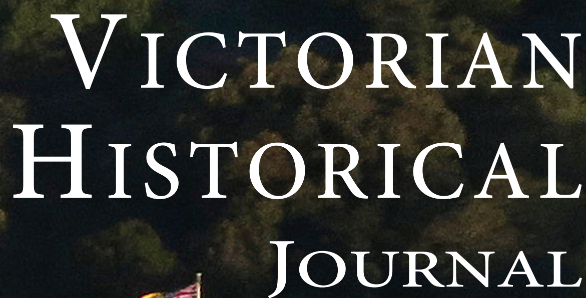

Understanding Victoria
Events at Government House

A Supplement from

VOLUME 95, NUMBER 2, DECEMBER 2024
ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

VICTORIAN HISTORICAL JOURNAL

ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

The *Victorian Historical Journal* has been published continuously by the RHSV since 1911, thus comprising a unique and growing collection of Victoria's history. It is a double-blind refereed journal issuing original and previously unpublished scholarly articles on Victorian history, or occasionally on Australian history where it illuminates Victorian history. It is published twice yearly in hard copy and digital form by the Publications Committee, overseen by an Editorial Board, and indexed by INFORMIT, Scopus and the Web of Science.

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- The John Adams Prize will be presented biennially at the RHSV AGM following its judging and will be announced in the ensuing June issues of the *VHJ* and *History News*.

Richard Broome, Chair, RHSV Publications Committee

John Adams Prize Winners

2017–2018
Nicola Cousen, 'The Legend of Lalor's Arm: Eureka Myths and Colonial Surgery', *VHJ*, vol. 88, no. 2, November 2017, pp. 212–34

2019–2020
Charles Fahey, 'Happy Valley Road and the Victoria Hill District: A Microhistory of a Victorian Gold-rush Mining Community, 1854–1913', *VHJ*, vol. 90, no. 2, December 2019, pp. 271–300

2021–2022
Mary Sheehan, 'A Grassroots View of Spanish Influenza in Melbourne', *VHJ*, vol. 93, no. 2, December 2022, pp. 349–72

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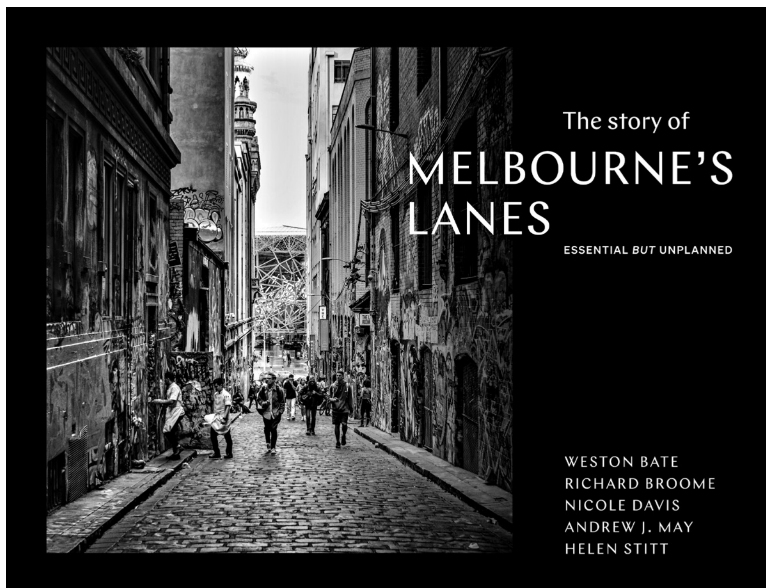

Weston Bate's *Essential But Unplanned* (1994) is reborn, enlarged and published by the RHSV.

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Introduction

Judith Smart and Richard Broome

We open this issue of the Victorian Historical Journal with the speeches delivered at a special reception held at Government House on 22 August 2024 to celebrate the 115th anniversary of the foundation of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, then the Victorian Historical Society. The reception was hosted and introduced by the Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC, Patron of the RHSV, who was followed by the Honourable Sonya Kilkenny, Minister for Planning, and Emeritus Professor Richard Broome AM, RHSV President, all of whom congratulated the society on its longevity and commended its dedication to preserving our state's history and culture.

Consistent with this objective, we are also delighted to publish in this issue of the journal the first session in a Discussion Series, 'Understanding Victoria', initiated and hosted by the Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC. The series has been divided into three sessions, all hosted at Government House, Victoria, and each addressed by three leading historians, followed by a moderated discussion with an invited audience of distinguished historians and other participants. The first session, titled '"Disturbing the Order of Things": The Impact of the Gold Rush on Ideas, Identity, and Society in Victoria', was held on 30 May 2024, following an explanation of the purpose of the series and an introduction to the first theme by the Governor. Facilitated by Maxine McKew AM, the session featured speakers Emeritus Professor Richard Broome AM, Robyn Annear, and Professor David Goodman, each offering insights into the impact of the gold rush on the formation of the new colony of Victoria shortly after separation from New South Wales in 1851. The presentations, which are published below, were followed by audience participation in exploring the ideas raised. The papers given at the second session in the series, titled '"Faith in the People?": Victoria and Federation, Creation and Outcomes', held on 19 September 2024, will be published in the *VHJ* in June 2025, while the third, held on 21 November 2024, discussed political protest movements that challenged

and changed the state of Victoria in the 1960s and 70s. The second and third sessions will be published in the *VHJ* in 2025.

The first item in the next section marks the inauguration of the RHSV Victorian History Hall of Fame to recognise and honour significant contributions made both posthumously and by those still living to the writing of Victoria's history. An explanation of the criteria accompanies the citations for the first five inductees included in this issue. The Hall of Fame will be published in the *Victorian Historical Journal* each December and updated annually, normally with two posthumous and two living inductees.

Sadly, the next item in this section of the journal is a farewell and tribute to Emeritus Professor John Rickard, a major contributor to Victoria's published history and a long-term member of the RHSV, including its Council and Publications Committee. We will miss both his wisdom and his charm.

The main body of the journal then opens with three of the key annual lectures delivered at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria during 2024, followed by three refereed articles and two historical notes. The review section contains ten reviews of recent books, providing insights into various aspects of Victoria's history.

The sixth annual Women's History Lecture, part of our Distinguished Lecture Series, was presented at the RHSV on 19 March. The 2024 lecturer was Professor Joy Damousi AM, currently professor and director of the Australian Catholic University's Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences. The lecture, titled 'Women's Humanitarian Work is Never Done: Women Humanitarians and War Child Refugees in the Twentieth Century', employed a biographical lens to capture the activism of some relatively unknown Australian women who traversed the national and international arena undertaking humanitarian work in the interest of child refugees. In problematising the changing meanings of women's humanitarian roles in the twentieth century, the lecture focused on three major sources of child refugees: the Armenian genocide of the 1920s; the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s; and the Vietnam War of the 1960s.

The 2024 Weston Bate Oration was delivered at the RHSV, following the Annual General Meeting on 28 May 2024, by Dr Fiona Gatt, the society's second Historian in Residence 2023. Funded by long-term RHSV benefactor, the late Gordon Moffatt AM, Dr Gatt investigated and compared the shopkeepers who operated in three distinct, representative

suburbs of nineteenth-century Melbourne: genteel Malvern, inner urban North Melbourne, and industrial Footscray. While the study concurs with views of shopkeepers as an 'anxious class', it argues that they must be seen as neither working class nor as a 'fluid part of the lower middle rung' but rather as a 'distinct section of Melbourne society'.

Dr Ross L. Jones delivered the third annual Hugh Anderson Lecture to an appreciative audience at the RHSV on 20 August 2024. With James Waghorne and Marcia Langton, Dr Jones has recently authored the first volume of *Dhoombak Goobgoowana: A History of Indigenous Australia and the University of Melbourne*, the second volume to be completed by the end of 2025. In this lecture Jones has taken a number of case studies from volume 1 (*Truth*) to show the 'myriad of places and buildings [at the university] named after those who were deeply implicated or involved in teaching race science and in eugenic endeavour that diminished and excluded Indigenous Australians'. The practice of removing or ignoring these aspects of their careers in the act of memorialisation continued up to 1990, and one of the main objectives of *Dhoombak Goobgoowana* is to uncover the processes of erasure, thus contributing to rewriting 'the story of intellectual life in Melbourne'.

The three refereed articles discuss very different aspects of Victoria's twentieth-century history from debates about the funding basis for the first old-age pensions, through patterns of development and sources for a social history of Dandenongs settlement before World War II, to an analysis of the sources of inspiration for Napier Waller's artworks.

In '"Summonsed to show cause": State Experiments in Compelling Adult Children to Support their Aged Parents in early Twentieth-century Victoria', Peter A. Gunn describes the 'relative responsibility provisions' included in the Victorian *Old-age Pensions Act 1901*. The article outlines the administrative arrangements aimed at compelling contributions, concluding that the Act failed 'to raise significant revenue to offset the cost of the scheme' and 'neither reduced the number of inmates in benevolent asylums nor the cost to government of both indoor and outdoor relief'.

John Schauble's article, 'Finding Fact in Fiction: A Novel Source of History in the Dandenongs', focuses on the history of community transformation at Sherbrooke in the Dandenong Ranges east of Melbourne. It asks whether, 'in the absence of other substantive material, fiction can be regarded as a source of historical truth when writing local history', taking as a case study social realist writer John Morrison's *The*

Creeping City (1949), a novel drawing on Morrison's own experience and describing 'the change from one way of life based on pioneering agriculture being swept away in favour of a more effete, less productive one focused upon wealth and leisure'. Schauble concludes that *The Creeping City* is 'arguably the most comprehensive and historically accurate account available of one period in Sherbrooke's history'.

In 'Napier Waller: A Fresh Perspective on the Wellsprings of his Artistic Inspiration', Ann Ashton offers a broad overview of Waller's life and art with the aim of providing fresh insights into his artistic inspiration, especially the 'expression of value and respect for women in his art'.

The two 'Historical Notes' in this issue discuss very different aspects of Victoria's settlement history—on the one hand, a story of migration opportunities and disappointments, and, on the other, changes in underground mining technology from the 1860s to the 1950s. In 'Patrick Phelan: The Forgotten First Member for West Bourke', Judy Maddigan links sparse sources to extend Phelan's story beyond his truncated political career, sketching business success and failure, links with other better-known settlers, involvement in his community and church, and family tragedy. While not always allowing for a consistent narrative, research of this kind can 'tell us something about the variable fortunes of nineteenth-century Melburnians and indicate possibilities for building a collection of these incomplete stories'. On the other hand, David Huggonson's 'History of Rock Drills: From "Old Kyo" and Hand-held Drill Rods to Jack-leg Drills' traces a story of progress from primitive underground mining practices in Australia in the 1860s using 'old kyo' hammers to pound drill rods into the face of the ore body, to compressed-air and steam-powered piston rock drills, and finally hand-held pneumatic and jack-leg drills. Huggonson concludes that post–World War II miners, though still facing occupational hazards, would have been almost unrecognisable to the miners of the 1850s.

This issue of the journal also includes twelve book reviews with particular significance for Victorian history, including biographical studies, bushwalking, Antarctic exploration, local histories, early Indigenous–settler colonial relations in Naarm/Melbourne, and a history of changing treatment of intellectual disability at Kew Cottages. The variety and extent of these accounts of Victoria's history are indicative

of the many different approaches and interests inspiring research into the records of our past.

ERRATA

Susan Priestley, 'George Arden, Gentleman Drunkard', *VHJ*, vol. 95, no, 1, June 2024, p. 135, paragraph 1, last sentence should read: 'His flattery of Lord Stanley reportedly led to an appointment as Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong, although that stalled with Stanley's resignation from office later in the year.'

Patrick Ferry & Angus Davison, 'Exodus from Vienna: A Jewish Austrian Family's Escape from Nazi Persecution to a New Life in Melbourne', *VHJ*, vol. 94, no. 2, December 2023, p. 522, caption, 'Margrit' should read 'Margareta/Greta'; p. 538, lines 1 and 2, change 'A.J. Weiss & Son' to 'A.J. White & Son Pty Ltd'.

RHSV'S ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Celebrating the 115th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria in 1909. Government House, 22 August 2024

Introduction

In early 1909 a campaign began for the preservation of Victoria's early official documents following a newspaper article entitled 'Vanishing Records' by W.J. Hughston. This article suggested that a league be formed for collecting and recording the experiences of the early colonists. The idea appealed to Alfred Greig, who wrote to Hughston requesting a meeting. The men met on 7 April 1909 under the portico of the Public Library (now State Library Victoria). According to his diary of these events, Greig then took Hughston to the Exhibition Building where they had a conference with Mr E.A. Petherick on the subject. The idea was snowballing.

Greig actively pursued the concept of an historical society during April, arranging meetings with many key people, and on 14 May 1909 he issued a circular that stated 'an endeavour is being made to establish a Society, having as its principal object the collection and preservation of reminiscences of old Colonists, and all other information connected with the early history of Victoria'.

The Historical Society of Victoria came into being on Friday, 21 May 1909, following a public meeting at Furlong's Music Studio, Royal Arcade, presided over by the speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Hon. (later Sir) Frank Madden. The meeting elected the provisional society's first chairman, Professor Harrison Moore, dean of the Law School of the University of Melbourne, with Henry Gyles Turner and Alfred Deakin as vice-presidents, and Alfred Greig as secretary.

We thank those far-sighted men and women who could see our history disappearing. Now, 115 years later, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, which was granted the title 'Royal' on 7 August 1951 by His Majesty King George VI, is stronger than ever. To celebrate our 115th anniversary, Her Excellency Professor Margaret Gardner AC, Governor of Victoria, graciously hosted a reception at her home at Government House.

Three speeches given at the reception are published in the following pages.

Special guests of Her Excellency the Hon. Professor Margaret Gardner AC, Governor of Victoria, Governor's Hall, Government House, Melbourne, 22 August 2024 (Courtesy Office of the Governor of Victoria, photographer Jack Sammann)

Front Row left to right: the Hon. Ted Baillieu AO, former Premier of Victoria and Robyn Baillieu; Her Excellency, Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC, Governor of Victoria; the Hon. Sonya Kilkenny MP, Minister for Planning; Emeritus Professor Richard Broome AM, President Royal Historical Society of Victoria

Second Row left to right: Professor Philip Goad, Chair, Heritage Council of Victoria; Ms Justine Haezlewood, Director, Public Record Office Victoria and Keeper of Public Records; Ms Margaret Donnan, Independent Board Director and wife of Richard Broome; Nick Mann, Executive Director, Heritage Integration, Department of Transport and Planning

Third Row left to right: the Hon. James Newbury MP, Shadow Minister for Planning, Environment and Climate Change, and Equality; Emeritus Professor Peter McPhee, Chair, History Council of Victoria

Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC, Governor of Victoria

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge: the Honourable Sonya Kilkenny, Minister for Planning and Minister for the Suburbs; the Honourable Ted Baillieu, former Premier of Victoria and Robyn Baillieu: Members and Former Members of Parliament; members of the Judiciary; Professor Richard Broome, President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, and Margaret Donnan; members, volunteers and supporters; distinguished guests.

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands on which Government House stands, the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people, and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

Significance of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria

In the inaugural issue of the *Victorian Historical Magazine,* the opening article explored the history of Collingwood and its surrounds pre-Federation. According to the article, some 60 years earlier nanny goats had roamed the muddy streets breaking into backyards and eating vegetables. Snakes were such a common sight that the local Council Chambers offered a shilling for their capture—until a man walked in with six snakes. The water of the Yarra was described as having different levels of sweetness depending upon where you drank. And the thunderstorms were so fierce that locals claimed to have spotted mermaids. This article, published in 1911, evokes a sense of otherworldliness right in our own backyard, and it probably seemed otherworldly even in 1911.

The Roman orator and philosopher, Cicero, said of history that it 'is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illuminates reality, vitalises memory, provides guidance in daily life and brings us tidings of antiquities'. Although that quote is more than 2,000 years old, the sentiment it encapsulates of history vitalising and brightening our understanding of the world holds true to this day. Encouraging our appreciation for the past, and the importance of the lessons we learn from it, continues to be a way of sustaining and reshaping our culture. Our understanding of our history changes as our evidence and its interpretations develop and change. Debate about our heritage should be encouraged.

Achieving the milestone of a 115th anniversary of an organisation is not something that comes about by chance. It is thanks to the hard work of volunteers, partners, donors, and supporters—all of those who are with us today and those from past years. And there is no more fitting place than Government House to celebrate this achievement, for where we stand is a great physical example of the importance of preserving and upholding our history. That is why it has been a pleasure to work with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria in the 'Understanding Victoria' discussion series held here, which are to be published in its journal.

As a volunteer-led organisation, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria thrives on a sense of duty and selflessness. And it is the feeling that Cicero described in his reflections that has provided the drive that has so far maintained the Society for 115 years—and we hope many more to come.

I want to acknowledge the Society's organisers, with special thanks to its president, Professor Richard Broome AM. To all the members of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, thank you for your dedication to preserving our state's history and culture. Every research piece, article, and discussion brings us closer—bit by bit—to better understanding where we have been as well as informing where we are headed.

I now invite Minister Kilkenny to address us.

The Honourable Sonya Kilkenny, Minister for Planning

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on today, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong/Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nations, and pay my respects to all Elders past and present and to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today. I think it is appropriate, when we talk about our history as a state, that we recognise that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia are one of the oldest continuing living cultures on Earth and have a history and connections to this land that long precede those of the colonial settlers, their descendants, and more recent immigrants.

Acknowledgements

I also wish to acknowledge and welcome the following people present here today: Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC, Governor of Victoria; the Hon. Ted Baillieu AO, former premier of Victoria; the Hon. David Davis MP, Shadow Minister for Energy, Affordability and Security, Shadow Minister for the SEC, Shadow Minister for the Arts and Creative Industries; James Newbury MP, Shadow Minister for Planning, Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Shadow Minister for Equality; Judy Maddigan, the former and first woman speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly (2003–05); and Professor Richard Broome AM, Emeritus Professor of History at La Trobe University, President of the RHSV.

Celebrating the Royal Historical Society of Victoria

It is a great pleasure to be here tonight to celebrate the 115th anniversary of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, and I would like to extend my appreciation for the opportunity to speak to you all tonight.

I want to take a moment to reflect on this significant anniversary for the Royal Historical Society—115 years of leadership in recognising and celebrating Victoria's diverse history. The RHSV boasts more than 300 local historical societies as members—volunteer groups who I am sure are well represented here tonight, and who dedicate time, energy, and skills to promoting the history of our communities. The RHSV plays a crucial role supporting those community groups throughout the state, providing access to its significant collections for use by historians and researchers, and sharing history with the Victorian community through public education activities and publications. And that matters. Because our past matters.

While Victorians need to move forward as a society, we gain a lot from looking back. We can celebrate the things that make our state special. We can admire the progress we have made as a community. We can learn from the darker parts of our history that help us understand some of the challenges we face today.

This year we also celebrate 50 years of heritage legislation and the Victorian Heritage Register. The Victorian Heritage Register has grown from the initial listings in the Historic Buildings Register of 1974 to more than 2,400 places and objects currently listed as being of significance to the story of this state. I am proud that, as the Register has grown, it also started to better represent Victoria's diversity, including the cultural diversity in our community. Some recent inclusions include: the Melbourne AIDS Memorial Quilt; the Albanian Mosque in Shepparton; the residence of the Yorta Yorta activist Willam Cooper in Footscray; and Dame Nellie Melba's Coombe Cottage in the Yarra Valley. We know there is more work to do in this respect, and I have asked both Heritage Victoria and the Heritage Council to consider further ways we can promote Victoria's diversity in the Register. The work of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and historical societies throughout the state have contributed to the development of the Victorian Heritage Register over the past 50 years. And I hope the RHSV can continue to provide support towards ensuring that Victoria's extraordinary diversity is further reflected in the Register.

It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to talk about the two nominations for world heritage listing that our government is progressing, because our history is not just important at a local level or even at a state or national level. It is also internationally significant. The first nomination is for the Victorian Trades Hall—which reached a significant milestone late last year after being added to the tentative list, the precursor to world heritage listing. The other bid is for the Victorian Goldfields, and we are currently preparing a submission to the Commonwealth for tentative listing for that nomination too. Both of these nominations reflect unique aspects of Victoria's history and show it off on the international stage. And it is because of people like you and groups like the RHSV who put in an extraordinary amount of work to recognise and document Victoria's history that we are able to celebrate the things that make Victoria unique.

So again, I thank the Royal Historical Society of Victoria for all of your work and extend my congratulations and those of the government on reaching 115 years.

Professor Richard Broome AM, RHSV President

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet, the people of the Kulin Nation, their Elders past and present. I acknowledge too, Indigenous people present with us tonight.

I wish to thank Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC, Governor of Victoria, for so generously hosting this reception tonight and for her wonderful words about the work of the RHSV from its earliest years. We honour the Governor for being the RHSV's patron-in-chief. Her Excellency must also be thanked and congratulated for initiating the current series of conversations 'Understanding Victoria', which explore key moments in our past. I have been privileged to be a participant in the first of these conversations. They will be published in our *Victorian Historical Journal* over three issues.

I thank the Minister for Planning, the Honourable Sonya Kilkenny, for her presence tonight and her generous speech acknowledging the contribution of the RHSV to Victoria's history and heritage over a hundred years. I acknowledge the presence too of former Premier Ted Baillieu and Robyn Baillieu, and of Judy Maddigan the former and first woman speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly (2003–05), current President Public Records Advisory Council, and an RHSV member. I recognise too the presence of two shadow cabinet ministers, David Davies and James Newbury, who are also RHSV members.

I thank our members, friends, supporters, staff, and especially our wonderful volunteers, including four former presidents and many councillors and committee members, for their presence here tonight.

The Roman god Janus, in Latin meaning 'portal' or 'doorway', had two faces to symbolise beginnings and transitions. The Royal Historical Society of Victoria, unlike Janus, must look not just two ways, but five, in order to transform itself and transition to the future. These five ways are: past, present, future, inwards, and outwards.

Those eminent Victorians, educationalists, and law makers who began our society in 1909 looked backwards to their past, collecting manuscripts and images that documented Victoria's European beginnings. Key items in our collection date from these early years: Judge Willis's casebooks, our pioneers' register of early immigrants, and the magnificent painting by William Barak, gifted by Barak to Anne Bon his friend, and by Anne Bon to our society.

Each year for 115 years, RHSV Council, staff, and volunteers have looked to their own present to fulfil the founders' vision for a collection to explain the state's past to all Victorians. These men and women were, however, people of their time and, inevitably, until recently, celebrated their European past.

We here tonight are people of our time, one that is more aware of Victoria's ethnic and cultural diversity. We recognise the place of women in society as never before, we respect the multicultural diversity of Victoria as never before, and in this time of truth telling we acknowledge our deep and long Indigenous heritage as never before. To reflect these changes, the RHSV some years ago created a Women's History Month and lecture, and an annual lecture in Indigenous history—the Billibellary Lecture—and we seek too to represent Victoria's diversity in our publications. In addition, our catalogue is now being constantly reviewed to find the hidden diversity within our own collection.

These transitions will help the RHSV to build a stronger and more relevant future. To do so we need the permanent home that has eluded us for 115 years and eagerly await the minister's decision on our request for a very long lease on the Drill Hall. Soon, we will launch 'Vision 2030', which aims to make our temporary Drill Hall home adjoining the Flagstaff Gardens into a 'History Hub' for the next generation.

Such a future requires us to look deeply inward. Our Council has developed investment and fundraising strategies to make us sustainable in an era of declining public funding. We now consider more closely our risks and their mitigation. We now also strive to enhance our governance procedures and constantly review and renew our Council and committees.

To achieve our best future, we must face outwards as well to guarantee we remain relevant to society; remain relevant to our 350 affiliated historical societies; remain relevant to Melbourne; and finally remain relevant to all those loving history across Victoria, or those who might learn to love it. Our publications, bookshop, and co-hosting with the Public Record Office Victoria of the annual Victorian Community History Awards all embed the historical imagination into our culture.

Janus symbolised beginnings and transitions. By facing five ways, we will create strategies to transition into the future and advance cultural understanding for all Victorians. We celebrate our Society's creation in 1909 but must make ready for the coming century. We need your help to remain strong; to remain vibrant; to remain apt for our time—so that we will remain valued into the future. Hope for your support rises within us!

UNDERSTANDING VICTORIA

Discussion Series Hosted by the Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC

Prologue: Opening Remarks and Background

Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC,
Governor of Victoria

In May 2024, a new 'Discussion Series: Understanding Victoria', was initiated and hosted at Government House. 'Understanding Victoria' is a series of conversations or discussions about aspects of Victoria's history, with the goal of exploring questions of significance to the state's development and their implications for our future. The first three discussions in 2024 concentrate on questions about the engagement of our people in the development of our systems of democracy and government.

Three particular periods are being explored: the creation of the colony of Victoria and the gold rush of the 1850s and 1860s; the creation of the federation, the Commonwealth of Australia, from the 1880s to the turn of the twentieth century; and the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s that brought new perspectives to the struggle for human rights.

The first in the series was titled '"Disturbing the Order of Things": The Impact of the Gold Rush on Ideas, Identity, and Society in Victoria'. Facilitated by Maxine McKew AM, speakers Robyn Annear, Professor Richard Broome AM, and Professor David Goodman offered insights into the impact of the gold rush on the formation of the new colony of Victoria shortly after separation from New South Wales in 1851. The three speakers, whose presentations are published below, examined key questions around this theme, inviting audience participation in exploring the ideas raised.

Understanding our history enables us to better appreciate the causes and consequences of key moments in our development. In reevaluating our interpretations of these key moments' significance in

light of new evidence and from new perspectives, we are able to draw new conclusions about their continuing impact. In thus exploring the issues that were central to these periods we gain a better appreciation of Victoria's unique character and the 'hows' and 'whys' of its development. And, in seeking to better understand our history, we forge the means to better evaluate, as a community, changes now occurring or proposed.

This series is deliberately framed as conversations or discussions rather than as debates. One of the signs of a healthy democracy is open debate of ideas. We have open debate in Victoria—and on some issues we have polarised positions. However, another sign of a healthy democracy is the ability to explore issues and to deepen, through discussion, our understanding of society and how we have chosen to govern ourselves. Questioning can lead to re-evaluation and different understandings and also to constructive building of ideas and explanations. In the spirit of healthy exploration of our history, this set of contributions is the first in the planned series of conversations.

To frame the first discussion in the series, the following material was provided to participants as background.

Figure 1: L to R: Robyn Annear, Professor David Goodman, Her Excellency Professor the Hon. Margaret Gardner AC, Maxine McKew AM, Professor Richard Broome AM. Photographer Jack Sammann (Courtesy Government House, Victoria)

DISCUSSION SERIES 1

'Disturbing the Order of Things': The Impact of the Gold Rush on Ideas, Identity, and Society in Victoria

Background

The gold rush in Victoria is generally seen as occurring over the period from around 1851 to the late 1860s. In 1850 the British Parliament passed the Australian Colonies Bill, which provided for the establishment of a new colony. The Colony of Victoria was declared on 1 July 1851, marking its separation from the Colony of New South Wales, where it had been designated the Port Phillip District from 1836 to 1850. The announcement of the discovery of gold on 2 July 1851 in Victoria at Mount Alexander near Castlemaine was coincident with the foundation of the new colony. The role of government was immediately significant, with Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe introducing the gold licence system on 23 August 1851.

The first two decades of the new colony, Victoria, were marked by this phenomenal and transformative change. The gold rush brought intense activity and movement of people, changing the landscape through clearing and digging, and changing the development of the colony by the creation of many temporary settlements and eventually a series of new permanent settlements and towns, as well as a burgeoning and 'marvellous' Melbourne.

Victoria's First Peoples were involved in, and were materially and culturally affected and often harmed by, the rapid expansion of settlement and diggings, coming as it did soon after the conflicts and displacement perpetrated by earlier settlement prior to the separation of the colony.

Immigrants from other nations, principally Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA, but also China, flooded into the new colony. This added to the significant migration of people from other Australian and British colonies. Between 1851 and 1861 it is estimated that the population of Victoria grew from 75,000 people to 500,000. In 1855, around 19,000 Chinese immigrants were in Victoria.

Art, music and writing attempted to capture and respond to the ferment that the gold rush occasioned. There are bush ballads, many drawings, and some paintings created then, speaking to the time and its disruptions.

David Goodman argues that contemporaries agreed that the gold rushes 'were a disturbance to the normal order of things', most particularly in terms of the opportunity to become very wealthy without much work or effort. There was also a unique disturbing event, the Eureka Rebellion, which encompassed the Battle of the Eureka Stockade on 3 December 1854. It is clear that this event, marked by dissemination of Chartist ideas, affected the constitution of the Parliament of Victoria and led to adult male suffrage. However, its long-term significance and representation is contested.

Was there a lasting impact on Victoria as we know it today from the gold rush? And, if there was, how did it affect our society, politically, socially, and culturally? With that background information provided, along with some readings (listed at the end of this article), the opening remarks to the first conversation in the Discussion Series provided some further context.

Opening Remarks

Long before the state of Victoria was established, this site on which Government House now stands was an important meeting place for different language groups of the Kulin Nation. These lands, with their abundant natural resources, had supported the business and ceremony of First Peoples for countless generations. When European settlers arrived on the banks of the Yarra River in 1835, they recognised potential that was already familiar to the First Peoples of the area.

In 1836, concerned by the growing number of unauthorised settlements, Governor Sir Richard Bourke appointed a police magistrate, William Lonsdale, to oversee the Port Phillip District, which became a separately administered part of New South Wales. Within twelve months, settlers would be given free rein to claim as leaseholds large swathes of country to the detriment of Victoria's First Peoples, who had inhabited and cared for these lands for millennia. The following year, Bourke visited the District and approved plans for a town to be named Melbourne.

In his book, *1835: The Founding of Melbourne and the Conquest of Australia*, historian James Boyce argues that it was Melbourne's birth,

not Sydney's settlement, that signalled the emergence of European control over Australia. According to Boyce, from this point, 'no more was settlement to be restricted to defined boundaries'.

In 1839, Charles La Trobe was appointed superintendent of the District, later becoming the lieutenant-governor when the *Australian Constitutions Act 1850* created the Colony of Victoria in 1851. At that point the rapid settlement of the lands, now called Victoria, and the particular events and outcomes that proceeded from one of the world's largest gold rushes began. It is this period and its outcomes that are being explored in the first of these 'Discussion Series: Understanding Victoria'.

Following a tour of Australia in 1895, American writer Mark Twain described our nation's history as 'curious and strange' and something that reads like 'the most beautiful of lies … full of surprises, and adventures, and incongruities, and contradictions, and incredibilities'. Perhaps it takes an outsider to fully appreciate the depth and complexity of our past.

We might ask ourselves: why did particular outcomes and characteristics develop while others did not? What is the significance of these events in the context of the formation of our state? And, what can we learn from our history that should be a foundational understanding for our future?

In the broad sweep of Australia's history, the 1850s gold rushes and the Eureka Rebellion are a story familiar to many, even if the details may not be so well remembered. Yet the significance of this period for creating the Victoria we see today is not part of the popular imagination or narrative about our identity. This is not very surprising, because there are very few elements of Australia's history that are well-remembered and frequently recounted parts of our national story. The notion that we 'don't have much history' is how this lack is commonly expressed.

The framing of the conversation and the contributions of the speakers in the first of the 'Discussion Series: Understanding Victoria' captured in these pages tell us there is still much to discuss and to learn about even this most 'familiar' period of Australian history.

This gold-rush period was uniquely formative for the then new colony of Victoria, and it helped shape the fortunes and misfortunes of many at the time. The events and decisions of this period:

- Added to the dispossession of our First Peoples that had been underway since 1834;

- Enshrined access to land and opportunities to improve material wealth and life prospects for immigrants from many nations;
- Put in place the elements of Chartist ideals, male suffrage, and a democratic constitution for Victoria that were crucial to building Australia's democracy; and
- Reaffirmed exclusion and forms of discrimination against others, including women, Chinese, and Victoria's First Peoples, as well as reinforcing property rights and wealth as early determining influences in Victoria's Legislative Council, the colonial legislature's upper house.

Telling a fuller story that speaks about the society we created, as well as speaking to the issues for the society we wish to create, is a reason for future conversation in these 'Discussion Series' and beyond.

Reading List

Robyn Annear, *Nothing but Gold: The Diggers of 1852*, Melbourne, Text Publishing, 1999, chapters 1 and 23.

Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History since 1800*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2024, chapters 1–5.

David Goodman, 'The Gold Rushes of the 1850s', in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Cambridge History of Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 170–88.

David Goodman, 'Gold and the Public in the Nineteenth-Century Gold Rushes', in Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell (eds), *A Global History of the Gold Rushes*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2018, pp. 65–87.

Further Reading

Clare Wright, *We Are the Rebels: The Women and Men Who Made Eureka*, Melbourne, Text Publishing, 2015.

Notes

1 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, 'History of Gold Mining in Victoria—Resources Victoria', at https://resources.vic.gov.au/geology-exploration/minerals/metals/gold/gold-mining-in-victoria.

2 'The Victorian Goldfields: World Heritage Bid: Mount Alexander', at https://goldfieldsworldheritage.com.au/place/mount-alexander/.

3 Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 'Victoria's Historic Population Growth: European Settlement to Present, 1836–1911', at https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0027/29295/accessible-version-of-Victorias-historic-population-growth.docx.

4 David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s*, Redwood City CA, Stanford University Press, 1994, p. xiv.

5 James Boyce, *1835: The Founding of Melbourne and the Conquest of Australia*, Melbourne, Black Inc., 2011.

6 Literary Dilettante, edited extracts from: Mark Twain (with an introduction by Don Watson), *The Wayward Tourist: Mark Twain's Adventures in Australia*, Melbourne, Miegunyah Press, 2007. Extracts published 28 March 2010 by Literary Dilettante, at https://musingsofaliterarydilettante.wordpress.com/2010/03/28/the-wayward-tourist-mark-twains-adventures-in-australia-by-mark-twain/.

'Disturbing the Order of Things': The Impact of the Gold Rush on Ideas, Identity, and Society in Victoria

Introduction

Maxine McKew

'Victoria is the most progressive state in Australia.' So said former Premier Daniel Andrews, and it was notable at the time that few demurred. That such a statement can be confidently proclaimed in Australia's second most populous state suggests a strong sense of collective belief and shared history. This series of talks by some of our most eminent historians attempts to trace the origins of this belief. When most contemporary Victorians look at towns and cities across the regions and at the mighty metropolis of Melbourne, they see visible evidence of a glorious start to European settlement. The great good fortune of the discovery of gold within days of the proclamation of the state in 1851 provided the power that forged the future. It supercharged migration from all over the world, created spectacular wealth, and set the scene for a particular kind of democratic development. It also marked, as David Goodman argues, a massive disruption to a more orderly transition to self-government. But, if a mark of a society is how it responds to unexpected and even chaotic events, then Victoria was served well from the beginning.

David Goodman maintains that the idea that the golden wealth should be used for the public benefit, while resisted by many gold seekers, ultimately gave the state its distinctive look and sense of civic pride. It certainly helped build what became Marvellous Melbourne, with a distinct class of individuals—Redmond Barry and Charles La Trobe among them—determined to invest in great public institutions. Thus we see in this period the development of the State Library, the University of Melbourne, and the Atheneum. By the 1880s a colonial outpost had been transformed into one of the world's most celebrated cities. And while chic urbanites were 'doing the Block' on Collins Street, the gold seekers who had come from crowded English towns or elsewhere, were remaking themselves in the vibrant communities that became Castlemaine, Ballarat,

and Bendigo. As Robyn Annear points out, a pattern of settlement was established with the miner's right, which allowed a digger to occupy a quarter acre of crown land for a house and garden. This led, as Annear says, to Victoria having, for some time, 'the highest levels of home ownership in the world'.

In retelling this story in the early decades of the 21st century, we must also acknowledge that what was a cause of celebration for many was a disaster for First Nations peoples. Richard Broome's fine work demonstrates that from the 1830s colonisation represented a great rupturing of history, culture, and lifestyle for the original inhabitants. He reminds us that Batman and Fawkner were illegal settlers, and that what followed was theft on a grand scale. The combination of mass migration and dramatic changes in agricultural practice saw a collapse in the size of the Indigenous population by something like 80 per cent. Some estimates suggest this is a conservative figure. Yet, despite this tragedy, there was, as Richard Broome also points out, extensive and ingenious adaptation on the part of those Indigenous people he describes as 'voyagers'.

I recommend these contributions to all lovers of history as a way of understanding who we are. I am reminded of what lawyer/activist Noel Pearson says of our shared past: that there are three great stories—'our ancient heritage, our British heritage and our multicultural triumph'. Reconciling the three versions of our history is a national work in progress.

Indigenous Responses to Port Phillip's Colonisation

Richard Broome

Abstract
Settlers viewed the colonisation of Victoria as a glorious march to progress, first by the occupation of verdant sheep pastures, then by the glorious discovery of gold. But there is another side to colonisation and the gold rushes—the devastation of the world of the traditional owners. Colonisation caused massive loss of life through violence and disease, and great trauma due to loss of land and culture. Yet we should not ascribe a simple victimhood to the survivors but instead see them as complex humans who found ways to exert power and transform themselves so they might endure and eventually thrive.

We can fall into the trap of thinking that we can easily know and understand the past—that all we need to do is find and read the sources and write about what they mean. However, while historical characters might seem similar to us, and often not too distant in time and place, they often thought in very different ways and operated in contexts very different from ours. Like us they were complex people, and to recognise that is a start to understanding. But it is quite impossible to know for sure what was going on inside their heads, although their actions and words can give us hints. We can, however, say with certainty that what they were doing and thinking involved considerations and calculations as intricate as those involved in our own thoughts and actions.

What we can know, is that colonisation from 1834 of what became known as the Port Phillip District led to a great rupturing of the fabric of the Aboriginal world. And the gold discoveries in 1851 continued the transformations for First Nations peoples that had been in train for the previous seventeen years—and in some respects longer. Aboriginal responses to this threat of devastation were extremely varied, illuminating the complex humanity of those often mislabelled by the intruders as 'savages'. I will argue that these responses revealed First Nations peoples as both victims of, and voyagers within, this time of great transformation.

The colonisation of Port Phillip by the Henty brothers in 1834 at Portland began badly with violence and the killings at the Convincing Ground defining the local traditional owners as victims. However, when John Batman and William Pascoe Fawkner landed in Naarm (later Melbourne) in 1835—illegally so, as settlement on the southern coast was banned by the British government—the presence of Indigenous inhabitants elicited different reactions.

After days of observation, the Wurundjeri of Naarm chose to engage with, not avoid, the new arrivals. In June 1835, Batman produced a parchment ('treaty') with marked boundaries and sought signatures to purchase land, while the Wurundjeri for their part acted out their own welcome ceremony of *tanderrum*.[1] The Wurundjeri Elders did not consider that these pale strangers, who had no traditional rights and did not know the stories of Country, might seek permanency. Batman soon claimed to have purchased Aboriginal Country through this treaty. He was playing to the evangelical Christian lobby in London, but Governor Richard Bourke in Sydney quickly declared this 'treaty' null and void.

Similarly, when Fawkner landed to set up a settlement in October 1835, the Boonwurrung man Derrimut engaged with the Europeans and warned of trouble from the Wathawurrung of the Geelong area and the up-country Daungwurrung or Goulburn River people. Fawkner repulsed those hostile groups who approached his camp with concealed clubs and axes under their possum skin cloaks and dragging spears through the grass with their toes. Unlike the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung, these more distant groups did not want to engage with Fawkner but instead attacked his party. We must recognise this diversity in Aboriginal responses.[2]

Despite this low-key and often benign start to Melbourne's settlement, within a few years colonisation had inflicted devastating impacts on traditional owners and their Country as sheep in their thousands were shipped across Bass Strait or driven down from NSW and onto Aboriginal lands. The pastoral occupation of central and western Victoria was the most rapid in the history of British colonisation and had destructive consequences. The spread was enabled by the British government's claim that the land was not owned by First Nations peoples but was the crown's to lease.

As pastoralists took up vast runs, their sheep ate out indigenous plants and grasses such as the yam daisy, causing a loss of traditional

Aboriginal food resources. The hooves of the sheep were like jack hammers on Country, pounding the earth that had felt the softer touch of marsupial padded feet for thousands of millennia. The sheep did not roam like native animals but stayed close to water, intensifying their impact. Within just a few years erosion resulted.

New pathogens took their toll on Aboriginal people, who had no experience of, and no immunity to, diseases such as influenza and many European childhood diseases. Smallpox had already had an impact ahead of the frontier when it spread to parts of Victoria in the 1790s and again in the late 1820s, with a possible death rate of 50 per cent of those contacted each time. So Indigenous peoples were already seriously impacted by colonisation before Europeans ever set foot on Aboriginal lands in Victoria.

Violent episodes erupted on distant sheep runs as traditional owners and new leaseholders battled for the land. Possibly 1,500 to 2,000 Indigenous lives were lost through frontier violence, with massacres all too frequent. By the eve of the gold rushes the Aboriginal population had plummeted by a massive 80 to 90 per cent due to violence, dispossession of their traditional lands, damage to habitat, and loss of food sources, as well as the impact of disease. Whole families and groups were lost and clans and language groups devastated. Trauma was widespread and long lasting. For a people whose knowledge was stored in songs, stories, on rock walls and carved possum skins cloaks, in the heads of Elders and not written down, colonisation resulted in a massive cultural loss. Aboriginal people were clearly victims of colonisation, despite fighting back where they could, as set out in detail in 'Wild Times', Part One of my book *Aboriginal Victorians: A History since 1800.*[3] However, this is not the whole story of the Aboriginal response to invasion.

First Nations people proved to be curious about the world of the invaders and willing to make adaptations to survive in this new world. They inspected the invaders' clothes, pocket watches and buttons, examined their houses, doors, locks, and panes of glass, and, learning the value of money, asked for silver (not copper) coins in the street from those who occupied their Country. They found cloth and steel axes to be novel and interesting, as well as useful. They watched ceremonies and church services, trying to fathom what was going on. They embraced the settlers' dogs, and within a few years their camps were host to packs of these companion animals. Aboriginal people learnt English words and

soon invented a workable creole English, even singing settlers' songs in an Irish or Scottish brogue. Few Europeans bothered to learn Aboriginal languages, so the cultural transactions remained mostly one-way traffic.

Gaining a liking for the tea and tobacco of the invaders, First Nations people soon took paid work to gain more of these novelties or simply foodstuffs from the butchers and bakers of Melbourne. Some became excellent shepherds, unafraid to follow the flocks on fenceless runs, being so familiar with the country. The few who worked on the minority of pastoral runs that stocked cattle became excellent horsemen. When a Native Police Corps was formed in 1842, many Aboriginal men joined up, encouraged by Billibellary, a Wurundjeri Elder, and lured by the rations and access to uniforms, guns, and horses. They enjoyed the status and power these brought, and the ability to arrest both black and white fellas.

In 1843 Billibellary asked for land saying, 'if Yarra blackfellows had a country on the Yarra … they would stop on it and cultivate the ground'.[4] It was an interesting and perhaps transforming request, as they were not farmers of a single piece of land. As the historian Bill Gammage wrote: 'Aboriginal people farmed and shaped the land but were not sedentary like a farmer, for sedentarism would have spelt failure'. 'People civilised all the land, without fences, making farm and wilderness one ... This is farming, but not being a farmer'.[5] Billibellary's request was a modest one likely to succeed and resonate with the government, which desperately wanted to settle Aboriginal people down. An Aboriginal Protectorate had been formed in 1839 to do so.

The transformative nature of some Aboriginal responses is revealed by the case of Charlie, a young boy at the Merri Creek Aboriginal school by Dights Falls. Charlie, like some of the older boys, held the horses of the finely dressed Baptist gentlemen of Melbourne when they came to inspect how the school they funded was progressing. Charlie told his teacher, Mr Edgar, that he aspired to be a gentleman. Edgar scoffed, saying that gentlemen had two names. Charlie replied that he would now call himself Charles Never and obtained a job in Collingwood as an apprentice tailor. He soon gained the necessary skills to make his own gentleman's clothes, purchased calling cards, and paid social visits to the respectable people of Melbourne, leaving a card when they were not at home. He then joined the Native Police as a tailor.

Charlie was joining white society, but wisely at the top not the bottom. And, while he appeared to desire assimilation into white colonial

culture, he maintained an Aboriginal objective. He informed his teacher, Mr Edgar, that he wanted to write to the Queen, to ask for £250 (five times the annual wage of a shepherd), and some land up at Pentridge (after 1869, modern-day Coburg). Charles Never was in effect asking for compensation for colonisation![6]

His response was not unique. While Billibellary's request for land was not granted before his death from influenza in 1846, the Wurundjeri continued to ask for land throughout the 1850s, led by Billibellary's son Simon Wonga and other Kulin people, and finally gained land at Coranderrk in 1860.

If we focus on the devastation wreaked on Aboriginal people by European invasion and simply dub them victims, we overlook the transformations of which many of them were capable. In 1958 Australia's most influential anthropologist, William Stanner, spoke about his field work in the Fitzmaurice River region in the 1930s and the voluntary movements of Aboriginal people he observed. He met a group of station workers who informed him their home Country was a long way away. Asked why they were now here on a pastoral station, they replied that they had come to the station voluntarily, negotiating their way across unfriendly neighbours' Country, seeking tea and tobacco. To continue the supply of these goods, they stayed to work as drovers and rural labourers, a life they embraced over time. Stanner remarked: 'They went because they wanted to, and stay because they want to'. He called them 'voyagers', likening them to the ancient spice traders who crossed the world from European ports seeking condiments and preservatives for their unexciting and perishable foodstuffs. He observed that such journeys by Aboriginal people into white centres were frequent and purposeful. Certainly, the banks of the Yarra in the late 1830s hosted scores of Aboriginal up-country visitors seeking out exotic things in Melbourne—guns, foodstuffs, metal objects—and slaking their curiosity for new knowledge.

Stanner concluded of the station people he observed that they had agency—power expressed through voluntary movement. In a plethora of action words, Stanner stated: 'In becoming their own voyagers, the Aborigines claimed, coaxed and fought an opening into an incomprehensible new world'.[7] Aboriginal people in the face of colonisation were not simply victims, but also voyagers into a perplexing new world in which they sought to survive and hoped to thrive.

'Going to Work', by Samuel Thomas Gill, 1850s (Courtesy National Library of Australia)

Relations between settlers and Indigenous people in Victoria were set by 1851 when the gold rushes began. For those who survived the initial pastoral phase of colonisation, a mere 2,000 Aboriginal Victorians, there were new challenges. The Protectorate had closed in 1849, deemed a failure by government and hated by most settlers, who thought it harboured thieving and violent 'savages' and was a refuge for scoundrels ironically paid for by the settlers. Indeed, there was no Aboriginal policy in place during the 1850s, when the remaining Indigenous people faced a massive inflow of gold-rush immigrants and a fearsome tearing up of their Country by diggers bent on gold seeking.

To see Aboriginal people simply as victims of colonisation is to miss their efforts to voyage, to survive, and indeed to transform themselves in order to retain their Aboriginal identity in the new settler society. And to overlook such tenacity and courage is to be guilty of a great condescension towards these historical characters in Victoria's past. As Stanner remarked almost 70 years ago, to overlook this, was to miss 'the self will and vitality of the Aborigines'.[8] To ignore these examples of their ingenuity also fails

to see the continuity of agency that First Nations people have expressed throughout colonisation, as evidenced in the recent Indigenous testimony to the Yoorrook Truth Telling Royal Commission, and the drive to treaty in Victoria.

Notes

1 See William Thomas's description of *tanderrum* or freedom of the bush in his 'Brief Account of the Aborigines of Australia Felix', in T.F. Bride, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers: A Series of Papers on the Early Occupation of the Colony, the Aborigines, etc. Addressed by Victorian Pioneers to His Excellency Charles Joseph La Trobe, Esq., Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Victoria*, first published in 1998, this edition edited with an introduction and notes by C.E. Sayers, Melbourne, Currey O'Neil, 1983, pp. 434–5.

2 Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History since 1800*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, second edition 2024, Chapter 1.

3 Broome, Chapters 4 and 5.

4 Broome, p. 33.

5 Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2011, p. 304.

6 Broome, pp. 50–3.

7 William Stanner, 'Continuity and Change among the Aborigines', Presidential Address to Section F (Anthropology) ANZAAS, Adelaide, 1958, reprinted in William Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938–1973*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1979, pp. 48–9.

8 Stanner, p. 48.

The Magic of Gold

Robyn Annear

Abstract

One way of understanding colonial Victoria is to consider the experience of the gold rushes and how transformative that experience was for individuals and society as a whole. The outbreak of the gold rushes in 1851 threw the fledgling colony into an era of ad hockery and onto a different track from that envisaged in the run-up to Separation. The agitations and developments of the gold-rush decade made Victoria distinctive among the Australian colonies—and dominant, right through till Federation and the early years of the Commonwealth.

The leading question for my contribution to this discussion was meant to be: 'How might we best understand the impact of the gold rush on the development of Victoria? What if the gold rush had never happened?' But, when I looked hard at it, the question seemed both too big and too small for this occasion. So, in the spirit of the gold seekers, I propose to 'disturb the order of things'. 'What if the gold rush had never happened?' What can I say? It *did* happen. So, let me tell you how gold hijacked the fledgling colony of Victoria.

On Tuesday 1 July 1851, Separation from NSW became official, and at long last Victoria was a colony in its own right. Two weeks and two days later—a miraculous bit of timing—came the news that gold had been discovered within a hundred miles of Melbourne, in quantities that promised to rival the goldfields of NSW. *Their* gold rush had broken out a few months earlier, causing a haemorrhage of Victoria's working population that weakened the colony before it even began. But now Victoria had its own gold! In one way, it saved the new colony, setting it on a path to fame and prosperity; but, of course, it threw into chaos all the well-laid plans for Victoria's orderly transition to self-government along with the early settlers' visions of a pastoral dominion.

Beginning in the spring of 1851, fresh goldfields opened up almost every week, each richer than the last, and the rush of colonial gold seekers

left other colonial cities—Adelaide, for one—almost bereft of menfolk, as well as leaving sheep unshorn, crops unharvested, and Melbourne virtually without police. Then, in September 1852, came the first massive wave of gold immigrants from Britain and Europe. These were the hopeful souls who had been electrified by the news of six ships docking on the Thames bearing *eight tons* of Victorian gold. Nine months it had taken; those ships sailed from Melbourne just before Christmas 1851 and arrived in London in April 1852. The news reverberated far and wide, and imaginations were set alight. Passages were booked and departures taken from homes and families—in many cases never to be seen again.

It is hard to picture eight tons of gold. Suffice it to say, it was a *lot* of gold. And it was just the beginning. While it may be too difficult to picture *eight tons* of gold, it is possible to picture specks in a pan, or a matchboxful, or a nugget in your hand. This was gold you could find *for yourself*, gold that was yours to keep, or to spend, or to send home. Actual gold. There is nothing like it; nothing else looks like it or feels like it—the *weight*, the solidity … the *goldness* of it. Its appearance—not just the way it looks, but the way it *appears* out of the dirt—it is like magic, every time. Gold is not complicated; on the contrary, it is easy to understand. Gold is money, and all that money can bring.

In those early days, the gold lay close to the surface—there was 'gold in the grassroots', they said. Just imagine the initial reaction of those early gold seekers. Gold in the grassroots, gold for the taking. But that phase of gold mining did not last long. Soon the shallow gold would be gone, and then the deeper digging began. Initially, however, there was the small matter of the gold licence, a monthly fee of 30 shillings (equivalent, then, to half an ounce of gold) that entitled you to dig for (or pick up) the precious metal. The iniquities and indignities of the gold-licensing system would eventually lead to the uprising at Eureka. But at first it seemed miraculous that you were allowed to dig for gold—gold that belonged to the crown—and to keep what you found.

Consider the lives that gold seekers had left behind. Many were town and city dwellers, working at trades, or as servants, or in clerical or professional jobs. Many came from the crowded towns of northern England where they had been cogs in the industrial revolution. And many were from the countryside, agricultural labourers. There was practically nothing in England's green and pleasant land that you could help yourself to, with or without a licence. Things like cutting timber for fuel or hunting

game for food could, and did, get you transported to the colonies. But here, on the goldfields, the diggers were free to do such things—and they did them, with abandon.

They lived in tents, usually with a handful of mates—either from home, or met on the ship or the road. In the absence of a woman—a sister, wife, or daughter of one of them—they would take turns, week about, as tent-keeper, doing the cooking, shopping, wood-getting, and minding the gold while the rest went out to dig. They wrote home, extolling the brilliance of the night sky, and the marvels (the sounds of kookaburras, or possums at night) and the freedoms of living outdoors in the bush. And remember, the gold seekers were young—under 30, most of them—so their gold-digging experience would be forever imbued with the glow of youthful adventure.

'Coffee Tent 6m from Bush Inn. Diggers' Breakfast', by Samuel Thomas Gill
(Courtesy *Sketches of the Victoria Gold Diggings and Diggers, as They Are*, 1852)

Let us consider, too, the aspirations they brought with them. To make that risky journey into the unknown took audacity. While some were of a gambling disposition, most came with high hopes of something better than, if not exactly serfdom, then the limited, foreshortened prospects that their old lives held. While Governor La Trobe and his

Legislative Council had harboured their own high hopes for the new colony, these aspirations were swiftly overrun by the exigencies of the gold rushes. Towns sprang up willy-nilly—not in the planned way La Trobe had envisaged—and the diggers demanded roads and bridges to service them. The government 'camps' installed at the various goldfields—stocked with police, soldiers, and commissioners administering the gold licence system—became flashpoints of antagonism between gold seekers and the authorities. Having tasted independence, the diggers resisted when they felt their freedoms threatened. They were by no means all Chartists, republicans or revolutionaries, but there was a vocal element on all the goldfields that worked to focus and articulate the diggers' ire—and to extend it to broader democratic issues.

David Goodman's article discusses where the gold rushes led in terms of democratic reforms, so let me end with a lightning sketch of what the gold-rush decade did to Victoria.

The majority of the gold seekers stayed and settled down. The break with the past, the taste of independence, and the dislocation of social norms and hierarchies all provided a licence for these men and women to reimagine the terms and promise of life, both for themselves as individuals and for the new society they were moulding.

That wild outdoor life, however short-lived, gave the diggers a powerful attachment to their new country. Without a thought for the displaced First Peoples, they pictured themselves as pioneers, with a pioneer's stake in the place and its future. The annual miner's right, which would replace the hated gold licence in the wake of the Eureka outbreak, allowed a digger to occupy a quarter acre of crown land, enough for a house and garden. That both encouraged them to put down roots and led to Victoria having the highest level of home ownership in the world for some time.

Melbourne's share of the colony's population fell from something like half in 1851 to less than a quarter ten years later, and the city would not regain its dominance until the 1880s. The decentralising force of its big inland towns influenced Victoria's priorities and power dynamic, making it a colony like no other. Victoria's population as a whole grew six-fold between 1851 and 1861, and, relative to the British population overall, the newcomers were literate, skilled, and aspirational. And, thanks to gold, they were cashed up, like Victoria itself. In a world that worshipped progress, Victoria was Mecca.

Some may dismiss all I have said as just hyperbole, myth-making. But embellishment is in keeping with the temper of those times. And, if I do argue for Victorian exceptionalism, well, isn't that what Victorians have always done? The gold rushes, coinciding as they did with Separation, built on the uppity strain of anti-Sydney sentiment and added a hard sheen of superiority that would last—just about—until Federation, and would then continue into the new century with the choice of Melbourne as the first national capital.

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Now … where's my gold?

This question at the end of my talk referred to a tiny bottle of gold dust I had handed into the audience to illustrate my contention that there's nothing like gold. But that cocky question—'Where's my gold?'—took on a different significance when, towards the end of the session, a First Nations audience member rose to speak. She reminded us that the event was being staged during Reconciliation Week, and that the narrative of gold diggers forging freedom with their picks and shovels, guns and axes, relied on her ancestors' dispossession. In their talks for this seminar, both Richard Broome and David Goodman discussed that ongoing injustice with sensitivity and insight.

‘Swearing Allegiance to the Southern Cross’, detail of watercolour by Charles A. Doudiet,1 December 1854 (Courtesy National Museum of Australia)

Gold and Democracy in Victoria

David Goodman

Abstract

The Victorian response to the discovery of gold in the 1850s included concerns about the way the gold rush promised or threatened to redistribute wealth randomly, alongside more optimistic responses. The article describes the democratic reforms that resulted from political activism by the gold immigrants. Finally, it characterises the gold era's complex settlement of the tension between individual wealth seeking and public good—while gold-seeker political activists sought to equate private wealth seeking with the public interest, there was also importantly a flurry of settler institution and public sphere building.

Gold was the catalyst for the second rapid invasion of Victoria—the first was that of the sheep. During the second invasion, the over-excited gold seekers comprehensively transformed landscapes as they diverted rivers, cut down trees, and dug up the soil. Recent work has shown that Aboriginal people did actively participate in the gold rush in some places, but overall gold was—as settler society gold rushes almost always were—a further disaster for the Indigenous owners of the country.[1]

My 1994 book was called *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s*—the title deliberately calling attention to the core activity as they named it back then. Why did I write in it that the gold rush posed a 'disturbance to the normal order of things'? My argument was that the work ethic—the idea that hard work should meet its just reward—was absolutely central to Victorian society. Gold threatened or promised the opposite—a random distribution of wealth. Everyone compared it to a lottery. In Victorian thought, life should not have been a lottery. Charles La Trobe as governor brought these class-based moral concerns to his decision making, telling London in late 1851 that he wanted to maintain the colony as 'a suitable home and place of refuge, not only to the poor, indigent, or restless, but for the sober and enlightened middle classes'.

In the book, I highlighted pessimistic responses to gold, in part because the optimistic responses are so much more familiar to us today.

We know in retrospect that gold boosted the settler population, thus enabling the long economic boom of 1860–1890 and creating the modern state of Victoria.[2] The pessimists of course did not know how the story ended. Surprisingly few people in 1850s Victoria, across the political spectrum from radical to conservative, thought gold seeking was a good basis for a society. Those who were happiest were free-market liberals, confident that the market would self-regulate and all would be well in the end. At least in the published record, they were never anywhere near a majority. I wrote:

> the mid-century gold rushes were made possible by a modern ethos that regarded uprooting oneself from home and undertaking a long and hazardous journey in pursuit of uncertain wealth as not only possible but desirable. We know this ethos was controversial because many contemporary commentators registered doubts about it, warning that nothing good could come from abandoning settled lives and responsibilities to search for randomly distributed gold.

To many Victorians, the gold rush seemed like capitalism gone mad, and they were uneasy about it. In subsequent memory, however, most of that complexity of response was leached out, and the gold rushes were simply celebrated as positive, nation-building events.

What kind of democracy emerged in the gold-rush period? Geoffrey Serle's magisterial 1963 *The Golden Age* gives clear, mid-twentieth century answers. The democratic activism of the gold diggers and their allies helped create a broadly based male democracy—beginning with the 1855 granting of the vote to holders of a £1 annual miner's right, then full manhood suffrage for the lower house in 1857: 'Every male person of the full age of 21 years, and not subject to any legal incapacity, who shall be a natural born subject of Her Majesty, shall be qualified to vote in the election of Members of the Legislative Assembly'.

Where does that sit on the scale of democracy internationally? Way ahead of Britain, where only one man in six had the vote. Comparable to but different from the US, where, by the 1850s, in all but a handful of states, constitutions specified that the voter had to be an 'adult white male'. In Victoria there were practical obstacles to Indigenous men voting—probably very few did—but no explicit constitutional or legislative prohibition. Women of all kinds were deliberately excluded (although in 1863–65 some were accidentally given the vote) just as in

the US and the UK. Victoria led the world in the introduction of the secret ballot in 1856—known internationally as the Australian ballot. But wealth still gained extra privileges in Victoria. If you owned property in more than one Assembly electorate, you could vote more than once. The upper house (Legislative Council) retained a steep property qualification until the 1950s. Serle wrote in 1963 that this was Victoria's 'first bite' at democracy—'but payment of members and equal electoral districts' as well as reform of 'the real fortress of conservatism', the Legislative Council, remained to be achieved. We would add now that one of the crucial things that also happened in the 1850s was that the British government ceded Aboriginal policy and land revenue to the colonies, ending the humanitarian oversight it had exercised since the abolition of slavery in the empire in the 1830s. Democratic settler colonial governments everywhere became even more responsive to settler interests and their insatiable desire for land; like gold rushes, expanding settler democracy was almost never good for Indigenous peoples.

That is all very important to know and remember, but it is a kind of tick box institutional approach to scoring democracy—a nineteenth-century version of what Freedom House does internationally today.[3] What are some additional 21st-century questions we might ask about the democracy Victoria created in the 1850s? I have written more recently about the balancing of public and private in gold-rush democracy.[4] My question is: how was it that, so rapidly through the 1850s gold-rush period in Australia, public good arguments became coded as conservative? How and why—given the early response I have just described—did individual wealth seeking become so strongly associated with democratic politics? There were, after all, other possibilities. The gold could have been reserved for public use (as it was briefly in Georgia, USA, in 1830).[5] It could have been more highly taxed. And those possibilities could have been, and in some cases and places were, understood as democratic.

A central issue in Victoria was the licence system. Legally the precious minerals belonged to the crown, and (as in NSW) you had to pay a licence fee to be allowed to dig for them and to keep what you found. In the British world, finders keepers was not innately the law of the land when it came to precious minerals. Lots of things were licensed back then; you needed a licence to run a shop or a pub, for slaughtering, auctioneering, operating a billiards room, selling wine and spirits, being a butcher, hawker or peddler, grazing sheep on public land. You paid for

a licence, that is, to gain the right to do something in public under certain conditions, or for the right to use public resources for private benefit. That principle was generally accepted. But what happened here in Victoria was that the gold licence fee became understood as an attack on the dream of independence and escape from class subordination. Opposition began with objection to the amount asked, or the manner of collection, but soon grew to become opposition to the licence fee *in principle*. Rejection of the gold licence as a tax on free labour, a class-based attempt to thwart the legitimate aspirations of working people for independence, became more and more common. Somewhat paradoxically, the individual finders-keepers miner became the personification of the public.

Individualism was never entirely triumphant in Victoria. On the public side of the ledger, the post-Eureka goldfields regulations put in place things like a million acres of commonage (that is, shared grazing and agricultural land), the right to claim a garden near a mining claim and so on, all managed by local courts and mining boards. The goldfields radical democratic movement that we sum up in the word 'Eureka' tipped the balance heavily, but not entirely, towards private interests. But we do not remember that dynamic as much as we should. People who are today in favour of a resources tax, who think that people who profit privately from natural resources now should also contribute to the public good, do not always bring that orientation to their understanding of the 1850s. True we are talking mainly about individuals in the earlier 1850s and large companies now, but in the nineteenth century too one replaced the other quite quickly.

In my view we are still not very good at thinking about the different strands of this history together. I wrote in 2001:

> Until we see the vigorous, masculine, democratic politics of the 1850s gold-rush period, with its insistent calls for the land to be distributed amongst "the people", as part of the same story as the taking of Aboriginal land and the breaking up of Aboriginal families and communities—until we see, that is, that the "black armband" history of Australia and the history of democratic progress in Australia tell the same story from different perspectives—we will not have fully acknowledged the conflict of historical understandings which reconciliation aspires to resolve.[6]

Thinking more holistically about this history, thinking about the different perspectives as different aspects of the one history, is more

crucial now than ever as the Yoorrook Justice Commission hears evidence about the 'brutal and fast' invasion of Victoria and the wealth that has been extracted from the land and waters ever since.[7] The gold rushes are a part of the history of Victoria that still has consequences for living Victorians—further reason to rescue the history of this period from the colourful anecdotes and triumphalist narratives of progress with which it has for so long been associated.

Notes

1 See Fred Cahir, *Black Gold: Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria, 1850–1870,* Canberra, ANU Press, 2012.

2 See for example Weston Bate, *Victorian Gold Rushes*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1988.

3 https://freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map.

4 David Goodman, 'The Gold Rushes of the 1850s', in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Cambridge History of Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 170–88.

5 See David Goodman, 'Gold and the Public in the Nineteenth-Century Gold Rushes', in Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tufnell (eds), *A Global History of Gold Rushes,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2018, pp. 65–87.

6 David Goodman, 'Making an Edgier History of Gold', in Iain McCalman and Andrew Reeves (eds), *Tailings: Forgotten Histories and Lost Artefacts of Australian Gold*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 185–6.

7 https://yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au/news-stories/what-yoorrook-heard-about-land-sky-and-waters/#theft.

RHSV VICTORIAN HISTORY HALL OF FAME

Introduction

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria, as part of its vision that 'Victoria's rich history is a meaningful part of all contemporary Victorians' lives', has created a Victorian History Hall of Fame. This will recognise and honour significant contributions made both posthumously and by those still living to the writing of Victoria's history.

The Hall of Fame will:

- Honour both past and present practitioners;
- Be drawn from nominations made to the Fellowship and Awards Committee by any RHSV member;
- Be chosen annually by the RHSV Fellowship and Awards Committee;
- Normally take into account the whole career *oeuvre* of a nominee and not one particular work;
- Begin in 2024 with three posthumous and two living historians;
- In any one year confer this honour on a maximum of four new nominees, with a maximum of three in each category;
- Normally include four new awards each year, two posthumous and two for living nominees;
- Make no new awards in either category in any given year if the Fellowship and Awards Committee so recommends.

The Fellowship and Awards Committee will award a place in the RHSV Victorian History Hall of Fame to those who:

1. Have made a highly distinguished and sustained contribution to the published body of Victorian history, or history that illuminates Victorian history, judged in the context of their time;*
2. And/or have made a significant and sustained contribution to one or more of the keepers of Victoria's history, including, but not confined to: State Library Victoria, Museum Victoria, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, and/or the Public Record Office Victoria.

*'In the context of their time'

This phrase recognises that, in the case of posthumous awards:

- Individuals are products of their historical context in terms of their ideas and values. To ignore this would be ahistorical. However, the Victorian History Hall of Fame will not honour work done in the past that would cause gross offence today;
- Outlets and opportunities to publish change over time; for instance, Australian history journals apart from the *Victorian Historical Magazine* (later the *VHJ*) and the *Journal of the RAHS* did not appear until 1940 when *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* was first published (their number did not substantially increase until the 1970s);
- The funding of, and expectations about, historical research were quite limited until the last quarter of the twentieth century;
- Women had fewer opportunities than men to participate in public and academic history until the last quarter of the twentieth century;
- First Nations and migrant historians had limited opportunities to participate in public and academic history until the 21st century;
- The keepers of Victoria's history defined above in criterion 2 either did not exist across the whole of Victoria's history or were limited in function for much of that time.

Location

The Hall of Fame will be published in the December issue of the *Victorian Historical Journal* and updated each year. The names of new inductees will be accompanied by a citation of 500–600 words prepared by the RHSV Fellowship and Awards Committee.

William Barak (1824–1903)

Wurundjeri Knowledge Holder, Elder and Painter

The Board of Directors of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Corporation has given its approval of this nomination.

Historical knowledge comes in many forms, no less so than Indigenous knowledge in Victoria. William Barak was one of the leading custodians and recorders of such knowledge dating back to the foundation of the colony of Port Phillip in 1835.

William Barak was a Wurundjeri man, son of Bebejern and nephew of Wurundjeri *ngurangaeta* (elder) Billibellary. Barak was eleven years old at the time of the European invasion of Port Phillip. He witnessed the signing of the Batman Treaty in June 1835 and attended the Reverend G. Langhorne's mission school three years later, learning to read but not to write. He joined the Native Police Corps with other Kulin leaders or sons thereof and converted to Christianity under the influence of his friend, the Presbyterian lay preacher John Green. William Barak with others founded Coranderrk Reserve at Healesville in 1862.

William Barak was shaped by colonisation but also shaped himself by his decisions and actions to maintain Wurundjeri culture and continue Indigenous knowledges about Wurundjeri Country.

Barak ensured the maintenance of traditional knowledge once he assumed leadership of the Kulin community at Coranderrk following the death of Simon Wonga in 1874. Barak led the successful fight for the continuation of Coranderrk against the Central Board for the Aborigines' efforts to close this government reserve. Despite this agreement, the 1886 Act contained measures that constituted an attack on Coranderrk's future, although it endured until 1924 and thereafter in Kulin memories. Barak's fight ensured traditional knowledge was passed on to members of the generations who followed him and who continue to build on his legacy and care for the land at Coranderrk.

In the 1880s Barak became a key informant to ethnographers William Howitt and Lorimer Fison about the traditional world into which he was born. His knowledge is in their field notes and was written up in papers and in Howitt's *The Native Tribes of South East Australia* (1904), often with too little acknowledgement. Barak told stories to visitors to Coranderrk and at the dinner table of his friend, local Coldstream winemaker and

Swiss consul Frédéric De Pury. De Pury also encouraged Barak to teach the young De Pury men something about Wurundjeri culture.

In the early 1880s Joseph Shaw, the superintendent at Coranderrk (1882–1908), suggested that Barak write down some of his memories. Barak dictated these to a young Kulin man, William Edmunds, in a document known as 'My Words'. This short account recorded Batman's arrival, the coming of Europeans, the creation of the Protectorate, and the collecting of artefacts to send to England. Through the decades until his death in 1903, Barak no doubt told his people at Coranderrk many more stories about how colonisation unfolded.

In his 50s William Barak began painting scenes of Wurundjeri ceremonies from his childhood; these records became his most enduring legacy of traditional knowledge. They were painted using traditional dyes, ochres, and watercolours on found card and paper. An estimated 52 paintings survive in European museums, Australian state and private collections, and at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

Alan Geoffrey (Geoff) Serle (1922–1998) AO, FAHA, FASSA, FRHSV

Reader in History Monash University, Editor *Australian Dictionary of Biography*

Geoffrey Serle was born in Melbourne, son of accountant and scholar Percival Serle and Dora née Hake an artist. He attended Scotch College and Melbourne University before joining the AIF and being seriously wounded in the New Guinea campaign. Serle resumed study at Melbourne University completing a BA (Hons) in history and winning a Rhodes Scholarship. He graduated with a DPhil from Oxford University in 1950, then taught at Melbourne University before being appointed to a senior lectureship at Monash at its foundation in 1961. He was promoted to a readership in 1963, but, as John Ritchie wrote, 'neither sought nor accepted a chair'.

Serle was prodigiously active in Melbourne's cultural life, helping to establish the Victorian Branch of the Fabian Society and the Friends of the La Trobe Library (former Australiana branch of State Library Victoria). He was founding editor of the *La Trobe Journal*, vice-president of the Council of the State Library (1989–94), and a councillor of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria 1970–75. Serle was also a member of the boards of *Meanjin* and *Overland*, editing the former for a year (1957) and contributing articles to both. He also edited *Historical Studies*, later *Australian Historical Studies* (1955–63) and edited volumes 7–11 of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (7–10 with Bede Nairn) as well as serving as chair of the Victorian Working Party. He wrote a staggering 49 articles for the *ADB.*

Although 'unapologetically Australian' in outlook, Geoff was also a committed Melburnian and Victorian. He pioneered postwar Victorian history with classic works on Victoria's social, political and economic history during the vital decades of Victoria's development, the 1850s and the 1880s. He also wrote key Victorian biographies and interpretations of national cultural life. He was made a fellow of the Academy of the Humanities, a fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences, and, in 1969, a fellow of the RHSV. In 1986 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO).

Serle published many articles and seminal books including the documentary collection with James Grant, *The Melbourne Scene, 1803–1956* (1957); *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria,*

1851–1861 (1963); *The Rush to be Rich: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1883–1889* (1971); *A Biographical Register of the Victorian Parliament, 1851–1900* (1972) with Kathleen Thomson; *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788–1972* (1973); *John Monash: A Biography* (1982); *Robin Boyd: A Life* (1995); *For Australia and Labor: Prime Minister John Curtin* (1998), and biographical memoirs of his father Percival Serle and Melbourne University vice-chancellor John Medley.

Geoff Serle was a fine sportsman in his youth and an avid spectator in middle age. Born 'almost within sight and sound of Glenferrie Oval', he was an enthusiastic and loyal supporter of the Hawthorn football team and was responsible for converting many new arrivals at Monash to the cause. As a colleague and postgraduate supervisor, he was as comfortable discussing research ideas while drawing on his pipe in his office as he was while sipping on a beer at the pub. And, as a historian, Serle was, in John Ritchie's words: 'Incisive and insightful, pragmatic and down-to-earth, left-leaning in his political sympathies without being dogmatic … [and] exceptionally hard working'. 'Through his understanding of our past, he has helped us to understand ourselves.'

Marjorie Tipping (1917–2009) MBE, BA, MA, D.Litt., FRHSV

Historian, Art Historian

Marjorie Tipping made an outstanding contribution to the history and culture of Victoria and pioneered women's leadership roles at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. She is truly deserving of being the first woman nominated posthumously to the RHSV Victorian History Hall of Fame.

Marjorie Jean Tipping, née McCredie, was born in Melbourne, the daughter of John Alexandra McCredie and Florence Amelia Paterson. She was influenced by her parents' politics—both her father's Fabian socialism and her mother's activism in the conservative Australian Women's National League. Marjorie attended Presbyterian Ladies' College and graduated from the University of Melbourne. She wrote regularly for the student paper *Farrag*o and founded the Melbourne University Fine Arts Society with Zelman Cowan. In 1940 she edited the *Melbourne University Magazine* and worked part time for the *Sun News Pictorial*.

In 1942 Marjorie married *Herald* journalist E.W. (Bill) Tipping. They travelled to the United States with their three sons in 1951 where Bill held a fellowship at Harvard. While there, Marjorie took classes in cultural history at Harvard. She stayed again in the United States in 1968 when her husband was Washington correspondent for the *Herald*, but his ill health forced their return, and he died two years later.

Encouraged by her friend and RHSV president, Ian McLaren, Marjorie joined the RHSV in 1958. The following year, she became only the sixth woman elected to Council and served from 1959 to 1968 and 1970 to 1985. She was vice president (1966–68), became the first woman fellow in 1968, and the first woman president (1972–75). Tipping founded the Association of Affiliated Historical Societies and gave various talks at the Society. She convened the first two RHSV biennial conferences held in 1965 and 1967 and the fourth in 1971.

Marjorie Tipping also represented the RHSV on the Committee of Human Rights, Friends of the Baillieu Library, and Friends of the La Trobe Library. She served on many other cultural bodies in Victoria, both historical and literary, including: the Place Names Committee; Matthew Flinders Bicentenary Committee; Science and Humanities Committee Museum Victoria; Victorian Arts Advisory Council; Victorian Publications and Literature Committee; Council of Adult Education;

Theatre Policy Committee Victorian Arts Centre; and the Board of Victorian State Opera.

Tipping presented many papers and lectures on a wide variety of topics and flourished as a historian during the 1970s and 1980s. She wrote articles for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, the *Victorian Historical Magazine* (later the *Victorian Historical Journal*), and the *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*. Her books included: *Eugène von Guérard's Australian Landscapes* (1975); *Melbourne on the Yarra* (1977); *Ludwig Becker: Artist & Naturalist with the Burke & Wills Expedition* (1979); *Victoria the Golden* (1980) on the sketches of William Strutt; *An Artist on the Goldfields: The Diary of Eugène von Guérard* (1982); and *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the* Calcutta *Convicts and their Settlement in Australia* (1988). *Convicts Unbound* related the experiences of those 300 convicts who provided the labour for the first (failed) European settlement of Victoria near present-day Sorrento between October 1803 and February 1804.

Marjorie Tipping was awarded the MBE in 1981 for her contribution to the arts and, in 1990, on the basis of her extensive published scholarly works, she became the first woman to receive a Doctor of Letters by examination from the University of Melbourne. It was fitting that Marjorie Tipping, who did so much to foster and write about Victorian history, cut the cake at the RHSV's 100th birthday celebration in May 2009. She died aged 92 in September 2009.

Geoffrey Blainey AC, FAHA, FASSA, FRHSV

Emeritus Professor University of Melbourne

Described as the 'most prolific, wide-ranging, inventive' and sometimes 'most controversial of Australia's living historians', Geoffrey Blainey is probably the only Australian historian whose name is widely known among the public. The author of over 40 books, he is almost alone in straddling the divide between academia and public popularity, with many of his books being both best sellers and opening new areas of academic debate with their ground-breaking research and penetrating insights. Are there any other Australian historians whose books have been translated into Czech, Lithuanian, and Portuguese?

Geoffrey Blainey was born in 1930, the son of a Methodist minister and spent his childhood in country Victoria. In 1944 he won a scholarship to Wesley College, and in 1950 he graduated with first class honours in history from the University of Melbourne. Rather than following the usual academic path, he seized an opportunity to write the history of the Mount Lyell Mining & Railway Company. Published in 1954 when Blainey was 24, *The Peaks of Lyell* was an instant classic. Written with the tight, accurate prose that is a feature of his books, it displayed his masterly ability to create an atmospheric picture with a few sentences.

The Peaks of Lyell was followed by a succession of commissioned histories for engineering firm Johns & Waygood, the University of Melbourne, Mount Isa Mines, the National Bank, the City of Camberwell, and more. For nearly a decade he was probably the only academically trained historian in Australia making a living through writing histories. During the 1960s, with his research being heavily focused on Victorian topics, Blainey was active in the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, organising several local history seminars. He was an RHSV councillor from 1958 to 1966 and, in 1967, aged 37, became the Society's youngest-ever fellow.

In 1961 Blainey was offered a senior lectureship in Economic History at the University of Melbourne, a brave appointment as Australian economic history was dominated by the dry-as-dust quantitative approach. Blainey's work, while academically rigorous, featured nary a graph, table, or equation. Within a short time, Economic History was transformed from a quiet backwater of the Commerce Faculty to one of the most exciting departments in the university. Students flocked to

his lectures and he took a genuine interest in all of them. There was an air of excitement as he expounded the ground-breaking themes of *The Tyranny of Distance*, *The Causes of War*, *The Triumph of the Nomads*, and many more.

In 1968 Blainey was appointed professor of Economic History before transferring to the History Department as Ernest Scott Professor of History in 1977. He was dean of the Arts Faculty from 1982 to 1987. In addition to his writing and teaching, he was chair of the Australia China Council, the Commonwealth Literary Fund, the Australia Council for the Arts, the National Council for the Centenary of Federation, and Queen's College Council, as well as chancellor of the University of Ballarat and an active member of innumerable other committees, inquiries, and public bodies. He has always been in demand as a public speaker, book launcher, and foreword writer. His wife Ann is a well-known biographer.

In 1988 he retired from the university and returned to full-time writing. The next decades saw a further string of commissioned histories, along with the publication of books that reflected the wide range of his interests, from a history of the world and a biography of Captain Cook, to a definitive history of the origins of Australian football, and a history of Christianity. To his books specifically on Victoria such as *Our Side of the Country* he added the delightful memoir *Before I Forget.* His contribution to history and Australian public life was recognised with the award of Companion of the Order of Australia in 2000.

In advanced years Blainey has remained a prolific and thoughtful writer and popular public speaker. Charming, modest, and wise, he has been recognised by the National Trust as a 'national living treasure'.

Janet McCalman AC, FAHA, FASSA

Emeritus Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor in the School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne

Janet McCalman has a long and unparalleled record as a social and medical historian, focusing principally on Victoria. Her pioneering research methods employing historical life course data sets for demographic and health analysis have been ground breaking.

Janet Susan McCalman was born in Bethesda Hospital in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond on 5 December 1948, the daughter of Laurie Brian McCalman and Hélène Ulrich, both members of the Communist Party of Australia and a major influence on Janet's political and intellectual interests and commitments. She won a scholarship to Methodist Ladies' College, Kew, and graduated BA Hons in history from the University of Melbourne in 1970. She completed her doctorate on 'Respectability and Working-Class Radicalism in Victorian London, 1850–1890' at the Australian National University in 1976, then turned her scholarly attention to the suburb of her birth. The much-acclaimed *Struggletown: Public and Private Life in Richmond 1900–1965*, first published in 1984, won the Ernest Scott Prize in 1985 and has now appeared in three editions.

With that research began McCalman's interest in the material, moral, and cultural lives of the working classes of Melbourne, the disadvantaged poor—both rough and respectable—and the socially marginalised. Even in *Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-class Generation 1920–1990* (published 1993 and winner of the *Age* Non-fiction Book of the Year), much of the analysis emphasised the sacrifices many working-class families made to give their children just one or two years at leading private schools so they might have some chance of escaping dead-end jobs and achieving a social status and standard of living beyond the grasp of their parents. However, McCalman's focus on the underprivileged achieved new heights of analysis after she turned her attention to medical history in the aptly titled *Sex and Suffering: Women's Health and a Women's Hospital* (1998), a social history of poor women's reproductive health from the 1850s to the 1990s through the archives of the hospital as well as oral histories.

From 1993 until 1997 McCalman held an Australian Research Council Fellowship at the University of Melbourne before taking up

a senior lectureship based in the Centre for Health and Society, split between the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences and the History and Philosophy of Science programs. In 2000 she was promoted to reader and from 2001 to 2003 served as head of History and Philosophy of Science. She was appointed professor in Public Health by the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences in 2003. Between 2011 and her retirement in 2020, she was based in the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health.

Janet has also brought her research skills on historical life courses and her understanding of the health problems, violence, and exploitation experienced by disadvantaged and marginalised groups in colonial Melbourne to her most recent book, also awarded the 2022 Ernest Scott prize (shared)—*Vandemonians: The Repressed History of Colonial Victoria* (2021), focusing on the many ex-convicts from Van Diemen's Land who settled in nineteenth-century Melbourne.

Other pathfinding projects include: the 'Koori Health Research Database', a cradle-to-grave dataset of Aboriginal Victorians from the 1840s; 'Land and Life: Aborigines, Convicts and Immigrants in Victoria, 1835–1985', an interdisciplinary investigation of dispossession and colonisation of southeast Australia using longitudinal cohort studies across five generations; and 'Diggers to Veterans', a cradle-to-grave medico-demographic study of the survivors of military service in World War I comparing their health and family formation to those of civilians.