figures of Aboriginal depopulation exist for Port Phillip. From a pre-contact population of about 10,000, the number of Aborigines declined to 1,907 by 1853 - a decline of 80 per cent in 18 years.

Research by a number of historians since 1981 has indicated that the pre-contact population of Victoria was more likely to have been 20,000, not 10,000; making the decline more like 90 per cent over these 18 years.

11 See Richard Broome, 'The Struggle for Australia: Aboriginal-European Warfare, 1770-1930' in McKernan & Browne (eds), *Australia Two Centuries of War & Peace*, AWM. & Allen & Unwin, Canberra, 1988, pp. 92-120; and, Stuart Macintyre & Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2003.

12 Beverley Nance, 'The Level of Violence...' pp. 532-552.

DOCUMENT 4.63

> What caused this dreadful depopulation on the southern and south-eastern frontiers? It has been estimated that in Port Phillip of the 8,000 deaths, 5,000 were from disease (or 62 per cent), while European violence, Aboriginal violence against other Aborigines, and death from natural causes, each accounted for 1,000 deaths (or 12 per cent each). Each region was of course unique. Curr, who is a reliable observer, believed that only two of the 120 Bangerang deaths in the 10 years of his residence on the Murray were caused by white violence and none were due to alcohol. The Aborigines, he says, were wiped out by disease. In areas where there were massacres, European violence played a large part. Overall, disease, malnutrition and alcohol were the greatest killers, accounting for possibly two-thirds of the deaths; these were followed by white violence which caused on average about a tenth of deaths; while black violence lay behind perhaps a twentieth of all deaths. The rest perished from natural causes.
>
> Not only was the death-rate of 80 per cent or more in a generation quite horrific, but the birth-rate was extremely low. For instance, Protector Parker

only recorded 20 births in the 10 years to 1849 amongst all the seven tribes around Melbourne. Elsewhere the lack of children was often commented upon. Venereal disease probably contributed to infertility. Also many of those babies born in the early period of white contact did not survive the diseases and poor conditions the Aborigines had to endure. The traditional practice of infanticide which probably increased under the stress of culture contact and inter-racial union, also kept the birth-rate down.

In the midst of all this, it cannot be discounted that some Aborigines lost a sense off purpose and a desire for living.

Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians. Black Responses to White Dominance, 1788-1994,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 3rd edition, 2001, pp. 65-66.

The British Government's Aboriginal policy suffered from conflicting ideas. Its desire for peace and justice was contradicted by its claiming of Aboriginal land as the Crown's, and by the problems of dispensing cross-cultural justice, that is, of extending equality under British law to a people who could not understand it and did not wish to recognise such laws. The next document outlines a fundamental aspect of British Aboriginal policy, as stated by Charles Grant (Lord Glenelg), British Secretary of State for the Colonies in a letter to the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Richard Bourke, in 1837.

DOCUMENT 4.64

Your commission as Governor of New South Wales asserts her Majesty's sovereignty over every part of the continent of New Holland, which is not embraced in the colonies of western or southern Australia. Hence I conceive it follows that all the natives inhabiting those territories must be considered as subjects of the Queen, and as within her Majesty's allegiance. To regard them as aliens, with whom a war can exist, and against whom Her Majesty's troops may exercise belligerent rights, is to deny that protection to which they derive the highest possible claim from the sovereignty which has been assumed over the whole of their ancient possessions.

Lord Glenelg to Sir Richard Bourke, 26 July 1837, in Cannon (ed.), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol. 2A, p. 69.

Despite the problems of maintaining order on the frontier, there was a reality to this policy. This was realised when eleven white stockmen were tried and seven executed after being found guilty of the murder of about 30 Aboriginal men, women and children at Myall Creek in 1838. The government, in establishing a government mission on the Yarra in Melbourne, issued this specific directive in 1837 to the missionary, George Langhorne:

DOCUMENT 4.65

The Governor approves of your endeavouring to induce the adult Aborigines to leave their children with you for education, but cannot consent to any restraint being placed upon their inclination if they desire at any time to withdraw them from your care. It is by persuasion alone that you should endeavour to effect your purposes.

G. K. Holden [for the Governor] to George Langhorne, 25 March 1837, quoted in Cannon (ed.), *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol., 2A, p. 171.

The Nuremburg trials of Nazi war crimes against Jews and others during the second world war adopted a new word, 'genocide', coined by Raphael Lemkin. In 1946 the United Nations defined 'genocide' as either:

DOCUMENT 4.66

-A direct mass murder by order or instruction

-Forcing an ethnic, racial or religious group to live in conditions which might lead to a partial or complete liquidation of the group.

-Measures taken in order to prevent births in that group or a violent shifting of the children to be brought up in another group.

Quoted in Annette Hamilton,
'Blacks and Whites. The Relations of Change', p. 36.

QUESTIONS

1 What are the key terms in the definition of genocide in document 4.66?

2 Compare this definition with documents 4.63 to 4.65. Do you think it is appropriate or not to apply the word 'genocide' to the Port Phillip frontier?

A historian, Tony Barta, has attempted to alter the meaning of genocide. This is a brief extract of his views:

DOCUMENT 4.67

That genocide must be seen as a *policy*, for which individuals could be held responsible and called to account, was the main argument behind Raphael Lemkin's [the word's creator] conception. The new word was meant 'to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves'. This emphasis on *intention* and scope, on purposeful annihilation, has given the word its terrible leading edge. It has succeeded in devaluing all other concepts of less planned destruction, even if the effects are the same...

It was not 'an exclusively good or bad will on either side' which caused the destruction of the Aborigines but ' the objective nature of the relationships' between (white) capitalist wool producers and (black) hunter-gatherers. Local encounters were always between individuals, and individual attitudes could make an immediate difference between life and death. The quality of personal relationships varied according to the whole range of individual character and circumstance, but the larger encounter and the *inescapable relationship* was between totally incompatible forms of economy and society.

At the center of this relationship - both in consciousness and in actuality - was the land. Both peoples, the Aboriginal inhabitants and the invaders, needed the land. Because of the uses for which each people needed the land, and because of the cultural gulf in understandings about the land, coexistence was impossible. The black belonged to the land, their being was part of it and it was part of them. Collectively and individually, it was their life. To the white people it was land to be brought in to production; that production was in the center of their culture and the basis of their social order. Collectively, taking over the land was the driving force of the colonists; individually, they saw the land as potential and then actual property...

> It will still be objected that taking over a continent and destroying its inhabitants are two very different things. And - as I have been at pains to agree - the determination to do one did not imply the *intention* to do the other. Only a minority 'had to' kill, as they saw it, in defense of their property, or in defense of their own lives - lives on the line because of commitment to property. But the violence accompanying the appropriation of the land was of a scale and ruthlessness - largely uncurbed by official intervention - which could leave no doubt in black or white minds as to the fate if those who resisted the 'inevitable' course of events, and it can be no coincidence that it was accompanied, among those with no thought of murder in their minds, by much talk of the 'inevitable' dying out of the black race. I do not think it is too simplistic to see in this dominant opinion the most comfortable ideological reflection of a relationship which could not be recognized in good conscience for what it was - a relationship of genocide.
>
> Tony Barta, 'Relations of Genocide: Land and Lives in the Colonization of Australia', in I. Walliman and M. Dobkowski (eds), *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1987, pp. 238, 247-248.

QUESTIONS

1. On what does Lemkin's original definition of genocide hinge?
2. What does Barta mean by 'the objective nature of the relationships'?
3. Explain what Barta means by 'a relationship of genocide'?

ESSAY TOPICS

1. Outline the major destructive forces of Colonialism for the Aborigines.
2. Discuss the proposition that the Aborigines of Port Phillip were more than simply victims of Colonialism.
3. Discuss whether it is appropriate to use the term 'genocide' to characterise the treatment of Aborigines on the Port Phillip frontier.
4. What was the impact of the gold rushes on Aboriginal people?
5. Explain Aboriginal visions of the future expressed by them in the 1850s.
6. How did Aboriginal people engage with European society?

For a consideration of changes to the land from gold-mining, see Don Garden's excellent article, 'Catalyst or Cataclysm? Gold Mining and the Environment', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 72, no. 1-2, September 2001, pp. 28-44 available online through the State Library of Victoria's catalogue.

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BIOGRAPHY

Richard Broome is Emeritus Professor of History at La Trobe University in Melbourne. He is the author of eleven books and numerous articles on Australian History, including the first booklet in the La Trobe University Studies in History Series, *Refugee Immigrants* (1990) and three previous editions of *The Colonial Experience* (1997, 1999, 2009).

He has written elsewhere on Port Phillip and Victoria society, especially on immigration in *Arriving* (1984) and on Aboriginal-European relations in *Aboriginal Victorians. A History since 1800* (2005). This was short listed for four prizes, winning two, namely: the NSW Premier's prize for Australian History in 2006 and the best book in the Victorian Community Awards 2006-2007.

His book *Aboriginal Australians* (1982) was fully rewritten and revised into a 4th edition in 2010, and published as *Aboriginal Australians. A history since 1788*. In 2015 he published *Fighting Hard. The Aborigines Advancement League of Victoria*, and is now working with a team to write an environmental history of Mallee lands in southern Australia.

Despite retiring in 2012 he remains active in furthering links between History in universities and secondary schools; is a regular presenter for the History Teachers' Association of Victoria; and has acted as its Patron since 2013.

VICTORIA was a remarkable place in the nineteenth century. An Aboriginal space was overwhelmed and transformed into a British colony by the full flush of a pastoral boom. Less than a generation later it was again totally transformed by a mad gold rush that laid new social foundations to the colony and unleashed new visions of colonial society. Richard Broome has fully revised this fourth edition of *Colonial Experience*, with over 50 new documents, images and a new section to align with the VCE Australian History Unit 3 guidelines 2016-2020.

ABOVE 'Eaglehawk Gully, Bendigo, Victoria', John Allan. *nla.pic-an7404357. National Library of Australia.*

FRONT COVER "Mounted stockmen talking to natives', S. T. Gill. *nla.pic-an2377106. National Library of Australia.*

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