

# HISTORICAL NOTES

## Charles Bonney and the Fertile Kilmore Plains

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### **Abstract**

*Charles Bonney was a pioneer of overland routes from New South Wales to Port Phillip and South Australia from 1837 but was also a leading figure in politics and public administration in Adelaide for the rest of his life. From 1871 he wrote that his most important achievements included the discovery for European use of the fertile district of Kilmore and the route of the Sydney Road, both seemingly obscure to modern eyes. This article will present the lost evidence for Bonney's primacy in Kilmore's foundation and reveal exactly when Bonney's importance was erroneously erased by later historians.*

I pushed through rough timbered country in bitter cold all day. I made one last effort up a stiff pinch, up one more ridge line towards the setting sun. There before me as far as the eye could see lay the golden rich rolling fields of ... my childhood home, Sandon, Stafford.

(An imaginary journal entry by Charles Bonney on 21 March 1837, on seeing the Kilmore Plains for the first time from the ridge at Green's Pinch on the Sydney road.<sup>1</sup>)

### **Charles Bonney's Overlanding**

From July 1836 Port Phillip settlers in early Melbourne were urging pastoralists of New South Wales to overland stock to their newly opened lands.<sup>2</sup> Charles Bonney was the first individual to attempt the journey from Albury in that same month but was turned back by floodwaters on the Ovens River at Wangaratta.<sup>3</sup> Within months, John Gardiner, Joseph Hawdon and Captain John Hepburn had succeeded in driving cattle from Howe's station at Jugiong on the Murrumbidgee to the Yarra, arriving there for Christmas Day 1836.<sup>4</sup> Bonney made a second attempt with Charles Hotson Ebdon from Ebdon's station, Mungabareena, at Albury on 25 December 1836. They reached the Yarra two weeks after the Gardiner party on 7 January 1837.<sup>5</sup> Bonney returned to Albury to



**Panorama from the Hume and Hovell Memorial, Kilmore, Vic.** (Source: Rose Series, Rose Stereograph Co., c. 1920–1954, but evidently 1925. Courtesy SLV H32492/1401)

drive 10,000 sheep for Ebden to the Port Phillip District, departing on 1 March 1837.<sup>6</sup>

Bonney later recorded key elements of this journey in a letter of 1871<sup>7</sup> and autobiographical notes of 1882.<sup>8</sup>

I ... proceeded again to Mr. Ebden's station, and, in the month of March, started with ten thousand sheep for the Port Phillip district, these were the first sheep taken across to the New Settlement. Having crossed the Goulburn, the sheep were halted on some open country where Mr. Ebden first intended to place them.

Captain John Hepburn provided the location of this halting place: 'Mr. Ebden took up the Sugarloaf Creek, but abandoned that part of the country and took up Carlsruhe ... Mr. William Hamilton took up the Sugarloaf Creek, left by Mr. Ebden.'<sup>9</sup> Thomas Henry Nutt surveyed Sugarloaf Creek in 1842 and identified 'Hamilton's sheep station' on land adjacent to what is now the intersection of Seymour Pyalong Road with Tallarook Pyalong Road.<sup>10</sup> Nutt surveyed with sufficient precision to identify this location readily as 37°05'04" S; 145°02'41" E.

The distance between Ebden's Mungabareena station at Albury and Sugarloaf Creek station along the original Thomas Mitchell journey line was approximately 141 miles. To estimate Bonney's date of arrival

at Sugarloaf Creek, Thomas Walker recorded that 9,000 of this same flock of sheep owned by Ebden were driven from Mitchell's Town on the Goulburn on 21 May 1837 to Redesdale on the Campaspe.<sup>11</sup> Walker's records indicated that this journey was 39 miles and took three full days, or eleven miles per day. Using this real rate of travel of Ebden's flock of sheep as a guide, I have calculated that Bonney would have taken approximately thirteen days to drive the sheep the 141 miles to the Sugarloaf Creek station, arriving about 14 March 1837.

This estimate is corroborated by the journey of George Hamilton. After his arrival at Sugarloaf Creek Bonney was made aware of the proximity of another overland party behind him. He later recollected that on the eve of taking two drays to Melbourne for supplies: 'I received intelligence that there was a party with cattle about a day's journey behind me, under the leadership of the late George Hamilton.'<sup>12</sup> Hamilton was droving stock overland to Gisborne for Henry Howey. For a brief period, it was considered that the party and the livestock had been lost.<sup>13</sup> But a letter dated 1 April 1837, written from Campbelltown to the *Sydney Monitor*, advised that 'Mr Hamilton ... is perfectly safe ... My informant is Mr. Waddy of the Mounted Police, who sent a party in quest of Mr H.'<sup>14</sup> Further traceable details were provided on 6 April 1837 when a Mr Hallen, part owner of the stock, wrote that 'he had just received a communication from Mr. Hamilton ... his party had arrived safe at their place of destination.'<sup>15</sup>

It is not clear exactly when and where the police search found the party to be safe, but their destination was Gisborne. It would have taken at least seven days for a message to get from there to Yass by horseback and another two days by coach mail to Sydney.<sup>16</sup> These estimates are based on later mail runs, which were journeys made under pressure with changes of horses and riders, a facility also available to the mounted police. Thus Hamilton could have reached his destination at Gisborne as early as 24 March 1837, depending on the place where Lieutenant Waddy's detachment actually found him to be safe.

Assuming that Hamilton had communicated from Gisborne, and that it would have taken him about six days to drive stock the 68 miles there from his position near Bonney, we can conclude that the pair were in close proximity on about 18 March 1837. When Bonney was at Sugarloaf Creek station around that time, he was advised that two bushrangers were in the vicinity. He paused to search for them

before leaving for the settlement on the Yarra. On this trip he made two important discoveries:

In company with one of Mr. Hamilton's overseers I spent an afternoon in searching the country round about in the endeavour to find the bushrangers, but, not succeeding, I had to start the next morning with the drays for the settlement. On this journey I made the track which afterwards became known as the Sydney Road, and I also discovered at the same time the fertile district, named afterwards Kilmore, where I formed a sheep station.<sup>17</sup>

Assuming that Bonney began his trip by dray on the next day, 19 March, he would have covered the fifteen miles to Kilmore in about two days, marking 21 March 1837 as the approximate date of the European discovery of that district by Charles Bonney.

Bonney had returned to Sugarloaf Creek station in May 1837 by the time Ebden commenced driving 9,000 of the flock of sheep to Carlsruhe. 'The sheep I had brought over, with the exception of two flocks that I had taken charge of, were removed to Mount Macedon.'<sup>18</sup> This journey was recorded by Thomas Walker, who wrote that Ebden settled on his Carlsruhe station on 26 May 1837.<sup>19</sup> Bonney reported that he in turn left Sugarloaf Creek station after his camp had been robbed, 'and with these two flocks, shortly after the robbery of my camp, I moved to Kilmore.'<sup>20</sup> The bushranger George Commerford made a statement to police when he was captured on the Murrumbidgee on 24 June 1837. It revealed that ten days had elapsed between his robbing of Bonney's station and his capture, making the date of the robbery 14 June 1837.<sup>21</sup> Bonney drove his sheep to the Kilmore station and occupied it 'shortly after' 14 June 1837. Like all overlanders, he was under pressure to occupy the run he had selected because, if he failed to reach it in time, another party could take it over. This provided him with an incentive to move on and not to tarry at Sugarloaf Creek. The journey of fifteen miles would normally have taken about two days, but, allowing three days for 'shortly', we can conclude that Kilmore would have been under European occupation by about 17 June 1837, its first European settler being Charles Bonney.

Gisborne, Carlsruhe and Kilmore, occupied by these overlanders, became townsites. They would have had their first European buildings on them within days of their occupation. The squatters had to build a head station and separate outstations for every multiple of about a

thousand sheep.<sup>22</sup> It would take two days to build each sheep station hut and so about four days to set up a small run.<sup>23</sup> It was essential to have huts distributed around the run as 'outstations' at the boundaries of the squatted land so that it was physically occupied by sheep and could be defended from other squatters.<sup>24</sup>

Bonney had squatted on the rich volcanic Kilmore Plains, a physiographical feature of about 20,000 acres centred now on Willowmavin and including Moranding, Bylands and the Kilmore township.<sup>25</sup> Some of the best of the land had permanent water from the three streams across it: Kurkuruk Creek, Ryan's Creek and Kilmore Creek. The water supply and rich arable nature of the plains were central to the future of the district. The track that Bonney had made to Melbourne in March 1837 became the principal road between Melbourne and Sydney. The permanent water and pasture at the Kilmore Creek led to it becoming the main rest stop between the Goulburn River and Melbourne on Bonney's new Sydney Road. Bonney, however, squatted at Kilmore for only six months, later recalling:

There I remained with them till the end of year 1837. Being the farthest out station from, the Port Phillip Settlement, and there being no other station within a distance of nearly twenty miles, I found the difficulty of managing the sheep so great in consequence of the trouble I had in getting men that I gave up the station and took the sheep to Mount Macedon.<sup>26</sup>

Joseph Hawdon recorded that he met Bonney at his outstation at Kilmore immediately prior to the pair making the first overland stock drive to Adelaide. Bonney had left Kilmore for good by 17 January 1838.<sup>27</sup>

### **Bonney's Successors**

Dr Richard Julian Hamlyn was a resident of Melbourne when he wrote to Captain William Lonsdale on 26 December 1837 requesting employment.<sup>28</sup> Hamlyn was from Goulburn and was an associate of the overlanders Henry Howey<sup>29</sup> and George and William Faithfull.<sup>30</sup> At the end of February 1838, Hamlyn was identified as occupying a sheep station on the Sydney Road by a G.B.S., who wrote.

To Ebden's old station since occupied by Mr. Hamilton ... station off the road to the right, to the left a remarkable hill called Hepburner's Sugar Loaf.

6 [miles] Cross a creek without water, half a mile water.

8 Mr. Hamlyn's station, the road passes in front, and from hence is to be traced by the cuts on the trees, keeping on the top of the range, thick scrub.

14 Open on a plain, a remarkable bluff face of trees in front, to the left a group of three hills, under which Mr. Thomas' station, beautiful spring of water.<sup>31</sup>

This description, including the distance estimates, matched the track of the Sydney Road pioneered by Bonney, running from William Hamilton's station at Sugarloaf Creek, leaving Hepburner's Sugar Loaf (Mt Piper) to the left, passing in front of what had been Bonney's outstation at Kilmore and then, remaining on the top of the range, moving south through Bylands to Pretty Sally Hill until the road opened up onto the plain leading to Thom's station, now Beveridge, with three prominent hills in the foreground. Having reached Dr Hamlyn's station, G.B.S. recorded the distance to Melbourne as 38 miles, a close approximation to the actual distance of 37 miles.

Hamlyn had clearly taken up Bonney's outstation. The writer, G.B.S., was Lieutenant George Brunswick Smyth. He and Lieutenant Alfred Miller Mundy had just made the overland trip to Port Phillip, having arrived at the end of February 1838 as the *Melbourne Advertiser* reported: 'Lieutenants Smith and Munday arrived last week overland from Sydney. Lieut. Smith relieves Lieut. Hawkins.'<sup>32</sup> Hamlyn applied for a pastoral licence on 26 June 1838, Peter Snodgrass, the commissioner for crown lands, informing the colonial secretary that, 'R.J. Hamlyn, gentleman, residing at Port Phillip, applies to His Excellency the Governor for a licence to depasture sheep, cattle and other stock upon vacant Crown Lands.'<sup>33</sup> However, Smyth's account had demonstrated that Richard Hamlyn was already occupying the Bonney Outstation when this licence application was made on his behalf by Snodgrass.

### **The Obscuring of Bonney's Primacy**

A century later a celebratory article on Kilmore's centenary obscured the reality that Bonney was the first European settler. James Maher in 1938 wrote that:

About the end of the year 1837 Dr. Richard Hamlyn made a station on the Dry Creek, and grazed his flocks over the area where the town of Kilmore later sprang up. This run he held (without going through the formality of taking out a licence) for a few years.<sup>34</sup>

Maher gave no reference for these assertions but merely wrote ‘compiled from notes supplied by the Historical Society’.<sup>35</sup> There has never been a reference to either Richard Hamlyn or the Dry Creek near Kilmore in the *Victorian Historical Journal* or its predecessors.<sup>36</sup> Later writers C.E. Sayers<sup>37</sup> and Myra Tucker<sup>38</sup> reproduced the baseless assertions by Maher almost verbatim but provided no citation to him or any other traceable source. The absence of evidence that Hamlyn was at Dry Creek only added to the credibility of Smyth’s personal observation that Hamlyn was at the Bonney Outstation on the Sydney Road. Notwithstanding the occupation of his prized squatting run, Hamlyn had left it by April 1839.

Lady Jane Franklin’s journal provides evidence of Hamlyn’s successors on Bonney’s original run. Lady Jane, the wife of the governor of Van Diemen’s Land, commenced a journey overland from Melbourne to Sydney on Monday 8 April 1839, during which she visited Frederick Armand Powlett and John Green, the next occupants of Bonney’s station. She observed near present-day Beveridge:

It was 14 miles hence to Green’s outstation [on the Sydney Road] & 18 to the upper house where we were to sleep ... Met Captain Smyth on horseback, gaily dressed in police costume [Captain G.B. Smyth, Commander of Mounted Police] ... The house stands on the side of the bare hill whence can see over bare sloping foreground several ridges of hills, without being able to see into hollows [Powlett and Green’s Head Station at Moranding].<sup>39</sup>

The exact locations of the outstation and the ‘upper house’ home station were identified by Nutt in 1841 in marking out the Kilmore Special Survey. Nutt recorded in his survey field notes an ‘old hut’ that he measured as ‘19,50 links’ (392 metres) due west of the Kilmore creek along his survey line. That meant that it was eleven metres east of the intersection of Church Street and Foote Street, Kilmore (37°17’45” S; 144°56’ 57” E).<sup>40</sup> Tucker concluded logically that the ‘old hut’ was the Bonney outstation.<sup>41</sup> Powlett and Green’s head station was marked by Nutt at what became Kennedys Lane, Willowmavin, diagonally opposite the Willowmavin Primary School (37°53’31 S; 144° 53’23” E).<sup>42</sup>

Given the previous connections between Hamlyn, Mundy and Smyth, the next day's entry in Franklin's diary is apposite. After staying overnight at Powlett and Green's head station, the Franklin party travelled to the neighbouring station held by Lieutenant Alfred Miller Mundy and Captain G.B. Smyth. 'Tuesday 9th April To Mundy's 9 miles, Hamilton's 5 miles. Nothing interesting as we approach Mr Mundy's—saw Mr Mundy in blue jacket & plaid ... Mr Mundy, with whom Captain Smyth is joined, was sending near 700 head of cattle overland to South Australia'.<sup>43</sup> John Green himself confirmed that Mundy and Smyth's station was nine miles from Powlett and Green's station. 'Melbourne Court Register, 23 October 1838. John Green ... I directed the prisoner to take some bullocks to Mr Mundy's station which is about nine miles distant but he refused to do so'.<sup>44</sup> The station that was nine miles from Powlett and Green's station and, from there, five miles to William Hamilton's (second) station, at Glenaroua, was the run later named Pyalong station on Percival Creek. These stations are all shown precisely by Nutt.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the direct route from Powlett and Green's station to Hamilton's Glenaroua station along Kurkuruk Creek happened also to be a distance of nine miles, thus precluding it from the recorded journey of nine miles to Mundy and Smyth's station followed by an additional five miles to Hamilton's station. William Hamilton's station became Glenaroua Homestead, adjacent to the bridge on the Glenaroua Broadford Road over Kurkuruk Creek (37°8'58" S; 144°58'11" E). Mundy and Smyth's station became Mollison Park at the corner of the Northern Highway and Fullards Road, Pyalong (37°9'29" S; 144°52'10" E).

These observations by Franklin disprove William Thomas Mollison's written statement of 1853 to Governor Charles LaTrobe that: '1838. Pyalong was occupied as a cattle station. W. Hamilton, Mundy & Smyth, and F.A. Powlett followed in this quarter'.<sup>46</sup> In reality, all four had preceded Mollison. Mollison's claims, which have become an historic truism since 1853, stand corrected by the eyewitness Lady Jane Franklin. Indeed, when Captain George Leggett of the Historical Society, Victoria, unveiled a memorial to the Mollison family at Pyalong in 1937, he was equally vague about the location of Mundy and Smyth's run; yet he was standing on their head station.<sup>47</sup>

On 21 August 1838, Frederick Armand Powlett and John Green, describing themselves as 'the undersigned graziers and stock

holders, residing on the River Goulburn and the adjacent country, signed a petition to the colonial secretary requesting the presence of a resident police magistrate. Other signatories included Alfred Miller Mundy, William Hamilton, George B. Smyth JP, and Peter Snodgrass (commissioner of crown lands, Port Phillip).<sup>48</sup> This petition further demonstrated that it was John Green who was in partnership with Frederick Armand Powlett. The W.P. Greene (William Pomerey), incorrectly linked to Powlett by Tucker,<sup>49</sup> did not arrive in the colony until five years later.<sup>50</sup>

### **William Rutledge's Special Survey**

In 1841 a radical change occurred to Bonney's original run. William Rutledge purchased, by Special Survey, 5,120 acres of the rich arable soil occupied by 'Messrs Powlett and Green's station on the Sydney Road' with the intention of subdividing and selling it.<sup>51</sup> Rutledge had purchased the most fertile and best-watered land from beneath their feet. This survey breached Special Survey Regulations, which stipulated that a 'block can never contain more than ... one mile of ... water frontage ... for every four square miles of area.'<sup>52</sup> Rutledge's survey of eight square miles was entitled to two miles of water frontage, but it included one bank of Kurkuruk Creek and both banks of each of Kilmore Creek and Ryan's Creek for a total of ten miles of water frontage, five times greater than was permissible. Rutledge was quite conscious of the subterfuge. His advertisements made open reference to the fact that 'a constant supply of pure water from three different creeks passes through the grounds.'<sup>53</sup>

This grant had its ironies in that it reflected ascending levels of illegal possession of the time. Bonney's original holding was in defiance of Governor Richard Bourke's explicit instruction that squatters in the Port Phillip District had no legal right to the land that they occupied, it being the crown's,<sup>54</sup> but the rights of the crown itself to possession of the land against the rights of the Indigenous population were based on prevailing notions that later proved flawed. William Blackstone best represented these views, writing, 'lands are claimed by right of occupancy only, by finding them desert and uncultivated, and peopling them from the mother-country.'<sup>55</sup> In recent times his views were deemed a legal fiction in the Mabo Decision.<sup>56</sup>

Nutt, in his survey of the 'Remainder of Kurkuruk Creek' in 1842, revealed an immediate practical consequence of Rutledge's purchase

for Powlett and Green. It showed Dry Creek with the label 'Greens Sheep Strn' on it two miles east of Kilmore and 400 metres SSE of today's Kilmore East Railway Station (37°17'47" S; 144°59'04" E). The plan also showed Powlett and Green's sheep station, still existing at Moranding, as a separate entity.<sup>57</sup> It was apparent that John Green took up a run to the immediate east and south of his partnership station with Powlett after they were displaced by Rutledge in 1841. This has shed light on the use of Dry Creek near Kilmore as a sheep station. Dry Creek was occupied by Green, and not by Hamlyn.

### **Kilmore Rising**

Rutledge's survey was the making of Kilmore. Land sales commenced immediately, and there were two competing taverns at 'Rutledge Town' by the end of October 1841.<sup>58</sup> The size of Kilmore's population during the early 1840s remains elusive. It was not mentioned separately in the census returns of 1841 or 1846. However, newspaper sources provide some insight, showing that from 1847 the Kilmore Special Survey and township were being taken up, and rapidly. In May 1847, 'there are about 400 people located on the survey within a distance of 2 square miles.'<sup>59</sup> This was verified in an *Argus* report in July 1848: 'A census of the population of Kilmore ... shows ... upwards of 400 persons residing on the special survey.'<sup>60</sup> By July 1849 the population had increased markedly: 'Kilmore ... [was] a thriving township with three Inns and a population of 600.'<sup>61</sup> It had nearly doubled in size again by 1851. The *Argus* gave accurate census figures for the population of Kilmore borough in 1851 as 1,137<sup>62</sup> and the Police District of Kilmore, a much larger area, as 2,064.<sup>63</sup>

The growth at Kilmore was given another major fillip in 1850 when the government, clearly intending to cash in on the success of the Kilmore Special Survey, subdivided and sold more of the Kilmore Plains creating both a new town area and small farm lots in Bylands, immediately adjoining the south boundary of the survey.<sup>64</sup> The township size and area of small farms were approximately doubled by this subdivision.<sup>65</sup> The effect on growth at Kilmore was shown in the census of 1854 in which the combined 'Bylands Parish', 'Kilmore Township' and 'Kilmore (Suburbs of)' population amounted to 2,267, another near doubling in size in three years. Kilmore had become unique among overlander townsites in inland Victoria in terms of size.<sup>66</sup> Of other early towns, Gisborne had a population of 279, Karlsruhe had no more than

152 (1861 data) whilst Kilmore's Sydney Road neighbour, Seymour, which had the same advantage as Kilmore in being an important staging point on the Sydney Road, had a low population of 138, so it was not proximity to the Sydney Road that caused the growth at Kilmore.<sup>67</sup> Two other townsites on the original Sydney Road had been surveyed and town lots sold to speculators in 1839—Mitchell's Town<sup>68</sup> and Violet Creek.<sup>69</sup> Of these, Mitchell's Town was abandoned in 1840 when the Sydney Road shifted to Seymour, along with the town's only hotel proprietor,<sup>70</sup> whilst Violet Creek (later Violet Town) was still uninhabited in 1841.<sup>71</sup> The latter was not proclaimed a town until 1861, and its population was then only 204.<sup>72</sup> This indicated that by 1851 Kilmore had become the first inland town in Victoria by the combination of age, physical occupation, and its having grown to become the largest by a factor of four. Its rapid rate of growth then continued for another decade. For those reasons alone it had come to deserve the regard in which it was held by Bonney.

Kilmore's population growth gave the town significant political importance because many of the settlers were able to meet the franchise property qualification of owning freehold property valued at £100 or leasing property with an annual value exceeding £10 and thus qualify to vote in the newly formed Victorian parliament of 1851.<sup>73</sup> In the election of 1851, the United Boroughs of Kilmore, Kyneton and Seymour were dominated by Kilmore township, while the United Counties of Talbot, Dalhousie and Anglesea were dominated by the Rutledge Kilmore Special Survey.<sup>74</sup> As a further demonstration of the importance of the district, the first elected representative of the United Counties was John Pascoe Fawkner. In the election of 1856, this concentration of electoral power was reflected in a new Legislative Assembly seat of Kilmore, which comprised all of the Kilmore Special Survey, the new government town and the Bylands subdivision of small farms.<sup>75</sup> This level of political importance was also unique in inland Victoria and was another confirmation of Bonney's regard for the worth of Kilmore and his pride in playing a pioneering role.

In practice the growth at Kilmore had merely repeated that of the Belfast Special Survey on the coast at Port Fairy, which was purchased later—in 1843—but developed more rapidly. About 40 families were reported to have been brought immediately from Melbourne to settle on the property in 1843.<sup>76</sup> It had grown to a population of 904 by the

time of the 1851 census.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, with its concentration of population, Belfast became an important electorate. In 1851 it shared the Legislative Council electorate of the United Towns of Belfast and Warrnambool, but in 1856 it had its own Legislative Assembly electorate of Belfast.<sup>78</sup> In 1850 both Kilmore and Belfast featured concentrations of population that had been created by Special Surveys, Belfast on the coast and Kilmore inland. Kilmore was the only inland place in Victoria to have such a dense population.

There were further explanations for the uniqueness of Kilmore. The Kilmore Plains comprised rich volcanic land suitable for both close agriculture and pasturage and, critically for the times, was permanently watered. It was thus capable of supporting both the first and second waves of colonial land use, pastoral and agricultural. Before 1851 Victoria was overwhelmingly pastoral. The *Argus* reported that, in the total return from exports of £978,741 17s 10d in the financial year 1849–50, the vanishingly small amount of £610 0s 0d, or less than one-tenth of 1 per cent, arose from non-pastoral sources like whale and bark products.<sup>79</sup> The inland areas were given over to low-population-density grazing, and the Kilmore Plains with its permanent water was among the best of the grazing lands. Nevertheless, incipient agriculture had emerged there by 1842.<sup>80</sup>

It was more or less impossible to purchase town blocks and small farm holdings anywhere inland in Victoria except for Kilmore before 1851. Whilst some villages had been surveyed to service the mail run on the Sydney Road—Seymour in 1844,<sup>81</sup> and Benalla and Wangaratta together in 1849<sup>82</sup>—the large-scale survey and sale of Victorian townships and small farms around them did not begin until the newly separated colony of Victoria was created in 1851. Only from that year did an abundance of township allotments and suburban lands become available, thus enabling other towns to catch up.<sup>83</sup>

When Charles Bonney died in 1897 eulogies written for him included those by the historians Ernest Favenc<sup>84</sup> and George Barton.<sup>85</sup> They were published in leading metropolitan newspapers in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney and still recorded Bonney's discoveries of the fertile Kilmore district and the route of the Sydney road as amongst his major achievements.<sup>86</sup> Their authors must have known that those facts of exploration would still have resonance for their readers in the cities.

For much of his lifetime Bonney's own assessments of his achievements and of Kilmore prevailed. The Kilmore district, by population and political influence, was uniquely important in inland Victoria at least until the census of 1861 when the town of Kilmore was noted as having one of the fastest growing populations in the state and one, remarkably, that matched those of gold-mining towns like Ballarat, Sandhurst and Beechworth.<sup>87</sup> Bonney's Sydney Road route remained the principal highway between Melbourne and Sydney for 139 years, and it is still in use, almost exactly where Bonney placed it in 1837, as a part of the major Northern Highway to Bendigo and the Riverina.

Kilmore experienced a slow decline after 1861. So too did Bonney's primacy as the European founder of the district. His legacy dimmed from the late nineteenth century until it was entirely lost to local historians by 1938. Bonney's early presence at Kilmore was noted again in the 1980s, but his key role in pioneering the Kilmore Plains and their unique position as the earliest agricultural powerhouse of inland Victoria had also been lost to history.

## Notes

- 1 The view was no doubt similar to this 'Panorama from the Hume and Hovell Memorial, Kilmore, Vic', Rose Series, Rose Stereograph Co., c. 1920–1954, but evidently 1925, SLV H32492/1401.
- 2 Phillipian Farmer, *Sydney Monitor*, 20 July 1836, p. 2.
- 3 Charles Bonney, 'Autobiographical Notes', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society Australia, SA Branch*, vol. 5, 1901–02, p. 82.
- 4 John Hepburn, in Thomas F. Bride (ed.), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, Melbourne, Trustees of the Public Library, 1895, p. 46.
- 5 Bonney, p. 83.
- 6 Charles H. Ebdon to James Donnithorne, 28 November 1836, Donnithorne Family Papers, c. 1837–c. 1849, MS 10152, State Library of Victoria (SLV).
- 7 George B. Barton, 'Old Time Memories', *Australasian*, 15 May 1897, p. 44.
- 8 Bonney, p. 84.
- 9 Bride (ed.), p. 53.
- 10 Thomas H. Nutt, 'Goulb18A1; Goulburn River, 1842', Historic Plan Collection, VPRS 8168/P0002/2320, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).
- 11 Thomas Walker, *A Month in the Bush of Australia*, London, J. Cross, 1838, p. 34.
- 12 Bonney, p. 84.
- 13 'Melancholy Loss of Life', *Australian*, 31 March 1837, p. 2.
- 14 Original Correspondence, Campbelltown, *Sydney Monitor*, 3 April 1837, p. 3.
- 15 'A Gentleman Hallen', *Australian*, 7 April 1837, p. 2.
- 16 'Melbourne Mail', *Australian*, 29 October 1839, p. 2.

- 17 Bonney p. 84.
- 18 Bonney, p. 86.
- 19 Walker, p. 42.
- 20 Bonney, p. 86.
- 21 Statement of George Commerford, *Sydney Herald*, 7 August 1837, p. 2.
- 22 William Westgarth, *Australia Felix*, London, Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1848, p. 238.
- 23 David Mackenzie, *The Emigrant's Guide; or Ten Years' Practical Experience in Australia*, London, W.S. Orr & Co., 1845, p. 107.
- 24 Maggie MacKellar, *Strangers in a Foreign Land: The Journal of Neil Black and Other Voices from the Western District*, Melbourne, Miegunyah Press, 2008, p. 175.
- 25 Jeffrey J. Jenkin, 'Physiography', *Atlas of Victoria*, Melbourne, Government of Victoria, Australia, 1982, p. 21.
- 26 Bonney, p. 86.
- 27 Joseph Hawdon, *The Journal of a Journey from New South Wales to Adelaide*, Melbourne, Georgian House, 1952, pp. 4, 5, 12.
- 28 Richard J. Hamlyn, Letter to William Lonsdale, 26 October 1837, Folder No. 84 1837/181, VPRS 4, P0003, PROV.
- 29 'The Church at Goulburn', *Sydney Herald*, 4 June 1835, p. 1.
- 30 'Address to Major Breton', *Sydney Herald*, 17 April 1834, p. 2.
- 31 G.B.S., 'Journey Over-land from Sydney', *Sydney Herald*, 9 April 1838, p. 2.
- 32 *Melbourne Advertiser*, vol. 1, no. 10, 5 March 1838, p. 3, MS 13486, SLV.
- 33 Peter Snodgrass to Col. Sec., 26 June 1838, 'Applications for a Licence to Depasture Crown Lands beyond the Limits of Location', in Michael Cannon and Ian McFarlane (eds), *The Crown, the Land and the Squatter, 1835-1840: Historical Records of Victoria* [comp. PROV], Vol. 6, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1991, p. 139.
- 34 James A. Maher, *The Tale of a Century, Kilmore, 1837-1937*, Melbourne, Spectator Publishing Co., 1938, p. 7.
- 35 Maher, p. 9.
- 36 *Victorian Historical Journal*, Index, A comprehensive index from 1911 to the past two years, at <http://collections.historyvictoria.com.au/rhsdatabases/journal.htm>.
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