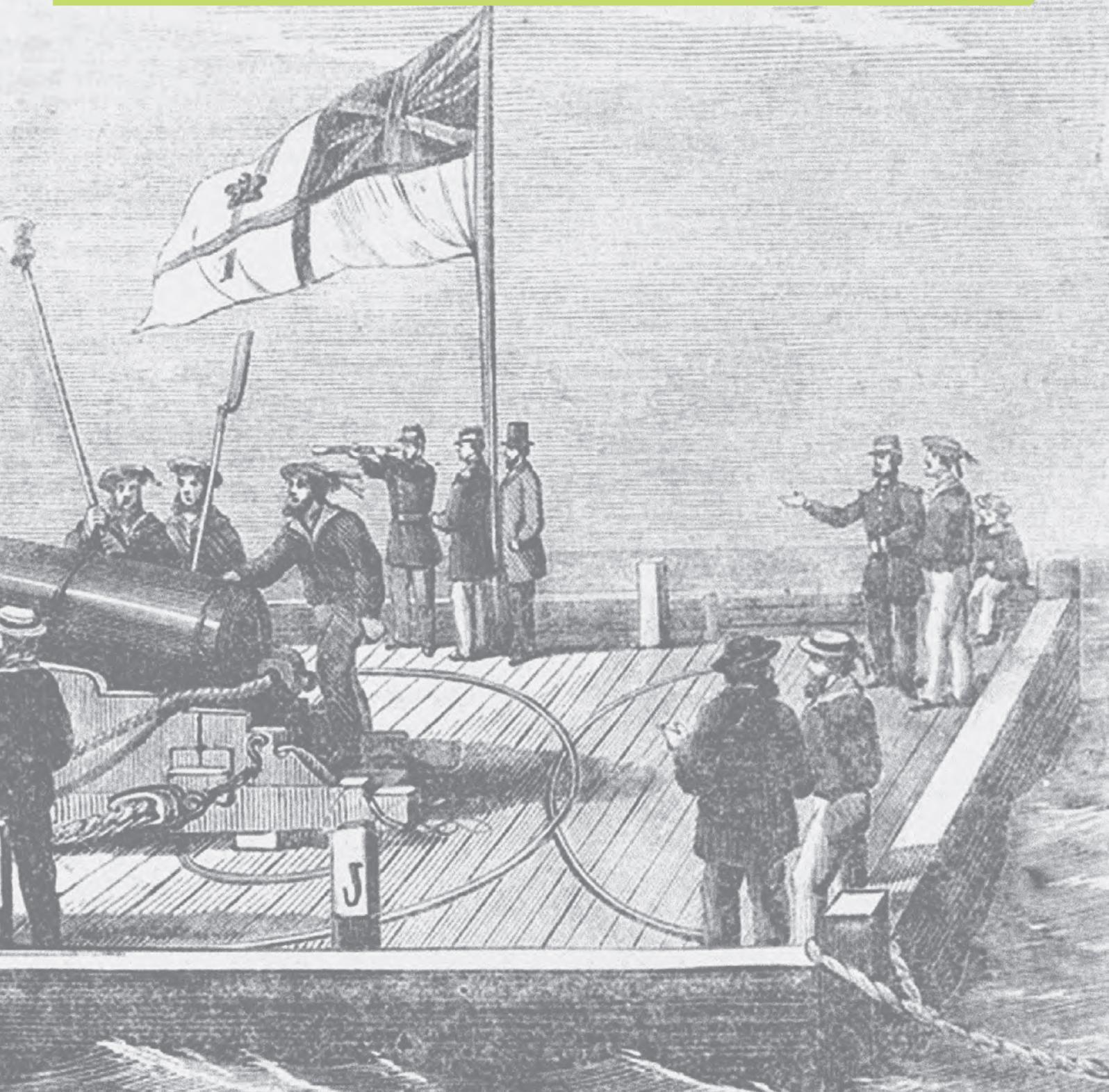


# Provenance 2012

Issue 11, 2012 ISSN: 1832-2522





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# About Provenance

## The journal of Public Record Office Victoria

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# Editorial

## Provenance 2012

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The latest issue of *Provenance* provides a veritable tour of Victoria, and its history. Paul Macgregor begins our journey in Melbourne in the 1850s with Lowe Kong Meng (1831-1888), an entrepreneur of Chinese descent born in British Penang whose business activities reveal the intricate connections between Victoria's Chinese goldmining sector and the world economy.

Felicity Jensz explores the difficulties of teaching at a remote Aboriginal mission station during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Ramahyuck school was located in eastern Victoria near the Gippsland town of Sale and was managed by Moravian missionary Reverend Friedrich Hagenauer. Jensz argues that exhaustion and the austere personality of Hagenauer were the main reasons for the rapid turnover of teachers at the school during this time.

Carolyn Woolman's article also gives an account of troubles at a rural school, in this case Baringhup State School, located to the south-west of Sandhurst (Bendigo). The focus of Woolman's article is the way in which the central administration of education in Victoria led to struggles for the control of local schools such as the one at Baringhup. Although the 1872 Education Act sought to provide free, compulsory, secular education to Victorian children, the machinery of administration produced outcomes that were at odds with local wishes. Woolman studies the documents relating to a two-day inquiry in July 1876. The inspector was brought in to deal with a conflict involving the head teacher and the pupil teacher.

In this year's Forum section, we have articles from two reference archivists. Elizabeth Denny, an Access Services Officer at Ballarat Archives Centre, builds on the work of other articles published in *Provenance* in recent years exploring the political and social engagement of the Chinese on Victoria's goldfields. The article presents the Chinese residents of Creswick as political agents, petitioning local authorities for the same level of services and entitlements that were afforded to other goldfields residents. The presence of Chinese residents in the early goldfields era also feature prominently in the article by Michele Matthews, archivist at the Bendigo Regional Archives Centre (BRAC). As the custodian of the records of Bendigo's six former town councils, the BRAC collection gives Matthews the opportunity to take a broad survey across the records that can be found in the

Bendigo collection. As Matthews explains, the presence of this integrated collection and the service it provides has vastly improved access to the history of Bendigo, in particular the lives of ordinary residents of this remarkable town. Researchers coming to BRAC can now more easily access records that reveal the lives of local 'women, children and minority ethnic groups'.

Mary Daley recounts the events surrounding the fire that destroyed the Steiglitz Coffee Palace in 1895. Located around 70 km west of Melbourne, Steiglitz fell within the Supreme Court catchment of Geelong, which is where a trial by jury found that there were two people responsible for deliberately setting fire to the Coffee Palace. At the time, arson was treated as a very serious crime, and in this case attracted the death sentence. The prosecuting lawyer himself lodged an appeal, raising the possibility that Joseph Gill and his mother-in-law, Ella Hicksh, had been convicted on the basis of false evidence.

John Rogers brings us back to Melbourne, or more particularly Port Phillip Bay. In the early days of the colony, Rogers contends, Victoria's earliest naval flags featured a kangaroo and crown, in addition to the Union Jack. These flags were subsequently forgotten once the 1877 flag was established as the precursor to our current Victorian flag featuring the Southern Cross and crown. Shurlee Swain looks at child welfare records held by PROV to reveal the correspondence between poor women and child welfare officers seeking to regain access to their children. Swain argues that these records show that these mothers cared about their children and sought to gain the support of the predominantly female inspectors to cast light on the interaction between poor women and welfare authorities as seen through the operations of the variously named predecessors of find a more reasonable approach to the care of their children than was offered by the draconian welfare policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Sebastian Gurciullo  
Editor

# Refereed articles



# The state of feeling in the district

## An attempt to resist central control after the 1872 Education Act

Carolyn Woolman

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'The state of feeling in the district: An attempt to resist central control after the 1872 Education Act', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 11, 2012. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Carolyn Woolman.

This is a peer reviewed article.

Carolyn Woolman is a former secondary school and TAFE history teacher who in 2011 completed a Masters in history at La Trobe University. Her thesis examined the socioeconomic mobility and civic involvement of a Scottish miner on the central goldfields of Victoria, concentrating on the (Maldon) Tarrangower field. She has a strong interest in regional history, and is a volunteer indexer and researcher for the Maldon Museum and Archives Association.

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### Abstract

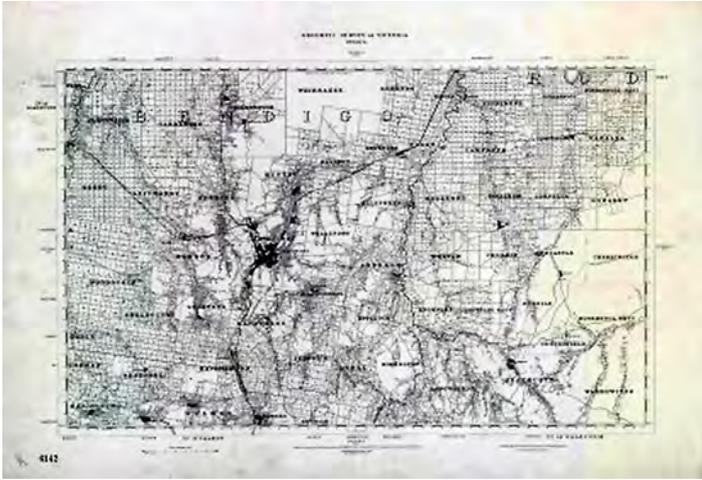
**The 1872 Education Act was designed to make major changes to the way public education was organised and administered in Victoria. Its central concept was the provision of free, compulsory, secular education. To conduct the system a highly centralised bureaucracy was proposed: the government through the Education Department would control staffing, salaries, buildings, the curricula and examinations. Doubts were voiced by politicians and others about the large-scale shifting of control from the local school committees, but the Act was eventually passed.**

**In July 1876 the local district inspector ran a two-day inquiry at Baringhup State School after the head teacher suspended the pupil teacher who had made charges against him to the school's Board of Advice. This article will examine how power was exercised in this specific situation and the factors affecting the outcome of the inquiry. The crucial issue was who was to control the local school.**

The passing of the 'free, compulsory and secular' Education Act in Victoria in 1872 has been regarded by later generations as a victory for democracy. The notion that every child had the right to a basic education was generally accepted by colonists at the time, but it took several years before the Act was passed. Catholic and Protestant clergy and adherents were disappointed by the 'secular' provision, as were influential liberal politicians such as George Higinbotham, chairman of the 1866 royal commission into the common schools system,

the process of which had resulted in the (collapsed) 1867 Bill. Higinbotham regarded the secular provision not as an ideological expression but as a compromise. He would have preferred that part of the school day under the new administration included a syllabus of non-sectarian 'common Christianity', imparted by laymen, but viewed a secular system as a lesser evil than the existing system of state aid to clerically controlled schools.[1]

A highly centralised system of administration was proposed to conduct the reformed education system to be set up by the 1872 Act. A major reason was that this was believed to be the best means of removing the schools from local sectarian pressures. However, some politicians were uneasy about centralisation and endorsed it with reluctance. There was a leaning among both liberals and conservatives to value the restraints which local government placed on the state. There was also a belief in the desirability of ratepayers participating in local education as a communal responsibility and a fear that this commitment would be stifled by the centralisation of school administration in the hands of a government department.[2] The powers proposed for the Minister of Public Instruction, such as control over teacher appointments, secular instruction and the use of school buildings, were directly at the expense of the school committees, which would now be boards of advice appointed by the minister.[3] These boards were to see that the Act's compulsory attendance clause was carried out and advise on the needs of schools throughout the district.



PROV, VPRS 8168/P2, Unit 1674, Geodetic Survey of Victoria, Division E, showing the town of Baringhup in the bottom left hand corner.

Some historians have emphasised the growth of centralised control and consequent withering of local school government. For instance, Stuart McIntyre argues that the passage of the 1872 Act ended any chance of effective local control of (or even influence on) Victorian state schools, with the local boards becoming 'lifeless vestiges' of the earlier local committees.[4] Denis Grundy states that the Act 'accomplished the ruin of local school government, overwhelmed the conservative tradition by stressing the need for public efficiency and revealed the increasing reluctance of the liberal state to leave matters to the untidy and uncertain operation of local interests'.[5] He concedes that the boards of advice did not go quietly and the first ten years after the Act involved a power struggle between the Education Department and the boards. In contrast to Grundy, Ann Larson points out that although the only formal avenues provided for community input were the local boards of advice 'whose title reflected their lack of authority', micro-histories have demonstrated that parents, teachers and local boards at times achieved continuity and control through a variety of strategies.[6] For example, Marjorie Theobald uses the Education Department's special case files to analyse the complexity of relationships between individuals, local boards and the department.[7]

This article will examine how power was exercised to resolve a conflict involving staff at Baringhup State School No. 1687. The agricultural settlement of Baringhup, located on the Loddon River and originally part of the Bryants' Cairn Curran pastoral run, was established under Governor La Trobe's reserve powers in the early 1850s to provide food for the miners on the Central Victorian goldfield of Tarrangower. The township which developed on this goldfield was situated about seven miles from the district of Baringhup, and in

1856 was surveyed and named Maldon. By the 1870s, the riding of Baringhup's main products were grains, flour, dairy and wool. *Bailliere's gazetteer* describes 'an industrious and well-to-do class of yeomen and farmers, possessing holdings up to 1000 acres. The largest holders combine wool with grain growing in the Baringhup district. The farms on the whole are well laid out with comfortable homesteads'.[8]



Baringhup Common School, opened 1855, from *The Early History of Baringhup* by D Thomas. State Library of Victoria.



Baringhup Common School outside Free Library Hall, from *The Early History of Baringhup* by D Thomas. State Library of Victoria.

The first school had been opened in Baringhup in 1855 when parents and guardians of eighty children paid quarterly fees. In 1859 a more substantial building was erected, then from 1874 the Baringhup Free Library Hall was used as a schoolhouse. In July 1874 Henry Walter Mills was appointed head teacher.[9] Baringhup State School No. 1687 was opened in January 1876 in a large bluestone building with an attached bluestone residence of four rooms, with Mills again appointed as head teacher.[10] At the Common School, his wife Mary Anna Burn Mills had been work mistress and Mary Jane Griggs had been pupil teacher (from September 1875). They were also reappointed.[11]

According to the school's entry in *Vision and realisation*, ninety-five children were enrolled in 1876, aged between three and fourteen and a half. The 1876 enrolment records show eighty-four enrolments.[12] This range of ages was not uncommon in the period. Previous inspectors' reports on Mills's performance were favourable. His most recent was from Inspector Thomas Bolam (Dunolly District) in August 1875 at Baringhup Common School: 'An intelligent and thoroughly industrious teacher whose heart is evidently in his work'.[13]



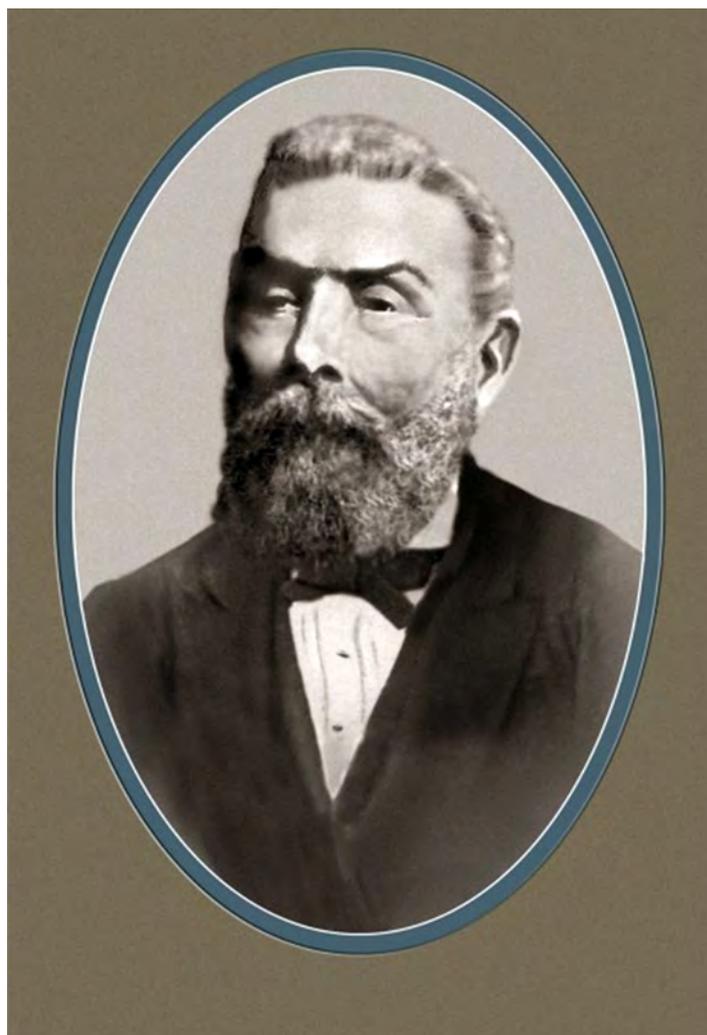
Baringhup School 1687, showing combined teacher's residence, schoolroom and porch, 2012. Private collection.

In July 1876 a two-day inquiry was held at the school by Inspector Bolam. Mary Griggs had been suspended by the head teacher Henry Mills for 'insubordination and maliciously injuring his reputation', after she complained to the Board of Advice that the head teacher neglected his duties, shifted his responsibilities onto herself and punished pupils for consequent poor achievement. There was sufficient evidence uncovered by the inquiry to satisfy Inspector Bolam and later Henry Venables, the Secretary of the Education Department, that Mills had in fact neglected his duties. Venables recommended that Mills should be removed to a smaller school or demoted to an assistantship.

A considerable amount of information on this inquiry is held as a Special Case File at PROV. According to the description in PROV's online catalogue, special case files were 'created by the collation of relevant information from various parts of the Education Department's correspondence systems'. These files 'were determined to be special because of their excessive size, their delicate or important subject matter or due to the seniority of staff using the files eg: ministers, directors and their assistants'.[14]

Such a collation can prove very useful to a researcher. In this case, it furnishes the district inspector's full report; letters from the head teacher, the suspended pupil teacher Miss Griggs, her father Samuel Griggs, and

a Board of Advice member David Marshall; 'comments' from James Service MLA; recommendations from Henry Venables, the department secretary; a petition to the Minister of Public Instruction, Robert Ramsay, signed by parents of current pupils and others; and a memo from Ramsay. The local Maldon and district newspaper, the *Tarrangower times*, published nothing at all about this case, and not necessarily because of its sensitive nature. (The paper was not reticent about publishing astonishing personal and family details in 1870 when a Maldon schoolteacher was sued by his wife for maintenance.[15] ) Obviously a newspaper editor could decide to omit or alter material to protect the reputation of someone perceived as a valued community member. On the other hand, the material in the PROV file has not been interpreted, adorned or sanitised. It is therefore a valuable resource when seeking to cast light on the tension between local communities and a centralised bureaucracy brought about by the 1872 *Education Act*.



Photograph of David Marshall, date unknown. Courtesy of Margaret Froomes Galletly.

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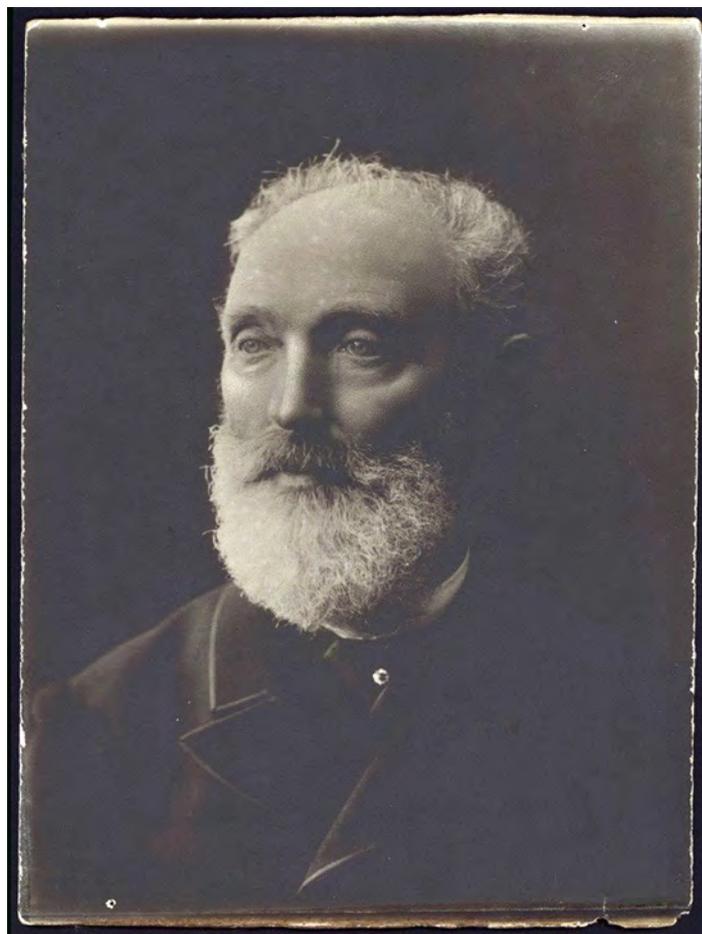
In Bolam's report on the inquiry (dated 11 July 1876) he outlined the two sets of charges and attached detailed evidence relevant to each charge.[16] The head teacher's charges against the pupil teacher were: insolence on the afternoon of June 26; insolence on June 27; scandal reported by the pupil teacher's father; and forwarding to the Board of Advice a false and malicious report affecting the head teacher's character.

The pupil teacher's charges against the head teacher were: frequently neglecting his duty by leaving school during school hours; causing extra work to be done by the pupil teacher who was unable to attend to it; and punishment of children in the pupil teacher's classes for want of improvement when under the circumstances they could not receive proper attention.

Much of Bolam's evidence was obtained by questioning the pupils themselves and some by questioning parents and other adults. Staff attendance sheets were also included as evidence. Unsurprisingly, witnesses swore to conflicting versions of Mills's frequency and duration of absences and his treatment of pupils with poor results. A crucial point is that some of the children the head teacher called as his own witnesses admitted, sometimes inadvertently, his frequent absences from the classroom. For example, William Lawrence stated that Mr Mills 'was not usually absent for more than thirty minutes at a time'.

Bolam's findings were succinctly expressed. He concluded that Mr Mills's role as honorary secretary of the local agricultural society had interfered with his school duties. He had also incurred too many other unwarranted absences. He had loaded too much work onto the pupil teacher who was young and inexperienced and 'of a highly sensitive and nervous temperament'. He had reprimanded the teacher and punished children in her classes (the punishment included caning) for 'want of improvement' when they had not received sufficient attention. Further, he 'had suspended the pupil teacher without consent of the department'. The latter criticism is directly relevant to the centralisation issue under discussion.

Bolam conceded that 'until this current year Mr Mills appears to have worked well in the school, with good reports and results'. He considered Miss Griggs 'intelligent, diligent and promising'. However, he urged that it was 'most undesirable' that the head teacher and pupil teacher should continue to work in the same school.



Photograph of James Service [picture] In collection: [Portraits of Victorian Surveyor-Generals and Ministers for Lands] [ca.1920-ca. 1950] Courtesy State Library of Victoria.

After the hearing, Bolam told Board of Advice member David Marshall that the pupil teacher's charges against the head teacher had been proven and that his against her had not. Marshall was not acquiescent. He sent a telegram dated 12 July to Maldon MLA James Service requesting him 'to ask Secretary Education Dept to stay action re Baringhup case till letters arrive midday'. Marshall was a successful Baringhup farmer and prominent in local affairs in both Baringhup and Maldon. (He had been present for the two-day hearing, while the Board chairman Thomas Lillie had stayed for one day, then left in disgust.) Marshall's subsequent letter to the secretary argued that the inspector was not impartial in conducting the hearing.[17]

Service added the following note before forwarding Marshall's letter to Robert Ramsay, probably to ensure that attention would be paid to a letter which, though coherently argued, might be judged by the latter to be deficient in penmanship and presentation.

I beg to forward this communication for the consideration of the Hon. the Minister of Public Instruction. Mr Marshall unfortunately had not the benefit of a govt education in his youth, but he is a worthy straightforward man, and possesses a strong sense of justice. He is also a member of the Shire Council.

I have [under] lined the statements that seem to require special enquiry. J Service/ 14/7/76

Part of Marshall's letter reads:

I found the enquiry was conducted so unfearly by the Inspector that after sitting a short time I drew his attention to the great Partiality he was showing on behalf of the pupil Teacher – whose Brother is in his Employ – I obtained from him no redress but was informed that if I spoke again I would have to leave the room. The Inspector had an evident bias against Mr Mills and when that gentleman brought forward witnesses to disprove the charges Made against him Mr Bolam either declined to take their evidence or if he did take it he informed them that it would do Mr Mills no good as he would not consider their evidence when sending in his report I therefore trust you will take no further action in the matter until a further enquiry has taken place before an impartial Judge as none of the witnesses were examined on Oath & the statement made by some of them were very ridiculous & could easily I think have been disproved had Mr Mills been allowed the opportunity.

The underlining was Service's.

Secretary Venables' memo to his clerk dealt with Marshall's letter and also Bolam's report on the case.[18] Regarding Marshall's claim that Miss Griggs's brother was employed by Bolam, he wrote 'This is as stated'. He required that Marshall should be requested to explain how the 'great partiality' was demonstrated and to state 'whose evidence did Mr Bolam decline to receive, and what points were those witnesses prepared to disprove'.

In response to Bolam's report he wrote:

Mr Bolam has forwarded the evidence given, in each case signed by the witness.

I have carefully considered this evidence in connection with Mr Bolam's report, and judging from it I agree with Mr Bolam in his finding that the teacher has neglected his duties and thrown work upon the pupil teacher which should have been performed by himself. I also consider the suspension of the pupil teacher to have been unwarrantable.

My opinion is subject to revision on any further evidence Mr Marshall may indicate as suppressed.

In regard to Mr Mills' charges against Miss Griggs of insubordination and insolence, Mr Bolam considers the Teacher has failed to prove insolence. My opinion is that she was pert and disrespectful. Mr Bolam appears to base his finding upon the pupil teacher's conduct being justified by the cause given by Mr Mills. I agree with him that Mr Mills had laid himself open to such expressions of want of respect as Miss Griggs was guilty of; but this does not justify her – she should have appealed not rebelled.

I have no doubt some allusion was made to the pupil teacher's brother being employed by Mr Bolam, but so far do not see anything in the evidence which would seem to show that this has caused any irregularity in the manner in which Mr Bolam has dealt with this case.

I think that, unless Mr Marshall's reply should raise any point calling for further enquiry, Mr Mills should be removed to a smaller school, or to an assistantship as the Inspector General may think most desirable, and that Miss Griggs should be cautioned. H.V. 22/7/76

Marshall's long letter in reply furnished many examples of what he perceived as Bolam's partiality, which included the following. During the inquiry the inspector invariably addressed the pupil teacher as 'my dear' and when speaking of her called her 'this child' or 'this poor delicate girl', while his manner to Mr Mills was 'quite the opposite'. He asked the pupil teacher if she had called the head teacher 'a dog', 'a beast' and 'worse than a beast' and the girl admitted this; he put this down in writing and afterwards tore it up, saying he would not forward it.[19] Mr Bolam refused to receive two letters that Marshall presented from two pupils attending the school because one of these was out of the district, while he received hearsay evidence 'of the most trivial description' from witnesses called by the pupil teacher. He told various (named) witnesses who spoke in favour of Mr Mills that their evidence was worthless and he would not submit it. Mr Lillie, the chairman of the Board of Advice, was ordered to 'leave the room' on two occasions and Mr Lillie 'felt so the manner in which Mr Bolam was treating Mr Mills' that in consequence he, Lillie, declined to attend on the second day of the inquiry. Also, Mr Bolam had told Marshall that 'the girl' came to stay at his own house on the day she was suspended.

Mills had been asked by the secretary whether he too accused Bolam of partiality in conducting the inquiry. Mills replied on 22 July in a seventeen-page letter. [20] He included an account of Bolam's conversation with Mrs Caroline Lawrence when he first arrived in Baringhup for the hearing, to indicate that the inspector had already made up his mind on its outcome. Caroline Lawrence was the owner of the Loddon Hotel and farmland and four of her children were attending the school in 1876.

The reported conversation included the following:

Mr Bolam volunteered to Mrs Lawrence the statement that I would lose my appointment or be dismissed, and insinuated further that I was like a horse that had just come off poor feed to be fed on oats. A gratuitous insult on Mr Bolam's part as I occupied a far better position before I became a teacher than I have ever done since.

There was a note in the margin next to the above from Bolam: 'Incorrect'.

Mills then gave an outline of his past career, 'digressing so far to show that Mr Bolam's insulting insinuation was quite uncalled for', and this outline gives some insight into why he had considerable local support.

Before I was 20 years of age, I served through the New Zealand war, was present at 4 general engagements and received the war medal for my services. On returning to Victoria I went into business as a Store Keeper and traded to the extent of £1000 per month. During that time I served 6 years as a Councillor of the Shire of Metcalfe [which included Chewton and Harcourt], held the office of President for a term, and was appointed to the commission of Justice of the Peace. On relinquishing store keeping I unfortunately turned my attention to mining speculation where I lost a good deal of money, when I entered the profession of teacher and passed the necessary examinations.

He expressed bitterness at Bolam's generally 'demeaning and insulting' manner to him during the inquiry and detailed several examples of perceived partiality to Miss Griggs. He disputed the evidence of several of Miss Griggs's witnesses that he frequently absented himself from the classroom and unduly punished pupils. He thought neither that his absences were excessive nor that he was exploiting his pupil teacher.

I quite admit that the two days prior to the Agricultural Show I was absent from the school a great deal, that I have been absent for not more than 10 minutes on a few occasions since, chiefly for necessary purposes or after my illness by the doctor's orders for the purpose of having a glass of wine, that I gave the classes not supervised by the pupil teacher ample work to last them until I returned, and I invariably told the pupil teacher if any talking went on etc she was to at once report the matter to me on my return. I always asked her if the children had behaved themselves and she always told me they had.

Later in his letter he expanded on his two-day absence at the Agricultural Show, offering a controversial reason:

His Excellency the Governor had promised to visit Baringhup on the day of the Show and I was requested to assist with the big boys attending the school in preparing for his Excellency's reception building triumphal arch etc. As a Government officer and loyal subject of her Majesty I did not think I could well refuse, so took the big boys and worked with a will for that object.

To a present-day reader of this letter, Mills reveals a lack of awareness of the unenviable position of Mary, who at fifteen was responsible for his classes as well as her

own during his absences. Her parents Samuel and Julia Griggs lived in the Baringhup district, her father being listed as a labourer in the school enrolment records and in a *Tarrangower times* report of a court case in which he was a witness.[21] The nature of her elder brother John's employment with Inspector Bolam is not known. Her sister Annie, aged eleven, and brother Samuel, aged eight, were pupils at the Baringhup school. Mary may have always told the head teacher that the pupils 'had behaved themselves' as he claimed, but she was in a vulnerable position – she was dependent on him for her training. Also, Mills expresses resentment that Inspector Bolam had stressed her youth, because she was 'not a child' but 'nearly 16 years old and tall and stout for her age'. This attitude seems harsh. However, Mary's 'shortcomings' as a pupil teacher affected the results of students on which his own pay depended. In his own view he had done nothing wrong, but nevertheless as a result of her accusations had faced a humiliating inquiry in front of his own pupils which threatened his employment. The issue of cultural context is also relevant here. The level of maturity expected from a fifteen-year-old in 1876 was greater than that expected now.

Meanwhile, a petition addressed to the Minister of Public Instruction, Robert Ramsay, was circulated in Baringhup. Local MLA James Service wrote a covering letter:

Sir

I have the honour to hand you herewith a petition from a large number of Parents having children attending state school 1687, requesting that you will cause a further enquiry into the truth of certain charges preferred against Mr Mills head teacher. This petition is following up the action of Mr David Marshall whose letter I sent you the other day

I have learned from Mr Venables' letter of 19th inst. the action you have already taken in this matter, but I think it only proper to put you in possession of the petition so that you may be aware of the state of feeling in the district

Yours truly  
James Service

The petition was headed:

We the undersigned Parents of children attending State School 1687 and other residents of Baringhup beg most respectfully to request that you will cause a further inquiry into the truth of certain charges preferred against Mr Mills head teacher of the above school and lately investigated by Mr Inspector Bolam as we are of opinion that the investigation was not conducted in an impartial manner[22]

Then followed forty signatures – plus occupation, address, and number of children attending school where relevant. The name of Matthew Bryant, the local pastoralist, headed the list.

Of the forty signatures on this petition to the Education Department asking for an unbiased hearing, eighteen belonged to people who did not have children at the school in 1876, although there was no attempt to conceal this fact. According to the school records, in 1876 there were thirty-two parents of eighty-four pupils. (Only one parent of each pupil was recorded.) Only eighteen of these thirty-two signed the petition. The remainder of the petitioners (four) was made up of people who claimed to be parents of relevant pupils, but who were not included on the enrolment records. Despite Service's reference to the large number of current parents, the petition is not strongly representative of these. However, Service's warning to Minister Robert Ramsay regarding 'the state of feeling in the district' may have carried more weight.

This petition and the efforts of Mills, Marshall and Service did not alter the conviction of the relevant public servants that Mills was guilty of neglect. The opinion of Venables was reviewed and the same conclusion was reached:

This is borne out not only by the witnesses produced by the pupil teacher, but also by those called by himself. Against this cloud of testimony as to Mr Mills' frequent absences no statements of other persons that they had not seen him leave the school could have been of weight, and in pointing out to Mr Mills the uselessness of adducing such evidence Mr Bolam cannot be said to have shown a want of impartiality. Whether Mr Bolam did or did not show a leaning towards the pupil teacher – though matter for regret if it occurred – does not affect the question of Mr Mills' negligence, which is all that is ... to be proved against him. On this matter the evidence signed by the respective witnesses furnishes sufficient material for forming an independent judgment without reference to the opinion of Mr Bolam. 25.7.76 [The signature is indecipherable.] [23]

These case files reveal much about both processes and cultural attitudes of the era. Mills referred in his letter to Secretary Venables to his public humiliation in front of his own pupils.[24] No misgiving seems to have been generally expressed about children being interrogated on the alleged misdoings of their teacher, in the presence of that teacher, with potential repercussions for those children. More relevant to the theme of this article is the following question. Why did Henry Mills, despite some damaging evidence against him, apparently retain support from the Board of Advice and many members of the Baringhup community?

David Marshall and Thomas Lillie, the Board of Advice members present at the hearing, concentrated on what they viewed as the inspector's bias towards Miss Griggs, and were possibly justified in their concern. But the separate question of Mills's frequent absences and consequent shifting of responsibilities onto his pupil

teacher was apparently of less importance to the Board and those parents who supported him.

It is probable that other factors operated. Of the signatures on the petition to the Minister, four were those of women and thirty-six those of men. (Of the four women, two signed as 'widows' with no occupation listed, the third listed 'postmistress' and the fourth 'farmer'.) Wives did not usually sign petitions in this male-dominated society, and so without more evidence a gender issue cannot be argued. Class might have been a factor. Mills was honorary secretary of the flourishing Baringhup Agricultural Society and thirty-one of the forty signatures were those of farmers. Only one man signed as 'farm labourer', suggesting that other farm labourers could not sign because they were illiterate, or were not asked, or chose not to sign. The most likely reason for Mills retaining support was his usefulness to Baringhup. He had outlined his previous occupations as soldier and storekeeper and his previous civic involvement in his letter to the Education Secretary. In addition, he was a sergeant in the Maldon contingent of the Castlemaine Volunteer Corps and frequently participated in rifle competitions, including at the Victorian level. He was honorary secretary of the Baringhup Free Library, performed in concerts to aid local charities, and was the electoral registrar.[25] All of the above would have worked in his favour with the Baringhup farmers. If they were over-lenient in their estimation of Mills's conduct as a teacher, or not concerned with it, this would be hardly surprising. David Marshall as president of the Agricultural Society had an additional reason for supporting Mills, in that it was given in evidence at the inquiry that the teacher had engaged in Society business during class hours.

Moreover, there was the immeasurable but potentially powerful resentment against the Education Department's 'interference' in local affairs. Marshall and Lillie were not only angered by the inquiry being conducted in a 'most partial manner', but as members of the Board of Advice felt denigrated by Bolam's behaviour towards them. Receiving public castigations from the district inspector is likely to have sharpened their awareness of the local committee's weakness.

As noted previously, the *Tarrangower times* made no mention of the inquiry in 1876. It reported that Mills had submitted his resignation as secretary of the Agricultural Society on 19 July (Bolam's report was dated 11 July) but included no reason for this, which was not its usual practice. The silence of the local newspaper can be viewed as additional assistance to Mills.

## Outcome of the Inquiry

The outcome was that Mills stayed in the same position, in the same school, until 1879.

Mr Mills may be allowed to remain but he must in future be careful not to allow his duties in connection with local matters to interfere with his attendance at his School.[26]

And despite the alleged efforts of Mills to prevent this, Miss Griggs was re-instated. However, Mary did not resume duty after her suspension by Mills on 29 June until 25 October. There are several letters in the Special Case File related to this delay, but the essence is that Mills tried to prevent her re-instatement by informing the department that she had left the district. Mills was asked for an explanation for this but Venables did not believe him.

Inform him that his explanation is considered very unsatisfactory. He completely misled the Department by his letter of 8 July in which he stated that Miss Griggs had left the district. She must be allowed to resume duty at once and claim for the period of her absence.[27]

Minister Ramsay authorised back pay for Miss Griggs but ordered that she was to be informed that 'any disrespect shown to the H.T. will lead to her removal'. [28] Her report from Bolam in August 1875 reads, 'Quiet, needs more animation, but is intelligent and gives promise of future usefulness'. Reporting Mills to the Board of Advice in 1876 would have taken courage, as would returning to the school in October. In reporting her supervisor the pupil teacher was presumably assured in advance of the support of Inspector Bolam. (Mary resigned her position in March 1877. The reason is unknown.[29] )

In September 1876, Mills applied for a transfer 'to some other school' on the grounds that Miss Griggs's proposed return would place him 'in a most humiliating position' because his authority with the pupils would be undermined and the discipline of the school would suffer.[30] Venables' response was uncompromising:

His application for transfer will be considered should a fitting opportunity occur, but he has only himself to blame for the position in which he is at present placed. [31]

Mills was transferred to Brighton State School in late 1879. In 1884 he was appointed head teacher of Brighton East State School.[32] In 1878 Thomas Bolam was appointed Assistant Inspector General of Schools and for several months was Acting Secretary of the Education Department.[33]

After 1872, the system used by the department to ensure control over its schools included the inspectorate, payment by results and recruitment of

pupil teachers to be trained by experienced teachers. This case study reveals a breakdown in the supervisor pupil teacher relationship, and the inspector's finding, although accepted by the department secretary, was not acted upon. It was not unusual for conflict to occur between teachers and district inspectors whose reports affected the teacher's livelihood, and in this case the conflict might have been personal as well as professional. It is likely that Mills's considerable standing in the local community saved him. Possibly a political decision was made at the ministerial level as a result of intervention by James Service. Service, who represented Maldon in the Legislative Assembly from 1874 to 1881, was already a prominent colonial politician. He had been Victorian Treasurer from 1874 to 1875 (and would later become Premier in 1880, then Premier/Treasurer from 1883 to 1886). Political pressure through the agency of local members was common.

Moreover, the proposed transfer of Mills at this early stage in the development of the Education Department's responsibilities clearly presented a practical problem, because even if there were a suitable vacancy, another school would be receiving a teacher already found negligent. Ultimately the decision whether to proceed against Mills may have rested on this question of timing, for in this transitional phase it would also have been impolitic to alienate the Baringhup community.

Whatever the nature of the final pressure, or the practical considerations, the judgement of the department was overridden. The 1872 *Education Act* had handed administrative power over Victorian schools to a government department, but the progress of the Baringhup inquiry and its outcome give an insight into the power, albeit somewhat unedifying, which could still be exercised at the local level.



## Endnotes

[1] D Grundy, *'Secular, compulsory and free': the Education Act of 1872*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1972, pp. 9-12.

[2] *ibid.*, p. 78 and S McIntyre, *A colonial liberalism: the lost world of three Victorian visionaries*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991, p. 140.

[3] Grundy, p. 71.

[4] McIntyre, pp. 83, 153.

[5] Grundy, p. 5.

[6] A Larson, *Growing up in Melbourne: family life in the late nineteenth century*, Demography Program, Australian National University, Canberra, 1994, p. 66.

[7] MR Theobald, 'Women's teaching labour, the family and the state in nineteenth century Victoria', in MR Theobald and RJW Selleck (eds), *Family, school and state in Australian history*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990.

[8] *Bailliere's Victorian gazetteer and road guide*, 3rd edn, FF Bailliere, Melbourne, 1879.

[9] HW Mills had previously taught at Castlemaine (Christ Church) Denominational School and Castlemaine Common School. PROV, VPRS 13579/P1 Teacher Record Books (VPRS 13718 microfilm).

[10] LJ Black (ed.), *Vision and realisation: a centenary history of state education in Victoria*, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, 1973, vol. 2, p. 786; *Tarrangower times*, 6 December 1873.

[11] PROV, VPRS 13718 Teacher Record Books (microfilm).

[12] *Vision and realisation*, vol. 2, p. 786; see also Baringhup State School enrolment records 1876, Maldon Museum & Archives Association.

[13] PROV, VPRS 13718 Teacher Record Books (microfilm).

[14] PROV, VA 713 Board of Education (1862-1872) and VA 714 Education Department (1873-1977), VPRS 892 Special Case Files, Description of the Series.

[15] *Tarrangower times*, 22 October 1870 – 17 May 1871.

[16] PROV, VPRS 892/P0, Unit 34, File 24956, Inspector Bolam's report on the inquiry.

[17] *ibid.*, File 25934, David Marshall's telegram & letter to Education Secretary.

[18] *ibid.*, File 25935, Secretary Venables' memo.

[19] Bolam's explanation for this decision was that Miss Griggs had used this language as a result of being suspended, but not previously.

[20] PROV, VPRS 892/P0, Unit 34, File 26145, Henry Mills's letter to Education Secretary, 22 July 1876.

[21] *Tarrangower times*, 12 July 1876.

[22] PROV, VPRS 892/P0, Unit 34, File 26084.

[23] *ibid.*, File 26144, Review of Secretary Venables' findings.

[24] *ibid.*, File 26145, Henry Mills's letter to Education Secretary, 22 July 1876.

[25] *Tarrangower times*, 10 October 1874 – 19 July 1876.

[26] PROV, VPRS 13718 Teacher Record Books (microfilm).

[27] PROV, VPRS 892/P0, Unit 34, File 33056, Secretary Venables' memo to chief clerk.

[28] *ibid.*, File 41704, Minister Ramsay's memo.

[29] PROV, VPRS 13718 Teacher Record Books (microfilm).

[30] PROV, VPRS 892/P0, Unit 34, File 33056, Henry Mills's letter to Education Secretary, 15 September 1876.

[31] *ibid.*, Secretary Venables' memo to chief clerk.

[32] PROV, VPRS 13718 Teacher Record Books (microfilm).

[33] *The Argus*, 25 February 1884.

# In future, only female teachers

## Staffing the Ramahyuck mission school in the nineteenth century

Dr Felicity Jenz

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### Abstract

**This paper examines the employment of teachers at the school on the Ramahyuck mission station in eastern Victoria in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It demonstrates that both physical exhaustion as well as a difficult head missionary resulted in a frequent turnover of staff. Moreover, comments from the teachers supply us with an insight into the daily running of this school for Koorie children. Although the school was on a mission station, the files from the Board for the Protection of Aborigines do not allow a detailed reconstruction of the teaching history of the school, in contrast to the files of the Education Department, which do. By examining one file held at Public Record Office Victoria at length and contextualising it with cross-departmental correspondence, we can also gain an understanding of where the jurisdictions of each department lay, and of how both teachers and missionaries responded to these structures. The teacher-centred correspondence does not allow an insight into the responses from Koorie children, and thus their voices cannot be uncovered from these sources. The engagement of Koorie mothers in their children's education is, however, evident within the file. In the historiography of mission stations in colonial Victoria, historians mostly use material written by missionaries, Church bodies or the Aboriginal Protection Board. This examination of the writings of teachers themselves reveals a new perspective on a Koorie school.**

In October 1898, Friedrich Hagenauer, missionary at the Ramahyuck Aboriginal mission station near Sale and secretary of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, received a reply to a request that he had sent out to the Secretary of the Education Department in Melbourne. The reply read:

Sir, I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 19th ultimo requesting that, in future, only female teachers may be appointed to the charge of aboriginal schools, and to inform you that an effort will be made to give effect to your recommendation as far as practicable.[1]

This letter anticipated the end of male teachers on the Ramahyuck mission station. There had been a number of male teachers at the school, from its missionary beginnings through to its transformation to a half-time Rural School (No. 12) in April 1869, and finally to its classification as a full-time Common School (No. 1088) in April 1871.[2] Although the exclusive employment of female teachers was ultimately enforced, this directive did not put a stop to the frequent turnover of teachers at the school.

.....

This paper will draw heavily from PROV files that contain the correspondence of teachers and potential teachers at the school with the Board of Education during the period from 1885 to 1901. In doing so, it will provide a general insight into the nature of education on Aboriginal mission stations beyond the single mission station examined here. In the historiography of mission stations in colonial Victoria, the most commonly used material is that of missionaries (such as official reports as well as official and personal letters); Church bodies (such as official reports); the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines (such as minutes of meetings and official reports); and governmental Royal Commissions. Few historians have engaged deeply with Department of Education material available at PROV.[3] Yet in addition to the more commonly used sources mentioned above, the PROV material provides information relating to the employment of teachers at the school, and records the teachers' comments on the achievements of their Koorie pupils. Within the PROV files, teachers often gave personal or health-related reasons for wishing to be transferred from the school; however, another reason that one could infer by cross-referencing some of these letters with missionary writings as well as government source material is that Hagenauer was himself a hard task master, and that his interfering contributed to the mental breakdown of a number of teachers. In examining a school for Koorie pupils, this article also provides some detailed insight into the relatively under-researched topic of Indigenous education in colonial Victoria.[4]



[Rev. Friedrich and Mrs Hagenauer] [picture] a15496. Tom Humphrey [ca. 1908] Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.

## Ramahyuck as a Mission School

In 1859, one of the first baptisms of an Indigenous person was celebrated in the colony of Victoria. Nathanael Pepper, a Wotjobaluk youth, was baptised by Moravian missionaries at the Ebenezer mission station in the Wimmera, near present-day Dimboola. [5] Pepper's conversion was seen as evidence that Indigenous people could be transformed spiritually, and with this and future conversions it was expected that a certain level of European 'civilisation' would be obtained by the Aborigines. The missionaries who brought the Christian message to the Wotjobaluk, Friedrich Hagenauer and Friedrich Spieseke, were members of a German-based church that began their global missionary work in the 1730s and had established mission stations in Victoria from the mid-nineteenth century. The Moravians' success in Victoria amongst people generally believed not to be convertible to Christianity led to the Presbyterian Church joining together with the Moravians in 1862 to establish the Ramahyuck mission station in Gippsland, amongst the similarly unconverted Gunai/Kunai.[6] In the turmoil of the post-contact period, the social, political and economic spheres of the Gunai were ruptured, and they were forced to adapt to the post-contact environment, including to different forms of education and training for their young. The Gunai had for millennia passed on skills that were needed to live in their country and had instructed their children in Indigenous law and traditions. Their form of education was different from the formalised classroom-based education that the missionaries offered at the Ramahyuck mission, yet this did not stop children from attending the school, nor parents from showing interest in it. Like most Protestant missionary groups in the nineteenth-century, the Moravians placed great emphasis upon education and saw a mission school as a way both to indoctrinate children at a young age with the Christian faith and to win 'the hearts even of heathen parents' as they observed the 'faithful care bestowed upon the children' by the missionaries. [7] The Moravians' agenda for education was tri-focal, in that it was intended to ensure 'symmetrical development through soul, mind and body'. [8] Thus, Moravian schooling was not academically focused, rather reformatory, its purpose being to effect social change by providing children with the skills and knowledge that would 'raise' them to the perceived level needed for assimilation into colonial society.

Hagenauer and his wife were initially the only missionaries present on the Ramahyuck mission station, and thus the only teachers. From the beginnings of the mission, numbers of Indigenous people fluctuated, as there was no law at that time compelling them to live on the reserve. In 1864, the Hagenauers were joined by Wilhelm Kramer and Wilhelm Kühne, two Moravian missionaries who had been sent out as part of a team to establish a mission station at Lake Kopperamanna near Lake Hope.[9] Due to a severe drought in the interior, the missionaries could not at first attempt the journey, and Kramer and Kühne were instead stationed at Ramahyuck, where they contributed to the running of the mission. Another two missionaries were stationed temporarily at Ebenezer. Kramer, who had gained teaching experience in Europe, was assigned the position of teacher. When the drought broke in 1866, Kramer and Kühne then left Ramahyuck for Lake Kopperamanna in South Australia, where they were to establish a mission amongst the Diyari. With a vacancy for a teacher at the school, Hagenauer combined his search for Kramer's replacement with his concern that some of the recently converted men needed to have good upstanding Christian wives. In 1867, he arranged for Mrs Anne Camfield to send some girls as potential wives from her 'Institution for Native and Half Caste Children' at King George Sound in Western Australia, near present-day Albany. Bessy Flower was one of these young women, and thanks to her high level of formalised Western education she was placed in charge of the school,[10] where she taught writing and reading as well as religious studies.[11] Despite the aptitude that Flower demonstrated in the task, Hagenauer lamented that 'I want my old young friend Kramer to do it!'.[12]



[Students and others in front of Ramahyuck School] [picture] a13414. Gibbs & Bloch [ca. 1900] Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.

In 1869, Hagenauer received his wish and Kramer was once again teaching at the school, having returned from the failed missionary attempt with the Diyari. Flower was therefore no longer a teacher at the school; rather, with her husband, Donald Cameron, a man of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, she was in charge of Ramahyuck's boarding house. Hagenauer had originally envisaged this as a five-teacher boarding school in which the children would be instructed in a Christian environment.[13] The children, he suggested, 'would be very happy to live here, and the parents are willing to leave them here!'.[14] In the nineteenth century, boarding or residential schools were established for Indigenous and non-European peoples in many British colonies, including in Canada where they had detrimental consequences for language and cultural maintenance.[15] Boarding schools reflected contemporary educational theories in which Indigenous people were expected to be 'turned into useful members of society'[16] through Christian instruction provided under the auspices of colonial institutions. Although Flower and Cameron were originally seen as models for all 'heathen' residents to follow, they had fallen out of Hagenauer's favour by the mid-1870s and he removed Flower from her post, prompting her later to declare that 'I can never be happy on a mission station!'.[17] Flower remained the only Indigenous teacher at Ramahyuck during the nineteenth century.

### A Government School

In 1871, the school at Ramahyuck became a government school, and thus Koorie pupils came under the same education system, with the same expectations, as all other pupils in the colony. In this year, there were seventy-four residents on the mission from a total of 492 inhabitants of the six government reserves and mission stations across Victoria.[18] The historian Amanda Barry has argued that because Hagenauer was a firm supporter of education, he wished the Ramahyuck school to be brought under the control of the Department of Education to ensure regular inspections and also to ensure that teachers would 'look out to do [their] duty'.[19] Hagenauer himself had had difficulties with some of his fellow missionaries, which had in turn led to difficulties with the Moravian Church headquarters in Germany.[20] Thus, government inspection was not just a case of ensuring educational standards, it was also a case of asserting external secular control over missionary teachers. Or, in Hagenauer's words: 'The difficulty is this, if we have teachers who are not under the inspection of the inspectors they begin to slacken!'.[21]



[Group standing in front of Church and State School, Ramahyuck Mission] [picture] a13412. Allan Studio [ca. 1900] Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.

Hagenauer also wished the school to be brought under governmental control so that the salary of the teacher would henceforth be paid by the government, thereby reducing the running costs of the mission.[22] Although missionaries generally preferred their pupils to be segregated from settler society, one of the consequences of the Ramahyuck mission school becoming a government school was that it was opened up to non-Indigenous children of the area. Hagenauer assessed the situation in the following characteristically racially arrogant language of the period: 'The selectors are glad to have a good school so handy, and for the black children it is of great benefit to mix at school and in the playground with those of a superior race.'[23] Thus, in his description, the education of Indigenous children occurred both through formal teaching in the classroom as well as through the informal influence of role models in the playground. The *Education Act* of 1872 entitled all of the colony's children to receive free, compulsory, secular education, with instruction in religious education being permitted outside of secular class hours. Kramer continued as a teacher at Ramahyuck under the government system and instructed the children in rhymes, reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, grammar and geography.[24] Under his supervision, the annual Board of Education examination results at Ramahyuck increased to 100% in 1872 and remained at this level for the next two consecutive annual inspections. [25] Such outstanding results were a source of pride within religious circles,[26] and a source of curiosity in scientific circles, where the mental ability of Indigenous students was rigorously discussed.[27] The excellent examination results from Ramahyuck as well as from two other Aboriginal mission stations, Lake Tyers and Lake Condah, encouraged the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in their 1876 annual report to express the

wish that all schools on the six mission and government reserves would come under the control of the Board of Education, with this wish finally coming to fruition in 1891.[28]

Kramer was transferred to the Ebenezer mission station in 1875, once again leaving Ramahyuck without a teacher. The position was filled in January 1876 by August Hahn, a Moravian missionary who had been sent out to Australia with his wife for the express purpose of working at Ramahyuck. However, the initially amicable relationship between Hahn and Hagenauer soon soured. Hagenauer complained that Hahn spent all his spare time in his room and, like Kramer, did not help as much as was needed. Hagenauer requested the Moravian administration in Germany to replace Hahn with a more suitable missionary.[29] According to Barry, Hagenauer was concerned that Hahn was inciting the mission residents to become rebellious against the mission order.[30] Hagenauer had indeed complained to headquarters that Hahn was turning the Aborigines against him, yet he placed the blame squarely with Hahn, who he claimed had committed fraud against the mission, and who, he vaguely claimed, had broken all the rules and regulations in regards to the Board of Education. This latter point led Hagenauer to fear that if the public were to hear of this the whole mission would be brought into disrepute.[31] Exactly what Hahn did is not clear; however, with Hagenauer against him, he was forced to leave Ramahyuck in late 1879.[32]

A replacement government teacher was sent to Ramahyuck in the form of Christopher Beilby, who was accompanied by his wife. Beilby was the first teacher at the school who had been neither an Indigenous resident nor a missionary. By this time, in the early 1880s, Hagenauer had known Beilby for ten years. Beilby had had his eye on the position of teacher since 1876, but while Hahn held the post he had requested it in vain.[33] Although as a government teacher Beilby's confessional allegiance as a Baptist was not problematic for the Department of Education, it was a problem for the Moravian Church officials in Germany. They felt acutely the lack of input they had had in appointing a teacher to the school and suggested that 'It is an abnormal situation that the Government sends out teachers for the school without any further [discussion], this school is indeed seen to be a Government school.'[34] Such comments hint at difficulties in the transition from a religious to a government school, especially from the side of the religious authority itself. The Moravian Church was concerned as to who would be responsible for the teaching of religion; the situation was resolved by Hagenauer taking on this responsibility and providing the requisite daily half hour of moral and religious training that all Indigenous pupils received in addition to secular class work.[35]

From 1885, the date from which we can reconstruct the teaching staff of the Ramahyuck school through records held at PROV, the relationship between Beilby and Hagenauer had become strained. In mid-August, both Mr and Mrs Beilby were ill with influenza and the school had to be closed for a few days.[36] In 1886, the length of illness was even longer, with a doctor prescribing four weeks' rest for Beilby as he was suffering a bout of dysphasia combined with mental depression. As no substitute was available, the school was closed again.[37] Soon after returning from sick-leave Beilby applied to be transferred to a 'Seaside or Hill-country school residence, as a change has become desirable'. [38] Yet his mental depression continued to plague him and in September of the same year he retracted his application for transfer, and instead tendered his resignation.[39]

At this point, Hagenauer stepped in to ensure that he was to receive the teacher that he wanted, and not one that the Education Department might have sent. Although, as detailed above, the relationship between Hagenauer and Hahn had been strained, Hahn remained Hagenauer's preferred candidate. There had been other candidates for the position, including one Elizabeth Simpson, who, after making enquiries concerning the school in October, declined the offer of head teacher at Ramahyuck, stating that 'it would not be a desirable position for a lady'.[40] Her comment can be read to reflect colonial concepts of female respectability. Earlier in that month, Hagenauer had forwarded Hahn's application to the Department urging it to grant him the favour of appointing Hahn as the head teacher, noting that 'An Aboriginal School is not suitable to many, for which reason we greatly desire to have Mr. Hahn reappointed to his former school'.[41] Beilby even suggested to the Department that another candidate for the position, Mrs Temper, had been advised not to apply for the post, but rather for a position at Woranga School, which was where Hahn was currently employed.[42] With Hagenauer's support, Hahn began teaching at Ramahyuck on 22 November 1886. Early in the following year, he complained to the Department that the children's school work had suffered because of Beilby's frequent bouts of illness. [43] However, he was soon also requesting a transfer, noting that the nightly din which was produced by Hagenauer's 'half-grown-up son'[44] and the 'black school children' was so unbearable that it was affecting his nerves. He further indicated that such annoyances were the cause of Beilby's breakdown, a comment that sheds light on the broader personal politics played out on the mission between Euro-Australians as well as between Euro-Australians and the Indigenous residents.[45] Hahn was not immediately removed,

however; he became the half-time head teacher of the new Perry Bridge school (No. 2982), which serviced Euro-Australian children, whilst remaining half-time at Ramahyuck, serving Koorie children.[46] Perry Bridge was opened in October of 1889, with Hahn working alternative days at this and the Ramahyuck school. When both schools were reclassified in 1892,[47] Hahn became the full-time head teacher at Perry Bridge, and left the now unclassified, yet full-time school at Ramahyuck.[48]

### **The Teaching Staff of the Declassified School**

Within the colony, the passing of the so-called 'Half Caste Act' of 1886 had meant that only 'full blood' Aborigines were allowed to live on Aboriginal mission or government stations, and thus all people under the age of thirty-five, including children, not classified as 'full blood' under this law were required to leave these sites. [49] The consequence of this Act for the Ramahyuck school was that pupil numbers dropped substantially below the number needed to maintain a classified school, and, as an unclassified school, the teaching position became available to less qualified people.[50] It was not, however, just the dispersal of Indigenous people from the vicinity of the mission that reduced the number of pupils. According to a letter that Hahn sent to the Education Department, Hagenauer had been annoyed that some Aboriginal boys had followed white girls home, seeing this as a situation that could potentially reflect negatively upon the mission. In order to rectify this and to ensure that it would not happen again, he encouraged Euro-Australian children not to attend the government school, and thus curtailed potential enrolments.[51] In doing so Hagenauer also compromised the standard of teaching available at the school.

The first teacher at Ramahyuck following declassification was Ida Vidler, who applied for and received the position in December 1891.[52] Like her predecessors, she also fell out of favour with Hagenauer. Furthermore, she fell out of favour with the Indigenous mothers of the school's pupils. After being only some six weeks in the position, a letter of complaint was sent to the Secretary of the Education Department, Thomas Brodribb, Esq. Signed by five women and written by one of the school's former teachers, Bessy Cameron (née Flower), the letter voiced the complaint that the two ladies who ran the school demoralised the Koorie children by saying such things as 'You horrible nasty creatures.' In protest the mothers had taken their children from the school and would not send them again until both teachers, Miss Vidler and Miss Moss, had been removed.[53]

One mother, Emily Stephan, was particularly concerned that the bad language and behaviour of the teachers, and especially Vidler's willingness to discredit Hagenauer in front of the children, was setting a bad example.[54] Rather than Hagenauer forwarding these letters to Brodribb in his capacity as missionary, he did so on official letterhead of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in his capacity as General Inspector of the Aborigines (a position he had held since 1889), thereby demonstrating his willingness to see this problem as a secular one and not a spiritual one.[55]



Ramahyuck Aboriginal Mission, Gippsland, Victoria [picture] is001731. 1885. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.

After such a clash it is understandable that Vidler urgently wished to leave her post. She wrote to the Department in March 1892, enquiring if it were absolutely necessary for her to stay until a new teacher was appointed.[56] A replacement, in the form of the ex-teacher trainee Rachel Evans, was sent at the end of March. Although Evans had failed her teaching exams, she was deemed by Hagenauer to be 'highly suitable' for the position.[57] Her willingness to obtain the necessary teaching qualification was expressed in her desire to sit for the teaching exams in 1894. However, she noted in a letter to the Education Department that the 'somewhat peculiar' duties, including the monitoring of pupils at night, did not allow her sufficient free time for private study.[58] This comment also suggests that the moral supervision of Koorie children was seen as an important aspect of the teacher's position. Evans worked for almost two years at Ramahyuck before tendering her resignation. When her resignation – possibly motivated by her wish to attend to her dying father[59] – was accepted in April 1896, the teaching position became open once more.[60] For Hagenauer, it was imperative that a female fill the position. He wrote a letter to the Education Department, once again on Board letterhead, stating that 'at all the Schools for aboriginal children female teachers are more preferable than male teachers and [the] above Board will feel obliged for a similar appointment to the Ramahyuck School'.[61] Female teachers were less expensive to employ than male

teachers,[62] and although Hagenauer was very cautious with both his own personal money and money for the mission under his care, it is doubtful that the extra expense of a male teacher would have been a reason for his request. Within schools for Native Americans in the United States of America, for example, more females were employed than males in the nineteenth century, not only because they were less expensive to hire, but also because teaching was seen to be a profession for which women were more broadly suitable, as they were deemed to be the bastions of moral virtue.[63] This may well have been the case with the Ramahyuck school; however, the letters of application do not provide any concrete evidence as to why women were driven to apply to teach at an Aboriginal school. As the applications are exclusively from females it may be assumed that teaching in an Aboriginal school in the nineteenth century was seen by teachers themselves to be a position best filled by women. Throughout the British (post) colonial world, teaching was predominately a women's profession,[64] with schooling deemed a means by which Indigenous and non-European pupils could be taught 'civilising' habits within the school environment that would help them assimilate into the broader (post) colonial society. Women, it was believed, had the inherent moral constitution to effect these changes. In this light, Hagenauer's desire to only employ female teachers was not anomalous, yet it was curious in its explicit nature.

In 1896, Elizabeth Armour took on the position of teacher at Ramahyuck with Hagenauer praising her in a letter to the Education Department as having been 'so well suited to manage the difficulties with aboriginal children'.[65] However, she only taught to the end of the year, with it being unclear as to why she left. Her replacement was Annie Seymour, who had previously taught at Camberwell (No. 888).[66] After two years of working at the Ramahyuck school, Seymour also requested a transfer to another school. Her letter of request to the Department reads in full:

Sir,

I have the honor to apply for a transfer from this school after the Christmas Vacation. I have now been two years in this aboriginal school and find the work of teaching the native children uphill, hard, trying and unsatisfactory.

That the work done has been careful, zealous, useful & hard, the results of the annual examination & the reports of the District Inspector will, I think, show.

I cannot undertake the work of this school after this year as it is too uphill & trying for me.

I wish to apply for the position of 8th class Assistant or of a Reliever.

I have the honor to be,  
Sir  
Your most obedient servant  
Annie Seymour[67]

.....

Seymour's letter hints at the difficulties that she faced working with Indigenous children. She was not alone in finding the position taxing, for, as the annual Board reports demonstrate, other female teachers on Aboriginal and mission stations also expressed similar sentiments, with the teaching of Indigenous children deemed to be particularly difficult work.[68] However, as Joanna Cruickshank has argued, Seymour not only found the teaching difficult, she was also pressured by Hagenauer's wife to resign from the post because of her close connection with an Indigenous man – a relationship deemed not suitable for a white lady. [69] Thus, once again, colonial ideas of respectability affected the staffing of the school. With Seymour's transfer in force, yet another teacher was sought. Elizabeth Harper Armour, who had previously worked at the Ramahyuck school, returned at the beginning of 1899 to take charge.[70] When members of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines visited the station in early 1899, they were so impressed with Armour's teaching work that they wished a half-day holiday to be granted. However, as they did not have the jurisdiction over state schools to grant holidays, their request was presented to the Education Department. The file is inconclusive as to whether the holiday was granted or not.[71] Armour herself applied to the Education Department for the granting of two bank holidays a couple months later on the occasion of the marriage of Hagenauer's daughter, Ellen Grace, to Ernest Le Souef, the son of Albert Alexander Le Souef, member of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. It would be, she urged, 'a great festivity in which the the [sic] black children will bear a part', and as such, 'I am applying for the two days. The Wednesday 19th is for decorating & preparation & the next day 20th April is the day of the ceremony.' The Department, however, saw this as being excessive and granted only the day of the ceremony. [72]

In October of that year, Armour requested a month's relief duty in Melbourne, where her sister, who was about to get married, lived. As her sister was to relocate to China after her wedding, Armour was keen to spend at least five weeks with her.[73] By June of 1900, Armour had, like many of her predecessors, reached a point of physical exhaustion. She suffered from 'Anaemia & Delicility [sic]' and was required by a physician to spend at least a month convalescing, which ultimately extended to three.[74] Hagenauer was concerned that a temporary 'suitable female' teacher should be sent 'without delay', as it was deemed 'very desirable to keep the children at their regular work'.[75] A temporary female teacher in the form of Edith Brotchie was sent at the end of September 1900.[76]

As teachers were, however, paid partly on examination results, Armour was very desirous that her illness would not affect her payment. She wrote to the Board in December 1900 applying for special consideration:

Sir,

I have the honor to inform you that my annual exam for results has been lately held, and that the percentage dropped from last year. As the school was closed for three month on account of my illness & considering how easily the aborigines forget in a very short time, I herewith apply to be paid on my last years percentage 85.

This is the third examination since I have been teaching at this school, & in no other instance has the percentage fallen, it has always risen.

The percentage this year is 80.7.

I have the honor to be sir,  
your obedient servant,  
Elizabeth H. Armour[77]

Unlike her application for two bank holidays, this application was granted. Although the file recording the correspondence between teachers and the Board of Education ends in 1901, an epilogue can, nevertheless, be pieced together from information available in the annual Board reports. As mentioned above, the introduction of the so-called 'Half Caste' Act had a great impact on the number of students at the school, as government regulations ensured that only 'full-blooded' Aborigines were able to live on the station, consequently decreasing the numbers of pupils. With only twelve students left in 1901, the Department of Education closed the school. The Board stepped in and appointed 'one of the educated native women to carry on the school', with this nameless woman maintaining the programme of the Department of Education for the next four years.[78] In 1905, the Department of Education re-established the Ramahyuck school. Hagenauer's request of 1898 was not heeded, for a male teacher was employed.[79]

## Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the ways in which the archives at PROV can shed light on the institutional as well as the personal experiences of teachers at schools through a reading of their letters of application and requests for transfer. It is thus more than a list of dissatisfied teachers leaving the Ramahyuck school due to altercations with the head missionary. The Ramahyuck school was unusual in the history of the colony of Victoria in that it was one of only a handful of schools that educated predominantly Indigenous pupils. Yet, in the context of those schools connected to Aboriginal reserves or missions in colonial Victoria, Ramahyuck was not unique.

Other Aboriginal reserves and missions struggled with disruption of teaching staff; other schools taught both Euro-Australian and Indigenous children; and other schools also obtained good percentages at the annual examinations.[80] By reading the correspondence to the Board of Education we gain an insight into the particularities of these commonalities. The article has demonstrated the amount of meddling undertaken in education affairs by the head missionary at Ramahyuck as well as the physical, emotional and mental pressures to which the teachers at the school were subjected. It has also demonstrated how colonial concepts of respectability affected who taught at the school. Moreover, although the voices of Koorie children are missing from the file, the voices of outraged parents indicate the importance of education for Indigenous communities.

The education of Aboriginal children was, as Amanda Barry has argued, not 'a single project with a single aim'.<sup>[81]</sup> The Ramahyuck school had begun as a mission school primarily aimed at drawing pupils to Christ through teaching them to read the Bible. Over the decades, the school became more secular in its staffing, no longer being taught by missionaries, rather by Department of Education teachers. The curriculum also became more secular, with the daily half hour of moral and religious training held outside of regular, secular school hours. In a broader sense, the file on Ramahyuck school, combined with external sources, reveals the complexities of negotiating both personal and institutional goals within and between the strictures of missionary organisations, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, and the Department of Education. Whether similar experiences defined the histories of other mission and government reserves remains to be fully revealed. The records at PROV provide potentially unparalleled insights into these schools and their fascinating histories.

**Table 1: Teachers at the Ramahyuck mission school, 1864-1901**

Name	Appointment date	Leaving date	Reason given for leave / transfer
Hagenauer, Friedrich	1862	1864	Kramer took over position
Kramer, Carl Christian Wilhelm	1864	1866	Mission work at Lake Kopperamanna in the interior of Australia
Flower, Bessy	1866	1868	Married and replaced by Kramer
Kramer, Carl Christian Wilhelm	1869	1875	Transferred to Ebenezer Mission station in the Wimmera
Hahn, Heinrich A.	Feb. 1876	Dec. 1879	Difficulties with Hagenauer
Beilby, Christopher	1880	Resigned, Sept. 20, 1886	Mental depression
Hahn, Heinrich A.	22 Nov. 1886	1891	Requested transfer away from station
Vidler, Ida	18 Jan. 1892	14 March 1892	Removed for rude behaviour
Moss, Miss	?	?	Removed for rude behaviour
Evens, Rachel	28 March 1892	12 April 1896	Wished to look after dying father
Armour, Elizabeth H.	13 April 1893	18 Dec. 1896	Temporary teacher, not fully qualified
Seymour, Annie	18 Jan. 1897	16 Dec. 1898	Conditions too difficult
Armour, Elizabeth H.	24 Jan. 1899	Dec. 1900?	
Brotchie, Edith	13 Sept. 1900	24 Sept. 1900	Temporary teacher, filling in for Armour

## Endnotes

[1] National Archives Australia, Victorian Branch, B[230] , General correspondence, [77a] , Secretary, Education Department, Melbourne, to FA Hagenauer, Secretary, Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, 4 October 1898.

[2] C Bowden, 'The East Gippsland region', in LJ Blake (ed.), *Vision and realisation: a centenary history of state education in Victoria*, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, 1973, vol. 3, p. 1073.

[3] An exception is Amanda Barry's PhD thesis, 'Broken promises: Aboriginal education in south-eastern Australia, 1837-1937', School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 2008.

[4] Exceptions are: Barry, 'Broken promises' and AR Welch, 'Aboriginal education as internal colonialism: the schooling of an Indigenous minority in Australia', *Comparative education*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1988, pp. 203-15.

[5] For a plausible reconstruction of surrounding events, see R Kenny, *The lamb enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper and the ruptured world*, Scribe, Melbourne, 2007.

[6] For an overview of the Moravians' work in Australia see F Jenz, *German Moravian missionaries in the British Colony of Victoria, Australia, 1848-1908: influential strangers*, Brill, Leiden, 2010.

[7] [AG Spangenberg] , *Instructions for the members of the Unitas Fratrum, who minister in the Gospel among the heathen*, Brethren's Society, for the Furtherance of the Gospel among the Heathen, London, 1784, p. 47.

[8] M Haller, *Early Moravian education in Pennsylvania*, Moravian Historical Society, Nazareth, Pennsylvania, 1953, p. 213.

[9] For an overview of this mission see Jenz, *German Moravian missionaries*, pp. 15573.

[10] B Attwood, '... In the name of all my coloured brethren and sisters: a biography of Bessy Cameron', *Hecate: a women's interdisciplinary journal*, vol. 12, nos. 1-2, 1986, pp. 9-53.

[11] See the letter from Bessy Flower at Ramahyuck to Anne Camfield in Albany, August 1867, in E Nelson, S Smith and P Grimshaw (eds), *Letters from Aboriginal women of Victoria, 1867-1926*, History Department, University of Melbourne, 2002, p. 198.

[12] National Library of Australia [NLA] , manuscript 3343, Hagenauer Letterbook, Hagenauer to Mackie (South Yarra), [date illegible] 1867, pp. 163-5.

[13] *ibid.*, Hagenauer to Reichel (Herrnhut, Germany), 1 May 1866, pp. 524.

[14] Unitäts Archiv, Herrnhut, Protocoll der Missions-departement [Minutes of the Missionary Department] , 28 February 1866, #4, pp. 289.

[15] For an overview see JR Miller, *Shingwauk's vision: a history of native residential schools*, University of Toronto Press, 2009.

[16] JS Scott, 'Penitential and penitentiary: Native Canadians and colonial mission education', in *Mixed messages: materiality, textuality, missions*, ed. JS Scott and G Griffiths, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005, pp. 111-33 (117).

[17] Bessy Cameron, writing from Ebenezer, to Captain Page, Secretary, Board for the Protection of Aborigines (Melbourne), 10 October 1883, cited in *Letters from Aboriginal women of Victoria, 1867-1926*, p. 153. See also P Grimshaw, 'Faith, missionary life, and the family', in P Levine (ed.), *Gender and empire*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 26080.

[18] *Seventh report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the colony of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1871, p. 3. These reports have been digitised and are available on the website of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

[19] Hagenauer, examined 23 May 1877, Minutes of Evidence, 'Royal Commission on the Aborigines', *Victorian parliamentary papers*, 1877, p. 36, quoted in Barry, *Broken promises*, p. 111.

[20] For an exemplary case, see Hagenauer's discussion of his difficulties with the missionary Hahn in NLA, MS 3343, Hagenauer to Connor (Herrnhut, Germany), 27 October 1879, pp. 433-60.

[21] Hagenauer, examined 23 May 1877, Minutes of Evidence, 'Royal Commission on the Aborigines', 1877, p. 48.

[22] NLA, MS 3343, Hagenauer to Reichel, 29 February 1868, p. 244.

[23] *Twenty-first report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the colony of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1885, p. 7.

[24] State Library of Victoria, Manuscript file 10401, Inspector's register book, 1871-1874, Ramahyuck School, n.p.

[25] *ibid.*

[26] JE Hutton, *A history of Moravian missions*, Moravian Publications Office, London, 1922, p. 345.

[27] See AH Keane, 'The Australian and Tasmanian races'. [Review of *The Aborigines of Victoria, with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania*, compiled from various sources for the Government of Victoria by R Brough Smyth, FLS, FGS, &c., 2 vols, Trübner and Co., London, 1878] , *Nature*, vol. XIX, no. 494, 1879, p. 551; B Kidd, *Social evolution*, Macmillan and Co., New York and London, 1895, p. 295.

[28] *Twelfth report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the colony of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1876, p. 4; *Twenty-seventh report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the colony of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1891, p. 4.

- [29] NLA, MS 3343, Hagenauer to Connor, 10 September 1879, pp 427-8.
- [30] Barry, *Broken promises*, p. 120.
- [31] NLA, MS 3343, Hagenauer to Connor, 27 October 1879, pp. 433-60.
- [32] NLA, MS 3343, Hagenauer to Bechler (Herrnhut, Germany), 13 January 1880, p. 467.
- [33] NLA, MS 3343, Hagenauer to Bechler, 12 May 1880, p. 477.
- [34] Unitäts Archiv, Herrnhut, Protocoll der Missionsdepartement, 11 February 1880, #7, pp. 74-5.
- [35] *Seventeenth report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the colony of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1881, p. 8.
- [36] PROV, VPRS 640/P0 Central Inward Primary Schools Correspondence, Unit 657 School No. 1088, Item 1885/26580, Hagenauer to Secretary of the Department of Education, 21 August 1885. All subsequent items of correspondence cited are from this file.
- [37] Item 1886/1988, Med[ical] Cert[ificate] on behalf of CA Beilby signed by Matthew McLean, 18 July 1886.
- [38] Item 1886/32050, CA Beilby to Secretary [Ed. Dept] , 30 August 1886.
- [39] Item 1886/34368, Beilby to Secretary [Ed. Dept] , 20 September 1886.
- [40] Item 1886/38675, Elizabeth Simpson to Ed. Dept, 20 October 1886.
- [41] Item 1886/36845, HA Hahn (1562) applies for H. Tship., 5 October 1886, Forwarded by FA Hagenauer, 7 October 1886.
- [42] Item 1886/38385, Beilby to Secretary [Ed. Dept] , 19 October 1886.
- [43] Item 1887/525, Hahn to Ed. Dept, 19 February 1887.
- [44] Hagenauer had nine children. Exactly which child is being referred to here is unclear. See LJ Blake, 'Hagenauer, Friedrich August (1829-1909)'; in *Australian dictionary of biography online*.
- [45] Item 1888/8648, Hahn to Secretary [Ed. Dept] , 17 March 1888.
- [46] Item 1889/44732, Hahn to Secretary [Ed. Dept] , 29 October 1889.
- [47] For information about the classification system see E Sweetman, CR Long and J Smyth, *A history of state education in Victoria*, published for the Education Department of Victoria by Critchley Parker, Melbourne, 1922, pp. 98-102.
- [48] Bowden, 'The East Gippsland region', pp. 1107-08; see also *Twenty-ninth report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the colony of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1882, p. 9.
- [49] *The Aborigines Protection Act*, 1886 (50 Vict. No. 912).
- [50] Item 1891/66706, Notice, Ramahyuck, Registered 23 December 1891.
- [51] Item 1888/8648, Hahn to Secretary, Education Department, 17 March 1888.
- [52] Item 1891/66828, Ida Vidler to Secretary, Education Department, 22 December 1891.
- [53] Item 1892/8131, Petition signed by Bessy Cameron, Florence Moffat, Mary Scott, Emily M. Stephen, Lulu Darby to J Brodribb Esq, 27 February 1892.
- [54] Item 1892/8131, EM Stephan to Miss Moss and Miss Vidler, 25 February 1892.
- [55] Item 1892/8131, Hagenauer to Brodribb, Secretary Department of Education, 1 March 1892.
- [56] Item 1892/9715, Vidler to Secretary, Education Department, 10 March 1892.
- [57] Item 1894/35580, Hagenauer to Secretary of Education Department, 1 November 1894.
- [58] Item 1894/35580, Rachel Evans to Secretary of Education Department, 30 October 1894.
- [59] Item 1895/40097, Evans to Secretary of Education Department, 11 December 1895.
- [60] Item 1896/6953, Evans to Secretary of Education Department, 13 March 1896.
- [61] Item 1896/21534, Hagenauer to Secretary of Education Department, 20 March 1896.
- [62] Sweetman, Long and Smyth, *A history of state education in Victoria*, p. 106.
- [63] DW Adams, *Education for extinction: American Indians and the boarding school experience, 1875-1928*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 1995, p. 81.
- [64] In Canada, for example, by 1880 two-thirds of teachers in the public sector were female. See J Guildford, '“Separate spheres”: the feminization of public school teaching in Nova Scotia, 1838-1880', *Acadiensis*, vol. 22, no. 1, Autumn 1992, pp. 44-64 (44).
- [65] Item 1896/21543, Hagenauer to Secretary of Education Department, 24 July 1896.
- [66] Item 1897/142, Hagenauer to Secretary of Education Department, 7 January 1897.
- [67] Item 1898/4188, Annie Seymour to Secretary of Education Department, 30 November 1898.

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[68] See for example *Thirty-fifth report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines*, Robt S Brain, Melbourne, 1899, p. 9.

[69] J Cruickshank, '“A most lowering thing for a lady”: aspiring to respectable whiteness on Ramahyuck Mission', in C McLisky and J Carey (eds), *Creating White Australia*, Sydney University Press, 2009, pp. 80-96.

[70] Item 1899/1151, Cover notes, 23 January 1899.

[71] Item 1899/5922, Albert Le Sou[e] f (vice Chairman), RR Godfrey, [?] Whitehead, MP, FA Hagenauer, Secretary, 24 February 1899.

[72] Item 1899/10589, Armour to Board of Advice, 11 April 1899.

[73] Item 1899/30211, Armour to Secretary of Education Department, 11 September 1899; Item 1899/32836, Armour to Secretary of Education Department, 2 October 1899.

[74] Item 1900/31093, Doctor certificate, 25 August 1900; Item 1900/21383, Note on back of letter from Armour to Secretary of Education Department, 26 June 1900.

[75] Item 1900/21708, Hagenauer to Secretary of Education Department, 29 June 1900.

[76] Item 1900/33726, Department file, 13 September 1900.

[77] Item 1900/47633, Armour to Secretary of Education Board, 12 December 1900.

[78] *Forty-first report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1905, p. 9.

[79] This was Mr E Geissler: see *ibid.*

[80] For an example of the disruption of teaching staff see *Twenty-first report of the Board...*, p. 8; *Twenty-seventh report of the Board...*, 1891, p. 7. For an example of mixed classes of both Euro-Australian and Indigenous children see *Twentieth report of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the colony of Victoria*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1884, p. 7; *Twenty-ninth report of the Board...*, p. 9. Both Coranderrk and Ebenezer reported Euro-Australian and Indigenous pupils studying together. For an example of the obtainment of good percentages at the annual examinations see *Twenty-ninth report...*, p. 9.

[81] Barry, *Broken promises*, p. i.

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# Low Kong Meng and Chinese Engagement in the International Trade of Colonial Victoria

Paul Macgregor

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## Abstract

**The level of integration of the Chinese goldmining sector into the Victorian mid-nineteenth century economy has been given little attention by historians. How much of the gold won by Chinese miners was spent in Victoria; how much was exported? Was it secreted back to China, as believed at the time, or was it used to finance trade expansion in the Asia-Pacific region? To what extent was cross-cultural co-operation involved in running the Chinese Victorian economic sector?**

**The business career of Melbourne entrepreneur Low Kong Meng (1831-1888) offers a locus around which to discuss these questions. A contemporary account stated that 'there were reputedly few wealthier men in Victoria than he' and that the transactions of his firm were 'on a large, it might be said, a gigantic scale'. A Chinese born in British Penang, he came to Victoria for the gold rush in 1853, and within six years, at the age of twenty-eight, was importing goods from China valued in today's prices at £6 million per shipment. Educated in English, French, Malay and Cantonese, he traded in food, tea and opium from China to Melbourne, rice from Calcutta to Victoria, and more. His shipments of gold bullion to Asian ports rivalled**

**the international financial exchange of the leading colonial banks. Head of a firm that by the early 1860s had branches in Melbourne, Mauritius, Hong Kong and London, his colleagues included those in the highest political and business circles of Melbourne, as well as New York traders and members of the Shanghai American community.**

Using shipping records of the Victorian Department of Trade and Customs held at PROV (VPRS 22, VPRS 38) combined with the wealth of trade and economic data in the Victorian colonial government's Blue Books (VPRS 943) of the late 1850s and early 1860s, this article interrogates Low Kong Meng's financial and shipping arrangements, explores his business engagement with Chinese and European Victorians, and maps out his part in the international Asian and imperial networks of trade and investment in the colonial era.



Lowe Kong Meng, c. 1863, aged 32. Thomas Bradley Harris photo album, on website *The Eastern window*, p. 27 (accessed 12 March 2012).

In 1859, the Chinese goldminers of Victoria were on strike. In a civil disobedience campaign longer and more widespread than the Eureka miner's licence campaign of 1854, the majority of the 45,000 Chinese across the goldfields were refusing to pay the newly imposed Chinese residence tax of £4 per annum.[1]

At the height of this campaign, a delegation of Lowe Kong Meng, John A Luk and A Kum, representing Melbourne's 'some 200 Chinese merchants, and persons in their employ', met with the Victorian Chief Secretary, John O'Shanassy, on 30 May 1859, to distance themselves from the miners' campaign and plead exemption from paying the tax.[2] Kong Meng and his fellow Chinese merchants also had with them three non-Chinese supporters: James Grant, lawyer and Member of

the Legislative Assembly, Mark Last King, merchant, and Rev William Young, missionary to Victoria's Chinese.

King argued to O'Shanassy on behalf of the merchants that, as they were not living under the government's Chinese protectorate system operating on the goldfields, the merchants were not causing any cost to the government, and there was no need for them to pay the tax which funded this system. They were already repeatedly paying the poll tax of £10 per Chinese passenger arriving in Melbourne, as they travelled to and from China frequently, being engaged in a large trade importing goods from China to supply the Chinese mining population. King stated that, 'for instance, Kong Meng had a cargo of goods just now arrived' in Port Phillip Harbour 'worth £10,000 pounds'.[3]

In today's figures, comparing average earnings, £10,000 is just over £6 million.[4] In 1863, the *Argus* reported that 'there are reputedly few wealthier men in Victoria', and that the transactions of Kong Meng and Co. 'are on a large, it might be said, a gigantic scale'.[5]

Lowe Kong Meng is briefly cited in a range of histories,[6] and brief biographies appeared in newspapers and books during his lifetime,[7] but little detailed investigation has been published about his life and career, and his impact on mid-colonial Victoria.

Although Kong Meng was active for thirty-five years in colonial, inter-colonial and international commercial affairs in Melbourne from 1853 until his death in 1888, for this article I focus on the 1850s-1860s, when his chief concern was supplying Chinese miners' needs, laying the basis for his wealth and fame.

Little has been written about colonial Victoria's international trade – what was being traded and with which countries, and the people and organisations undertaking the trading.[8] Fortunately, Victoria's 'Blue Books', from 1859 onwards, detail import/export data, itemised by ports of origin or destination, and by goods. [9] 1859 being the year of the meeting with O'Shanassy, this allows a trade context for Kong Meng's £10,000 cargo.

Total imports for 1859 were £15,622,891. There was a preponderance of trade with the UK (59% of value), and a large trade (18%) with other Australasian colonies, but also a strong trade with the Asia/Indian Ocean region (14%), almost as large as the inter-colonial trade. Other imports were from North America (5%), Europe (3%) and Latin America (1%).

**TOTAL VALUE in Sterling of the IMPORTS and EXPORTS of the Colony, from and to each Country, in the Year ended 31st December, 1859.**

COUNTRIES.	Imports therefrom.	Exports thence.	COUNTRIES.	Imports therefrom.	Exports thence.
United Kingdom ...	9,176,528	13,542,849	Foreign States—continued.	£	£
<i>British Possessions.</i>			Fou-tchow-foo ...	276,403	131
New South Wales ...	1,229,100	276,827	Gottenburg ...	43,331	
New Zealand ...	57,110	114,125	Hambourg ...	34,177	58,896
South Australia ...	796,314	269,797	Hermosand ...	8,506	50
Tasmania ...	723,845	251,921	Ilo Ilo ...	8,405	
Western Australia ...	74	11,185	Loer ...	3,187	
Aden ...	3,195	32,873	Lombock ...	67	4,172
Amherst ...		2	Macao ...	112,727	
Bombay ...		12,888	Malaga ...	10,557	
Barbadoes ...		29	Manilla ...	136,333	82
Calcutta ...	47,1228	367,250	Marseilles ...	41,800	
Cape of Good Hope ...	18,383	748	Medool ...	19,444	
Ceylon ...	57,219	165,945	Odessa ...	10,055	
Coringa ...	9,970		Philippine Islands ...	200	
Hong Kong ...	277,983	363,604	Pondicherry ...		7,867
Madras ...	5,080		Prussia ...	3,130	
Mauritius ...	523,986	370,404	Rotterdam ...	17,712	
Moulmein ...		37	Sourabaya ...	27,073	16,000
Paget Sound ...	17,520		South Sea Islands ...	10,223	781
Rangoon ...	5,641	66	Stockholm ...	2,100	
Singapore ...	2,887	512	Suez ...	102,421	376,167
St. John's, N. R. ...	6,377	28	Sundvall ...	3,083	
Vanouver's Island ...	1,300	149	Swatow ...	13,000	
<i>Foreign States.</i>			Sweden ...	13,359	
Amsterdam ...	19,543		Talcahuano ...	8,112	
Bahia ...	40		Timor ...	1,820	540
Bally ...	1,695		Valparaiso ...	83,374	191
Batavia ...	52,541	5,619	<i>United States.</i>		
Bourbon ...		1,126	Boston ...	226,131	57
Bredaux ...	171,382		Humboldt Bay ...	6,200	
Cadiz ...	31,814		Mobile ...		31
Callao ...	29,583	1,235	New York ...	405,632	1,161
Canton ...	3,010		Panama ...	4,400	
Chili ...	4,812		San Francisco ...	139,431	14,927
Christmas Island ...		1,550	Savannah ...	3,275	
Copenhagen ...	8,605		United States ...	2,911	
Cronstadt ...	47,280		Total ...	15,622,891	13,867,839
Dantzic ...	2,350				
Dieppe ...		20,826			
Feejee Islands ...	1,039				

Department of Trade and Customs, Melbourne, 1860. W. H. SPAIN, Comptroller of Accounts. VINCENT FYKE, Commissioner of Trade and Customs.

Victorian imports and exports, by country, 1859. 'Total value in sterling of the imports and exports of the colony, from and to each country, in the year ended 31st December, 1859', *Statistics of the colony of Victoria for the year 1859*, Government Printer, Melbourne, p. 272. PROV, VPRS 943/P0, Unit 11, Blue Book 1859.

Port of Origin:	Value of imports (£)	% of Total Trade
<b>Whole World</b>		
United Kingdom	9,176,528	59%
Other Australasian colonies	2,806,641	18%
Asia/Indian Ocean	2,128,357	14%
North America	814,377	5%
Europe	571,065	3%
Latin America	125,923	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15,622,891</b>	

Figure 1. Imports to the colony of Victoria, 1859, from the whole world. Statistics compiled from the Blue Book for 1859, p. 272.

Looking closer at the Asia/Indian Ocean figures, the six greatest sources were Mauritius, Calcutta, Hong Kong, Fou-tchow-foo (Fuzhou, China), Manilla and Suez (i.e. Egypt). Between them, their total import value was £1,788,354 – 84% of the total from Asia/Indian Ocean. Two-thirds of the ports in this region were British possessions in 1859.

Six main ports of origin:	Value of imports (£)	% of Total Trade
<b>Asia/Indian Ocean</b>		
Mauritius	523,986	
Calcutta	471,228	
Hong Kong	277,983	
Fou-tchow-foo [Fuzhou]	276,403	
Manilla	136,333	
Suez	102,421	
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>1,788,345</b>	<b>84%</b>
Rest of Asia/Indian Ocean	340,003	16%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,128,357</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figure 2. Imports to the colony of Victoria, 1859, from Asia/Indian Ocean, by port of origin. Statistics compiled from the Blue Book for 1859, p. 272.

Port of Origin:	Value of imports (£)	% of Total Trade
<b>Asia/Indian Ocean</b>		
<i>British Possessions:</i>		
Mauritius	523,986	
Calcutta	471,228	
Hong Kong	277,983	
Ceylon	57,219	
Cape of Good Hope [South Africa]	18,383	
Coringa [India]	9,970	
Rangoon	5,641	
Madras	5,080	
Aden	3,195	
Singapore	2,887	
<b>Total British Ports</b>	<b>1,375,572</b>	<b>65%</b>
<i>Non-British Ports:</i>		
Fou-tchow-foo [Fuzhou, China]	276,403	
Manilla	136,333	
Macao	112,727	
Suez	102,421	
Batavia [Jakarta]	52,541	
Sourabaya [Surabaya, Java]	27,073	
Swatow [Shantou, China]	15,000	
Shanghai [Shanghai]	14,051	
Ilo Ilo [Philippines]	8,405	
Canton [Guangzhou]	3,010	
Timor	1,820	
Bally [West Bengal?]	1,695	
Feejee Islands [Fiji]	1,039	
Philippine Islands	200	
Lombock [Lombok]	67	
<b>Total Non-British Ports</b>	<b>752,785</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,128,357</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figure 3. Imports to the colony of Victoria, 1859, from British and non-British ports in Asia/Indian Ocean. Statistics compiled from the Blue Book for 1859, p. 272.

Moreover, of Victoria's imports from the Asia/Indian Ocean arena, a third was from China, a quarter from Mauritius, and a quarter from India and Ceylon; these include the ports Kong Meng had great familiarity with in his early mercantile career.

Asia/Indian Ocean: Grouped by Regions	Value of imports (£)	% of Total Trade
East Asia (China)	699,174	33%
South Asia (India & Ceylon)	545,192	25%
Indian Ocean (Mauritius)	523,986	25%
Southeast Asia (Philippines, Burma, East Indies)	234,967	11%
Middle East (Suez, Aden)	105,616	5%
Southern Africa (Cape of Good Hope)	18,383	1%
Pacific Islands (Fiji)	1,039	0.05%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,128,357</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figure 4. Imports to the colony of Victoria, 1859, from Asia/Indian Ocean, by geographic region. Statistics compiled from the Blue Book for 1859, p. 272.

Date	Name of Ship	Tonnage	Port of Departure	Date of Arrival
1	Beaufort	257	Australia	25
1	Abneral Naper	459	do	25
3	Christopher Ball	648	Boston	15
9	Buckmore	640	Hong Kong	17
11	Lucey L. Ball	421	San Francisco	17
22	Kanata	1217	Ramberg	22
24	Bullfield	397	Ramberg	24
25	Elonore	426	Hong Kong	25
25	Alfred	362	Ramberg	25
25	Erdinand Brunner		Gotterdamf	25
26	Heath	311	Bordeaux	17
26	Port Jackson	441	Calcutta	
27	Ed	523	Batavia	17
27	Henderson	748	Hong Kong	27

Year	Port of Origin	No. of ships
1857	Hong Kong	1
1858	Hong Kong	3
1859	Hong Kong	3
1860	Hong Kong	5
1861	Hong Kong	4
	Lyttleton [Christchurch, NZ]	1
	London	1
1862	Hong Kong	7
	Otago [Dunedin, NZ]	2
	Adelaide	1
1863	Hong Kong	4
1864	Hong Kong	8
1865	Hong Kong	6
1866	Hong Kong	3
	Brisbane	1
1867	Hong Kong	2
	Sydney	1
<b>TOTAL 1857-67</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>TOTAL 1857-67</b>	<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>TOTAL 1857-67</b>	<b>Adelaide</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL 1857-67</b>	<b>Brisbane</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL 1857-67</b>	<b>Sydney</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL 1857-67</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL 1857-67</b>	<b>ALL PORTS</b>	<b>53</b>

Figure 5. Ships inwards to Melbourne, with Kong Meng & Co. as agent, 1857-67. Compiled from PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Units 3, 4, 5, Inwards shipping reports, 1854-67; PROV, VPRS 22/P1, Unit 1, Shipping index 1864-67.

The Victorian shipping registers highlight Kong Meng's trading activity.[10] From 1857 Kong Meng is listed as customs agent for cargoes coming to Melbourne (see Figure 5).[11] He is the only Chinese agent. Between 1857 and 1867 he was agent for 53 ships arriving in Melbourne: 46 from Hong Kong, three from New Zealand, and one each from Adelaide, Sydney, Brisbane and London. He was not the only agent for Hong Kong shipments; in 1859, of fifteen ships from Hong Kong, only three were in his name.[12] But his shipments from Hong Kong increased each year to eight in 1864 (out of nine from Hong Kong that year), dropping again to two in 1867 (out of six ships from Hong Kong).

As to cargo-value per ship, at the time of the audience with O'Shanassy, the Inwards Shipping Report states that the American *Red Rover* arrived in Melbourne from Hong Kong via Sydney, carrying a cargo of sundries, with Kong Meng as agent, and entered for customs on 31 May.[13] This would be the ship mentioned at the meeting. For 1859, there were £277,983 of goods imported from Hong Kong (see Figure 2), and fifteen ships coming from Hong Kong,[14] averaging £18,532 per ship, making £10,000 cargo for one ship a reasonable figure.

**BARQUE ELONORE, from HONG KONG**—This vessel having reported at the Custom-house, and being under demurrage, consignees are requested to **PAID** their **ENTRIES**, and pay freight to the undersigned.  
Arrangements have been made with Messrs. Lloyd and Hunt to lighten the cargo at current rates. Parties objecting to this to notify the same this day.  
**KONG MENG**, agent, Little Bourke-street east, or **FOXTON and HUNT**, Custom-house. 213 mar 2

Arrival of the *Elonore* in Melbourne from Hong Kong on 25 February 1858, Kong Meng as agent. Above: detail from PROV, VPRS 22/P0, Unit 12, Statistical record of passenger ship arrivals and departures, January 1858 to December 1859. Below: Shipping advertisement, *The Argus*, 27 February 1858, p. 1.

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## Asian/Indian Ocean British-Colonial Origins

How did Kong Meng gain such prominence in the import trade within a few years of arriving in Melbourne? The answer appears to lie in his origins in the British port of Penang in Malaya. Yong states that this gave him the advantage of fluency in English, while Cronin suggests that, as well as language fluency, he had the benefit of six years as an Indian Ocean trader before coming to Melbourne.[15] I argue that the Penang and Indian Ocean influences are even more pivotal.

When Kong Meng was born in Penang in 1830/1831,[16] it had been British for forty-five years. His father and progenitors, originally from Canton,[17] had been carrying on, for a century, an extensive business as merchants and contractors[18] and his father, Lowe a Quee,[19] possessed considerable property on Penang island.[20]

Chinese merchants had for centuries been looking for trade, mining and agricultural opportunities in southeast Asia, working with indigenous communities, then with Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch colonies in the region. But the pace of Chinese activity quickened with the expansion of British colonies, east of India, starting with Penang's founding in 1786 by the British East India Company. The British, unlike the Portuguese and Dutch, had a policy of encouraging Chinese immigration, due to their reputation for industry and wealth generation.[21] Within a few years it was realised that Chinese trade would also increase if Penang was declared a free port, meaning no customs duties or trade restrictions.[22] The second step was to encourage Chinese involvement in plantation agriculture, by relinquishing the idea of British planters employing Chinese labour but allowing Chinese capitalists to run their own plantations, bringing labourers from China.[23]

Even before the establishment of British Penang, Malacca, further south on the Malay Peninsula, was the destination of a Chinese-managed labour-import system, bringing coolies from south China each year on junks with the winds of the north-west monsoon in January and February.[24] Under British patronage and support, this grew rapidly, allowing expansion of Chinese mining and plantation in the Malayan and Borneo hinterlands, especially after the advent of steamships in the Straits in 1845.[25] By Kong Meng's time, Chinese merchants in Malaya had well-developed connections with Chinese merchants in south China, familiarity with British port and shipping systems, and well-established processes for recruiting labourers and their supplies from China.

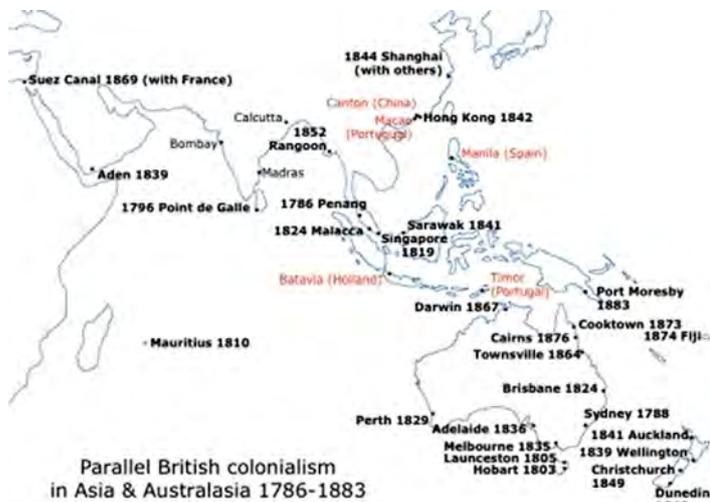
But British colonial agency in the East underwent major changes in this period, providing attractive opportunities for the Chinese to engage deeply in British commercial and cultural spheres. Not only had the focus of the East India Company shifted towards China as well as India, British interest in India also shifted, from maximising trade profits to the establishment of a quasi-government whose main financial rationale was the collection of revenue from people extracting resources from the land.

Roderick Matthews argues that the need to adopt government in India led to new approaches to civil service, both in rationale and mechanism, and in the application of theories of efficiency to government processes.[26] Matthews, and Lakshmi Subramanian, argue also that the tide of liberalism in Britain, one manifestation being the anti-slavery campaign, also saw a 'missionary' role for colonial government, with Britons educating locals in modern ways: especially vis-à-vis science, industry, law, liberalised commerce and Christianity.[27]

Early British Penang (and later British Malacca and Singapore) provided a locus for these modernist developments in colonial practice. Not only was there a public school (Penang Free School, 1817, the first English school in southeast Asia[28] ) but also:

- several newspapers (particularly the *Prince of Wales island gazette*, 1805-27, southeast Asia's first newspaper[29] and the *Penang gazette and Straits chronicle*, 1838-1968[30] ), with an advertising system and increasing freedom of the press;
- a charter of law (1807),[31] and a judicial system (1808)[32] following British legal principles, including trial by jury and probate for wills;[33]
- an early form of city council (the Committee of Assessors, 1800, responsible for rates, road-making and drainage), hospitals, a Post Office, the free operation of private commercial companies based on shareholdings and boards of directors with disputes able to taken to court,[34] the constant through-movement of sailing ships of the latest technology – even the arrival of the earliest steamship in Asia, the *Nemesis*, Britain's first ocean-going iron warship, in 1840.[35]

All were innovations for the Chinese world. Thomas Raffles enhanced these elements of modernity by promoting a vision of an international free-trade emporium – Singapore – at the junction of the Indian Ocean and China Seas, driven by a partnership of Chinese merchants and British independent traders. [36]



Parallel British colonialism in Asia & Australasia 1786-1883.

Kong Meng received an education in English, French and Malay at the Penang Free School.[37] He would have been taught modern subjects of the English schooling system, and acquired characteristics of a British gentleman. He would have read the *Penang gazette and Straits chronicle*, realised how a newspaper could facilitate commercial and shipping intelligence, learned of modern British forms of governance and commerce, and associated socially and commercially with the British in the settlement.

## A French Connection

When he was in his mid-teens, Kong Meng was sent to Mauritius[38] to perfect his English and French,[39] under private tutors.[40] There he established himself in trade as an importing merchant,[41] chiefly transacting Eastern produce,[42] connected to the firm of A. Goon(e) Frères.[43] His ventures were between Mauritius, Calcutta and Singapore[44] during the years 1847 to 1853;[45] and he generally travelled as supercargo,[46] with a particularly intensive trade between India and Mauritius.[47]

Mauritius was then a major source of the world's sugar.[48] In 1810, the British had captured the island from the French. After 1833, when slavery was banned in the British Empire, the plantation owners, mostly French, sought new (paid, indentured) labour from various locations before settling on India as a source.[49] Lowe a Quee, based in Penang where Chinese labour was a principal commodity, would see in Mauritius a potential for expanding that trade.[50] Allied with this, it was the drinking of sweet tea which really drove the increasing British appetite for China's tea,[51] so perhaps Lowe a

Quee saw a Francophone son as a good asset for moving into the sugar trade.[52] Further, though France lost Mauritius, and had been defeated as a major player in India by 1805,[53] even so, throughout the high noon of the British Raj, the French maintained trading ports on the Indian coast.[54] Again, a Francophone Chinese could maximise his trade in the region.

## British Ascendancy

Though Chinese, Lowe a Quee and his son supported the British 1842 victory over China in the First Anglo-Chinese (Opium) War: Kong Meng's 'brother was killed in the Chinese war, in the service of the East India Company'.[55] They would also have been impressed by the establishment, subsequent to victory, of Hong Kong, the opening of the first five Chinese treaty ports to foreign trade,[56] the effective replacement of Chinese junks by European square-riggers[57] and steamers[58] in Asian waters, and the massive growth in British, European, Chinese and American trade between all ports on Asia's Indian and Pacific coasts.

Kong Meng and his father would also have noted a parallel expansion of British ports and colonies throughout Asia and Australasia subsequent to Penang's founding (see Figure 6). This created a web of ports tied by trade, mail, exchange of newspapers, personal and commercial networks, political developments and mutual interest, with Australia a part of this Asian colonial enterprise. During Kong Meng's early years in Melbourne, the *Argus* regularly featured news from Asia and Indian Ocean ports; more if a war was in progress (see Figure 7).

In Mauritius, Kong Meng heard of the Australian gold rush, and came to Melbourne,[59] in 1853, with cargo from Mauritius;[60] the first Chinese merchant in the colony.[61] He tried mining for three unprofitable months, sailing soon afterwards for India and resolving never to return to Australia.[62] In Calcutta, his friends (presumably British, Indian and Chinese traders) induced him to change his determination. He returned to Victoria,[63] with fresh merchandise from India,[64] and in 1854 established an importing firm entitled Kong Meng and Co.[65]

Whether in Mauritius, Calcutta, Penang, Hong Kong, Singapore or Melbourne, Kong Meng would have seen himself as part of overlapping spheres of British and Chinese interests. His upbringing as a merchant's son in the port of Penang, and his education and acquisition of contacts across British Asia, equipped him admirably to trade between ports and across cultures.

Asia/Indian Ocean/Pacific	Australia and New Zealand
Penang 1786	Sydney 1788
Galle, Ceylon 1796	Hobart 1803 Launceston 1805
Mauritius 1810	
Singapore 1819	
Malacca 1824	Brisbane 1824 Perth 1829
	Melbourne 1835 Adelaide 1836 Wellington 1839
Aden 1839	Auckland 1841
Sarawak 1841	
Hong Kong 1842	Dunedin 1848
Shanghai 1844-1854	Christchurch 1849-1856
Rangoon 1852	Townsville 1864 Palmerston [Darwin] 1867
Suez Canal 1869	Cooktown 1873
Fiji 1874	Cairns 1876
Port Moresby 1883	

Figure 6. Founding or acquisition of British colonial ports 1786-1883.

An Indian Ocean country or port: 1 Jan-30 June 1857	'China' 1 Jan-30 June 1857 <i>Note more articles due to Second Opium War in progress</i>	'India' 1 Jan-30 June 1859 <i>Note more articles due to Indian Mutiny in progress</i>
12 January, p. 5 Singapore 30 January, p. 6 Mauritius	21 January, p. 4	20 January, p. 5 22 January, p. 5 25 January, p. 5
25 February, p. 6 India 25 February, p. 6 Singapore 26 February, p. 2 Calcutta 26 February, p. 2 Ceylon	6 February, p. 4 10 February, p. 5 10 February, p. 4	8 February, p. 6 9 February, Supp. p. 1
4 March, p. 6 Cape of Good Hope 4 March, p. 6 Mauritius 9 March, p. 5 Bombay 18 March, p. 5 Ceylon 21 March, p. 5 Singapore 30 March, p. 6 Mauritius 31 March, p. 6 Mauritius	3 March, p. 4 17 March, p. 5 19 March, p. 5	1 March, p. 5 21 March, p. 3 22 March, p. 6
1 April, p. 4 Calcutta 8 April, p. 5 Calcutta 8 April, p. 5 Singapore 8 April, p. 5 Mauritius	3 April, p. 7 7 April, p. 4 27 April, p. 5	
25 May, p. 6 Mauritius 25 May, p. 6 The Cape 26 May, p. 5 Mauritius 10 June, p. 6 Mauritius	15 May, p. 6 16 May, p. 6 23 May, p. 6 11 June, p. 7 12 June, p. 2 23 June, p. 6	2 May, p. 2 2 May, p. 5 12 May, p. 7 9 June, p. 7 14 June, p. 5

Figure 7. Reports from Asia/Indian Ocean in the *Argus*, 1857 and 1859: columns or articles with the names of ports or countries in the heading. Compiled from an online search of Trove, the National Library of Australia's database of Australian newspapers.

He knew how to import men and goods from China, and to source goods across the Indian Ocean. As well as fluency in English, Cantonese, French and Malay, he knew the European-Asian shipping system, the captains, the routes, the times and the annual winds. He had commercial contacts with Chinese, French and British merchants across Asia. He knew how to use the shipping intelligence and advertising columns of English-language newspapers to further his business.

Moreover, his involvement with Calcutta, after 1847, was at a time when British and Indian traders there were actively promoting joint stock companies, providing initial capital and supporting these ventures before opening shares to the public, retaining control by purchasing as many shares as possible and integrating their industries vertically as well as horizontally.[66] Asiya Siddiqi has demonstrated that Parsi merchants in India, such as Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy (1783-1859), were involved in inter-country trade, utilising the British trading system. Jeejeebhoy's income derived from a variety of sources, 'from profits of trade on his own account, the income from hiring freight on his ships, interest on loans to shippers, dividends on shares in marine insurance companies and commission on the sale of his bills of exchange:[67] These approaches are very similar to the business models followed by Kong Meng in Melbourne; possibly the two knew each other. [68]

### The Nature Of The Imports

Well placed to be involved in importing from many ports in Asia, how widespread were the sources of Kong Meng's goods? Although one account stated that he was an importer of Chinese produce,[69] another account says he had establishments in Mauritius, London and Hong Kong, [70] and that he owned a fleet of half a dozen vessels, plying regularly between Australia, India and China.[71]

Figure 8 itemises the principal categories of goods imported into Victoria in 1859 from Asia/Indian Ocean. Sugar, tea and rice predominate – over two-thirds of all imports from the region. Mauritius supplied the great majority of sugar, with the rest from India, the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. Virtually all tea was from China, and the vast majority of rice from India. Beyond these three commodities, China and India were supplying a wide range of other goods; less came from other regions.

**IMPORTS—continued.**

ARTICLES	Quantity	Imported			Value in Pounds	Value in Shillings	Value in Pence
		In British Ports.	In Foreign Ports.	Sea.			
Opium—undecanted	116 cwt. 8 qrs. 12 lbs.	268 cwt. 8 qrs. 12 lbs.	1,472 cwt. 0 qrs. 0 lbs.	6,000	120,000	720,000	
Tea—undecanted	200	200	200	200	200	200	
Tea—decanted	200	200	200	200	200	200	
Tea—other	200	200	200	200	200	200	
Tea—total	600	600	600	600	600	600	
Spices	...	...	...	...	...	...	
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,600 cwt. 8 qrs. 12 lbs.</b>	<b>41,600 cwt. 8 qrs. 12 lbs.</b>	<b>13,447 cwt. 0 qrs. 0 lbs.</b>	<b>41,600</b>	<b>832,000</b>	<b>5,040,000</b>	

'Sugar-Undescribed' : imports to Victoria, 1859. Sample page from 'Imports: general imports into the colony of Victoria, during the year ended 31st December, 1859', Blue Book for 1859, p. 198.

	East Asia (China) (£)	South Asia (India & Ceylon) (£)	Indian Ocean (Mauritius) (£)	Southeast Asia (Philippines, Burma, East Indies) (£)	Middle East (Suez, Aden) (£)	Southern Africa (Cape of Good Hope) (£)	Pacific (Faejee Is) (£)	Total for Asia/Indian Ocean (£)
<b>Principal Imports</b>								
Sugar	28,344	93,381	511,545	146,822	8	120		780,212
Tea	416,373		14	27,936	8			444,331
Grain - Rice	13,346	261,163	755	11,185				286,450
<b>Total</b>	<b>458,063</b>	<b>354,544</b>	<b>512,314</b>	<b>185,944</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,510,993</b>
<b>Other Main Imports</b>								
<b>(1) Stimulants &amp; Medicines</b>								
Coffee	10,451	42,037	380	6,183	1,716			50,316
Drugs (i.e. medicines)	23,592	23,150			147			14,445
Opium	9,895				4,710			51,452
Spirits - Undescribed						5		9,900
Tobacco	8,893	4,068		257	6	700		13,924
Tobacco - Cigars	200	136	2	17,414				17,752
Wine	19,084	5	2,930	1	8	561		22,589
Other	587	385	12	155	101			1,240
<b>Total</b>	<b>72,702</b>	<b>75,828</b>	<b>3,324</b>	<b>24,010</b>	<b>6,688</b>	<b>1,266</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>181,818</b>
<b>(2) Food</b>								
Grain - Gram		39,202						39,202
Grain - Oats		29,895			1	46		29,942
Grain - Beans & Peas	8,086	400						8,486
Fruit - Dried	1,805	42	1,824			11,175		14,846
Fruit - Raisins		60	3,990			5,250		9,300
Oils - Undescribed	22,739	130						22,869
Provisions - Preserved	47,516	4						47,520
Spices	3,722	4,089		2,412				10,223
Other	12,410	13,279	1,648	1,360	8	286	975	29,966
<b>Total</b>	<b>96,278</b>	<b>87,101</b>	<b>7,462</b>	<b>3,772</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16,757</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>212,354</b>
<b>(3) Ordinary Consumer Goods</b>								
Apparel & Shops	12,298	827		20	1,634	10		14,798
Other	10,137	1,504	100	60	925			12,726
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,435</b>	<b>2,331</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>2,559</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27,515</b>
<b>(4) Production Goods</b>								
Bags & Sacks	5	10,374	50	668				11,097
Cordage	432	4,315		19,843				24,590
Oilmen's Stores	27,365	2,450						29,815
Other	6,643	9,121	400	425	4,417	120		20,126
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,445</b>	<b>25,260</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>20,936</b>	<b>4,417</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>85,628</b>
<b>(5) Specialties</b>								
Books	305	580			13,949			14,814
Drapery	40	225			12,510			12,775
Jewellery	100				23,580			23,680
Silks	7,306	145			16,165			23,616
Watches & Clocks		180			9,411			9,591
Other	7,500	1,218	336	225	16,320	110	64	25,773
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,251</b>	<b>2,328</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>16,320</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>110,249</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>699,174</b>	<b>545,192</b>	<b>523,986</b>	<b>234,967</b>	<b>105,616</b>	<b>18,383</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>2,128,357</b>

Figure 8. Main imports to Victoria from Asia/Indian Ocean in 1859 (over £8,000 per annum). Compiled and classified by the author from 'Imports: general imports into the colony of Victoria, during the year ended 31st December, 1859', Blue Book for 1859, pp. 147-211.

Breaking down Chinese products by port (see Figure 9), it is clear that Fuzhou and Macao were providing mostly tea; Hong Kong provided the greatest diversity of cargo. Imports from Swatow [Shantou], Shanghai and Canton [Guangzhou] were insignificant by comparison. The profile of goods from Hong Kong matches well the needs of a Chinese mining population: preserved foods, oils, opium, wine, spirits, medicines and clothing.

As most Chinese miners in Victoria were from Guangdong province, near Hong Kong, it would make sense that the bulk of their supplies would come via this British colonial port, though it is clear from the shipping registers that other European-named agents were also bringing Chinese miners' supplies from Hong Kong.[72]

A major anomaly is that most of the rice was coming from Calcutta. Although no ship from Calcutta had Kong Meng as agent, the volume of rice, compared with the number of Chinese in Victoria, indicates it was primarily for Chinese consumption. Given Kong Meng's Calcutta connections, it is possible he could source rice cheaper there than from China, and had another agent handle the importing. This is also likely to have been the case with other goods he was importing from places besides Hong Kong.

While one 1863 source states that Kong Meng's chief imports were tea and opium, and 'anything that will pay',[73] it is likely his role in tea was small at the time. British traders were the ones supplying most of the British tea-drinkers in Melbourne (the majority of the settlers in the colony), although Kong Meng imported 1200 packages of tea on the *Warrior* in 1864.[74]

John Fitzgerald follows Wang Sing-wu's reading of J Dundas Crawford in stating that Australia's Chinese merchants funded Chinese coming to Australia using the credit-ticket loan arrangement.[75] One can view this as the labourers being a commodity 'bought' by merchants to work on mining projects, although Adam McKeown has highlighted the difficulties of applying this approach to Chinese 'free migration'.[76] Closer reading of Crawford suggests more complex economic arrangements:

In mining matters the merchant finds it more lucrative, rather than be himself the labour-master, to act as banker for mining-captains, as registrar of mining guilds, and charterer of immigrant ships, or camp purveyor through his agencies, leaving the arrangement of work to head-men of co-operative gangs and experienced mining captains, entrusted with bonded labourers and slaves, to work their claims.[77]

Many of the ships Kong Meng brought from Hong Kong to Melbourne had Chinese passengers, but in small numbers: between 1857 and 1867, only 1985 Chinese are recorded on his ships, and most were from 1862 onwards, when Victoria's anti-Chinese taxation began to be relaxed.[78] Only one of the ships for which he was agent, the *City of Carlisle*, is recorded as offloading Chinese passengers at Robe in South Australia in 1857, to avoid the poll tax, before coming to Melbourne to deliver its cargo. This out of 32 ships from whom 14,616 Chinese disembarked at Robe across 1857.[79] It is possible that Kong Meng was the labour importer on these ships, but the data known so far does not confirm this.

	Hong Kong (£)	Macao (£)	Fou-tchow-foo [Fuzhou] (£)	Shanghai [Shanghai] (£)	Swatow [Shantou] (£)	Canton [Guangzhou] (£)	TOTAL CHINA (£)
<b>Principal Imports from Asia/Indian Ocean</b>							
Sugar	13,310	34			15,000	3,010	28,344
Tea	23,787	99,373	276,203	14,000			416,373
Grain - Rice	9,166	4,000	180				13,346
	<b>46,263</b>	<b>103,407</b>	<b>276,383</b>	<b>14,000</b>	<b>15,000</b>	<b>3,010</b>	<b>458,063</b>
<b>Stimulants and Medicines</b>							
Drugs	10,451						10,451
Opium	20,692	2,900					23,592
Pipes - Tobacco	487						487
Spirits - Cordials	100						100
Spirits - Undescribed	9,895						9,895
Tobacco	8,893						8,893
Tobacco - Cigars	200						200
Wine	19,084						19,084
	<b>69,502</b>	<b>2,900</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>72,702</b>
<b>Food</b>							
Arrowroot	565						565
Biscuit	108						108
Confectionary	725	500	2				1,227
Eggs	100						100
Fish	38						38
Fish - Preserved	3,580						3,580
Fish - Salted	454						454
Flour	1,303						1,303
Fruit - Bottled	20						20
Fruit - Dried	1,805						1,805
Fruit - Green	22						22
Grain - Beans & Peas	8,086						8,086
Honey	3						3
Nuts	1,446						1,446
Nuts - Almonds	76						76
Oils - Cocoa Nut	250						250
Oils - Olive	36						36
Oils - Undescribed	17,070	5,669					22,739
Onions	2						2
Preserves	3,010	50					3,060
Provisions-preserved	47,516						47,516
Provisions, Salted - Pork	40						40
Spices	3,632	90					3,722
Vinegar	80						80
	<b>89,967</b>	<b>6,309</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>96,278</b>
<b>Ordinary Consumer Goods</b>							
Apparel and Slips	12,298						12,298
Boots and Shoes	2,942						2,942
Brassware	12						12
Brushware	120						120
Candiles	180						180
Chinaware	195						195
Copperware	34						34
Cottons	63						63
Cottonwick	8						8
Cutlery	212						212
Earthenware	360	3					363
Hats & Caps	316						316
Mats and Rugs	5,233						5,233
Woodenware	229						229
Woolens	220						220
	<b>22,432</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22,435</b>
<b>Production Goods</b>							
Alkali (Soda)	1						1
Bags & Sacks		5					5
Cordage	432						432
Hardware & Ironmongery	246						246
Iron - Pig	90						90
Oilmen's Stores	27,365						27,365
Paints, etc	42						42
Plants, etc				20			20
Quicksilver	112						112
Seeds	1,943						1,943
Stationery	4,121	2					4,123
Tinware	43						43
Tools & Utensils	10						10
Upholstery	13						13
	<b>34,418</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>34,445</b>
<b>Specialties</b>							
Arms: Fireworks	1,469	60					1,529
Books	305						305
Curiosities	336						336
Drapery	40						40
Fancy Goods	3,257	20					3,277
Furniture	165						165
Haberdashery	35		3				38
Instruments - Musical	20						20
Jewellery	100						100
Millinery	40						40
Miscellaneous Articles	222	1		1			224
Paintings & Engravings	20						20
Perfumery	1,703						1,703
Silks	7,256	20		30			7,306
Specie - Copper	12						12
Toys	121		15				136
	<b>15,101</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15,251</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>277,983</b>	<b>112,727</b>	<b>276,403</b>	<b>14,051</b>	<b>15,000</b>	<b>3,010</b>	<b>699,174</b>

Figure 9. All imports from China to Victoria in 1859. Compiled and classified by the author from 'Imports: general imports into the colony of Victoria', Blue Book for 1859, pp. 147-211.

The year 1859 saw the peak number of Chinese miners in Victoria. The merchants' delegation to O'Shanassy estimated that there were 45,000 in May 1859,[80] but restrictive immigration laws meant few came to Victoria via the port of Melbourne after 1855, and by 1859 new rushes in New South Wales, then New Zealand in 1862, led to a shift of Chinese miners north and east in the 1860s. Yet in 1866-67 there were still over 19,000 in Victoria.[81]

Based on the increase and then decline in the number of Hong Kong ships with him as agent, it would appear that Kong Meng's business grew to become the largest supplier of Chinese miners' goods to Victoria by the mid-1860s, then dropped off after that as he changed his supply arrangements to follow the miners to other colonies.[82]

The article on Kong Meng in the *Australian news for home readers* in 1866 reported that 'Ever since his settlement in Melbourne he has been carrying on an extensive business ... with his own countrymen and different Europeans'.[83] Calcutta as his first choice to source goods in 1854 suggests an interest in supplying European tastes as well as Chinese, and fireworks, fancy goods, perfumery and silks from Hong Kong itemised in the 1859 import statistics (see Figure 9). He was advertising, in 1856, in the *Argus*, offering 'Patna Rice, 60 tons of the best samples';[84] 'Opium - Three Chests Benares, also 300 Tins of Prepared';[85] and other goods ('On sale, just landed, ex Beatrice and Aurora, White China sugar; brown ditto; Chinese oil, in jars; Ditto, in tins; Ditto matting; Preserved ginger').[86] Being an English-language newspaper, it is unlikely this was for Chinese readers. The volumes offered suggest wholesale, not retail. Most likely he was moving goods promptly through his reasonably large premises at 94 Little Bourke-street East to commercial customers.[87]



'Chinese Quarter, Little Bourke Street, Melbourne'. Wood engraving in *The Australian news for home readers*, 21 October 1863. Digitised image courtesy of State Library of Victoria, Picture Collection - Accession No: IAN21/10/63/5, Image No: mp000693.

## Other Chinese Merchants

It is difficult to determine whether other Melbourne Chinese merchants were bringing in goods directly. The merchants' delegation to O'Shanassy said there were about 200 Chinese merchants and their staff in Melbourne,[88] but the *Sands & Kenny* and *Tanner's* directories for 1859 between them list only thirteen Chinese merchants in Little Bourke Street, the Chinese quarter.[89] Assuming ten staff per firm, and a few firms in other streets, a 200-total staff corps seems reasonable.

Some Melbourne Chinese merchants may have used Kong Meng as agent while maintaining direct relations with Hong Kong businesses. Others may have used European-Melbournian shipping agents. Mark Last King claimed at the O'Shanassy meeting that he 'had acted as agent for Chinese merchants for a long period',[90] although his name as agent is not in the shipping registers. R Towns & Co., of Robert Towns of Sydney, merchant and shipper, was also commonly agent for ships from Hong Kong into Melbourne:[91] research into Towns may shed more light on the Hong Kong import story.

One other Chinese merchant may have been a significant manager of the trade with China – Louis Ah Mouy. His name is not in the shipping registers, but, like Kong Meng, he spoke English, via a Singapore sojourn before arriving in Victoria in 1851. He established a tea merchant's business in Swanston Street, and sent large quantities of goods to Ballarat.[92] In September 1855, he and Kong Meng were jointly agents for passengers travelling to China via the *Tremelga*. [93] Like Kong Meng, Ah Mouy was frequently in the newspapers. His career could well merit further research.

## The International Gold Trade

Another approach to the scale of Kong Meng's trade is to consider the volume of gold he shipped out to pay for imported goods.

Mark Last King told O'Shanassy that 'shipments of gold to China were not to be regarded as profits, won from the diggings, leaving Victoria and the British imperial fold, 'but that the greater portion of the money so transmitted was in payment for goods'. [94] This was of no little concern to some British in Victoria, who felt the gold found here should stay in European hands, rather than going to China to encourage more Chinese migrants. [95]

## MONETARY AND COMMERCIAL.

Melbourne, Saturday.

Export entries were passed at the Customs to-day for 23,414 ounces 17 dwt of gold, of which quantity 5262 ounces 4 dwt were for shipment, per Bombay, for Point de Galle; and 23,152 ounces 13 dwt per Yorkshire, for London.

The shippers of gold, per Bombay, are as follow:—

	oz.	dwt.
Oriental Bank Corporation .....	19743	2
London Chartered Bank .....	9595	16
Union Bank .....	7363	6
M'ulloch, Sellar, and Co. ....	3383	4
Bank of Victoria .....	2468	19
I. Stvenson and Son .....	1217	3
Hysan and Co. ....	809	13
Bank of Australasia .....	542	16
→ Kong Meng and Co. ....	121	0
S. Benjamin ..	105	0
Small shipments .....	3	3
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>45,353</b>	<b>2</b>

The following are the shippers of specie per Bombay, for Point de Galle:—

	Sovs.
→ Kong Meng and Co. ....	7,188
Bank of N. S. Wales .....	5,000
Oriental Bank Corporation ....	5,000
London Chartered Bank .....	5,000
Peninsular and Oriental Co. ....	2,620
Jas. Henry .....	575
Bank of Australasia .....	23
<b>Total, .....</b>	<b>25,406</b>

Kong Meng's shipment of gold to Pointe de Galle, Ceylon, October 1862. *The Herald*, 27 October 1862, p. 4.

Kong Meng was a major gold exporter to Asia. On 27 October 1862, he shipped 7188 sovereigns and 121 ounces of gold to Pointe de Galle (Ceylon) via the *Bombay*. [96] One month later, on 27 November 1862, he sent 9980 sovereigns by the *Madras*, again for Pointe de Galle. [97] He also shipped 8000 sovereigns on the *Geelong*, to Pointe de Galle, on 22 May 1869, as well as 2050 sovereigns, on his own ship the *Joshua Bates*, to Hong Kong two weeks later on 4 June. [98]

It is unclear why he was sending gold to Ceylon if most of his imports were from Hong Kong – perhaps the gold was transhipped from Ceylon to Hong Kong, or perhaps was payment for Indian rice. He also brought two shipments of gold to Melbourne from Otago, New Zealand, one arriving 25 February 1862, on the *Oithona*, the other arriving 29 May 1862, on the *Joshua Bates*;<sup>[99]</sup> perhaps there is a relationship between the Otago gold and that going to Ceylon.

Gold rush historiography pays little attention to the economic uses of Australasian-won gold. The general view is that most went to England, balancing both the import of goods from there, and capital investment from the London stockmarket.<sup>[100]</sup>

Britain remained on the gold standard throughout the nineteenth century. As its national and imperial economy grew exponentially following industrialisation, the commensurate growth in currency transactions required an increase in both the minting of gold coinage and also the quantity of bullion stored in banks to support the money supply.<sup>[101]</sup> Apart from this, though, and a minor role in jewellery, goldleaf and plate, British and European cultural use for gold was nothing compared to the importance of gold for adornment, religious devotion and family wealth accrual in India.<sup>[102]</sup> Yet a feature of Britain's incorporation of India's economy into global trade was that India moved from being an exporter of processed goods (e.g. textiles), and importer of bullion, to being an exporter of raw materials and importer of British manufactures<sup>[103]</sup> – increasing the demand for gold from other sources.

A similar proposition could be made about capital extraction by Britain from China, once it began extorting massive indemnities from China's government each time it won a war there, from 1839 onwards.<sup>[104]</sup> Along with Australia and New Zealand, Chinese-won gold was also being shipped back from North America and Malaya; it could be argued that the dispersal of Chinese miners around the Pacific rim, and the supply trade that followed them, was, perhaps inadvertently, a way of bringing bullion back into the Chinese economy.

So, can Kong Meng's shipments of gold from Victoria and Otago be seen not just as payment for goods from China and India, but as a needed commodity in its own right, a prop for the depleted wealth management and currency systems of China and India? This merits further research.

## The Wider Social Context of Trade

As the Chinese population declined in Victoria over the 1860s, Kong Meng shifted to being a player in the broader economy, such as increasingly importing tea for the colony's European market.<sup>[105]</sup> Nor did he just avail himself of the commercial advantages of understanding the British trading system; he was actively involved in, and courted by, top levels of Victoria's British colonial society. He became an avid investor in many companies (see Figure 10), along the joint stock lines he first experienced in Calcutta. His name on prospectuses sits alongside prominent businessmen and politicians of the day, such as Thomas Bent and David Mitchell.<sup>[106]</sup> His role from 1866 as a founding shareholder and board member of the Commercial Bank of Australia has often been mentioned.<sup>[107]</sup> Less known is that his involvement, and Louis Ah Mouy's, was because the directors desired Chinese depositors – hence Chinese text on the bank's notes.<sup>[108]</sup>



£1 note, Commercial Bank of Australia, date unknown. Kong Meng was a founding director. Photograph held by Chinese Museum, Melbourne (Museum of Chinese Australian History).



Sources: Prospectuses and articles in various newspapers (details note 145)

Figure 10. Victorian companies of which Lowe Kong Meng was a founding director, 1864-88. Compiled by the author from prospectuses and articles in various newspapers (see note 106).

A member of the Royal Society of Victoria – the premier organisation for scientific research, exploration and inquiry[109] – Kong Meng was also invited by Redmond Barry to curate Chinese works for the Art Exhibition of 1869.[110]

Far from presuming a Chinese-quarter domicile, Kong Meng lived in European suburbs – South Melbourne,[111] East Melbourne,[112] then Malvern[113] – in grand homes. He also chose an English-Australian bride, Annie Prussia. It is clear from their houses, dress and grooming that Kong Meng, Annie and their children lived as affluent upper bourgeoisie. Nor did their mixed-race union preclude attending British Victorian social events, such as 1867's fancy dress ball honouring the Duke of Edinburgh's royal tour – Kong Meng in mandarin's robes, Annie as a Grecian lady.[114]



Arthur Kong Meng, c. 1863. Thomas Bradley Harris photo album, on website The Eastern window, p. 27 (accessed 12 March 2012).

Agnes Kong Meng, c. 1863. Thomas Bradley Harris photo album, on website The Eastern window, p. 27 (accessed 12 March 2012).



Annie Kong Meng (née Prussia), 1863, aged 24. Thomas Bradley Harris photo album, on website The Eastern window, p. 28 (accessed 12 March 2012).

Kong Meng's association with Europeans was not confined to Melbourne. An album of 1860s' photos originating from Yankee entrepreneur Thomas Bradley Harris locates Kong Meng, his brothers, cousins and Annie in a network of merchants, ships' captains, professionals and colonial officials from American, British, European and Chinese backgrounds, connecting Shanghai, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, Melbourne and New York.[115]

Kong Meng always proclaimed he was British by right of birth in a British colony,[116] and he was not the only Chinese of his day with this view. Victor Purcell tells of Straits-born Chinese in Malaya who saw themselves as 'white men, meaning that they were British subjects and proud of it, although adhering punctiliously to the outward signs of a Chinaman'.[117] Kong Meng mirrored this, living 'in the style of an English gentleman',[118] yet firmly adhering 'to the costume of his countrymen'. [119] This contrasts with the more famous Sydney Chinese merchant of the next generation, Quong Tart, whose European clothing, Scottish-accented English, cricket playing and public-speaking facility more greatly endeared him to British Australians.[120]

Kong Meng's success in Victoria was in spite of his Chinese cultural traits and the strong anti-Chinese discrimination and immigration restrictions that existed during his early career in the colony. Geoffrey Oddie argued in 1961 that the Chinese merchant elite were acceptable to Victorian colonial society; only the Chinese labouring classes were the focus of racial concerns.[121]

More recently, Amanda Rasmussen has countered that social intermingling at local levels between Europeans and Chinese, including miners and labourers, led to local acceptance of Chinese as members of European-Australian communities.[122] Yet the Commercial Bank's desire for Chinese depositors suggests that, at least in some business quarters, cultural diversity as a principle was acceptable in Victoria. Letters to newspapers supporting Chinese immigration,[123] and the repeal of Victoria's anti-Chinese taxes from 1862[124] also suggest that opinions regarding Victoria's appropriate ethnic mix were more diverse than current historiography usually depicts. Again, another promising field for enquiry.

Cathie May, Henry Reynolds, Regina Ganter, Julia Martinez and Gary Lee have demonstrated that the ethnic composition, and interaction, of colonial tropical Australia was radically different from the predominantly British settlement of southern Australia.[125] Reynolds, Ganter, Martinez and Lee also argue that there were strong links between the peoples of tropical Australian outposts and countries to the north, greater than the links with southern Australia.

Lowe Kong Meng's career demonstrated that he believed an ethnically complex society, tied intimately to Asia, was valid for southern Australia too. His wealth was initially predicated on supplying a large Chinese mining population, using western and Chinese trading methods, efficiently sourcing goods from across Asia. In today's terms, he was sending Australian mineral wealth to Asia in exchange for Asian products. As gold mining's focus shifted elsewhere – to New South Wales, New Zealand and Queensland – his Chinese supply trade followed. Yet he also diversified into supplying Europeans in Victoria with tea and other Chinese goods, and worked closely with European entrepreneurs to develop Victoria's broader economy. His trading endeavours, his attempts to economically integrate Victoria with Asia, and his vision for Australian society are now becoming increasingly prescient of a convergence of the economies and cultures of Europe and Asia in the twenty-first century.

## Endnotes

[1] 'Chinese residence tax', *The Argus*, 31 May 1859, p. 7. For overviews of the Chinese miners residence tax strike, see V Lovejoy, 'Red ribbon revisited: the Chinese rebellion of 1859', paper presented at Chinese Studies Association of Australia conference, Golden Dragon Museum, Bendigo, 30 June to 3 July 2005; A Kyi, "'The most determined, sustained diggers' resistance campaign": Chinese protests against the Victorian Government's anti-Chinese legislation, 1855-1862', *Provenance, Issue 8, 2009*, pp. 35-62.

[2] 'Chinese residence tax'.

[3] *ibid.*

[4] Measuring worth (comparing 1859 to 2010 in UK pounds) (accessed 29 April 2012).

[5] 'Our oriental traders', *The Argus*, 14 April 1863, p. 5.

[6] G Oddie, 'The lower class Chinese and the merchant elite in Victoria, 1870-1890', *Historical studies*, vol. 10, no. 37, November 1961, pp. 65-70. See also Oddie's MA thesis, 'The Chinese in Victoria 1870-1890', University of Melbourne, 1959; Ching Fatt Yong, 'Lowe Kong Meng (1831-1888)', in D Pike (ed.), *Australian dictionary of biography*, vol. 5, 1851-1890 K-Q, Melbourne University Press, 1974, pp. 106-07 (available online); K Cronin, *Colonial casualties: Chinese in early Victoria*, Melbourne University Press, 1982, p. 28; T McCormack, 'Lowe Kong Meng 1831-1888: champion of racial tolerance', in S Baldwin (ed.), *Unsung heroes and heroines of Australia*, Greenhouse Publications, Elwood, Victoria, 1988, pp. 57-8; P Macgregor, "'Before we came to this country, we heard that English laws were good and kind to everybody": Chinese immigrants' views of colonial Australia', in A Broinowski (ed.), *Double vision: Asian accounts of Australia*, Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 2004, pp. 41, 47-54; J Fitzgerald, *Big white lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2007, pp. 66, 68, 111-12, 114-15; A Bowen, 'The merchants: Chinese social organisation in colonial Australia', *Australian historical studies*, vol. 42, issue 1, March 2011. Most of this material is based on brief biographical accounts published in his day (see note 7 below), without critical evaluation and with no additional primary research.

[7] 'Our oriental traders'; 'The Chinese population; Kong Meng', *The weekly herald*, 14 August 1863 (I am indebted to Pauline Rule for bringing this article to my attention); 'Mr. Lowe Kong Meng', *The Australian news for home readers*, 20 September 1866, p. 4; JD Crawford, 'Notes by Mr. Crawford on Chinese immigration in the Australian colonies', September 1877, *Great Britain Foreign Office Confidential Prints*, F.O. 3742 (available as Foreign Office Confidential Print 3742, National Library of Australia; also downloadable from the Chinese Heritage of Australian Federation website, Digitised history documents database, item 1576); 'The late Mr. Kong Meng', *The Argus*, 24 October 1888; HM Humphreys (comp.), *Men of the time in Australia: Victorian series*, Melbourne, 1878, 1882, p. 263 of 1878 edition [the same text is repeated in 'Lowe Kong Meng', in TWH Leavitt (ed.), *Australian representative men*, Wells and Leavitt, Melbourne, 1887; and a facsimile of these pages was reprinted in 'Lowe Kong Meng', in TWH Leavitt (ed.), *The Jubilee history of Victoria and Melbourne*, Duffus Bros, Melbourne, vol. 1, 1888, p. 98].

[8] D Day, *Smugglers and sailors: the customs history of Australia 1788-1901*, AGPS Press, Canberra, 1992 is a broad brush. J Bach, *A maritime history of Australia*, Thomas Nelson, Sydney, 1976, and more generally G Blainey, *The tyranny of distance*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1966 reflect on trading patterns by sea to and from Australia, and between the separate colonies, but the details of a period and place as specific as mid-nineteenth-century Victoria are too small a focus for their works. M Cannon and I Macfarlane, *Historical records of Victoria*, vol. 4, *Communications customs and trade 1835-39*, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1985 – see in particular ‘Part I, Shipping and customs’, pp. 3-252 – has many tantalising details, but pre-dates the gold rush era, and focuses on how the customs and port facilities were developing in the incipient harbour town at Port Phillip. O Ruhen, *Port of Melbourne 1835-1976*, Cassell Australia, Sydney, 1976 and J Buckrich, *The long and perilous journey: a history of the Port of Melbourne*, Melbourne Books, 2002 both focus more on the infrastructure and institutional development and less on the traders, and are also too broad in time-scale to provide much detail useful to understanding Kong Meng’s early decades in Melbourne. The best work to date is J Broadbent, S Rickard and M Steven, *India, China, Australia: trade and society 1788-1850*, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney, 2003, which squarely situates Australia in an Asian trade context, and focuses on the trading system and the products imported. However its account finishes before the gold rush, deals with New South Wales rather than Victoria, and is almost exclusively about British-Australian individuals and companies.

[9] The Victorian ‘Blue Books’ of 1851 onwards (*Statistics of the colony of Victoria, compiled from official records in the Registrar-General’s Office*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1851-73) include statistics for imports to the colony for each year, itemising the description, quantity and value of goods coming into the colony. The level of detail varies from year to year. From 1851 to 1858, imports are listed by broad groups of ports: ‘Great Britain’, ‘British colonies in the West Indies’, ‘British colonies in North America’, ‘British colonies elsewhere’, ‘United State of America’, ‘Foreign states’. This categorisation is too broad to be of much use in working out which ports, countries or geographical regions the imports were coming from. For instance, ‘British colonies elsewhere’ included all the Australian colonies, New Zealand, India, Hong Kong, Cape of Good Hope, etc. From 1859 onwards, though, the import data becomes much more useful, as all the individual countries or ports that goods came from were specifically itemised, and thus products can be grouped by their origin in a more detailed geographic arrangement. A set of these volumes (hereafter cited as ‘Blue Books’) is held at PROV: VA 856 Colonial Secretary’s Office, VPRS 943/P0 Blue Books and Statistics 1851-1854; PROV, VA 2889 Registrar-General’s Department, VPRS 943/P0 Blue Books and Statistics 1854-1873).

[10] There are a variety of shipping registers in PROV’s holdings. For the cargo trade in the 1850s-1860s, the most useful are VPRS 22, VPRS 38, VPRS 3504 and VPRS 8005. Produced for the Victorian Department of Trade and Customs as blank, bound, ruled volumes, some with printed headings for columns of data, each provides hand-written lists of ships as they arrived in, and departed from, Melbourne (and other coastal ports in Victoria). Some focus on passenger ships, others on all ships. The detail of data varies from register to register, and year to year, but the most useful registers include such data as: name of ship, date of arrival, size of ship (tonnage), the ship’s owner and master, country of the ship’s registry, the number of crew, a one or two word summary of the cargo, the port of origin for the voyage, the number of passengers (sometimes detailing whether they are Chinese or not) and the name of the customs agent. See PROV, VA 606 Department of Trade and Customs, VPRS 22/P0 Customs, Shipping and Immigration Records 1839-1898, Units 1, 2, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24; VPRS 22/P1 Customs, Shipping and Immigration Records 1864-1893, Units 1 to 5; VPRS 38/P0 Inwards Shipping Reports 1843-1885, Units 1 to 5; VPRS 3504/P0 Inwards Shipping Index (microfilm copy of VPRS 13); VA 1426 Port of Melbourne Authority, VPRS 8005/P1 Register of Shipping 1856-1983, Units 1 to 3.

[11] PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Units 3, 4, 5, Inwards shipping reports 1854-1867; VPRS 22/P1, Unit 1, Shipping index 1864-1867. In Melbourne the term ‘customs agent’ refers to a person who was licensed by the Department of Trade and Customs to do business at Customs House on behalf of merchants or private individuals (Day, *Smugglers and sailors*, p. xxxiii).

[12] ‘Shipping inwards: number, tonnage, and crews of vessels entered inwards into the colony from each country during the year ended 31st December, 1859’, Blue Book, 1859, p. 264 (PROV, VPRS 943/P0, Unit 11); PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Unit 4, Inwards shipping report, 1 December 1858 to 30 May 1863.

[13] *ibid.*

[14] ‘Shipping inwards: number, tonnage, and crews of vessels...’, Blue Book, 1859, p. 264.

[15] Yong, ‘Lowe Kong Meng’; Cronin, *Colonial casualties*, p. 28.

[16] Birth year 1830: ‘Mr. Lowe Kong Meng’; birth year 1831: ‘The late Mr. Kong Meng’ (see note 7 above for these references).

[17] ‘The Chinese population; Kong Meng’ (see note 7).

[18] ‘Mr. Lowe Kong Meng’.

[19] Humphreys, p. 263.

[20] ‘District Court Thursday, June 2’, *The Argus*, 3 June 1859.

[21] V Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 39.

[22] *ibid.*, p. 43.

[23] *ibid.*, pp. 44-7.

[24] *ibid.*, pp. 58-60.

[25] *ibid.*, p. 60.

[26] R Matthews, *The flaws in the jewel: challenging the myths of British India*, HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 130-57.

[27] *ibid.*, pp. 83-104; L Subramanian, *History of India, 1707-1857*, Orient BlackSwan [sic], Hyderabad, India, 2010, pp. 161-8.

[28] G Wade, 'New ways of knowing: *The Prince of Wales island gazette* – Penang's first newspaper', paper presented at The Penang Story International Conference 2002, and published on The Penang Story website, pp. 27-8 (accessed 3 September 2012).

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] *ibid.*, p. 30.

[31] Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, pp. 49, 144.

[32] *ibid.* Sir Edmund Stanley is described as the first Recorder (effectively meaning a judge).

[33] Wade, 'New ways of knowing', pp. 11, 23.

[34] *ibid.*, pp. 12, 24, 15, 17.

[35] DR Headrick, *The tools of empire: technology and European imperialism in the nineteenth century*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981, p. 47; WH Hall and WD Bernard, *Narrative of the voyages and services of the Nemesis from 1840 to 1843*, 2nd edn, Henry Colburn, London, 1845, p. 3.

[36] A Farrington, *Trading places: The East India Company and Asia, 1600-1634*, The British Library, London, 2002. p. 105.

[37] In 'Mr. Lowe Kong Meng' it is reported that he was educated at 'an English School'. 'The late Mr. Kong Meng' states that it was the 'High School', but current histories of the Penang Free School imply that these were alternative or early titles for that school. See the websites of the Historical Society, Penang Free School (accessed 2 April 2012) and the Penang Free School, in particular the pdf file 'A brief school history' (accessed 3 April 2012). However, another source indicates that he was educated at a 'private school, established under the supervision of his family' ('The Chinese population; Kong Meng'). See note 7 for articles cited.

[38] *ibid.*

[39] 'The late Mr. Kong Meng'; Humphreys, p. 263.

[40] 'The late Mr. Kong Meng'.

[41] Humphreys, p. 263.

[42] 'The Chinese population; Kong Meng'.

[43] In sources on Lowe Kong Meng, the name Goone is spelt usually with an 'e' on the end but sometimes without; see Humphreys, p. 263.

[44] *ibid.*

[45] 'Mr. Lowe Kong Meng'.

[46] Humphreys, p. 263. Kong Meng is also recorded as having arrived in Melbourne as supercargo of his own ship in 1853 ('The late Mr. Kong Meng'). A supercargo – responsible for managing the cargo of goods in terms of selling or buying – was a common feature of pre-telegraph ship-borne trade. It is uncertain whether other Chinese traders acted as supercargo, but it was not unusual for Chinese merchants in Malaya to have their own ships. Captain Francis Light, founder of Penang, wrote in 1794 that the Chinese of Penang 'employ small vessels and prows and send adventures [sic] to the surrounding countries' (Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, p. 40). Russell Wallace, the famous naturalist, described the typical Straits Chinese merchant he saw, between 1854 and 1862, as one who 'owns several retail shops and trading schooners' (*ibid.*, p. 95).

[47] 'The Chinese population; Kong Meng'.

[48] N Dauhoo, 'The history of sugar with reference to 19th century Mauritius', Articles base website (accessed 13 March 2012).

[49] 'History', on the official website of the Republic of Mauritius (accessed 13 March 2012).

[50] Lynn Pan refers to a 'Chinese settler, a trader called Log Ahime, [who] was commissioned by the first British Governor of Mauritius to go and arrange for the movement of Chinese migrants to the island'. It is tempting to think that 'Log Ahime' is a French romanisation of 'Lowe a Quee', or at least 'Log' the same as 'Lowe' and hence there to be a family connection. L Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: a history of the Chinese diaspora*, Martin Secker and Warburg, London, 1990, pp. 28-9 of 1991 paperback edition.

[51] SW Mintz, *Sweetness and power: the place of sugar in modern history*, Viking-Penguin, New York, 1985.

[52] Interestingly, when Hop Wah and Co., the first Australian Chinese sugar plantation and mill was established near Cairns c. 1879, all their sugar was consigned to Lowe Kong Meng in Melbourne. See 'In Northern Queensland: the sugar industry, no. 1', *The Argus*, 8 March 1884, p. 4; I was alerted to this article by J Volkmar, 'A company of his countrymen: refining the Hop Wah story, work in progress', paper presented at 'Rediscovered past: Chinese tropical Australia', the fourth conference organised by Chinese Heritage in Northern Australia Inc., Cairns, 11-12 February 2012.

[53] Matthews, *The flaws in the jewel*, p. 80.

[54] At Pondichéry, Chandernagore, Yanaon, Karikal and Mahé. See RH Fifield, 'The future of French India', *Far Eastern survey*, vol. 19, no. 6, 22 March 1950, pp. 62-4.

[55] 'District Court Thursday, June 2', *The Argus*, 3 June 1859.

[56] Guangzhou (Canton), Xiamen (Amoy), Fuzhou (Fou-tchow-foo), Ningbo and Shanghai.

[57] L Blussé, 'Junks to Java: Chinese shipping in the Nanyang in the second half of the eighteenth century', in E Tagliacozzo and Wen-Chin Chang (eds), *Chinese circulations: capital, commodities, and networks in Southeast Asia*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2011, p. 255.

[58] Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, p. 40.

[59] 'Mr. Lowe Kong Meng'.

[60] Humphreys, p. 263.

[61] 'The Chinese population; Kong Meng'.

[62] *ibid.*

[63] *ibid.*

[64] Humphreys, p. 263.

[65] 'The late Mr. Kong Meng'.

[66] Subramanian, *History of India*, p. 154.

[67] *ibid.*, p. 156; A Siddiqi, 'The business world of Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy', *The Indian economic and social history review*, vol. 19, nos. 3-4, 1982, pp. 301-24.

[68] See also two other Victorian Chinese company models: A Kyi, 'Unravelling the mystery of the Woah Hawp Canton Quartz Mining Company, Ballarat', *Active voices, hidden histories: the Chinese in colonial Australia*, special issue of *Journal of Australian colonial history*, vol. 6, 2004, pp. 59-78; and the Hop Wah and Co. sugar plantation and mill (see Volkmar, 'A company of his countrymen').

[69] 'The Chinese population; Kong Meng'.

[70] 'Our oriental traders'.

[71] The scale and growth of Kong Meng's fleet is hard to determine from the historical record. Accounts from his own day give varying stories. The earliest contemporary account mentioning his fleet is 1866, saying he owned 'several vessels' belonging to the port of Melbourne, some of which were engaged in procuring beche-le-mer [sic] from the Torres Straits, whilst the others were constantly trading between Melbourne and Hong Kong ('Mr. Lowe Kong Meng'). It was not until his death twenty-two years later that accounts refer to half a dozen being the number, that he was 'the only Chinese shipmaster in the colonies' [Australasia], and that, when he arrived first in Melbourne in 1853, it was as supercargo of his own ship ('The late Mr. Kong Meng'). Humphrey's account in 1878 stated that 'at the commencement of his mercantile career in Australia, he was the owner of several vessels sailing between Australia and China, and that, in 1864, he first tried to establish communication, by trading vessels, between Melbourne and the settlement at the Gulf of Carpentaria'. However, the first ship in the registers recorded with him as owner is not until 23 August 1865, the *Joshua Bates*; the *Spray* was the next one that was registered with him as owner, on 30 August 1866; then the *Caroline* on 8 April 1867 (William McHugh part owner) (PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Unit 5, Inwards shipping report, 1 June 1863 to 17 December 1867).

Paintings of the *Joshua Bates* and the *Kingfisher* remain as family heirlooms (pers. comm. of descendants of Lowe Kong Meng), and the *Kingfisher* appears several times in the shipping registers, but it was not owned by him before 1868 at least (PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Units 4 and 5; PROV, VPRS 22/P1, Unit 1). However, shipping records for the 1850s-1880s are not complete, nor have all the extant records been viewed by the author, so a definitive account of his ship ownership awaits further research.

[72] PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Units 3, 4, 5; PROV, VPRS 22/P1, Unit 1.

[73] 'Our oriental traders'.

[74] The *Warrior* arrived in Melbourne on 15 November 1864: PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Unit 5. For its cargo, see *The Press* (Canterbury, New Zealand), 9 November 1864, p. 3.

[75] Fitzgerald, *Big white lie*, pp. 66, 68; Wang Sing-wu, *The organisation of Chinese emigration 1848-1888, with special reference to Chinese emigration to Australia*, Chinese Materials Center, Inc., San Francisco, 1978, pp. 114-18; Crawford, 'Notes by Mr. Crawford on Chinese immigration in the Australian colonies', p. 30.

[76] A McKeown, 'The social life of Chinese labor', in Tagliacozzo and Chang, *Chinese circulations*, pp. 62-83. See also A McKeown, *Melancholy order: Asian migration and the globalization of borders*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008; A McKeown, 'Global migration, 1846-1940', *World history*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2004, pp. 155-89; A McKeown, 'Chinese emigration in global context, 1850-1940', *Journal of global history*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2010, pp. 95-124.

[77] Crawford, 'Notes by Mr. Crawford on Chinese immigration in the Australian colonies', p. 19.

[78] For passenger numbers on ships, see PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Units 3, 4, 5 and VPRS 22/P1, Unit 1. For removal of anti-Chinese taxation, see Wang, *The organisation of Chinese emigration*, p. 275.

[79] See 'Chinese immigrant ships arriving at Guichen Bay from Hong Kong between January 1857 and August 1863', in *ibid.*, pp. 379-80.

[80] 'Chinese residence tax'.

[81] Rev. W Young, 'Report on the condition of the Chinese population in Victoria, presented to both Houses of Parliament', Victoria, 1868; reprinted in IF McLaren, *The Chinese in Victoria: official reports & documents*, Red Rooster Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 49-58. Figures in the report are for 1866-67. There is a discrepancy between the population table at the end of the report, which adds to 18,007, and a summation of the Chinese populations in the individual town reports throughout the text (which add up to 19,584), but it appears that the table has some figures from the text left out of it.

[82] Kong Meng and other Chinese merchants in Victoria were invited by influential Otago citizens in 1865 to send Chinese miners to revive the flagging Otago gold rush, and a large movement of them from Victoria to New Zealand occurred in 1866-67: see *The evening post* (Wellington), 27 December 1865, p. 2. *The Bruce herald* (Milton, Otago) reported on 10 April 1867: 'We understand that Kong Meng will shortly make his appearance, and commence business on a large scale.'

[83] 'Mr. Lowe Kong Meng'.

[84] [Advertisements for] Produce, Provisions &c, *The Argus*, 19 September 1856, p. 8.

[85] [Advertisements for] Produce, Provisions &c, *The Argus*, 22 September 1856, p. 6.

[86] [Advertisements for] Merchandise, *The Argus*, 14 July 1858, p. 7.

[87] Although *Sands & Kenny's commercial and general Melbourne directory* lists 'Kong Meng & Co, Importers' at 100 Little Bourke-street East in 1860 (p. 33) and 1861 (p. 32), *Sands & MacDougall's directory for 1869* lists 'Kong Meng and Co., merchants' at 94 Little Bourke-street East (p. 9), and it seems from the positions of the intervening laneways that 94 is the more correct number. The street numbers changed in 1889, and the site is now 177-81 Little Bourke Street.

[88] 'Chinese residence tax'.

[89] (a) *Sands & Kenny's commercial and general Melbourne directory for 1859*, pp. 23-4:

*Little Bourke St, West:*

49 Chinese boarding house  
53 Houg Fat and Co., provision merchants  
89 Song Sang, provision merchant

*Little Bourke St, East:*

46 Shing Lewn Fat, provision merchant  
48 Gee Loy, general dealer  
[before 78] : Tuing Ting, general dealer

82 Sun Kwong Loong, general dealer  
84 Clin Geon Chong, general dealer

(b) *Tanner's Melbourne directory for 1859*, p. 102:

*Little Bourke St, West:*

49 Shing, Hop, dealer  
? Houg, Fat & Co., provision store  
89 Chinese store

*Little Bourke St, East:*

46 Shing Lewn, fat Chinese merchant [sic]  
48 Geeloy, Chinese store  
50 & 52 Chinese shops  
82 Sun Kwong Loon, Chinese dealer  
84 & 86 Chinese stores  
102 & 104 Chinese stores

[90] 'Chinese residence tax'.

[91] PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Unit 3, Inwards Shipping Report, 1 July 1854 to 30 November 1863; Units 4 and 5; PROV, VPRS 22/P1, Unit 1.

[92] 'In days of old; Victoria's first Chinaman; story of the gold fever', *The Sun*, 12 May 1918, p. 5.

[93] Shipping advertisements, *The Argus*, 13 September 1855, p. 1.

[94] 'Chinese residence tax'.

[95] 'The Chinese passenger trade', *The Star* (Ballarat), 30 March 1858.

[96] 'Monetary and commercial', *The Herald*, 27 October 1862, p. 4.

[97] 'Monetary and commercial', *The Herald*, 27 November 1862, p. 4.

[98] For the 8,000 sovereigns on the *Geelong*, see 'Melbourne', *New Zealand herald*, 14 June 1869, p. 4; for the *Joshua Bates*, and also the date and destination of the *Geelong*, see 'Shipping for the month', *Illustrated Australian news for home readers*, 19 June 1869, p. 130.

[99] PROV, VPRS 38/P0, Unit 4.

[100] Bach, *A maritime history of Australia*, p. 136; R Cotter, 'The golden decade', in J Griffin (ed.), *Essays in economic history of Australia*, The Jacaranda Press, Milton, Queensland, 1967, p. 125; G Serle, *The golden age: a history of the colony of Victoria 1851-1861*, Melbourne University Press, 1968 edition, p. 42.

[101] The general view is challenged in a more recent discussion of the economic context of the gold rushes: see K Reeves, L Frost and C Fahey, 'Integrating the historiography of the nineteenth-century gold rushes', *Australian economic history review*, vol. 50, no. 2, July 2010.

[102] G Rathnam, 'Gold: India's capital asset through history', *Mises daily*, 27 October 2009, website of the Ludwig von Mises Institute (accessed 5 February 2012); P Mehta, 'India's love of gold - 1: the history of the passion', *Gold-eagle editorials*, 24 May 2002 (accessed 5 February 2012).

[103] Subramanian, *History of India*, p. 147.

[104] J Chesneau, M Bastid and M-C Bergère, *China from the Opium Wars to the 1911 Revolution*, The Harvester Press, Sussex, 1977, p. 18.

[105] 'They also offered, on account of Messrs Kong Meng and Co., 1,050 packages fancy teas, ex *Sea Shell*, from Hong Kong, but the whole was passed in': 'Commercial intelligence', *The Argus*, 4 November 1870, p. 4.

[106] '[Yarra] Distillery Company', *Gippsland times*, 27 September 1864, p. 3; 'Prospectus of the South Crinoline Amalgamated Quartz-Mining Company', *The Argus*, 19 December 1864, p. 7; 'Commercial Bank of Australia: Prospectus', *Empire* (Sydney), 30 March 1866, p. 8; 'The English, Australian, and New Zealand Marine Insurance Company: Prospectus', *Sydney morning herald*, 23 June 1866, p. 2; 'Prospectus of the Hazelwood Coal-Mining Company', *The Argus*, 12 December 1874, p. 8 (Thomas Bent and David Mitchell were also directors); 'Prospectus of the North Midas Gold-Mining Company', *The Argus*, 10 July 1886, p. 14; 'Sixth schedule ... Application to register the Madame Kong Meng Gold-Mining Company', *The Argus*, 11 February 1887, p. 8; 'Prospectus of the Outward Bound Consolidated Silver-Mining Company', *The Argus*, 11 February 1888, p. 14.

[107] Yong, 'Lowe Kong Meng'; Oddie, 'The lower class Chinese and the merchant elite in Victoria', p. 67; McCormack, 'Lowe Kong Meng', p. 57; Cronin, *Colonial casualties*, p. 28.

[108] 'In days of old; Victoria's first Chinaman; story of the gold fever'; MP Vort-Ronald, *Banks of issue in Australia*, self-published by author, 1982, p. 135.

[109] Lowe Kong Meng is listed as a member of the Royal Society of Victoria in 1864 and 1866; see Science and the making of Victoria: histories and views of the Royal Society of Victoria from its inception to the present day, and its role supporting science and technology in Victoria, compiled by the Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre and the Royal Society of Victoria, Melbourne 2001, Alphabetical list of members 1854-1872, p. 164 (accessed 15 February 2012).

[110] Letter from Lowe Kong Meng to Redmond Barry, 18 March 1869, in PROV, VPRS 927/P0 Correspondence relating to various exhibitions [Trustees of the Public Library, Museum and Exhibition Buildings], Unit 5, Inter-colonial and Fine Arts Exhibition, 1869. Although he declined this invitation, on the basis that there was 'nothing in the colony ... that would reflect credit on ... the Great Nation of China', he was later a Commissioner for the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880-81, and also the Centennial International Exhibition of 1888, and organised Chinese cultural and commercial displays for these exhibitions. See 'The late Mr. Kong Meng'.

[111] Park House, 352 Moray Street, corner of Moray Street and Albert Road/Bridport Street, South Melbourne, occupied by Kong Meng 1861-65? See 'Old house attracted romantic legends', *The Age*, 21 July 1972, p. 12; see also Victorian Heritage Register (VHR no. H0224) (accessed 3 April 2012). On his departure from South Melbourne, the residents prepared an illuminated testimonial of their appreciation. The text of this testimonial is reproduced in 'The Chinese population; Kong Meng'.

[112] Valetta House, 202-06 Clarendon St, East Melbourne. The Victorian Heritage Register (VHR no. H0028) (accessed 3 April 2012) states that Kong Meng lived there until 1875, and that 'At this time the building was described as a brick house with fifteen rooms, laundry, stable and coach house, valued at £230.'

[113] Kooyong, corner of Elizabeth Street and Toorak Road, Malvern. Descendants of Lowe Kong Meng have told the author that it is incorrectly called Longwood in many sources (e.g. 'Kong Meng was a Mandarin', *Progress press*, 7 July 1971, p. 19).

[114] 'The Duke of Edinburgh in Victoria: the Corporation fancy dress ball', *The Argus*, 24 December 1867, p. 5.

[115] Pages 23, 27 and 28 of the Thomas Bradley Harris photo album contain photographs of Kong Meng and family (accessed 12 March 2012). I am indebted to Pauline Rule for drawing my attention to this album.

[116] 'The late Mr. Kong Meng'.

[117] Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, p. 61.

[118] 'Mr. Lowe Kong Meng'.

[119] 'The Chinese population; Kong Meng'.

[120] M Tart, *The life of Quong Tart: or, how a foreigner succeeded in a British community*, Maclardy, Sydney, 1911; R Travers, *Australian Mandarin: the life and times of Quong Tart*, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1981. Sophie Couchman argues that Quong Tart skilfully used the modern medium of photography to ensure that people recognised and remembered him in this style: S Couchman, 'Chinese-Australian visibility and photography: Quong Tart', chapter 7 of 'In and out of focus: Chinese and photography in Australia, 1870s-1940s', PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 2009, pp. 235-69.

[121] Oddie, 'The lower class Chinese and the merchant elite in Victoria', p. 69.

[122] A Rasmussen, 'The Chinese in nation and community, Bendigo, 1870s-1920s', PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 2009.

[123] For example, see *The Argus*, 1 January 1859, p. 4; 'The Chinese in Australia', *The Argus*, 1 January 1859, p. 6; 'The Chinese', *The Argus*, 12 January 1859, p. 1S.

[124] Wang, *The organisation of Chinese emigration 1848-1888*, p. 275.

[125] C May, *Topsawyers: the Chinese in Cairns 1870 to 1920*, Studies in North Queensland History No. 6, Department of History and Politics, James Cook University, Cairns, 1984; H Reynolds, *North of Capricorn: the untold story of Australia's north*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2003; R Ganter, J Martinez and G Lee, *Mixed relations: Asian-Aboriginal contact in north Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2006.

# Forum articles



# Making Their Case

## Archival Traces of Mothers and Children in Negotiation with Child Welfare Officials

Dr Shurlee Swain

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### Abstract

**This paper looks at the ways in which child welfare records held by PROV can cast light on the interaction between poor women and welfare authorities as seen through the operations of the variously named predecessors of the current Department of Human Services. It contests the notion that mothers were uncaring and children were unwanted, showing how mothers and the predominantly female inspectors with whom they interacted were able to moderate many of the harsher, punitive aspects of welfare policy.**

Christina Twomey's book *Deserted and destitute: motherhood, wife desertion and colonial welfare* makes a convincing case for the influence of mothers on the shaping of Victoria's child welfare systems.[1] Through some political activism and to a far greater extent by presenting their cases in the courts, mothers were able to show that Victoria needed a system to support children whose male providers had failed them. The *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864* marked the beginnings of that system, establishing the Industrial and Reformatory Schools Department, one of the first state children's departments in the world. In older western countries children were dealt with as a sub-section of much larger poor relief systems. But the Australian colonies were determined not to introduce a poor law, so different provisions had to prevail.

The records of the Industrial and Reformatory Schools Department (which was not a department but a section of the Chief Secretary's Office), later called the Neglected Children's Department, the Children's Welfare Department, the Social Welfare Department, and eventually the Department of Human Services, are, as the recent Ombudsman's report makes clear, scattered and disorganised.[2] What I will focus on in this article are two identifiable sets of records, one well known and relatively easy to navigate, the other more obscure, and consider what light they throw on the lives of poor women forced to turn to the state for assistance in supporting their children.

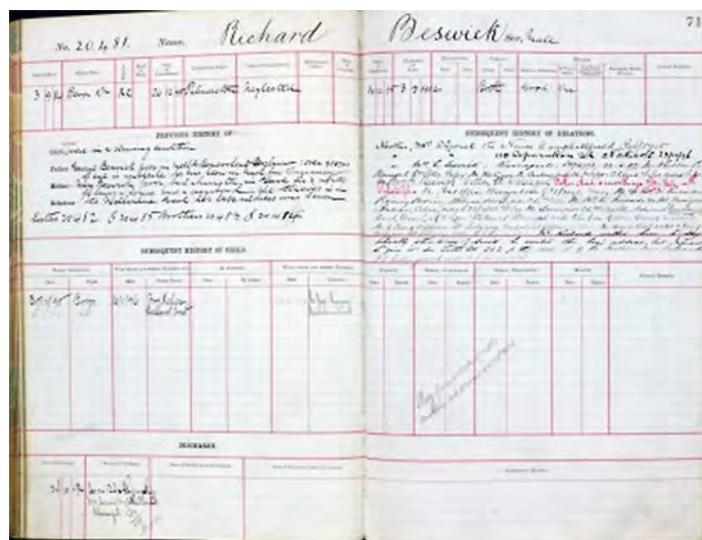
The operation of the system was premised on a set of assumptions many of which seem alien to us today:

- Parents were anxious to be rid of their children and needed to be deterred from doing so
- Parents were a malign influence on their children and hence should be kept as far away from them as possible
- Parents who expressed an interest in their children should be treated with suspicion
- Children needed to be trained so that they would be able to earn their living and hence not become dependent on charity as their parents had.

In the early years when children were congregated in large, and often makeshift institutions, parents were only allowed to visit once a month and had to see and converse with their children in the presence of an officer of the institution. However, resourceful parents found ways to improve their access. In the case of single mothers it is clear that some were able to join the staff of such institutions as wet nurses, retaining contact with their own infants in this way. There were widows, deserted wives, and women with incapacitated husbands who were also able to find employment as attendants, a fact which was cited as a reason for closure by those who were opposed to the schools. The decision, implemented during the late 1870s, to close almost all the institutions and board children out with families across the colony, was designed, at least partially, to break any such contact. Parents were then not able to visit their children, indeed they were denied knowledge as to where their children were placed. Although letters could be forwarded via the central office, and, with supervision, vested in voluntary ladies' committees, the department came to play a minimal role in children's lives. Record-keeping was not a high priority.[3]

### Ward Registers

The leather-bound volumes of ward registers (some of which pre-date the usage of the term ward) were the focus of departmental record-keeping and are the main source of records we currently have about children in care for the period prior to the 1920s.[4] In the registers each child is accorded a double-page spread. One side provides the basic identifying details of the child, the means by which it came into care, and the list of subsequent placements. The other page was used to detail any contacts with the department during the child's time in 'care'. The mother exists as a subject in these volumes but rarely as an actor. The identifying details for the child include name, address, occupation and marital status of the mother at the time of the child's admission. The explanation of why the child came into care may provide more detail, sometimes positive, more often negative about the mother's situation. While there was considerable effort expended in tracing paternity (so that maintenance could be collected) the only time a mother's movements would be traced was if subsequent children were admitted to care (in which case there is an attempt to cross-reference, as indeed there is cross-generationally) or if she applied to have her children returned to her.



Example of a ward register entry from 1895: Register number 20481, Richard Beswick, committed as a neglected child on 30 December 1895. PROV, VPRS 4527/P0, Unit 45, Folio 71.

These records are similar to later case files in that they are problem-based, and hence generally negative. What is recorded is what is wrong with the mother that she is unable to provide for her own children. The comments or contact page is little better. We read there what other people say about the mother: clerks in the office describe face to face communication when mothers come in to seek contact with their children or obtain information; occasionally someone of influence in the community attempts to intervene on a mother's behalf; or, more usually, a policeman, sent to enquire following an application to have a child home released, reports on what he has found. The mother's voice in such documents is highly mediated indeed. Even when a clerk or policeman claims to be quoting a mother, the quote is taken out of context, designed to support whatever conclusion the reporter is trying to justify.

### Chief Secretary's Correspondence

Despite its high degree of decentralisation, or perhaps because of it, a system as large as this generated far more documentation than is retained in the ward registers. Because the Industrial Schools Department and later the Neglected Children's Department and the Children's Welfare Department were in fact nested in the much larger Chief Secretary's Department, correspondence and other related documentation can be found among a range of other records related to the very diverse responsibilities which that office had.[5] There are grand indexes with neat headings like Infant Life Protection[6] and Industrial and Reformatory Schools

(a heading which survives long after the buildings themselves have disappeared) but the index directs the researcher to an item in a trail of correspondence. In line with nineteenth century record-keeping practices, the entire correspondence trail was filed according to the number of the final item. The indexes associated with these record-keeping systems lead to entries in registers through which the trail of correspondence can be retraced to arrive at the final item number and thereby locate the item in the actual correspondence series. Sometimes it is easier to simply order a box where you think the item you are after might be included, then make your way through all the material it contains. There is no guarantee that this tactic will produce the specific piece you were after, but it will almost always produce other files that relate to child welfare matters.



PROV, VPRS 1411/P0, Unit 39, Folio 363, these index entries under the heading Inspector of Industrial Schools include an entry beneath the month of August relating to the 1884 annual report of the Secretary of Industrial and Reformatory Schools.

1885.	D.	411
Particulars	Particulars	Particulars
7730	Wang King, Mayor of Ballarat to the Secretary - Supplied handbook of Sept. Month publishing receipt of public money	
7731	" 6. - Appendix of Report 1885 - In reply to application of Mrs. J. Smith re pension of Act	
7732	" 4. - Mrs. J. Smith & Mr. J. Smith Application re Report of the School for 1884	pa. in Appendix re Report
7733	" 4. - Long Young to the Secretary	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7734	" 6. - Ah Lap, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7735	" 4. - Jack King, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7736	" 4. - Ah Lee, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7737	" 6. - Ah Too, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7738	" 4. - East Hong, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7739	" 6. - Low Hong, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7740	" 6. - Ah Chee, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7741	" 6. - Ah Hoon, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7742	" 4. - Ah King, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7743	" 4. - Ah King, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7744	" Wang Kuan Sing, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7745	" 6. - Ah Kuan Sing, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7746	" 6. - Ah Kuan Sing, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7747	" 6. - Ah Kuan Sing, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7748	" 6. - Ah Kuan Sing, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302
7749	" 6. - Ah Kuan Sing, do	Transferred to EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPT. see FILE 0104302

PROV, VPRS 3994/P0, Unit 5, Folio 416, the third entry (no. 7932) in the first column on the left relates to the 1884 annual report of the Secretary of Industrial and Reformatory Schools.

It is in these sources that the voices of mothers are to be found, for filed away here are the letters which they wrote on their own behalf. The correspondence files also give some insight into the boarding-out/foster care system and its place in the broader community. Here also is a second group of women, foster mothers, who in a way are also clients of the welfare system. Somewhere there are probably traces of the correspondence generated by the ladies' committees, but that is a treasure yet to be located. Nell Musgrove is the only historian, so far, who has made systematic use of these records, and her work makes clear that the mothers who emerge in them bear a closer resemblance to Christina Twomey's sympathetic descriptions than to the punitive assumptions on which the system was based.

39

~~4/18/84~~  
~~4/18/84~~  
 # 4 August 1884

My dear Son, I have received your letter about June & July. I am delighted to hear you have been confirmed. You will now give your whole heart to God in prayer and thanksgiving for his goodness to you. Be attentive to your prayers night & morning. Joe is very good and obedient - and pious since his confirmation and I hope you will be the same.

You ask me to excuse your writing. I think it very good writing, but you should learn to spell well. There are many words in your letter. One spelled I hope you attend school every day. Joe is in the 4<sup>th</sup> class. Your sister Polly is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> - I am sure you will all turn out good scholars. He gives me much pleasure to hear you are happy and contented and fond of your foster brother. If you do as I wish you will be as obedient to your kind foster mother as you would to me.

Your brother Joe will write to soon if you answer this letter yourself. Joe will reply to it and you can then see for yourself which is the best writer.

My dear son I shall now conclude with kind love to you in which your sister and brother join your ever affectionate mother.

(M) Marie Corrigan

67

Austin Corrigan  
 # 4 August 1884

(Copy)

Madam, I have received your letter. I am much grieved to hear that my son Wally has given you and his foster mother so much trouble and anxiety by absenting himself from school and then staying out all night to avoid punishment.

I shall in writing to him be careful to advise and refer to his future. My object in promising to take him to live with me was meant as an encouragement to him to learn his lessons well and to attend to the instructions of his teacher and to be dutiful and obedient to his foster mother who I am satisfied is a good kind & respectable woman.

She is a poor woman & I have as much love for my child as if I were worth thousands. It wounds my feelings to think a child of mine should stay out all night - only low boys do so. I would rather see him dead than fall into bad company or bad habits.

I trust he is now sorry for his faults and will see never again be guilty of them. I shall not let him

him

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PROV, VPRS 1226/P0, Unit 20, Item D7932, Secretary of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Annual Report 1884, Letters of and concerning children, page 39, copy of letter from Marie Corrigan dated 4 August 1884 (above) and, page 67, of the response (above right).

make contact with the mothers from whom they had long been separated.[7]

This material shows the ways in which mothers worked around the intentions of the legislation to get temporary care for their children and to negotiate their release when their immediate need had passed. It shows members of the visiting committees assessing competing views as to the fitness of foster parents. Mothers wrote seeking to portray their families as upstanding, their partners as having overcome whatever problems had drawn them into poverty in the past. They also protested their separation from their children, demanding to be given reasons why they were being kept apart. There are also instances where mothers expressed their gratitude for the care that their children were receiving, even if such letters were filled with longing for the child who was away from their care. There are letters too from children attempting to

The structure of Victoria's boarding-out system was admired both nationally and internationally. Politicians in other colonies admired its economy, because although the foster mothers were paid, there was little in the way of central overheads. Advocates of boarding-out admired its demonstration of the value of engaging 'motherly' women to both care for and supervise what they liked to describe as 'children of the state'. However, I would like to posit another reason why the system, with all its harshness, had some admirable features: namely, the woman-to-woman interaction which was at its base. Ladies' committees were drawn from local benevolent associations, and brought with them all the prejudices that such a philanthropic approach encoded.

Yet, many of the members were also mothers, and at some key moments we can see their identity as mothers slipping through and facilitating policy change. I would like to end by proposing three of their significant achievements.

1. Members of the ladies' committees could recognise a happy child. Hence they became fierce defenders of boarding-out. When opponents committed to the older institutions depicted that model as being more efficient, as providing more consistent training and allowing for a greater paternal influence, the ladies' committees responded that the children who were boarded out looked happier. When governments suggested cutting the boarding-out allowance as an economy measure, they went into battle, even, in some cases, threatening to strike, arguing that the happiness of the children should be above government cost-cutting.
2. They were prepared to innovate. Faced with the problem of young single mothers who were not only unable to support but also to mother their infants, they came up with a scheme which boarded both mother and child out with an experienced foster mother, whose task it was to mother them both. Although this scheme appears to have produced no reduction in infant mortality, for those who survived it did cement the mother-child bond. Although the child may still have spent substantial periods of its life in care, in adulthood it was far more likely to have continuing contact with its mother (and almost certainly its foster mother) when wardship ended at eighteen.
3. Thirdly, and most importantly, they were able to identify with at least some of the mothers who were threatened with the loss of their children through poverty. It was ladies' committees which questioned the wisdom of paying a foster mother when a similar amount paid to the child's own mother would mean that they could stay together. This revolutionary change, pioneered at the instigation of mothers at the Brighton orphanage, slipped into the government system from the 1880s. It went against all the assumptions of conventional charity, yet to the ladies' committees it had an obvious appeal, and the more they saw of the happiness of children who were boarded out to their own mothers in this way, the more fiercely they defended the practice when it came under attack. By the mid 1890s more wards were boarded out with their mothers than with strangers, laying the basis for the social security schemes that would be established to assist mothers in this way from the 1930s on.

Unfortunately this practice too is under-documented (or the documentation has yet to be found) but it should be celebrated as evidence again that poor women actively argued that their ability to mother should not be judged by their ability to generate an income.[8]

For a researcher with the time there is clearly more to be found in this rich resource, but to this point what is already clear is the strength of the mother-child bond, and the lengths both parties would go to maintain and restore it.

## Endnotes

[1] C Twomey, *Deserted and destitute: motherhood, wife desertion and colonial welfare*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2002.

[2] Victorian Ombudsman, *Investigation into the storage and management of ward records by the Department of Human Services*, March 2012, available online (accessed 10 July 2012). To be fair, the paucity of wardship files that have survived to the present day is a legacy of inappropriate record-keeping policies that have a long history. The *Final report of the Royal Commission on the State Public Service*, published in 1917, contained an Appendix, 'The Departmental Record Systems. Report by Mr. H. O. Allan'. Allan described the record-keeping systems in use at the various Victorian Government departments at the time, but his most scathing criticism was for the records created by the Department of Neglected Children, which he described as the worst he had seen. A major complaint was that there was no central file created about wards: 'Every child's history should be complete on main file, even when it is necessary to divide files. If an officer requires to trace a child's history he will encounter the following difficulties: – He must (1) get the commitment, or mandate, as it is called; (2) [get the] boarding-out file; (3) [get the] transfer of child [file] from one home to another (perhaps the child's case is embraced in a general report); (4) [get the] rate of pay file; (5) [get the] service file, i.e after boarding-out the child is placed in service.' Allan also indicated that the department had 'Just started to destroy old records'. See *Victoria. Legislative Assembly. Papers presented to Parliament*, Session 1917, vol. 2, no. 15, pp. 130-1. I am indebted to Charlie Farrugia, Senior Collections Advisor at PROV, for this information. For further details see his reference to the destruction of wardship records 1864-c.1935 in his entry on the PROV Wiki entitled *Destruction of Victorian Public Records Before the Establishment of the Public Records Act 1973* (accessed 28 August 2012).

[3] N Musgrove, "'The scars remain': children, their families and institutional "care" in Victoria 1864-1954', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2009.

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[4] See PROV, VA 475 Chief Secretary's Department, VPRS 4527 Ward Registers (microfilm available in Victorian Archives Centre Reading Room). The detailed case files which survive to the present day are contained in PROV, VPRS 10071 State Ward Case Files, Single Number System. While these mostly date from the 1920s onwards there is some evidence to suggest that some of the earlier records were destroyed: see the PROV Wiki cited above.

[5] See PROV, VA 475 Chief Secretary's Department, VPRS 3991 Inward Registered Correspondence II, and VPRS 3992 Inward Registered Correspondence III.

[6] Children in care under Infant Life Protection were not made wards unless the parents became delinquent with their payments.

[7] Two categories added in the *Neglected Children's Act 1887* allowed for the care of children under sixteen found residing in a brothel or associating/dwelling with a prostitute (para. 21), and uncontrollable children (para. 23). Prior to 1887 these were defined as neglected children. In 1919 the *Maintenance of Children Act* added a new category, children without visible means of support. This was effectively a 'poor law' to prevent the 'abandonment' of children. Up until then, mothers and grandmothers sometimes went to great lengths to 'abandon' children because this was the only way to get them into the system if the family could no longer care for them in a crisis.

[8] For a fuller discussion of these points see S Swain, 'The Victorian charity network in the 1890s', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1976, available online at the University Library Digital Repository, The University of Melbourne (accessed 10 July 2012).

# The Crown and Kangaroo Victorian Flags

John Rogers

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'The Crown and Kangaroo Victorian Flags', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 11, 2012. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © John Rogers.

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## Abstract

**The current Victorian flag with the Union Flag and crown above a Southern Cross originated from the 1877 Victorian flag with a different crown. The 1877 flag was itself a variation on the 1870 flag which did not include the crown. This article presents the evidence for the existence of two earlier forgotten Victorian flags, which intriguingly included a kangaroo in their design.**

After separating from New South Wales in 1851, the colony of Victoria lacked a distinctive flag to fly from its vessels. It has previously been believed that this state of affairs continued until 1870 when a Victorian flag became available. The research detailed below indicates that two types of official Victorian flags were in use prior to 1870. It would appear that history had simply forgotten about them.

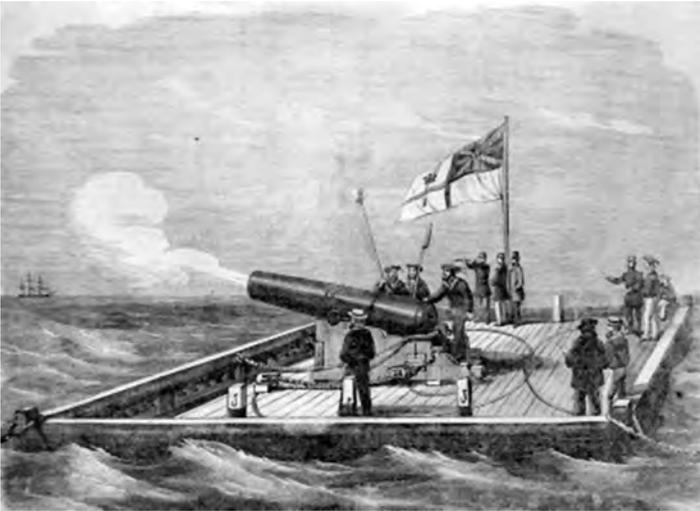
## Inauguration of the Victorian Flags in 1870

On 9 February 1870, Her Majesty's Victorian Ship (HMVS) *Nelson* and the Reformatory Ship, *Sir Harry Smith* fired a 21-gun salute. The occasion was the unfurling of the new blue Victorian Government flag and new red Victorian merchant flag on board the ex-Line-of-Battleship HMVS *Nelson*. Described by the *Argus* newspaper as an event of some importance,[1] the *Naval & military gazette* pointed out that the new (government) flag was 'adopted at the suggestion of the Admiralty to distinguish the vessels of the Victorian Navy'.[2]

This 1870 Victorian flag was very similar to the current Australian flag. Naturally, being prior to Federation, the 1870 flag did not include the Federation star and, unlike the current Australian flag, the stars of the Southern Cross on the Victorian flag had, and still have, five, six, seven, eight and nine points. The 1870 flag soon evolved into the 1877 flag when the size of the Southern Cross was reduced and an imperial crown added above it. The Victorian flag changed again in 1901 when the Imperial crown was replaced by the Tudor crown which was itself replaced by the St Edward's crown in 1953, thereby creating the current Victorian State flag.

## 1865 Victorian Flags

In all of the coverage of the inauguration of the 1870 Victorian flags, no mention was made that the colony of Victoria already had a flag. While researching Victoria's Colonial Navy I came across a fascinating engraving of the Victorian Navy's gun raft, known as *The Elder*.<sup>[3]</sup> Of particular interest in the engraving was the flag being flown by the gun raft.

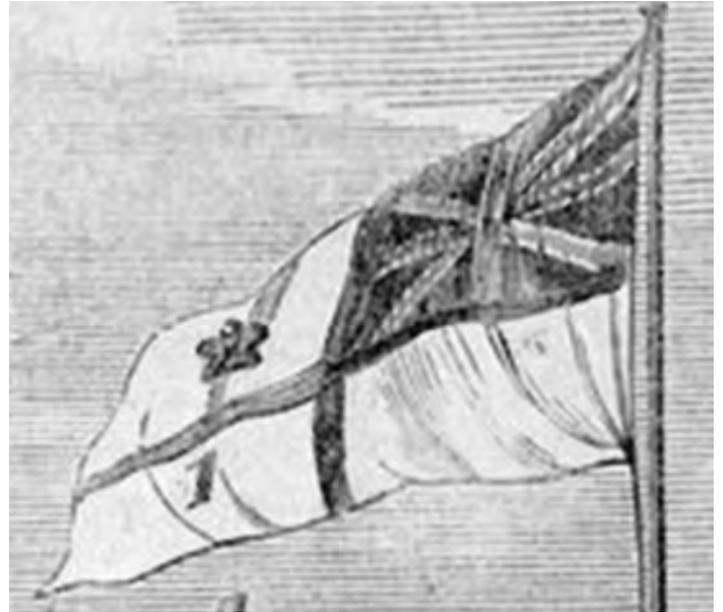


Captain Elder's gun raft manned by the Williamstown division of the Victorian Volunteer Naval Brigade. *The illustrated Melbourne post*, 18 February 1865, image courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.

The *Victoria Government gazette* of 27 January 1865 described the new flag for Her Majesty's Ships of War as 'shall bear a white ensign, with a red St. George's cross and the union in the upper canton'.<sup>[4]</sup> This item referred to ships of the Royal Navy and was for general information only.

Clearly the Victorian Government was inspired by and acted on this gazetted information and used the new British white ensign as the basis for its own new flag. In the *Victoria Government gazette* of 12 December 1865 it was stated that 'in accordance with the Admiralty Regulations, published in the *Government Gazette* of the 27th of January, 1865, the Blue Ensign with the Union described therein, together with a Crown and the initial letter H.M.C., will be borne by boats, &c., in the Customs Department, in lieu of that previously in force'.<sup>[5]</sup>

If the initials HMC indicate a practice of using initials to indicate that Her Majesty's Customs Department controlled the vessel, then the hard to distinguish letter on the gun raft flag of 18 February 1865 could be the letter T. This would make sense, as the Treasury Department controlled the Victorian Navy until the establishment of a Defence Department in the 1880s.



Most likely the letter T partially obscured by the fold in the flag. Detail from *The illustrated Melbourne post*, 18 February 1865.

The reason that the blue ensign was adopted was an instruction from Downing Street stating that, following from the circular despatch of 19 May 1865 containing a copy of the *Colonial Naval Defence Act 1865*, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty instructed 'That any vessel provided and used under the 3rd section of the *Colonial Naval & Defence Act* should wear the blue ensign with the seal or badge of the colony in the fly thereof, and a blue pennant.' The instructions further stated that non-defence government vessels 'should wear a similar blue ensign, but not the pennant'.<sup>[6]</sup>

While debating the Murray Customs Bill in the South Australian House of Assembly in 1866, the question of the use of the image of an emu on the South Australian flag arose. The South Australian Treasurer, Mr Walter Duffield, stated 'the emu was adopted because, as he had stated before, the kangaroo and emu were recognised as the arms of Australia, and the former had been adopted for the Victorian flag' (emphasis added).<sup>[7]</sup>

Yet another reference to the kangaroo image being used on the Victorian flag appears in 1867 when a correspondent named Weather-Gage wrote, 'In Victoria, the colonial sloop of War, the "Victoria," flies the Blue Ensign, with a kangaroo in it...'.<sup>[8]</sup>

A third reference to the crown and kangaroo flag appears in Ian MacFarlane's unpublished manuscript regarding the royal visit of Prince Alfred to Victoria in 1867. He writes, 'In 1867 the *Victoria* and Naval Training Ship hoisted blue ensigns with a crown and kangaroo design'.<sup>[9]</sup>

It was during this 1867 royal visit by Prince Alfred that Her Majesty's Colonial Ship (HMCS) *Victoria* was photographed with the crew having 'dressed ship' and manned the yardarms. *Victoria* is shown flying the Union Flag from the bow, the pre-1864 British Red Naval Ensign from the foremast, the post-1864 British White Naval Ensign from the main mast and the Victorian Naval Ensign from the stern. A copy of this photograph was hand-tinted at the time and presented to HMCS *Victoria*'s captain, Captain Norman. That the tinted photograph survives in the hands of Captain Norman's great-grandson is extremely fortunate. Given that the original dimensions of the photograph are 355 mm x 204 mm, the size of the Victorian Ensign of 20 mm x 10 mm is not going to hold a lot of detail. Clearly the tinting of the flag was not intended for future researchers to definitively identify elements of the flag. On its own the image of the flag is not sufficient evidence for identification purposes. However, taken with the preceding information the tinted flag does allow us to confirm that the animal that we know to be a kangaroo is standing erect rather than squatting or leaping, is coloured yellow, and is under what we know to be a crown. What is missing from this flag is the St George cross which was mentioned in the 1865 *Victoria Government gazette*. Perhaps the cross was only used on the department flags and not on flags flown by Captain Norman's 'executive ships', as mentioned later in this article. In any case the St George cross is missing from both the 1867 coloured photograph and from an uncoloured copy of the photograph held by the National Library of Australia.[10]



Her Majesty's Colonial War Steamer *Victoria*, celebrating the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Alfred, to Melbourne in 1867. The crew of the *Victoria* have 'dressed ship' and manned the yardarms. The photograph was hand-tinted for presentation to the ship's commander, William Henry Norman. Reproduced courtesy of Captain Norman's great-grandson, Martin Lemann.



Detail from the hand-tinted photograph of HMCS *Victoria* in 1867 showing a yellow kangaroo and crown on the fly. The image has been enlarged, flipped horizontally and rotated 40 degrees.

As mentioned earlier, the 1877, 1901 and 1953 Victorian flags featured different crowns which related to the monarch of the day. Given that the 1877 flag featured the Imperial crown used by Queen Victoria[11] it is reasonable to assume that, as the 1856 and 1865 flags were created during Queen Victoria's reign, the style of crown that they would have incorporated would also have been the Imperial crown.

On the departure of Prince Alfred from *Victoria* in 1868, his ship, HMS *Galatea*, was described in the *Launceston examiner* as flying different flags from her three masts: '... the *Galatea*, by this time carrying the Victorian ensign (we believe we have named it properly) at her fore, the Royal Standard at her main, and the white ensign at her mizen [sic].[12] In the engraving of HMS *Galatea* below, the Royal Navy's white ensign can be seen flying from a line attached to the mizzenmast (mast near the stern) and the Victorian ensign flying from the foremast. Apart from the St George cross, the artist or the engraver has omitted any details from the Victorian ensign. A comparison of the two ensigns with the shading on the Victorian ensign, and the gun raft flag, suggests that the blue mentioned in the *Victoria Government gazette* may have been, unlike in the tinted photograph, actually a light blue.



Detail from the engraving *Departure of HMS Galatea from Hobson's Bay, with the Victorian ensign flying from the foremast. The illustrated Melbourne post, 1 January 1868, image courtesy of State Library of Victoria.*

## 1856 Victorian Flags

On consulting Ian MacFarlane, an expert on the early Victorian Navy, about the gun raft flag, I was advised that Public Record Office Victoria held correspondence regarding a proposal for the various government departments to fly flags on their vessels. These flags were to bear initials so as to indicate which department controlled each vessel.

Although simply seeking further information on the 1865 flags, an examination of three documents and associated notes held by PROV, as well as information on 12 December 1865 in the *Victoria Government gazette*, specifically the phrase 'in lieu of that previously in force', revealed that there was an even earlier flag than the 1865 design.

On 28 September 1856, Captain William Henry Norman of HMCS *Victoria* wrote to the Victorian Chief Secretary (Premier William Clark Haines) regarding the Chief Secretary's desire to distinguish the various departments' operating vessels by having them fly distinctive flags.[13] This proposal was initiated by the Chief Harbour Master, Captain Charles Ferguson, who had recommended on 11 September that, when on active duty, government vessels should fly distinguishing flags bearing initials so as to indicate to which department they belonged, such as was already the case with customs vessels.[14] In a letter from the Office of Trade and Customs dated 19 September it was pointed out that the letter V was to be used for HMCS *Victoria*,

W.P. for Water Police vessels such as the Blockship, *Sir Harry Smith*, P.D. for ships of the Penal Department such as the prison hulks, and H.O. for the Health Officer's boat. Unfortunately no mention was made of the initials already in use by the Customs Department.[15]

Captain Norman disagreed with the proposal that his ship, HMCS *Victoria*, should have the letter V added under the crown on the flag. In his letter of 28 September he argued that only ships belonging to civil departments such as Customs and the Harbour Master should have distinguishing letters on their flags.[16] It was the practice in Her Majesty's service, and in the governments of other colonies, for vessels which received their orders directly from the head of government *not* to have letters, as they were considered Executive Ships.

Frustratingly, in spite of Charles Ferguson's stated intention of 'defining the description and colour of flags they (Government vessels) are to hoist', the exact nature of the intended flags is not known. We know that the flag bore a crown. It is reasonable to assume that there was a Union Flag in the upper canton (as on the Australian and later Victorian flags). The only other hint is in Captain Norman's letter where he states that 'I therefore beg to suggest that as the "*Victoria*" has the Honor of being the first "War" Steam Sloop belonging to this, and in these Colonies – and will be expected to do the customary honors to the flag of any of H.M. officers that may visit the Colony by flying **the same Colored flag...** As the red ensign was the main ensign of the Royal Navy until 1864, particularly of visiting ships, it is likely that Captain Norman was referring to the Victorian Naval Ensign as also being red.

What is even more fascinating in Captain Norman's letter is that, before he made the case for not including the letter V on his ship's flag, he wrote the following.

Before going to [the] expense of making the alteration having the 'Kangaroo' in the position named for the letter, I beg most respectfully to bring to your notice what is customary in Her Majesty's Service, and the Governments of other colonies.

He then went on to argue his case against the use of the letter V. However it is the reference to the inclusion of a kangaroo image on the flag that is of interest here.

It appears that Captain Norman had decided to place an image of a kangaroo under the crown but was holding off on doing so until the letter V issue was sorted out. The notation signed by JM (possibly Assistant Colonial Secretary John Moore) that 'The letter V be dispensed with' indicates that there was indeed room for the kangaroo image below the crown.

Unfortunately, the Chief Secretary's reply, dated 10 October 1856, that 'The request of Captn. Norman may be complied with',[17] although suggesting that Captain Norman was free to proceed with his design, does not specifically mention that a kangaroo image was adopted. If only records always covered the points that we wanted to them to cover, research would be a lot easier!

A further letter dated 18 December 1856 regarding payment of £9-0-10 for flags for the ship *Victoria* gives no details,[18] and as it was for Major-General Edward McArthur's trip to Geelong, could possibly refer to pennants rather than flags.

When HMCS *Victoria* left for her second trip to New Zealand on 24 July 1860 carrying more members of the 40th Regiment of Foot, the *Argus* stated that '... there was a pervading feeling of gratification that a British general officer and his staff should take his departure **under our colonial flag**...'[19] That the colour of Victoria's colonial ensign was red is clear from the *Herald* newspaper's report of the same event, which stated '... the *Victoria* moved slowly away, St. George's ensign at the fore, **the red ensign at the main**, and the Governor's flag at the mizen [sic] ...'[20] The Victorian Navy's first of its two overseas campaigns, known as the First Taranaki War, was at least partly conducted under the 1856 Victorian Ensign. The only known image of *Victoriain* New Zealand is a contemporary watercolour by Edwin Harris in the Puke Ariki Library and Museum, New Plymouth. This painting, also on the cover of Ian MacFarlane's book, *Victoria and Australia's First War*,[21] shows HMCS *Victoria* landing a detachment of the British 40th Regiment of Foot and flying only the Union Flag. That *Victoria's* departure on 24 July was her second trip to New Zealand indicates that she had not stopped flying the Victorian Ensign during the First Taranaki War and that it was either flown all of the time that she was in New Zealand or, if the painting is accurate, at the least when away from New Zealand.

On her return from New Zealand in 1861, HMCS *Victoria*, under Captain Norman, travelled to the Gulf of Carpentaria in search of the Burke and Wills expedition. On the banks of the Barkly River, Captain Norman caused a flag to be raised as a signal to the missing explorers.[22] Whether he raised the Victorian or Union Flag is not mentioned. It would appear that the explorers being searched for did use a Victorian flag. At least two poems of the day refer to Burke and Wills travelling to the Gulf of Carpentaria with the Victorian flag.

**'Burke and Wills'** by 'M.M.E.' (third verse)  
They travelled [sic] o'er the desert wild,  
Victoria's flag they bore,  
And rested not until they gazed  
On Carpentaria's shore.[23]

#### Poem by 'J'

Mourn for the brave heroic souls who bore  
Victoria's flag to Carpentaria's shore,  
Achieved the object of their country's pride,  
And, left to fate by bungling savans, died.[24]

While in the Gulf of Carpentaria, the brig *Firefly* was placed under the command of Captain Norman. A painting of the *Firefly* on the Albert River, labelled 'The Victorian Naval Depot, by Lieutenant GA Woods V.N.' shows *Firefly* flying a red ensign. Unfortunately there is no detail on the fly (body) of the flag. The 1856 red ensign was certainly travelling around Australasia. Another painting of HMCS *Victoria* on Ian MacFarlane's website shows *Victoria* flying a red ensign with a hint of yellow on the fly of the flag.[25]

#### Conclusion

By examining the letters preserved at PROV, reports in newspapers and government publications of the mid-1800s, and photographs, engravings and paintings of the same time, we now know that *Victoria* had two colonial flags prior to the previously known 1870 and 1877 colonial flags and the two Victorian 1901 and 1953 State flags. Not only do we now know that 1856 and 1865 Victorian flags existed, but we have a reasonably good idea of their appearance.



Possible 1856 Victorian Naval Ensign. Private Collection.



Possible 1865 Victorian Naval Ensign. Private Collection.



## Endnotes

- [1] *The Argus*, 10 February 1870, p. 5.
- [2] *Naval & military gazette*, 30 April 1870.
- [3] *The illustrated Melbourne post*, 18 February 1865.
- [4] *Victoria Government gazette*, item of 27 January 1865, p. 189.
- [5] *Victoria Government gazette*, item of 12 December 1865, p. 2888.
- [6] *Debates in the Houses of Legislature during the third session of the fourth Parliament of South Australia*, Andrews Thomas & Clark, Register & Observer Offices, Adelaide, 1867, 1 November 1866, column 839.
- [7] *ibid.*, column 837. In all of the quoted passages below, the highlighting has been added by the author.
- [8] *Bell's life in Sydney and sporting chronicle*, 29 June 1867 p. 3.
- [9] I MacFarlane, 'Victoria: a history of HMCSS *Victoria*', unpublished manuscript, private collection, p. 195.
- [10] Australian War Memorial, *Her Majesty's Colonial Steam Ship "Victoria"*, Photograph, Black & white – Film original negative 5x4 safety base, item no 300060.
- [11] PROV, VA 672 Premier's Office, VPRS 1163/P8 Inward Correspondence Files 1945-1971, Unit 1, 45/592 Seals, Flags, Arms, Badges etc.
- [12] *Launceston examiner*, 11 January 1868, p. 2.
- [13] PROV, VA 475 Chief Secretary's Department, VPRS 1189/P0 Inward Registered Correspondence 1, Unit 690 Customs (includes some Harbour Master), Item W56/8028.
- [14] *ibid.*, Item W56/8028, Harbourmaster Ferguson letter dated 11 September 1856.
- [15] *ibid.*, letter from the Office of the Commissioner of Trade and Customs dated 19 September 1856.
- [16] *ibid.*, Unit 579 Naval 1856- , Item X56/8282, letter from Captain Norman dated 28 September 1856.
- [17] *ibid.*, annotation on cover sheet, signed by WHC [presumably William Clark Haines the Chief Secretary] dated 13 October 1866.
- [18] *ibid.*, File Y56/10531 ½.
- [19] *The Argus*, 25 July 1860, p. 5.
- [20] *The Herald*, 25 July 1860, p. 4.
- [21] I MacFarlane and N Smith, *Victoria and Australia's first war*, Mostly Unsung Military History Research and Publications, Brighton, Victoria, 2005.
- [22] See Commander William Henry Norman's Journal ('Report of Commander Norman of H.M.C.S.S. *Victoria*, together with copy of his journal of the late expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria'), available on the Burke & Wills online digital archive (accessed 20 August 2012).
- [23] *The Cornwall chronicle*, 26 July 1862, p. 2.
- [24] *The South Australian advertiser*, 13 November 1861, p. 2.
- [25] See watercolour sketch, late 1850s?, on Defending Victoria website (accessed 14 September 2012).

# A Case of Arson

## Investigating the Fire at the Steiglitz Coffee Palace in September 1895

Mary Daley

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'A Case of Arson: Investigating the Fire at the Steiglitz Coffee Palace in September 1895', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 11, 2012. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Mary Daley.

Mary Daley, in her retirement, is undertaking history research as part of a Masters Degree at La Trobe University. When learning how to work in the records at PROV, Mary found the story of the fire at Steiglitz amongst the files of capital crimes. As a fifth-generation Victorian with relatives currently living close to the tiny town of Steiglitz, and as a bushwalker who has walked in that area, Mary was intrigued. The case of arson she uncovered proved to be complex, sad and disturbing.

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### Abstract

**In rural Victoria in September 1895, the Steiglitz Coffee Palace burned to the ground. At a Supreme Court trial held in Geelong, the jury found two people guilty of deliberately setting fire to the building. As arson was a capital crime in that period, the judge sentenced them both to death. Later, the prosecuting lawyer himself appealed for the release of the two prisoners. Had Joseph Gill and his mother-in-law been condemned on false evidence? This article reveals the curious story of the fire at the Steiglitz Coffee Palace.**

### Persons in the Report

#### *The accused:*

*Ella Hicksh*  
A widow  
Mother of *Mabel*, Julie, Olga  
Mothers-in-law of *Joseph Gill*  
Mothers-in-law of Will Liebenow

*Joseph Francis Gill*  
Lessee of the Victoria Coffee Palace at Steiglitz  
Husband of *Mabel*

#### *The judge:*

*Mr Justice Williams* (also known as Sir Hartley Williams)

#### *The lawyers:*

*Mr JTT Smith* (Crown Prosecutor)  
*Mr Purves QC* and *Mr Schutt*  
(Defence lawyers for Mrs Hicksh)  
*Mr Eagleson* (Defence lawyer for Mr Gill)

#### *Coroner at Steiglitz:*

*Mr GWF Patterson* (Police Magistrate)

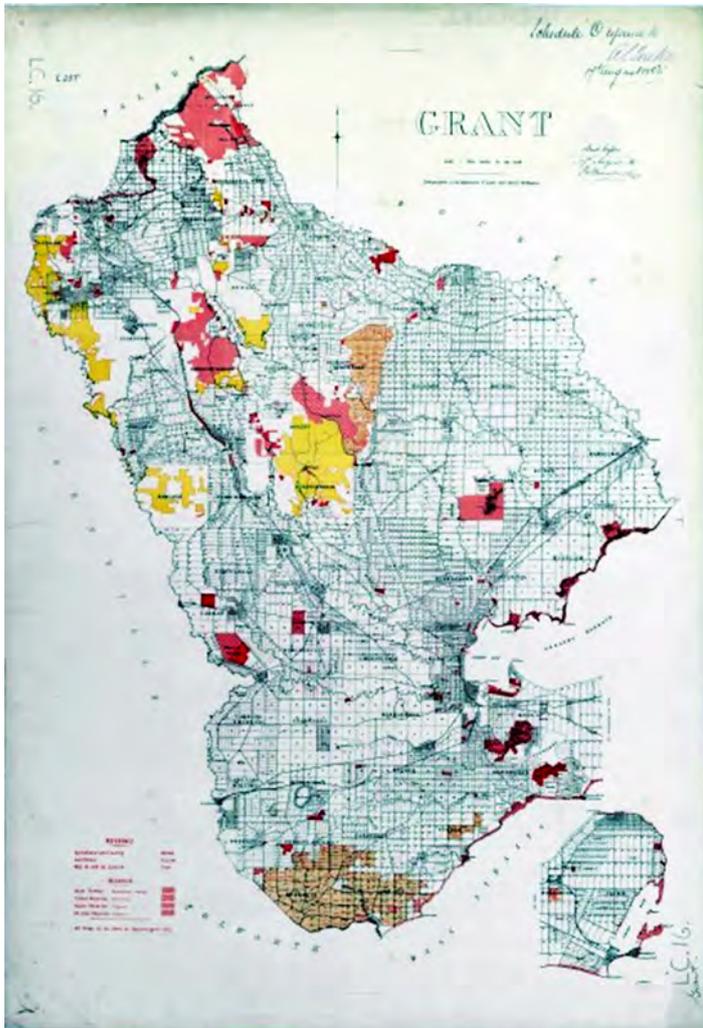
#### *Witnesses:*

*Senior Constable Arnold* (Policeman at Steiglitz)  
*Elizabeth Rocks* (niece of Mrs Bligh and staff member at Coffee Palace)

#### *Landlord:*

*Mr Thomas Eyre*

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PROV, VPRS 8168/P2, Unit 2431, Map of the County of Grant, showing the town of Steiglitz at centre in the yellow shaded reserve. Steiglitz is approximately 80 km west of Melbourne and 39 km north-west of Geelong.

In the early 1890s, a major recession in the colony of Victoria was being felt in a pretty country town called Steiglitz. Steiglitz had been settled when gold was found around the Sutherland Creek area in 1854. Though the population was no longer at the record gold rush levels of the 1860s of approximately 1500 residents, there were still sufficient numbers of people in the area to support seven working mines. In June 1893 a newspaper was introduced: the *Steiglitz miner* was published every Saturday morning and cost one penny per copy.

In 1892 Mr Eyre, a Melbourne investor, purchased one of the oldest hotels in Steiglitz. His original idea was to pull it down and rebuild a more spacious and opulent venue, but, considering the economic climate, he decided instead to renovate the timber building as a coffee palace with licensed wine bar. It had an adjoining store and he added a doctor's residence and surgery, all under the one roof.

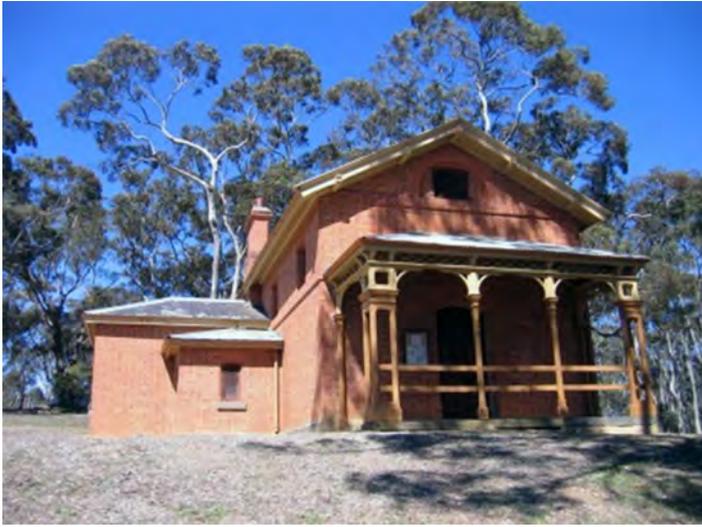
The Victoria Coffee Palace at Steiglitz burned to the ground in September 1895. The doctor's residence and surgery and the adjoining McLellan's grocery store were also destroyed. Ellis's draper's shop opposite was saved with great difficulty. There was no loss of life because a miner riding into town to summons Doctor Scott for a medical emergency smelt smoke, and was able to rouse all the people sleeping in the coffee palace and in the adjacent buildings.[1]

### The Investigation

In November 1895, before a jury at the Steiglitz Court House, Police Magistrate Mr GWF Patterson conducted an inquest into the fire. The jury found that the fire was deliberately lit but by persons unknown.[2] However, just a few days later the police arrested the lessee of the coffee palace, Joseph Francis Gill. The case was heard in the Supreme Court of Geelong, as this was the closest sitting of the court to Steiglitz.

The local newspapers, in particular the *Steiglitz miner* and the *News of the week and Western District advertiser* extensively reported the investigations into the fire at Steiglitz. The main witness was Miss Elizabeth Rocks, a friend of the lessee, who had met Joseph Gill in 1888 when he first arrived in Australia from Ireland. She went to Steiglitz in March 1895 to work at the coffee palace, and she left Steiglitz the morning before the fire, in September 1895. As Miss Rocks was then the sole employee at the coffee palace, when she left her employment on the morning of 8 September 1895, Mr Gill employed Mary Jane Moody to replace her. Two local girls, Mary Jane Moody and Amelia Murray, had been employed previously, but were layed off when business became too slow to support them. Mary Jane Moody was thus re-employed by Mr Gill on the evening before the fire and was asleep in the coffee palace at the time of the fire. Mrs Mabel Gill, wife of Joseph Gill, went to Melbourne temporarily in August 1895, but was detained there when she became ill with Influenza.

When giving evidence Miss Rocks stated that Joseph Gill had told her that he intended to set fire to the coffee palace. She stated that just two days before the fire she had overheard Joseph Gill and his mothers-in-law, Ella Hicksh, in a heated argument about a matter of Mr Gill repaying her a debt of £90. According to Miss Rocks, Mrs Hicksh threatened to make Gill insolvent the following Monday. Miss Rocks gave evidence that goods and paintings had been removed from the coffee palace about a month before the fire.



Steiglitz Court House. Photograph courtesy of Mary Daley.

In the witness box for five hours at the Supreme Court trial in February 1896, Elizabeth Rocks claimed that Mrs Hicksh had said that

both Mr Gill and his wife had been a terrible nuisance to her for a long time and if they got this insurance money I will have done with them, I will pack them off home to his father and let him have the bother I've had for a while... Mrs Hicksh told me her daughter had married Gill on the sly and that he was always a nuisance. Then she said that if she had known that Mrs Gill was going to be such a nuisance she would have twisted her neck when she was a child and that she wished that Mr and Mrs Gill would go and commit suicide...[3]

Miss Rocks further claimed that Gill had asked her to stop scrubbing the kitchen and had said, 'I forbid you before to scrub; you are not going to spoil my chance of a fire by damping the boards.' Miss Rocks stated that she had turned off the bath water running out of the bath, but that Gill had said that he wanted to empty the water tank. (On being cross-examined she agreed that Mr Gill had 'spoken before about putting lime into the tank to prevent typhoid fever'.) Miss Rocks stated that Gill had asked her to sleep in his dressing room when his wife was away because Mrs Hicksh had asked him to say this. Mr Gill and Mrs Hicksh denied the accusations made by Miss Rocks. They pleaded Not Guilty at all times.

The Crown Prosecutor called thirty-seven witnesses. Many people from the community of Steiglitz gave evidence. Details emerged. Some boxes taken from the coffee palace had been stored at the Cobb & Co Station before they were carted to Melbourne and to Port Fairy. The lists of all their contents were provided to the court. Claims that wood shavings were found in the billiard room, the room where the fire started, were noted. The carpenter working in the coffee palace to renovate and

extend the bar confirmed the shavings, and he claimed that a bag of shavings was missing. He said that Mr Gill had asked him to take his tools home 'in case of a fire'. A local police constable said in the courtroom that what struck him as peculiar was that Gill was remarkably well dressed after the fire. Several witnesses gave evidence about not finding money in a cash box recovered from the fire, the implication being that it had been emptied before the fire. The pump for water was found to be locked and broken. There was evidence that Mr and Mrs Gill had travelled to Port Fairy using tickets in the names of Mr and Mrs Liebenow (Mrs Hicksh's son-in-law Will Liebenow and her daughter Julie). A piano had been removed from the bar to a small anteroom, reportedly at the request of Mrs Gill to protect it from the miners. The grocer gave evidence that he considered that the amounts of kerosene purchased by Mr Gill were very large quantities. A local farmer who supplied firewood had thought that Mr Gill needed further supplies on the day before the fire, but Mr Gill (who stated that he was thinking to change his supplier of firewood) had instructed him to wait until the Monday following.

Joseph Gill and his mothers-in-law Ella Hicksh were found guilty of deliberately lighting the fire and were both sentenced to death.[4] The case is more complex, and more intriguing than the newspapers at the time suggested. The records from the trial still exist. And the story of what happened after the trial raises further questions.

### The Judge's Report of the Trial

The trial judge's report is held at PROV. It is apparent that Justice Hartley Williams was surprised that the jury found the accused guilty, as the decision suggested to him that the jury had believed the evidence of the witness Elizabeth Rocks. He wrote:

her story when read or heard strikes the mind as a most extraordinary one; but the jury evidently believed her, as they could not possibly have convicted the accused without accepting her evidence.

Sir Hartley Williams went on to itemise eight pieces of evidence needed to corroborate the evidence of Miss Rocks:

1. the locking up of the pump
2. the breaking of the pump on the morning of the fire
3. the purchase of kerosene
4. the removal of furniture &c from the Coffee Palace shortly before the fire

5. the moving of the piano from the Commercial room into a small parlour from which it would be very difficult to get it out
6. emptying a tank over bath
7. removal of pictures
8. giving false names to shipping agent when taking passengers for Port Fairy.

In his summary of the evidence at the trial, Judge Williams was satisfied that six of these points had received a reasonable explanation in the course of the evidence adduced at the trial. For item number 8, he accepted the defence counsel's suggestion that a clerk may have made a mistake when writing the names on the tickets. And he seemed to leave the matter of the broken pump unproven. He wrote: 'There is no evidence as to how the pump came to be broken on the morning of the fire except that contained in the deposition of Gill.' The judge also wrote: 'Wholesale searches seem to have been made everywhere ... and nothing found which could in any degree tell against the accused.'

Despite any misgivings the judge might have had, his report concluded: '... the jury having convicted both the accused I ordered sentence of death to be recorded against them. The jury recommended the male prisoner to mercy.'

The jury, in recommending mercy for the accused, Joseph Francis Gill, had apparently relied on the argument given by the Crown Prosecutor that the most significant blame for this crime lay with Ella Hicksh. In March 1896, Sir Hartley Williams approved an application to commute the death sentences. Joseph Francis Gill's sentence was commuted to a period of five years gaol, and Ella Hicksh's death sentence was commuted to eight years in gaol.

These sentences may seem unduly harsh today, but they need to be understood in the context of the fire risk at the time. Although Furphy's water cart had been developed in the 1880s and might have been used for water cartage by fire brigades, in fact in the 1890s fire brigades were rare. There was no fire brigade in Steiglitz. Fires took hold quickly, and in rural areas the risk of bushfires was real. Losses of life and property often resulted from fires. For these reasons, a severe penalty such as capital punishment was thought to be an effective and appropriate deterrence for this crime.

## Petitions

Two events then occurred which make the story of arson in Steiglitz a curious one. The first is that both people accused of deliberately lighting the fire were released

from prison early. Joseph Gill was released from gaol in December 1898 – after serving less than three years – and Ella Hicksh was discharged from prison in July 1900, after only four years' imprisonment. The second event is more remarkable. The Crown Prosecutor, Mr JTT Smith himself petitioned for the release of both prisoners. In the matter of Ella Hicksh's release, Smith expressed grave doubts about her guilt and was convinced 'of the high possibility of a mistake [having] being made in this matter'.

At the trial in the Supreme Court in Geelong, the Crown Prosecutor had provided evidence to the court by calling thirty-seven witnesses. The legal team of three defence lawyers had called just three witnesses for the defence. The defence lawyers included Mr Purves QC, who, with Mr Schutt, had represented Mrs Hicksh. In 1900, the Crown Prosecutor was critical of the limited number of witnesses called. He wrote: '... and I have always felt that if Mr Purves had adopted the course of calling witnesses the result in all probability would have been different'. Even so, in his cross-examining Mr Purves was able to elicit that two fires had previously broken out at the coffee palace, the first when a kerosene lamp overturned and the second when a burning log rolled out from the open fireplace.

## Mabel Gill

The early release of her husband and her mother was the result of the unflagging endeavours of Mabel Gill. About three months before the fire, Mabel's only child, born 7 June 1894, had died a day before his first birthday, on 6 June 1895. Mabel was in Melbourne on the night of the fire, unable to return to Steiglitz because she had succumbed to influenza, and her mother had travelled to the town in her stead.

More than a century later, we can only surmise about her level of grief on that trial day in February 1896 when she heard that her husband and mother were sentenced to death, but Mabel Gill did not falter. In October 1896 she presented a petition by forty-two signatories to plead for her husband's release from gaol. These signatories comprised solicitors, barristers, clergymen, accountants, a doctor, an architect, three merchants, a Justice of the Peace, and signatories from several other reputable occupations, forming a powerful list. How did Mabel manage to persuade such a respectable group to plead for her husband? One wonders whether the signatories personally knew Joseph Gill and thought him a man of good character, or if they signed out of pity for the bereaved wife and mother.

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## The Crown Prosecutor

The Crown Prosecutor's behaviour is also curious. In February 1896 he had argued that Hicksh and Gill were both guilty of deliberately setting fire to the coffee palace in order to obtain insurance money. But in October 1896 he supported Mabel Gill's petition for the release of her husband and he wrote a two-page letter pleading that Joseph Gill did not light the fire. He wrote:

I formed the opinion that Gill had intended to fire the building but being persuaded by Miss Rocks had abandoned his intentions and that there existed facts to justify the belief that probably the place was set on fire by Mrs Hicksh in the early Sunday morning without the knowledge or participation or consent of Gill.

Sir Hartley Williams seems to have been stung by this suggestion of Gill's innocence. He responded firmly: 'It never occurred to me that one was guilty and the other innocent, nor do I now think so.' He also repeated his earlier misgivings about Miss Rock's evidence: '... her evidence, if it be accepted as the truth appears to me to establish a clear case of arson against both prisoners'. He continued: 'The only doubt I had at the trial was to Miss Rock's credibility – but the jury believed her and I subsequently placed my doubts as to her credibility ... before the Executive.'

In response to the judge's written comments, the Solicitor General refused the appeal. He wrote to the Governor:

I was disposed to deal somewhat leniently with the case, but the report of Sir Hartley Williams ... leaves me in no doubt in my mind as to the course I should follow. His Honour is clear as to the guilt of the prisoner Gill and I have therefore no option but to advise His Excellency that there be no interference with the sentence passed by the Court in the case.

In May 1900, Mr Brent Eagleson (who acted as Gill's lawyer) wrote to Mr Smith:

As you know I have been strongly of the opinion and am so still that [Hicksh] was wrongly convicted: I firmly believe, as I have told you all along, that she is an innocent woman, and for that reason I will do whatever I possibly can to restore her to that liberty, of which in my firm opinion she has been wrongly deprived during the last long several weary years.

An initialled note below added 'I concur with the above.' They seem to be the initials of Crown Prosecutor, Mr JTT Smith.

In June 1900, Mr JTT Smith wrote to the Secretary of Law at the Crown Law Office to plead for Mrs Hicksh's release from prison:

As you are aware I have always had grave doubts as to the justice of the conviction in this case which came to me (and to my knowledge) to the presiding judge as

a great surprise resting as the proof did in the almost unsupported evidence of one witness and one animated as she herself explained to me by a sense of a great wrong done to her by Mrs Hicksh and of great anger toward her ... I am more than ever convinced of the high possibility of a mistake being made in this matter...

The petitions by the Crown Prosecutor, pleading for the release from prison of two people he had successfully prosecuted, are curious matters in this story.

## Joseph Francis Gill

Joe Gill's story seems straightforward enough. He migrated from Ireland in 1888 and came with good credentials, including a letter stating that his references were available from the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Carr. In Melbourne he boarded with a Mrs Bligh (aunt to Miss Rocks), became employed and was studious in his work as a clerk. He met and married Mabel Hicksh, and moved to Steiglitz some time during 1893 to open the Steiglitz Coffee Palace and licensed wine bar, in partnership with a Mr Brown. Mr Brown left the partnership and returned to Melbourne some months before the fire.

While Gill was a prisoner, he reported that a warder named Charles Foster was taking bribes and also selling contraband to the prisoners. He was assaulted by the other prisoners and suffered injuries to his head. In addition to the petition presented by Mabel Gill, it is probable that an issue of protection for Joseph Gill while in gaol was a factor in his early release. The documentation merely noted that his discharge date included remissions.

## Ella Hicksh

Ella Hicksh's story is more complex. She was a widow when she began to visit her daughter and family at Steiglitz. She supported herself and claimed that she belonged to the nobility in Ireland. She was generally regarded with suspicion and distrust. The Steiglitz policeman, Senior Constable Arnold, gave a statement about Mrs Hicksh that included the comment: 'all through my enquiry I could never trace the character of this woman further than that she was a woman living on her means ...'

The Capital Case File on Ella Hicksh held at PROV shows that she had been married to Robert Hicksh, a captain in the army who later worked as an engineer in the colony's Railways Department. He obviously left her well provided for, as Mrs Hicksh could prove that she had assets of about £4,000 in 1896.

.....

Around twenty-three years before the fire, Mrs Hicksh had been incarcerated in the South Yarra Lunatic Asylum 'for six months from February 1872 until June 1873 [sic]' as she was experiencing 'Puerperal Mania'. Puerperal fever is an illness caused by uterine infection following childbirth – by all accounts a highly distressing condition.

In 1882, Mrs Hicksh was injured in an incident referred to in her file as 'the Box Hill Railway Accident'. At that time, she had a toddler – her youngest daughter Olga, born in 1881. The injuries sustained in this accident led to a heart irregularity. Her file does not indicate when she was widowed. When she suffered the loss of her grandchild in June 1895, she arranged for the one-year-old to be buried in Melbourne with her husband.

Ella Hicksh was the mother of three daughters at the time of the Steiglitz Coffee Palace fire: Mabel, Olga and Julie. Julie and her husband, Will Liebenow, lived in Port Fairy. The Liebenows were also caught up in the web of the trial because of the travel tickets written in their names that were used by Mr and Mrs Gill for a trip to Port Fairy.



Steiglitz: Draper's shop and site of the Victoria Coffee Place in foreground. Photograph courtesy of Mary Daley.

If the fire at Steiglitz was meant to be an attempt to raise funds, then it failed. Joseph Gill lost everything in the fire. Mrs Hicksh met all expenses. Insurance claims paid by the insurance companies were paid back. Mrs Hicksh paid out approximately £2,500 to meet all costs, damages and claims. In a final petition, prepared in June 1900, two of her daughters, Mabel then aged 26, and Olga aged 19, pledged to take care of their mother. Mabel wrote that she would not resume her marriage with Joseph Gill and would support and take care of her mother.

### Questions Still Unanswered

Why did the jury believe Elizabeth Rocks? Senior Constable Arnold of Steiglitz was clear about Joseph Francis Gill. On 23 February 1896, just two days after Gill was sentenced to death for the crime of arson, he wrote: 'He was a man of orderly and industrious habits and of apparently good character although not generally well liked and in consequence his business did not thrive.' Did the Crown Prosecutor prove his guilt? Or did a man's unpopularity condemn him?

Was it a case of arson in Steiglitz? If the death penalties had not been commuted to terms of imprisonment then Ella Hicksh and Joseph Gill would have been hanged for the crime. This seems to have been a case which included malice and mischief and jury error and legal passivity. The cost was high. A marriage was sundered; a man was imprisoned for almost three years; a woman was imprisoned for more than four years; a man's livelihood was burnt to the ground; a woman's savings of £2,500 were consumed; a doctor's residence and surgery were burned down (Doctor Scott moved to Warracknabeal in October 1895, the move perhaps prompted by the fire[5] ); Mr McLellan's residence and newly-opened grocery business were lost. Doubt and sadness and loss prevailed. There are still questions about the fire in Steiglitz. Were two innocent people sentenced to death? Was the fire that burned so fiercely on the morning of 8 September 1895, like other fires in the coffee palace at Steiglitz, accidental?



Photograph of Joseph F Gill, June 1896. PROV, VPRS 515/P0 Central Register for Male Prisoners, Unit 50, prisoner number 27352, folio 76.

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## Endnotes

[1] *The Age*, 9 September 1895, p. 6; *Geelong advertiser*, 10 September 1895; *The Steiglitz miner and Meredithshire advertiser*, 14 September 1895, p. 1.

[2] *The news of the week and Western District advertiser*, 30 November 1895, p. 5.

[3] PROV, VPRS 264/P0 Capital Case Files, Unit 24, Ella Hicksh. All of the details about the case and the quotations given in the text are taken from this file.

[4] *Geelong advertiser*, 22 February 1896, p. 1.

[5] *Steiglitz miner and Meredithshire advertiser*, 26 October 1895, p. 3.

# ‘New History from below’ captured within the records of the Bendigo Regional Archives Centre

Dr Michele Matthews

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“‘New History from below’ captured within the records of the Bendigo Regional Archives Centre’, *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 11, 2012. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Michele Matthews.

Dr Michele Matthews has been a local and social historian for nearly three decades since she first used correspondence held by the then Bendigo City Council for her Honours thesis. She is an ardent advocate for the use of local history records to tell Victorian and Australian history from a grassroots perspective. Michele’s MA thesis, ‘A forgotten “Father” of Federation: Sir John Quick 1852-1911’ (2003), and her PhD thesis, ‘Survivors, schemes, Samaritans and shareholders: the impact of the Great Depression on Bendigo and District 1925-1935’ (2007), both drew heavily on Bendigo and district records.

Michele worked as an historian, undertaking numerous contracts for the former City of Bendigo Council, including researching and writing the Catalogue of Bendigo City Council’s Correspondence 1856-1899. Since working at the Bendigo Regional Archives Centre (BRAC), she has created an accompanying subject and person index for this catalogue. Michele also worked as the historian for Bendigo Bank, cataloguing their extensive record collection. She has also written articles, book reviews and teachers’ notes for documentaries. A personal highlight was writing the entry for Sir John Quick in the *Australian dictionary of biography*, vol. 11.

Michele has been an Archives Officer at BRAC since its commencement in 2008. Many of the records she now looks after in her day-to-day work are the same ones she first used while researching for her Honours thesis back in 1983. She has spoken at many public functions about the records housed at BRAC, and is particularly proud of the digitised online project, *Petitions of the people*, that was officially launched on 29 February this year.

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## Abstract

**Bendigo Regional Archives Centre (BRAC) is the caretaker of records created by six former councils, now all under the umbrella of the City of Greater Bendigo. Established in 2008, it is a rich resource for genealogists and local historians. The three sections in this article – Gender, Court Records, and Racism – each elaborate upon the central argument that local records held at BRAC allow researchers to tell ‘New History from below’ – that is, to research the stories of women, children and minority ethnic groups who have been omitted from local and wider history writing, partly because the records now housed at BRAC were previously difficult to access. That hurdle is no longer an issue.**

The newly established Bendigo Regional Archives Centre (BRAC) had its genesis in the 1980s, when locals, including the editor of the *Bendigo advertiser* and myself, argued that Bendigo needed to have its own archives centre (and museum) to house the region’s rich history dating back to the Victorian gold rush.

The culmination of many local grassroots meetings was the establishment of BRAC in 2008 as a Place of Deposit (POD) to care for permanent public records, as specified in the Victorian *Public Records Act 1973*. As well as having POD status, BRAC aims to collect and acquire private records from regional individuals and organisations.

BRAC’s establishment is definitely unique, being a joint partnership between the City of Greater Bendigo, PROV and the Goldfields Library Corporation. Each partner provides expertise and/or funding. Such a partnership has never occurred before in Victoria. We know that other regional centres are watching BRAC’s development with interest.

The reading room and the on-site repository, which houses half a kilometre of high-usage records, are located upstairs at the Bendigo Library, physically cheek-by-jowl with the Library’s Research Centre. This means that any researcher taps into the expertise of Margaret Sawyers (archivist), myself (historian), and the wonderful research librarians.

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I contend that the use of local and regional archival records, for any academic or non-academic research purposes, add a depth to the telling of Australian history that is still lacking in work undertaken in this country today. Grassroots perspectives of key events in our history – ranging from the development of white settlement outside Melbourne prior to 1900, to Federation, to the post World War I influenza epidemic and the Great Depression – all exist within the varied, inter-related series housed at BRAC. Hundreds of fresh stories await eager postgraduate students (and any other researchers) who want to move away from more mundane history writing that only focuses on prominent individuals and capital cities, and instead delve into what historian Martyn Lyons recently called the ‘New History from below’.[1]

BRAC records allow any historian, professional or amateur, to ‘hear’ the voices of working-class women and men, of minority residents from other countries (Cornish, German and Chinese in the case of Bendigo and district), of people who have never made it to the pages of any local history publication, let alone a wider Australian study – truly ‘New History from below’ waiting to be told.

To this day, there has still been only one all-encompassing history of Bendigo written, and it was first published in 1973.[2] Frank Cusack, its author, privately bemoaned the fact to me that, when he was researching that work, he had to rely on records held at the State Library of Victoria – pre PROV – and on microfilm of our long-established newspaper, the *Bendigo advertiser*. He could not gain access to any local government records in the 1960s.

This anecdote leads me to the important issue of access to the many records now held at BRAC. Prior to 2008, these sources were housed and cared for by the records staff employed by six former individual councils – the City of Bendigo, the Borough of Eaglehawk, and the shires of Huntly, Marong, Mclvor and Strathfieldsaye (the smaller boroughs of Raywood and Heathcote had earlier been absorbed into Marong and Mclvor shires respectively).[3] The time constraints and the skills of those staff determined whether or not any historians were permitted to use the records. Charles Fahey’s 1978-81 PhD research on ‘social mobility’ within Bendigo and north central Victoria in the last decades of the nineteenth century was a unique example. He told me he used both Bendigo and Eaglehawk’s rate books during the course of his research.[4]

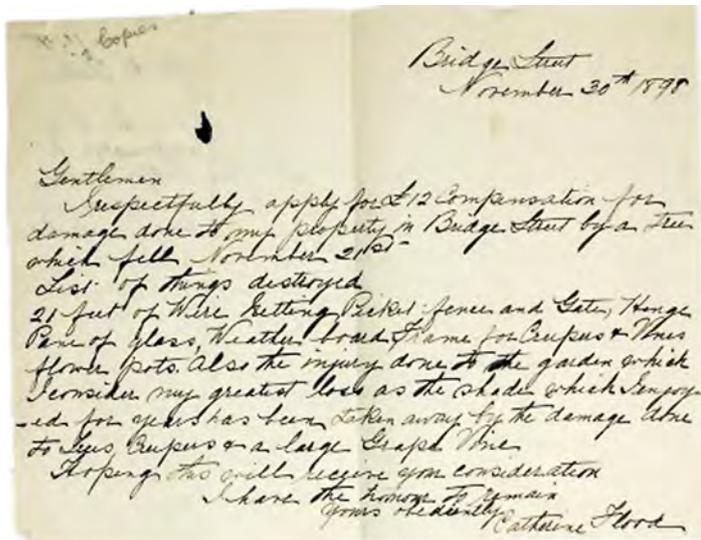
My own honours work in 1983, which saw me searching for surviving correspondence and minutes about Bendigo’s response to Federation, was a rare instance where permission was given to use the former Sandhurst/Bendigo Council’s extensive nineteenth-century correspondence collection (the care of which is now a rewarding part of my duties at BRAC).[5] The only person I know of who used Bendigo Council’s twentieth-century correspondence, also in the early 1980s, was Charlie Fox, for his ground-breaking analysis of the Great Depression’s politicisation of workers in Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong.[6] When Michael Roper conducted his Masters research in 1984, focusing on cultural traditions in Sandhurst between 1852 and 1886,[7] I supervised his access to the collection, because I was then employed by Bendigo Council to write a catalogue for their nineteenth-century correspondence. Bendigo’s town clerk allowed me to do this work after I explained to him how such a catalogue would ensure easier access to the correspondence for researchers and staff alike, as well as help to preserve the documents by reducing their handling.[8] Since joining BRAC in 2008, I have been able to type up an accompanying index to this catalogue, with subjects and individuals cross-referenced; this index makes the nineteenth-century correspondence even more accessible to staff and researchers.

The following sections of this article – Gender, Court Records, and Racism – show how the stories of forgotten individuals can be brought to light using the records housed at BRAC. These accounts are of course only the tip of the iceberg; many more stories wait to be told.

## Gender

Even short autobiographical accounts by local female correspondents in their own words and handwriting give us insights into the issues that concerned female ratepayers and residents of nineteenth-century Bendigo. A minority wrote letters of complaint about issues they had with their local council.

Catherine Flood made a detailed complaint about the state of her Bridge Street home and garden in November 1898, after a street tree fell into her property. She made it very clear to the councillors which damage bothered her the most: ‘the injury done to the garden which I consider my greatest loss as the shade which I enjoyed for years has been taken away by the damage done to Trees, Creepers & a large Grape Vine’.[9]



Catherine Flood's letter to Bendigo Council, 30 November 1898. Bendigo Regional Archives Centre, VA 2389 Bendigo Council, VPRS 16936/P1 Inwards Correspondence, Unit 47, Bundle 8-30 November 1898.

There were hardship letters from women like the widow, Eliza Haythornwaite. In 1886, she asked for a refund of the two lots of impound fees she had paid council because of her wandering cow and calf. She assured the councillors this would no longer be an issue because she had sold the carefree cow, but the refund was necessary because 'I am a poor Widow with 8 children to support...'[10] The Sandhurst rate books show that from 1882 to 1890 she was the owner and occupier of her home at the corner of Thistle and Rowan streets, with the land and house valued at £14. [11]

In contrast, BRAC records contain examples of local women who were more than comfortably off. One such example came to light when descendants of Amelia Burstall visited BRAC in 2010. They believed the family may have had money in the past, but had no details. The Sandhurst rate books showed that in the two decades 1868-1888 Amelia owned numerous blocks of land, culminating in ownership of nine blocks in 1884, all being geographically located within the one suburb of White Hills.[12] In 1873, she owned and lived on a farming property, valued at £40, located in the Parish of Lockwood within the Shire of Marong. Her occupation is delightfully recorded as 'farmeress'. [13]

Our own ladies' petition, dated 12 November 1873, is a rare example of large numbers of Sandhurst's women expressing their deep concerns about an issue. In this case it was an attempt to use a section of the city's central public recreational space, Rosalind Park, for sports activities which interfered with their use of this

public retreat. This petition was signed by a total of 146 women who called themselves 'Wives & Daughters of the Ratepayers'. [14] Their stated addresses were tightly concentrated in the very middle-class residential blocks within walking distance north of the park (only a sprinkling of addresses were further afield).

The wording of this petition's prayer is very powerful, particularly points 2 and 3 which assert their rights:

2. That such destruction of the ground would be depriving us of the only outdoor pleasurable place of resort within the City and is a deliberate interference with our domestic rights and privileges.
3. That your petitioners earnestly hope your Council will see the absolute necessity for voting against the proposals ... and your petitioners ... will be for ever grateful.

Mothers and daughters like Jane Vahland and her three girls signed in familial order. They were the respected family of the city's most famous architect, Wilhelm Carl Vahland. Surprisingly, the daughters were born in 1864, 1866 and June 1873, so the older girls were aged only nine and seven, and the youngest five months old, at the time this petition was created! [15]

The sports activities these women objected to did not eventuate. The city's main sports ground located in Rosalind Park, now our Queen Elizabeth Oval, was not commenced until the 1890s and is located in the southernmost corner of the park, not the lower section referred to in the petition. [16]

Examples of mourning or bereavement letters, complete with black edging, from female residents to the council have also survived. The young Frances Connelly, wife of Thomas Jefferson Connelly who was the city's first native-born and to this day its youngest mayor (aged only twenty-nine when he wore the mayoral robes), thanked Acting Town Clerk Honeybone for 'the Address they so kindly sent as a memento of their sympathy for us and the acknowledgement of my late husband's endeavours to do his duty as a citizen'. [17]

The 'us' refers to their three young children, aged only seven, six and four at the time of their father's death. The enormity of her personal loss explains her concluding comment: 'Words fail me, & at present I feel I dare not think.' Connelly died of apoplexy, at the age of only thirty-four, on 18 October 1892. This nearly unknown young champion of Australian Federation passed the national baton on to his friend and fellow stalwart believer, Dr John Quick. [18]

30/11/92.  
 Wattle Street  
 Bendigo

Dear Mr. Townshend.

I was very sorry I was too ill to see you the other evening, but am only able to write now. Please convey to the Council my deepest appreciation for the address they so kindly sent me. A. Connelly

Separately in red  
 & the reimbursement  
 of my late husband's  
 endeavours to do his  
 duty as a citizen.  
 God's will be done & at  
 present I feel I dare  
 not think.

Thanking you also  
 for the kind courtesy  
 you have always  
 shown me.

Believe me ever  
 yours most sincerely  
 J. Jefferson Connelly.

M. Townshend  
 Relief Town Clerk.

Mrs Connelly's letter to Bendigo Council, 30 November 1892. BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 35, Bundle 21-30 November 1892.

Bendigo even has its own local female suffrage petition, signed by women and men, and penned by the same Dr John Quick on 2 July 1894. Quick was, perhaps, Bendigo's answer to John Stuart Mill. He was definitely the writer of the petition's prayer and the first signatory; as his only biographer, I would recognise his unique scrawl anywhere.[19] The twenty-one petitioners asked the Mayor to convene a public meeting 'for the purpose of considering the advisability of extending the franchise to women'.[20] Relative to the fact that South Australia, the first colony to grant women suffrage rights, did not do so until 21 December 1894, five months after this local petition, means this small local document is historically intriguing.

Our recently launched *Petitions of the people* online project not only allows genealogists to find missing pieces of their family tree puzzles; there are also petitions that capture stories and individuals who do not appear in other primary or secondary sources. One such example is Jane Ruff. The *Pioneer index* told me that she married Raymond Ruff in 1870, and was the mother of seven children born between 1871 and 1886.[21] But Jane did not appear in her own right in the Sandhurst rate books. Her husband was the owner of the family home. However, they were struggling financially, as an extra note in the 1878 rate book showed 'Insolvent. No Assets'.[22] Perhaps this financial situation prompted Jane to tender for the Sandhurst Council's dust cart contract in 1880. She was successful, and held the contract for ten years. This was a most unusual occupation for a woman to undertake at that time in a provincial city.

It is only the fact that her tender was unsuccessful in 1890, leading sixty-nine fellow citizens to petition the council to reverse its decision, that we have these details about Jane's working life as recorded in the petition's prayer.[23] There is also a surviving letter from Jane herself, dated 5 September 1890.[24] She makes similar arguments to those in the petition: she had served the city 'faithfully' for ten years; she had purchased an extra cart assuming that her tender would be renewed; and there was only £1 difference between her tender and that of the successful tender.[25]

This letter left one clue that proved fruitful. I cross-referenced the date of Jane's letter against the minutes of the council's finance committee because she had addressed the letter specifically to them. At a meeting held one week after Jane's letter is dated, a fiery meeting of this committee took place. Councillors were divided over the way this tender had been handled. Finally, a motion was moved and seconded, and 'Jane Ruff's tender was recommended for acceptance'.[26]

Occasionally a male correspondent wrote to the council about protecting the sensibilities of female residents. In March 1892, the Wade Street district's local councillor, DB Lazarus (a mining magnate), was told that the sexual activities of McManara's bull were inappropriate because 'the cows from the district is [sic] served in gaze of all the Children and Women of the Neighbor[hoo]d'.[27]

A unique extra column appears in the Bendigo rate books from 1910 which lists the number of residents living in each household within the boundaries of the City of Bendigo; from 1926 this column is then split further into the total number of males and females within each household.[28] Together with the usual information recorded for each property, this extra column provides us with fantastic detailed census data about Bendigo families. This is the only series of rate books housed at BRAC which contains this extra column. The data has already proved useful to our genealogy researchers. I look forward to it being used further in numerous types of studies.

### Court Records

The court records for the busy Bendigo Court, as well as those for the neighbouring townships of Eaglehawk, Elmore, Heathcote and Huntly (and the further afield Rochester, Kyabram and Echuca) are all physically located at BRAC and have been processed by us. The legal transfer of these ninety-one series into BRAC's care is occurring at the time of writing. These records span the years 1858-1980s, and encompass all the different types of courts which existed over this long period – mines, insolvency, licensing, petty/magistrates, Supreme and Commonwealth branches.

While processing these records, I undertook some research using the Bendigo Court of Petty Sessions Cause List Books – Criminal Cases. During the nineteenth century, as today, crimes against a person such as abuse of a wife by her husband, rape, murder, and suicide were the province of the criminal sittings. But sprinkled throughout these entries were the many unexpected cases which dealt with children. It was during hearings, of what were deemed criminal cases in the nineteenth century, that ‘neglected’ children were told by the magistrate that they were to live in the Sandhurst Industrial School, which existed from 1868 to 1885.[29] Later, they were sent to other industrial schools located in or near Melbourne. Often the children arrived at court in sibling clusters – and they were not always orphans.

One such case, found in my study of 1875 as a sample year, was the Murphy boys – Thomas, Edward, John and James. The four of them, aged three, five, six and eight years, appeared together in court on 4 November 1875. The magistrate ruled that they were all to be ‘Committed to the Industrial School until attaining the age of 15 years.’[30] Unlike all of the other children found in my sample year, their father, John Murphy, was still living in June 1875 when he had a warrant issued for his arrest for lack of ‘Maintenance of 4 children.’[31] Just in that one calendar year, thirty-four children – twenty-one girls and thirteen boys – appeared in front of the Sandhurst bench charged with being ‘neglected’. In every case, except one, these innocent members of society were sent to an industrial school.[32]

## Racism

What we term racism, as seen through twenty-first century eyes, is abundantly evident within numerous records housed at BRAC. It is the fact that racism does not permeate all our local government series that is perhaps surprising. The main offender was Sandhurst/Bendigo City Council. Their series of voters’ rolls, which span the years 1896 to 1914, lump all local Chinese ratepayers together at the end of each ward’s lists of ratepayers, rather than placing them in correct alphabetical order as was done for all the Anglo-Saxon ratepayers. The Borough of Heathcote rate books often did not even bother to give the Chinese landowner’s name; he was just referred to as ‘Chinese’.

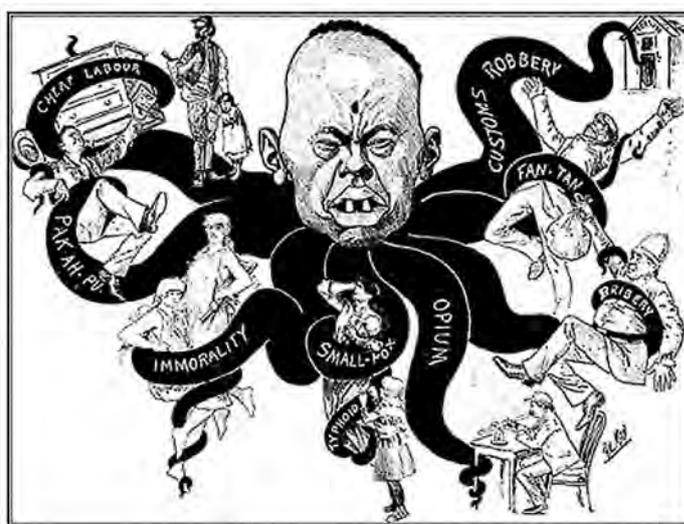
Surviving, detailed reports to Sandhurst Council from its own health officer show that he was expected to regularly inspect the ‘Chinese quarters’, located close to the city’s central business district throughout the nineteenth century.[33] In November 1881, for example,

Dr Cruikshank reported in detail that ‘On the occasion of my visit no prostitutes were observed by me nor men suffering from the effects of opium. Everything seemed orderly.’[34] Ironically, today this area is the site of the popular tourist attraction, the Bendigo Golden Dragon Museum.

In August 1882, the Central Board of Health in Melbourne sent an A3size poster to Sandhurst Council, being a ‘Sanitary Notice in the Chinese language’ to be displayed about the city.[35] The stereotypical idea of the Chinese as immoral, dirty opium smokers is truly reinforced by this surviving correspondence.

What about the city’s most prominent Chinese resident, James Lamsey, acting as guarantor for two other Chinese men who wanted to sluice a section of Bendigo Creek in 1895?[36] White applicants never needed a guarantor when they applied to the council to undertake similar activities.

While these documents are obvious examples of administrative racism, it was intriguing to find, within the smaller Borough of Heathcote rate books, open listings for an ‘opium house’ within its boundaries in the 1870s.[37] How enterprising for that local council to happily collect revenue from establishments which are represented in the infamous contemporary *Bulletin* cartoon ‘The Mongolian Octopus’ as one of the key factors behind Anglo-Saxons’ dislike for the Chinese population who inhabited the colonies during those years!



‘The Mongolian Octopus’, cartoon by Phillip May in *The Bulletin*, 21 August 1886. Image taken from the *Dictionary of Sydney* online (accessed 23 April 2012).

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In contrast, our *Petitions of the people* site contains one pair of petitions which display the antithesis of racism – unity between Chinese and Anglo-Saxon residents undertaking the same occupations. Stallholders and their suppliers, who worked at the Bendigo Council's market, were in agreement that the lighting at the market was inferior, especially in the early hours of the morning when they were trying to set up their produce stalls. Two petitions were duly dispatched to the council in April 1899. One was signed by fifty-eight local 'Chinese Market Gard[e] ners, Fruit Growers, Hawkers, Dealers and others', with one of them as the witness to all the others' signatures. The second petition was signed by eighty-seven Anglo-Saxon 'Fruit Growers, Market Gard[e] ners, Dealers, Hawkers and others'. The unexpected feature of this second petition was that these petitioners also witnessed each other's signatures. [38]

## Conclusion

The regional records housed at BRAC are rich in detail and full of historical insights. By their very nature, they contain the 'New History from below' – stories that are worthy of being told not just for their own sake, but as a means of adding grassroots depth to Australian history writing.

Processing continues at BRAC; the big task at the moment is to identify the more than 300 petitions within the Bendigo correspondence series, in order for them to be progressively digitised, transcribed and researched over coming months. The first petition prayer themes highlighted have been 1) the concerns of people with the same occupation 2) women, and 3) issues with the chimes of the post office clock. To date, we have processed 133 series – 42 local government series (rates, minutes, staff records), and 91 court series. This totals 1500 volumes – and we are not finished yet!

BRAC is becoming increasingly well known locally, in Victoria and interstate. Our statistics show that in the 2009-10 year, 186 researchers used 821 records, while in 2010-11, 258 researchers used 1241 records. Over these two financial years, Victorian researchers have doubled from 38 to 83, and interstate researchers have doubled from 15 to 29. In this latest financial year 2011-12, with two months to go, we have already exceeded both the researcher and records usage figures for the previous year.

Margaret Sawyers and I pride ourselves on the service we offer our clients, whether in person, via the telephone, or by email. Together with the research

librarians, the top floor of the Bendigo Library is a true 'one stop shop' for anyone who visits us. Our researchers have varied skills and backgrounds. City of Greater Bendigo staff have prepared conservation reports and heritage studies. Genealogists seek any information they can find about their ancestors. La Trobe University Bendigo undergraduate and postgraduate students have researched aspects of the city's history, architecture and planning using BRAC records. Professor Rod Home, the authority on the life of Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, was thrilled to be told about the surviving correspondence from Mueller to Sandhurst Council. These letters will now be included in his mammoth biography of Mueller.

Martyn Lyons observed rightly, I believe, that historians have too often been content to use only the writings of 'educated people' to tell the past, and to rely on 'indirect sources' for the stories of the 'silent masses'. [39] This omission can now be redressed because researchers can access and make full use of the unique local records housed at BRAC.

## Endnotes

[1] M Lyons, 'A New History from below?: the writing culture of ordinary people in Europe', *History Australia*, vol. 7, no. 3, December 2010, p. 59.1.

[2] F Cusack, *Bendigo: a history*, Heinemann Australia Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1973.

[3] These six councils were merged to form the City of Greater Bendigo in 1994. The City of Sandhurst existed from 1856 to 1891. In April 1891 a poll of ratepayers voted in favour of changing the city's name back to Bendigo.

[4] JC Fahey, 'Wealth and social mobility in Bendigo and north central Victoria 1879-1901', PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1981.

[5] MS Maslunka, 'Bendigo: one community's response to Federation', BA Hons thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1983 (this thesis was written under my maiden name).

[6] C Fox, *Fighting back: the politics of the unemployed in Victoria in the Great Depression*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2000 (this was the published version of his 1983 PhD work).

[7] M Roper, 'The invention of tradition in Sandhurst 1852-86', MA thesis, Department of History, Monash University, 1986.

[8] I have blessed the late Professor Greg Denning often for his wonderful archives workshop which I undertook as an honours subject at the University of Melbourne in 1983.

[9] Bendigo Regional Archives Centre (BRAC), VA 4862 Sandhurst Council and VA 2389 Bendigo Council, VPRS 16936/P1 Inwards Correspondence, Unit 47, Bundle 8-30 November 1898, Catherine Flood to Bendigo Council, 30 November 1898.

[10] *ibid.*, Unit 23, Bundle 17-30 June 1886, Eliza Haythornwaite to Sandhurst Council, 18 June 1886.

[11] BRAC, VA 4862 Sandhurst Council and VA 2389 Bendigo Council, VPRS 16267/P1 Rate Books, Units 26-34 (1882-1890).

[12] *ibid.*, Unit 28 (1884).

[13] BRAC, VA 2464 Marong (Shire 1864-1990), VPRS 16266/P1 Rate Records, Unit 10, Rate Book 1873, p. 8, Rate No. 197.

[14] BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 12, Bundle 12 November 1873, Wives and Daughters of the Ratepayers to Sandhurst Council. This petition can be viewed online as part of BRAC's *Petitions of the people* digitisation project.

[15] BM Jackman (comp.), *Bendigo Advertiser personal notices*, vol. 1, 1854-1880, self-published, Bendigo, 1992, pp. 47, 55, 78.

[16] While I did not have the time to pursue this story myself, an interested researcher could trace it through the connections between this petition, Council's minutes and the *Bendigo advertiser*.

[17] As she was writing in a formal capacity, Frances signed her name here as Mrs Thomas Jefferson Connelly. BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 35, Bundle 21-30 November 1892, Mrs T Jefferson Connelly to Bendigo Council, 30 November 1892.

[18] MS Matthews, 'A forgotten father of Federation: Sir John Quick 1852-1911', MA thesis, School of Arts and Education, La Trobe University, Bendigo campus, 2003, chapter 5, pp. 73-5.

[19] *ibid.*

[20] BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 40, Bundle 1-14 July 1894, Dr Quick to Bendigo Council, 2 July 1894. This petition is available online.

[21] *Pioneer index, Victoria 1836-1888: index to births, deaths and marriages in Victoria*, November 1998 (CDROM).

[22] BRAC, VPRS 16267/P1, Unit 22, p. 175.

[23] BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 31, Bundle 16-30 September 1890, Petitioners to Sandhurst Council, September 1890. This petition is also available online.

[24] I have compared the letter and the prayer; the handwriting is not the same, which means that the petition was written by someone else.

[25] BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 31, Bundle 1-13 September 1890, Jane Ruff to Sandhurst Council's Finance Committee, 5 September 1890.

[26] BRAC, VA 4862 Sandhurst Council, VPRS 16342/P1 Committee Minutes, Unit 18, 12 September 1890, p. 552.

[27] BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 35, Bundle 1-15 March 1892, George Knight to DB Lazarus Esq, 1 March 1892. (This letter was attached to a petition objecting to McManara's piggery; the bull issue seems to have been an afterthought.)

[28] BRAC, VPRS 16267/P1, Units 55, 70.

[29] F Cusack, *Candles in the dark: a history of the Bendigo Home and Hospital for the Aged*, Queensberry Hill Press, Carlton, 1984, Chronology.

[30] BRAC, VA 3008 Bendigo Courts (previously known as Sandhurst Courts), VPRS 16736/P1 Court of Petty Sessions Cause List Books – Criminal Cases, Unit 11, May 1875 – January 1876, 4 November 1875.

[31] BRAC, VA 3008 Bendigo Courts, VPRS 16735/P1 Court of Petty Sessions Cause List Books – Civil Cases, Unit 13, February 1875 – July 1875, 10 June 1875.

[32] BRAC, VPRS 16736/P1, Units 10 and 11, 1874-1876. These volumes match perfectly the entries contained in PROV, VPRS 4527 Children's (Ward) Registers.

[33] BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 17, Bundle 17-30 November 1881, Health Officer to Sandhurst Council, 18 November 1881.

[34] *ibid.*, Dr Cruikshank, Health Officer, to Sandhurst Council, 25 November 1881.

[35] BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 19, Bundle 17-31 August 1882, Central Board of Health to Sandhurst Council, 19 August 1882.

[36] *ibid.*, Unit 42, Bundle 1-12 November 1895, James Lamsey to Bendigo Council, 12 November 1895.

[37] BRAC, VA 2686 Heathcote I (Borough 1863-1892), VPRS 16334/P1 Rate Books, Unit 3 1872-1881, p. 68, Rate No. 494 (1876).

[38] BRAC, VPRS 16936/P1, Unit 48, Bundle 4-28 April 1899, Petitioners to Bendigo Council, April 1899. These petitions are also available online.

[39] Lyons, p. 59.4.

# Mud, Sludge and Town Water

## Civic Action in Creswick's Chinatown

Elizabeth Denny

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'Mud, Sludge and Town Water: Civic Action in Creswick's Chinatown', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 11, 2012. ISSN 1832-2522. Copyright © Elizabeth Denny.

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### Abstract

**This article examines four petitions written by the Chinese community on the Black Lead in Creswick between 1867 and 1873. The petitioners wrote to their local council requesting a water supply to their settlement as well as infrastructure to improve access and drainage. The petitions contain signatures in Chinese, which may be useful for family history research and for the study of networks of Chinese in colonial Victoria. The documents show that Chinese residents were willing and able to participate in the processes of local government.**

**The four petitions are among the records of the Borough of Creswick, now held in the Ballarat Archives Centre. While court and mining records have already been well utilised to study the Chinese on the goldfields of central Victoria, this article shows that municipal records can also be a valuable resource. They provide a context for understanding why three of the four petitions failed and why the Chinese community in the area declined after the 1870s.**

### Finding the Chinese community in early Creswick municipal records

During the 1850s gold rush, the town of Creswick, located in west-central Victoria about sixteen kilometres north of Ballarat, had a population of over 25,000 including 4000 Chinese. Today, the whole population of Creswick is around 3000, and the only tangible traces of the nineteenth-century Chinese population are memorials in the cemetery and a plaque on a footbridge in Calembeen Park.

In the files at the Ballarat Archives Centre is a petition from Chinese residents on the Black Lead, dated April 1871, asking the Creswick Borough Council to supply town water to their premises. The petition interested me for several reasons. The petitioners' names are given both in an English form and in Chinese characters, and among the names I recognised those of several Chinese settlers who had made their mark in nineteenth-century Australia.[1]

Kathryn Cronin's classic study *Colonial casualties*[2] describes the difficulties faced by Chinese immigrants who were attempting to establish themselves in colonial Victoria, so I was curious to find out whether the petitioners succeeded in getting the water laid on. I found the answer when I looked into the municipal records of the time.

Petitions from Chinese residents are rare survivals in the colonial records, but three other petitions from the Black Lead community exist in the files. These petitions, when read together with the minutes, contract books and rate books of the Borough of Creswick,[3] show that a group of prosperous Chinese from the camp at Black Lead were using the local political system with confidence and skill. What was once the Black Lead Chinatown is now under the lake and lawns of Calembeen Park, but the petitions survive and preserve the voice of that vanished community.

After the 1870s there are no more petitions from the Chinese community at Creswick. I wondered whether there was a reason for this, apart from a possible loss of the records. Perhaps there were changes within the Black Lead community and it had become less confident or less politically active.





On 17 July 1872, five years later, another petition stated that

... we the undersigned ratepayers of Chinatown Blacklead Creswick respectfully beg to call your attention to the Road leading to our residences also to the crossing over the Sludge channel which has become quite impassable since the late rains, and humbly pray you to have the same repaired also to have the abandoned race in Napier Street filled in as there is now only room for one dray to pass at a time.

The council agreed to build a footbridge for the Black Lead community.[8] However, a year later the residents were still waiting and requested in a further petition on 1 October 1873 that

One Footpath may be made along the road alluded to, to enable our relatives, friends, and customers to visit our several business establishments; many being at present deterred from so doing unless at the risk of wading through mud and water.

The petitioners pointed out that they were full citizens of the Borough of Creswick:

We promptly and cheerfully pay such rates as are from time to time imposed, and trust you may not deem us unreasonable in praying that we may be placed on a footing with our European brother burgesses ...

Not everyone who lived in Creswick was a burgess and entitled to vote in the municipal elections. The council minutes of 1872 and 1873 recorded the decisions of the yearly Borough Revision Court as it updated the Burgess Roll.[9] The Burgess Roll recorded those ratepayers, or burgesses, who were eligible to vote in municipal elections because they owned property of sufficient value in the Borough of Creswick to qualify, had paid their rates, and wished to be included on the roll. The roll listed the name of each burgess, profession, property details and the number of votes each was entitled to, depending upon the amount paid in rates.

### Living in a Mining District

The Black Lead camp during the winter of 1872 had developed a serious problem with contaminated water and poor drainage directly related to the mining industry that dominated the town. The Borough Inspector was instructed to visit the camp with the Health Officer,

at the rear of which, owing to the imperfect state of the drainage they found a large quantity of water in a putrid state which they believed must be injurious to the health of parties residing in that neighbourhood.[10]

Two weeks later the council was told that the inspector had found more problems at Black Lead, notably

the ground subsiding, caused by the mining at the rear of the Chinese stores and dwellings. In one place the ground sunk 4 feet carrying with it a brick chimney and the corner

of a wood building, probably had the house been built of stone the disaster would have been most serious to the inmates.

In several places large holes were to be seen where the ground had given way at the surface which led him to conclude that the place had been completely undermined; in consequence of which the drainage had become very imperfect, and the whole of the waste water and filth from the store dwellings and pig sties was forming one large unsightly stagnant pool which was very offensive, and would be extremely so if allowed to remain until the summer season it would render the place unfit for human habitation.[11]

Black Lead was not the only place in Creswick with drainage problems and the inspector

next called attention to the low land at the back of Montgomery and Riordan's Hotels where the drainage was very bad and suggested that the Board might visit this place when proceeding to inspect the Black Lead.[12]

If the Black Lead was as muddy in winter as the petitions claim, then it was probably dusty in summer. It would have been crowded and busy, with pigsties[13] and stables adding to the noise and smells.

### The Chinese Community in Creswick

Creswick had a large Chinese community, and the contemporary rate books show that in the decade before the petitions from the Black Lead, the Chinese population was not confined to Chinatown, but was also scattered throughout the town of Creswick and the surrounding mining leads.

The rate books in the early decades of the borough provide minimal details about the properties listed. They do not describe the number of rooms in each building. They record only the ratepayer of each property, and do not indicate if any other people – family members, tenants, employees – lived on the premises. The rate books cannot therefore be used to give reliable figures for the actual Chinese population in any part of Creswick. They can however show patterns of habitation in the Borough of Creswick, and locate individuals who were ratepayers.

Chinese businessmen had properties in the main street, Albert Street, which had a number of substantial shops, hotels and other public buildings:

The town consists of a main street – Albert-street – of great width, of an anabranch entitled Victoria-street, and of two or three little-used cross thoroughfares. We stroll through it, and return with a general impression of people who have not too much to do, of Chinamen and Chinese stores, of heavy boots, jumpers, and moleskin trousers...[14]

Three Chinese residents, with names written in Chinese and English, are listed as ratepayers in Albert Street in rate records from 1860.[15]

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## Chinese Residents Move to the Black Lead

The rate records indicate that throughout the period the petitions were compiled, Chinese residents of Creswick were moving to the Black Lead settlement from other locations in the town. Peng Que, a local mining entrepreneur and business man,[16] and two of the families with names on the petitions – Lee Hang Gong and Sarah Hang Gong,[17] and Hannie and Frances Kay – moved into the camp during this time.

### *Peng Que*

Peng Que, who signed three of the petitions, had been renting expensive premises in Albert Street in the years from 1867 to 1870. In 1870 his name is crossed off the water rate list for Albert Street, and he is not listed in the Creswick Borough rate books of that year. In 1872 he is listed as owner of a tenement on the Black Lead.[18]

### *Hannie and Fanny Kay*

Hannie Kay, interpreter, his wife Frances (Fanny) and their family lived in South Hill and South Parade for several years. The family moved in 1867, and the rate books from 1867 to 1874 list both Hannie Kay and Fanny Kay as storekeepers and property owners on the Black Lead.[19] The Kays, one or both, were involved in all four petitions.

### *Sarah Hang Gong and Lee Hang Gong*

Sarah and Lee Hang Gong lived in Napier Street Creswick, although they had businesses on the Black Lead. By 1871, however, it seems the family had moved into Chinatown and their fourth child, Selina, was born there.[20]

## Black Lead Chinatown

In 1870, 1871 and 1872, up to fifty-seven rateable properties were listed on the Black Lead and nearly all were owned by Chinese residents or European women married to Chinese residents. The Black Lead was clearly identified as a Chinese community by both the Chinese in their petitions and in the local council minutes, and the rate books confirm it as the biggest grouping of Chinese residents in the town.

## Town Water

In 1864 the Borough of Creswick, just one year old, planned to establish a town water supply, and expected that this would be a profitable enterprise. The *Argus* reported that

Creswick is not yet supplied with gas or water, but the latter it is speedily to have. The Government some time back handed over to the municipal council one of the gold-fields reservoirs, constructed in Bullarook Forest, eight miles away, together with a grant of £3,000 towards the conveyance of the water. Iron pipes have now been laid down to a distributing reservoir, at the Whitehills, a mile from the town, and 100ft. above its level; next year it is proposed to spend some £1,200 or £1,500 in bringing the water right into the township. At present, the only use it is put to is by the Chinese, who rent two sluice-heads from the council, for which they pay £10 per week. Indeed the council appear likely to make a very profitable thing out of their waterworks, and believing so, they have declined letting them to the Chinese, who have offered to take them off their hands. The capacity of the distributing reservoir is 1,000,000 of gallons, and it is calculated that this filled once a week will supply the town, leaving a great volume to be let for mining purposes. If 'John' can make a good thing in this way, the council think they can too.[21]

By 1880 the *Victorian municipal directory* was reporting that the Borough of Creswick had

a good water supply brought from two reservoirs, one eight miles distant and the other five miles, through pipes and open aqueduct. Length of mains and aqueduct conveying water to the town eleven miles thirty chains; length of streets reticulated nine miles, thirty three chains.[22]

In their petition of 15 April 1871, twenty-two Chinese residents of the Black Lead assured the Creswick Borough Council that they would 'take the water to our Establishments if it is extended to the Black lead'. The petition is brief and businesslike, as are similar petitions for town water from other neighbourhoods in Creswick. [23] It was important that petitioners guaranteed that they would take up the water once it was supplied. The council had to cover the cost of administration and public works with rates and licence fees and with special grants from the Victorian Government. The water rates made up a significant part of the council's total income from rates.

The council received £421 in water rates and standpipe use payments in 1870, and spent £500 on extending the town water supply.[24] In 1871, the European residents of Hard Hills in Creswick petitioned the Borough Council to extend the municipal supply water out to their homes. No Chinese names appear on this petition, even though the rate books show that clusters of Chinese were living in Hard Hills. These petitioners did not state that they would actually take up the water, and in fact, only one of them was willing to pay when the council piped water into the area. Councillor Jebb, on the Water Extension Committee, brought this up at the council meeting of 10 May 1871, and the Town Clerk was told to hunt up all the Hard Hills petitioners and get them to take up the water and pay for it.[25]

Not everyone was able to afford the water rates and have water connected to their premises. The water rates were high, as the printed schedule shows (see image below)[26] and reticulated water was still a luxury in Creswick in the 1870s. People were using standpipes in the streets even when the water supply system had been extended to individual properties in their neighbourhood.

### Extending the Water to the Black Lead

By 1871 the council had organised the source of the town water, set up infrastructure to bring it to the township, and established a Water Extension Committee to handle requests for water supply. The process of supplying residents who wanted the water extended to their premises seems to have been fast and efficient.

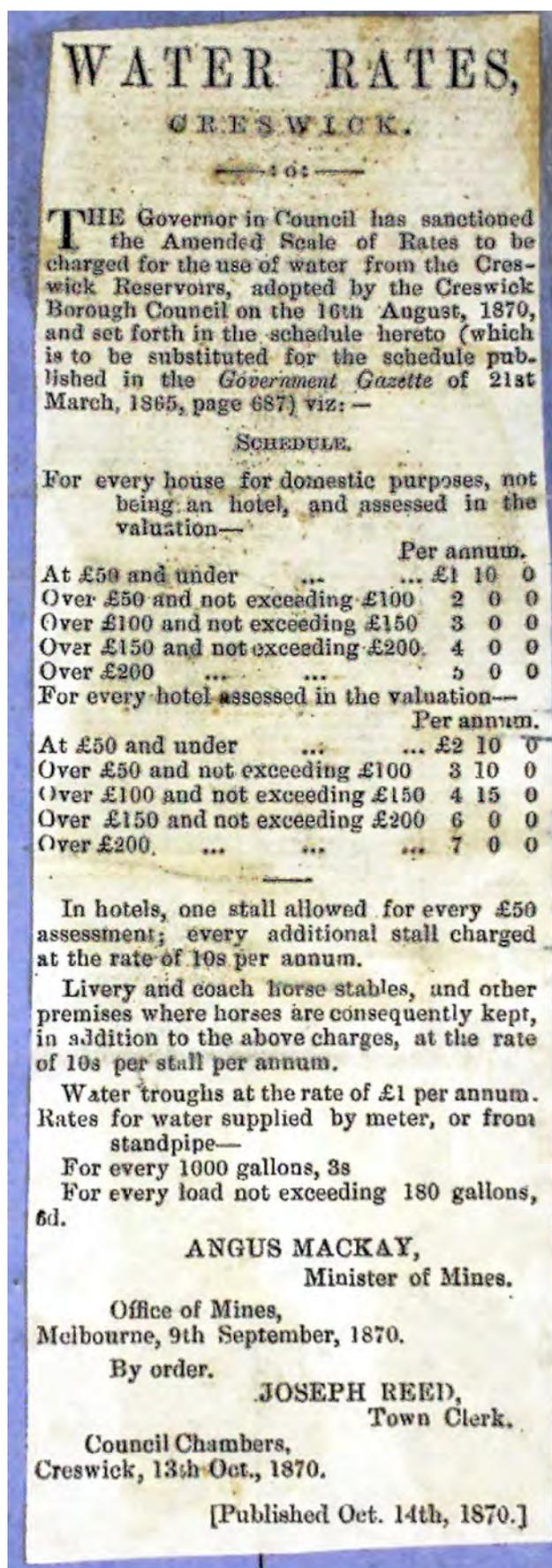
The community on the Black Lead asked for water in April, and the work was completed in May, a week before the date set in the contract.[27] On 10 May 1871 the Town Surveyor reported to council that the tender process for the extension of waterworks to Black Lead was underway.[28] Then, on 24 May he reported that the contract had been carried out and that water had been laid on to twenty-two premises in the Chinese camp.[29] According to the water rate receipts of 1871, all the signatories of the 1871 petition took up the water newly supplied to Black Lead and paid for the water that they had requested. These petitioners possessed property on the Black Lead rated between £16 and £26, and they often owned more than one property.

Twenty-one people in the camp signed the petition, however it is worth noting that more than thirty other ratepayers on the Black Lead, listed in the 1871 rate book, did not sign the petition or pay water rates.[30] The twenty-second name on the petition was Quock Ping, who is discussed below.

### The Black Lead Petitioners

The petitions reveal a group of residents at the Black Lead camp who were politically competent and active. Three of them were men who were well known in Creswick for their professional work or entrepreneurial success. Lee Hang Gong and Peng Que, prosperous local businessmen, and Hannie Kay, the interpreter, obtained Victorian naturalisation and were on the Burgess Roll. They were reported on, often respectfully, in contemporary newspapers. Hannie Kay has been remembered in a plaque in Calembeen Park – the only individual of the thousands of Chinese residents of Creswick so honoured.

List of water rates for 1871 pasted on inside front cover of PROV, VPRS 5921/P0, Unit 2, Rates General 1861-1931. ►





Plaque commemorating Hannie Kay, Calembreen Park, Creswick. Photograph courtesy of author.

Hannie Kay and Lee Hong Gong both established resilient families in Australia through their marriages to local women.

Henry Quock Ping appears only once on a petition. He signed the 1871 petition for town water. A Chinese-trained doctor, his name is not in the Creswick rate books or in the payment for water rates in 1871. He may have been operating a practice out of premises on the Black Lead when he signed the petition, but I first found him as a ratepayer in 1873 in Ballarat East.[31] He married Anna Jane Glenister in Ballarat in 1874 and the couple's two sons, Henry James Quock Ping and Albert William Quock Ping, were born in 1875 and 1877 in Ballarat East.[32]

In June 1875, Henry made a formal application to the Victorian Medical Board to be registered as 'a duly-qualified medical practitioner under the Medical Practitioners' Statute 1865'. [33] Although he claimed to be equally qualified by his Chinese training as the European medical practitioners in the colony, the Board refused to accept his Chinese qualifications. His appeal to the Victorian Supreme Court later that year, against the Medical Board's decision, also failed.[34] The following year, Quock Ping is listed as a doctor and owner-occupier in Victoria Street, Ballarat East. When he died in 1877, he left his young family a large house in Ballarat East.[35]

### The Women Who Signed the Petitions

Fanny (Frances) Kay and Sarah Hang Gong seem to have been particularly competent and adventurous women. They put their names to three of the petitions from the Black Lead, those of 1871, 1872 and 1873. There are many petitions addressed to the Borough council from other Creswick localities in the decade contemporary with the four Black Lead petitions, but these public

petitions are signed only by men. Fanny Kay and Sarah Hang Gong were listed separately from their husbands as individual property owners and rate payers. Sarah was enrolled as a burgess in Creswick.[36] Judging from the Creswick records, Sarah Hang Gong and Fanny Kay were unusual women in their community.

Sarah and Fanny maintained successful marriages to men outside their own culture, at a time when such marriages received strong public criticism. In an age of high child mortality they raised their children to adulthood and established strong families continuing over more than one generation. Kate Bagnall describes a wide range of experiences and lifestyles in her study of marriages between Chinese men and non-Chinese women in colonial Australia.[37] It is possible that Sarah and Frances found that differences between the Chinese and European cultural definitions of women and their roles as wives left them unusual opportunities to act and define themselves within their marriages and within their community.

### Conclusion: Changes in the Black Lead Community after 1873

Kathryn Cronin describes the 1870s and 1880s as a period of discouragement, both economic and social, for the Chinese in Victoria, and notes that there was a large migration out of the colony over these decades.[38] In Creswick the petition for water in 1871 was promptly followed up by the council, but the other three petitions, requesting better access and drainage for the Chinese settlement, show a continuing problem with lack of infrastructure and growing impatience with the council's response.

As far back as 1867, the Chinese petitioners had pointed out that they had already paid £100 for road works that were a borough responsibility. Five years later, in 1872, after a very unfavourable report on health and safety from the Borough Inspector, the council decided that the Black Lead community should be moved into a new settlement on higher ground. The council continued correspondence with the Central Board of Health and with the Department of Lands and Survey to have a new camp surveyed and the community moved, despite objections from the Black Lead residents.[39]

In 1873 the Chinese burgesses of Black Lead had pointed out to the council that they paid their rates promptly and contributed to local charities. They argued that the council should place Chinese ratepayers 'on a footing with our European brother burgesses by being allowed, at least a Footpath'. The Creswick Council was clearly not going out of its way to support its Chinese residents to live in Creswick on their own terms.

Because political participation in Creswick Borough proved to be such a disappointing experience for the Chinese, many may have decided to find their fortunes elsewhere. In December 1873, in nearby Clunes, a miners' strike developed into a riot when Chinese miners, quite possibly organised by Creswick Chinese entrepreneurs, were brought to Clunes to replace the striking miners.[40] Contemporary newspaper reports of the riot discuss increasing economic problems in the goldmining industry, and point out that where Chinese and European interests were in conflict, despite the legal and political rights of Chinese residents, a European majority prevailed.[41]

The economic opportunities in the town and surrounding district shrank as the easy gold was mined out. Creswick was offering fewer opportunities for its Chinese residents to engage successfully in the developing political and economic systems of colonial Victoria after the gold rush years. In addition, Victorians were hardening their attitudes to both Chinese residents and Chinese culture. As noted above, Henry Quock Ping's application to be registered as a doctor in Victoria was rejected. In 1875 Peng Que moved his business to the far north of Australia, and by 1880 the Hang Gong and Kay families had also left Creswick looking for opportunities in other Australasian colonies.

## Endnotes

[1] PROV, VA 657 Creswick I (Municipal District, 1858-1863; Borough 1863-1934), VPRS 5921/P0 Miscellaneous Council Files and Records, Unit 2, Petitions to Council no. 2.

[2] K Cronin, *Colonial casualties: Chinese in early Victoria*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1982.

[3] PROV, VA 657 Creswick I, VPRS 3730/P0 Council Minute Books 1858-1934; VPRS 3704/P0 Contract Books 1859-1933; VPRS 3726/P0 General Rate Books 1864-1934.

[4] A Kyi, 'Finding the Chinese perspective: locating Chinese petitions against anti-Chinese legislation during the mid to late 1850s', and 'The most determined, sustained diggers' resistance campaign: Chinese protests against the Victorian Government's anti-Chinese legislation, 1855-1862', *Provenance*, no. 8, 2009, pp. 133-40, 35-50. M Chin, I Chin and C Scott, *Chinese in the Creswick cemetery: headstones and transcriptions, a cultural interpretation*, Chinese Heritage Interest Network, Blackburn South, Victoria, 2009, also provides a very helpful discussion of these issues in the context of the remaining Chinese inscriptions in the Creswick cemetery.

[5] Petition by 'Chinese Market Gard[er]ners, Fruit Growers, Hawkers, Dealers and others', dated April 1899, available in facsimile and transcription on the Bendigo Regional Archives Centre website (accessed 20 June 2012).

[6] 'Country sketches. No. XII – Creswick', *The Argus*, 30 September 1864, p. 6.

[7] PROV, VPRS 3726/P0, Unit 1 Special Rate Book 1864-1870, Unit 2 General Rate Book 1864-1870, and Unit 3 General Rate Book 1870-1878.

[8] PROV, VPRS 3730/P0, Unit 9 Council Minute Books 1870-1872, p. 416.

[9] *ibid.*, Reports of Creswick Borough Revision Court, Monday 15 July 1872, pp. 399-400; VPRS 3730/P0 Unit 10 Council Minute Books 1872-1874, Reports of Creswick Borough Revision Court, Wednesday 16 July 1873, pp. 196, 197 and 198.

[10] PROV, VPRS 3730/P0, Unit 9, pp. 424-6.

[11] *ibid.*

[12] *ibid.*

[13] The Central Board of Health recommended that no more pigs be kept in the Chinese camp: PROV, VPRS 3730/P0, Unit 10, p. 87; and on Wednesday 6 August 1873, Key asked the council's permission to extend his water pipe to his pigsty at Black Lead to keep the sty clean: *ibid.*, p. 211.

[14] 'Country sketches. No. XII – Creswick'.

[15] PROV, VPRS 5921/P0, Unit 2, Rates General 1861-1931, see booklet titled *Creswick assessment notices 1860* containing assessments in Albert Street that includes Chinese characters.

[16] For a biography of Ping Que see T Jones, 'Ping Que: mining magnate of the Northern Territory, 1854-1886', *Journal of Chinese Australia*, issue 1, May 2005, available online (accessed 20 June 2012).

[17] For a family history of Lee Hang Gong and Sarah Bowman, see V Lee with J Godwin and A O'Neil, 'Lee Hang Gong/Sarah Bowman family history research: a progress report', *Journal of Chinese Australia*, issue 1, May 2005, available online (accessed 20 June 2012).

[18] PROV, VPRS 5921/P0, Unit 2, Rates General 1861-1931. Peng Que's name is crossed off the index of a booklet of water rate receipts for 1871, and replaced by the name of Pickles. The receipts include the names of all the Black Lead water petitioners. Their names are not in the index, however this may have been compiled before they were signed up to take the water. PROV, VPRS 3726/P0, Unit 3, Rate no. 629 shows that in 1870 Peng Que was not in Albert Street and Hang War had taken on the lease, and in 1871 no Chinese names are listed in Albert Street.

[19] For a biography of Hannie Kay see S Couchman, 'Kay, Henry (c.1828-1907)', in the online database *Chinese-Australian historical images in Australia* (accessed 20 June 2012). For movements of the Kays around Creswick, see PROV, VPRS 3726/P0, Units 1-3: 1868 Hannie Kay, interpreter, owner occupier Black Lead (rate number 381); 1869 Hannie Kay, storekeeper, owner occupier Black Lead (rate number 430); 1870 Frannie Key [sic], owner, Hong Gong is occupying tenant Black Lead (rate number 413); and 1870 Hannie Kay, miner, owner occupier Black Lead (rate number 420).

[20] Lee et al., 'Lee Hang Gong/Sarah Bowman family history report'. For property owned by the Hang Gong family on the Black Lead in 1871 see PROV, VPRS 3726/P0, Unit 3.

[21] 'Country sketches. No. XII – Creswick'.

[22] *Victorian municipal directory and gazetteer for 1880*, Arnall & Jackson, Melbourne, 1880, p. 31.

[23] PROV, VPRS 5921/P0, Unit 2 contains petitions from Camp Hill, dated 10 February 1872, and from Hard Hills (undated, [1871]), requesting water in similar terms to the petition from Black Lead.

[24] PROV, VPRS 3726/P0, Unit 3, see figures for estimated revenue and expenditure 1870.

[25] PROV, VPRS 3730/P0, Unit 9, p. 144, Council meeting 10 May 1871.

[26] PROV, VPRS 5921/P0, Unit 2, Rates General 1861-1931 contains a booklet of water rate receipts for 1871 with a printed schedule of water rate fees attached to the inside front cover.

[27] PROV, VPRS 3704/P0, Unit 1, pp. 111-12.

[28] PROV, VPRS 3730/P0, Unit 9, p. 132.

[29] *ibid.*, p. 149.

[30] PROV, VPRS 5921/P0, Unit 2, Rates General 1861-1931, see booklet of water rate receipts for 1871; PROV, VPRS 3726/P0, Unit 3, see rate records for Black Lead in the years 1870 and 1871.

[31] See the rate books of Ballarat East for the years 1873 to 1877: PROV, VPRS 7258/P0.

[32] Anna Jane Glenister married Henry Quock Ping in 1874 (*Pioneer index, Victoria 1836-1888: index to births, deaths and marriages in Victoria*, 3rd rev. edn, 1999 (CD-ROM), marriage registration no. 3701R). Henry James Quock Ping was born in Ballarat in 1875 (*Pioneer index*, birth registration no. 20874).

[33] 'A Chinese doctor', *The Argus*, 5 June 1875, p. 8.

[34] *The Argus*, 12 July 1875, p. 1c-d.

[35] Henry Quock Ping's will and probate papers at PROV have been digitised and are available online.

[36] In 1872 new additions to the Burgess Roll included Hannie Kay, Sarah Hang Gong and Peng Que: PROV, VPRS 3730/P0, Unit 9, pp. 399-400.

[37] K Bagnall, 'Golden shadows on a white land: An exploration of the lives of white women who partnered Chinese men and their children in southern Australia, 1855-1915', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, available from Sydney digital theses (accessed 20 June 2012).

[38] Cronin, *Colonial casualties*, see the chapter 'Chinese after the "Golden Age"', pp. 124-32.

[39] PROV, VPRS 3730/P0, Unit 10, p. 17: in a meeting of 23 October 1872, the council recommended the removal of the Chinese camp; *ibid.*, p. 49: on 6 December 1872, the Chinese petitioned the Commissioner Lands & Survey to be allowed remain where they were, and a copy of that petition was reported to be enclosed in a letter from the Central Board of Health to the Creswick council; *ibid.*, p. 87: on 8 January 1873 the council was still discussing the relocation of the Chinese camp.

[40] In her article on the Creswick Chinese camp, Carol Scott discusses the possibility that the recently developed contract Chinese labour force engaged by Chinese consortiums to work in the Creswick mines might have been that employed to work for the Lothair mine in Clunes (M Chin *et al.*, *Chinese in the Creswick cemetery*, p. 85).

[41] Articles in the *Argus*, 11 December 1873, p. 4, and 15 December 1873, pp. 6-7 give a contemporary viewpoint of the Clunes riot.

