

Notes on Massacres and other essays 2024

Introduction

As per my previous collections there may be a certain amount of repetition in the text. Also much of it is in response to recent inquiries and other material sent to me – in particular by Andrew Wrathall and Shane Rees. I also have a few more essays in the pipeline. Some of the essays here are of little consequence like the piece on ‘history and fiction’ and some snippets of autobiography. By far the most important is the information sent to me by Andrew Wrathall from the Rev. Login’s diaries published in 1912 in the Gippsland Mercury – clearly indicating that McMillan led the retaliation after Ronald Macalister’s murder. It will be an essential reference, if and when, someone replies to Rob Christie’s book on McMillan.

1. The Dried Tongues account and Hazelwood Station

Some time ago Andrew Wrathall, a regular contributor to the Gippsland History facebook page, sent me some material on frontier conflict he had found in Trove. The accounts involved the use by squatters of friendly Aborigines to stop cattle spearing by the Kurnai on the Hazelwood Station and who then some time later dutifully produced a collection of dried human tongues as evidence that the cattle spearkers has been killed.

The first account appeared in The Gippsland Farmers Journal as a footnote to a letter by Charles Du Ve then Clerk of Courts at Rosedale. Du Ve noted:

“P.S.—A little item of Gippsland fashion took place some little time after the station was taken up. The South Gippsland blacks were very bad at spearing cattle, and had speared some of the Hazelwood herd. A party of Western Ports blacks came over to Gippsland, and were promised tea, sugar, tobacco, etc., if they would hunt the ‘Spearkers’ away. This they undertook to do, and nothing further occurred for about three weeks when the Western Porters returned and exhibited with some ostentation some 18 dried tongues and they were not sheep tongues either. The run holders as may be imagined were a bit dismayed at the result of their negotiations, but it was best felt that money paid and no questions asked was the policy of the moment. The cattle remained in quiet afterwards, so there was no necessity to repeat the experiment. Rosedale, 19/4/99.”¹

In a later article entitled “Harking Back” by Llew Vary the same story of the tongues was told. Vary wrote:

“Hazelwood was taken up by a man named Ken Bennett after whom that creek was named.. The writer can remember as a boy listening to a conversation between his father and the late Mr Charles Du Ve, at the time Clerk of Courts, at Rosedale, who stated that he had been stock riding on Hazelwood during Bennett's time. He described Bennett as a very nice kind-hearted Englishman and at this stage I will describe an episode which Mr Du Ve related during the conversation already mentioned.. Here it is: Bennett discovered some of his cattle had been speared. Now he had been very good to his blacks as he called them and they liked him, so he informed them that this spearing stock must stop and until it did there would be no more backy, no more sugar, no more flour, etc. The blacks declared they did not do it, but that it must have been the Yarram-Yarram Feller and accordingly some time later they declared war on the Yarram-Yarram feller and brought back thirty human tongues as proof that they had put an end to the cattle spearing for some time at least. This, it was stated, so preyed on Bennett's mind that he decided to get out, which he did and afterwards settled on the Lachlan river in N.S.W. I have also been told that he died there as the result of a blackfellow's spear, but I have not been able to ascertain the accuracy of this statement.”²

On forwarding the quotes Andrew wrote:

“Looking at both stories... my understanding is that Ken Bennett had promised tea, sugar, tobacco and flour to the Boonwurrung/Bunurong, if they stopped the Brataualung from spearing sheep. The Boonwurrung/Bunurong killed at least 18 Brataualung men on behalf of Bennett and cut out their tongues. Bennett was a bit shocked that his happened.”

At the outset it is necessary to state that I had not seen either of these accounts before, having done most of my research in the pre Trove era. Nor had I previously seen mentioned the use of tongues as a substitute for a body count. Although in general terms the hostility between the tribes was recognized and it was accepted that much harm was done against the Kurnai during the first decade of occupation, little was recorded – this instance being an exception.

In the first account Du Ve notes that aggressors came from Western Port, which was interpreted by Wrathall as being the Boonwurrung or Bunurong and may have been so. In the second account the Aborigines were Bennett’s ‘his blacks’ and most likely were from Melbourne – either Wurundjeri or Bunurong – or from any other location outside Gippsland. In this instance either is possible but the latter more likely. The name “Yarram-Yarram” almost certainly came from Bennett’s ‘blacks’ and was quite possibly a derogatory label.

Wrathall also extrapolates from Du Ve’s ‘the South Gippsland blacks’ identifying the cattle spearkers as the Brataualung when almost certainly they were from the Briakaulung, the Latrobe valley and living in the vicinity of the station. Europeans early on merely divided the region into north and south – the latter area referring to the country west and south of Lake Wellington, and hence Bennett’s location for the Kurnai. It should also be noted that around the time the Hazelwood station was taken up (1843) Europeans were completely ignorant about the Kurnai and remained so for a number of years.

Charles Du Ve came to Gippsland aged 18 in 1853 long after black wars had finished³. However his time here coincided with that of the proprietorship of Bennett. Billis and Kenyon list the station holders of “Haslewood No 1 16,000 acres 1000 cattle 3 miles north of Morwell October 1844 [as] AE Brodribb & Wm. Bennett to 1851 then Bennett alone to 1860...”⁴ ‘Ken Bennett’ was a son of William. It is also interesting that the name Haslewood had changed to Hazelwood and that the later town of that name was located about 3 miles south of Morwell rather than to the north.

Although this is clearly a secondary account we can conclude that approximately twenty Kurnai of unknown age or gender – just possibly the cattle spearkers – were despatched by Bennett’s ‘blacks’. This would seem to be an example of a conflict probably repeated at an unknown number of stations in Gippsland on numerous unrecorded occasions.

2. Some Notes on the use of Fiction and History

The Howden Reminiscences

Some time ago I was completely taken in by the so-called ‘WB Howden reminiscences’ and wrote a short piece which I originally included in a collection of essays⁵. I sent a copy of this collection to several people including two local historians familiar with my work, then posted it on the publications page of my website. As is my wont I then gave the collection some promotion on the social media. This was taken up by the Gippsland History facebook page. For a day or two everything was fine until the facebook page moderator Linda Barraclough phoned me, and informed me the ‘reminiscences’ were merely ‘creative writing’. Erring on

the side of caution I took down the collection from my website, deleted the social media posts and emailed warning those I had sent copies to, of the changes.

On close examination it became apparent that the ‘reminiscences’ were written by Ian Howden, one of W.B. Howden’s descendants, though this was difficult to tell from the selective reading I was in the habit of doing. The website certainly looked authentic with a photograph of Howden, and lots genealogical information. But it is primarily a family history website and the reminiscences – despite the evident detailed research done by the author – are works of fiction. The ‘reminiscences’ are in a series of pdf documents with a competent introduction by what appears to be the editor and then what clearly appears to be historical material. From my brief perusal in two of these documents the ‘creative’ authorship is somewhere acknowledged.

I originally wrote the following: “The William Balleny Howden (1816-1894) reminiscences have been published online for some time, but I only discovered them recently whilst making a net search for Captain Orr of the merchants, Turnbull and Orr... There are a number of references to the Kurnai in his account of the 1840s and one in particular got my attention.”

The quote I then used was:

“Others reacted to Aborigines spearing their cattle by forming retaliatory groups to track down the offenders and kill them. Angus Macmillan (sic) told me that there were extreme cases where indiscriminate killing of Aborigines took place involving the death of innocent women and children. Angus was very considerate to the Aborigines but he was aware that a group of his stockmen had been guilty of indiscriminate killing. Such occurrences were kept quiet because of the likely hanging of the offenders, and it is possible that all together there were up to 400 deaths of Aborigines and only a small number of white deaths in retaliation before Tyers arrived on the scene.”

This seemed to confirm much of what I had been studying and written on nearly forty years ago and in particular the estimate of casualties by Henry Meyrick. Ironically much of the quote is probably based on Meyrick’s letters and possibly even some of my own work. We shall not know as I have been informed that the author, although he read widely, kept no records of his research. It appeared ‘too good to be true’ for such a document to now appear and my uncritical acceptance of the ‘reminiscences’ may have involved a certain amount of ‘wishful thinking’. Apparently I have not been the only historian deceived by this.

My Use of Fiction

I too am guilty of fictionalising history, mainly in the form of poetry and using a pseudonym. An early ambition of mine was to be a poet and writing history then was nowhere in the picture. This was succeeded in the early 1980s with my ambition to be a novelist, although by then I had written and had published a number of historical essays. I then wrote two novels and a novella – all unpublishable and remain unpublished. One of the novels – *Tales of Black Angus* – was a thinly veiled fictional account of McMillan. After the first publication of *Gippsland Massacres* in 1984 my writing output and research was almost entirely history with only the occasional poem.

In a recent essay (2017) on the cemetery in the Stud Road police paddocks I commented at some length on the problems of fictionalising history:

“In 1982 I was a guest speaker at the Dandenong Historical Society on the topic of Bungeleen and the Native Police Cemetery. I ended my talk with a poem I had written about the Bungeleen story. The poem romanticised the episode and tended at times to doggerel about the hero/victim and was written partly in frustration at being unable to conclude the story to my satisfaction. “Black is the night, his skin and his hair / and oh shall my Bungeleen die in despair?” Historians turning to fiction often create more problems than they solve.”

I end-noted this with the following: “Elsewhere and using the same pseudonym [as the poetry] of A. Angove or Amelia Angove I created a fictional account (short story) built on some of snippets of information surrounding a massacre in the Omeo district at Innisfail known locally as the ‘Valley of the Dead’... Unfortunately this has, incorrectly, been picked up and claimed as a primary source of massacres by others.”

This exception was the story - “The Sugar Bowl” - published with another story in *mt. nugong no.22: poems and stories*, (Ngarak Press, Ensay, 1992 pp.22-4). As if the book title was not enough, the story itself contained considerable dialogue – a clear indication that this was a work of fiction. Nevertheless, the story still managed to get some attention – from both sides of the political spectrum – as historical fact. That this writing was included in a slim volume of poetry was an obvious indication that the work was fiction. Also Angove’s poems contained many historical allusions – some of them incorrect. How any serious scholar of history could be misled by this is hard to understand. Historical fiction needs to be either obvious or correctly labelled.

Fictional Dialogue

I have often been quite critical of Kenneth Cox’s biography of Angus McMillan. Indeed my response to his book was my *Our Founding Murdering Father* and although not directly stated this work was an ‘alternative’ biography of McMillan presenting a completely different and mostly negative view of the same subject. One of my main criticisms of Cox’s biography was his use of fictional dialogue. The work, presented as a factual account, was undermined by this fiction leaving the reader in a grey area as to which aspects of the account were valid.

It is possible that fictional dialogue may make a more absorbing story than straight, dry history. One example that comes to mind is Frank Clune’s *The Kelly Hunters*. In this book, where the narrative is important, Clune combines fictional dialogue and factual dialogue. The latter where his famous subject’s individual words are on record. This combination carries the work far more successfully than Cox’s attempt. Clune was a prolific author who also wrote historical novels as well as popular histories, biography and travel. Wikipedia noted that “Clune had his detractors in the literary world. He was criticised for embellishing the facts in the interests of the narrative...”

Some history never really gets to the bottom of things. Almost always there are unanswered questions and loose ends. When these ‘ends’ are fictionalised it is essential that the origins of these efforts are clear, and if necessary, clearly labelled.

3. Boomerang Point

I recently reread Philip Gittins *Where the Pelicans Fish: a brief history of the Loch Sport area of Gippsland*, and was drawn again to his account of the Boomerang Point massacre ⁶. A large part of his account is from Massola which I had also used in my original edition of *Gippsland Massacres*. Massola's account, for which we have no idea of its origins, has the Tatungalung pursued along the spit of land by "Buckley and his men" where they 'plunged into the water' to escape, and then were "leisurely picked off, one at a time". Gittins does not identify Massola as his source, and he most likely obtained the information from my *Gippsland Massacres* which he did list.

Gittins expanded on the Massola account by identifying Buckley as holding Rotamah Island as a run from 1858 and goes into some details from the Buckley diary. The run that included Rotamah was listed as Mosquito Point, 12,800 acres between Lakes Victoria and Reeve. But Billis and Kenyon, imperfect a resource as it is, does not list Buckley as a holder of the Mosquito Point run ⁷. Nor does it mention Wilson Promontory at all. At a source I can no longer identify, Buckley was mentioned as running cattle there. On the other hand, if Buckley (or his men) was not the perpetrator of the massacre, and depending on the date of the event, it could have been any of the holders of the run including B.A. Cunningham (1845-49), J. and J.T. Bear (1849-50), H.H. Gibson (1850-2) and James Aitken (1853-1868).

In the second edition of *Gippsland Massacres* in 1993 I published another independent account of Boomerang Point by Carole Flint. Her story was passed down through her husband's family. Although the location is not specific, she mentions Lake Reeve or Lake Wellington where the Aborigines were 'herded' into the water and where "everyone, man, woman and child were murdered". The problem with this account is that Carole's source – her father-in-law – insisted that this event took place in the '1850s, 1860s'. The same problem can be seen with Gittins associating Buckley with Mosquito Point in 1858.

For a start by 1860 efforts were well underway to start the mission stations at Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers. Aboriginal Guardian William Thomas had done a tour of Gippsland and counted 222 Kurnai ⁸. Allowing for individuals missed the maximum population at this time must have been around 250. So the 1860s is wellnigh impossible. The movement of the survivors out of the bush in south and west Gippsland began about 1848 with both Buckley and Hoddinott noting that they had employed Aborigines and by 1850 generally the survivors were congregating around the stations. In the east it took much longer with the Krauatungalung first appearing for Tyers blanket handout in 1854. So in the more remote parts of the lakes like Rotamah it is just possible that this massacre took place in the early 1850s, but it is much more likely that it took place in the 1840s, probably before 1848.

Finally I had a verbal account from a customer in my shop about 2002. Perhaps I was busy as I failed to record the details. The gist of the conversation was that all the fisherman knew that Boomerang Point was a massacre site. Since the printed sources of this account were available in Massola (1968) mine (1983, 1993) and Gittins (1992) we shall never be able ascertain whether the 'folk' story originated from one of these written sources or the 'folk account' predated them all.

4. Notes on Rob Christie's *Angus McMillan: a convenient scapegoat*

Rob Christie's *Angus McMillan: a convenient scapegoat* has just been published. I have not seen the book, although I have already been asked for comments on it by an ABC journalist. But I have accessed a brief preview though with Rob's article of the same name in *La Trobeana*⁹. As I have not accessed the full volume I cannot be sure how thoroughly Christie has looked at my work, especially recent essays published as free pdfs on my website over the last 10 years, though his end notes indicate that he has accessed at least one of them. In an essay 'Our Founding Murdering Father Revisited (2016)' I looked at the reasons for my choice of this 'provocative and controversial' title and pointed out that the book was the negative case in an unofficial 'debate' with McMillan biographer Ken Cox¹⁰. In *La Trobeana* Christie states:

Edward Baylis, one of the first Europeans to visit the region, travelled as far as the Gippsland Lakes in 1838, followed in 1839 by the Scotsman, Angus McMillan who was hailed as a hero during his lifetime but faced ignominy following the 1987 publication of *Our Founding Murdering Father*. Its author Peter Gardner, a former secondary school teacher, blamed McMillan for massacres of the Indigenous population in Gippsland.

Bayliss is clearly mentioned in *Our Founding Murdering Father* as preceding McMillan although they followed different routes and were competitors and rivals and McMillan apologist J.J. Shillinglaw spent some time trying to debunk Bayliss' claim in 1874. I have written a brief essay on why McMillan was "hailed as a hero during his lifetime" in a collection of essays here¹¹. The actual publication date of my book was 1988 although Christie is unlikely to have known that unless he had read the essay above. Rather than 'blame' McMillan I identified him as being involved in three early massacres and the 'possible' leader of the reprisal at Warrigal Creek after the murder of Ronald Macalister. I have pointed out on a number of occasions that McMillan's prominence in the region meant he was more readily identified than many of the others who were also, almost certainly, culpable.

Christie wrote: "Gardner argues that Angus McMillan was primarily responsible for leading and participating in these massacres. However, no primary documentation exists to justify these assertions..." This is the generally refuted 'Windschuttle' argument – that there is no primary evidence therefore these events did not occur. The answer to this is that there is substantial evidence about the massacres that I collected over 15 years with the occasional piece still turning up. In response to the lack of primary evidence on the Warrigal Creek massacre I recently wrote:

The circumstantial evidence against McMillan as leader of the Warrigal Creek retaliation mounts up. He is in Gippsland at the time and possibly nearby, he is the self-proclaimed leader of the Macalister group and European 'discoverer' of the region, he is a close associate of the dead man, the retaliation vehicle was one of Scottish ethnicity and he is clearly implicated in earlier events of a similar nature. I have stated on a number of occasions it is possible that one of the Macalisters led the retribution but, if so, McMillan was there as well, and on the whole, I favour McMillan as leader.¹²

But the main primary evidence for these events and the general one-sided conflict is that of Henry Meyrick, whom Christie treats in a paragraph, and reconciling events with his horrible

statistic is a simple matter of maths. In 1846 Meyrick estimated that not less than 450 were killed altogether. Assuming the source is reliable - and it is the only one we have - there is a need to account for most of these deaths at Warrigal Creek and perhaps one similar large unknown event and the early massacres at Boney Point, Butchers Creek and Maffra. In a response to an article on casualties in these events by Richard Broome in 2005 I made a 'best guess' of 100 fatalities at Warrigal Creek, 60 for Boney Point and Butchers Creek at 50 – a total of less than half of Meyrick's estimate¹³. The question remains if not at these locations then where and when did all this slaughter occur?

Christie also makes the same mistakes as Wayne Caldwon in his Quadrant article using a 'straw man' argument – my claim that McMillan was the 'butcher' which did not stand up to inspection and thus everything else the author wrote was questionable or wrong¹⁴. Detailed work over 15 years was ignored and incorrectly it was claimed that 'Gippslander' was my only source on Warrigal Creek when I had used almost all the sources used by Christie including Dunderdale. Likewise the 'straw man' argument meant that anything I said previously that was contrary to his argument was ignored. One example will suffice. Christie noted on Warrigal Creek:

Meyrick also hinted at a perpetrator. 'He gave a reported act of a Scotchman who went out with a party Scowering'. In modern terms scowering would mean cleansing the area of Aboriginal people. Who the Scotsman is can only be surmised. Although Gardner concludes that it must be McMillan, it could have been one of the Macalisters, even another Scot altogether.

Elsewhere in *Our Founding Murdering Father* under a sub heading 'McMillan's Involvement: McMillan versus Macalister' I concluded 30 years ago that as leader of the reprisal at Warrigal Creek it was "just possible that it was Lachlan, and more likely that it was either Thomas or Matthew, and whichever Macalister was involved, Angus McMillan rode by his side"¹⁵. To be fair Christie uses this quote too, but without any explanation or emphasis of its contradictory nature to his argument. Of a population of about 80 scots in Gippsland in 1843 prominence and leadership of this group leaves us with only a handful of possible candidates. I have recently written an essay on who was at Warrigal Creek¹⁶.

Christie then deals with the 'Battle of Nuntin' which he names but which I also dealt with and the 'Boney Point Massacre' which I named and he disputes. He wrote:

Gardner asserts that the incident did not end there but that McMillan and some of his party followed the group approximately forty kilometres to the confluence of the Perry and Avon Rivers (Boney Point) at Lake Wellington and there shot them. It is difficult to believe that a small party, assuming some men were left at Nuntin to guard the hut and stock, would travel so far through unfamiliar country in pursuit of a party of Indigenous people who greatly outnumbered them.

Christie's calculations leave a lot to be desired, depending on where the original Nuntin hut was located. Assuming that the hut was first in the vicinity of Stratford then the distance involved to Boney Point, at the confluence of the Perry and Avon Rivers, was more like twenty kilometres, or even less¹⁷. On the massacre locations provided on Christie's map there are also a number errors including locating 'Warrigal Creek' and 'the Slaughterhouse' (not Slaughterhouse Creek) incorrectly¹⁸.

It is clear that a lot of the debate between Christie and myself is at cross purposes. My original work was to clearly outline frontier conflict and massacres, something that Christie accepts - that the violence occurred and was horrendous. On the other hand I don't dispute that most of the original population were either involved or at least supportive of the violent response – the problem being identifying these individuals and then finding any evidence against them. We just have more information about McMillan than any of the other earlier European intruders in Gippsland – hence the main difference between us.

Christie then suggests that Odell Raymond may be responsible for Boney Point, then offers the alternative of the Native Police as the perpetrators on slim evidence of Tyers and that the bones found by Robinson along the shore of Lake Wellington in 1844 “could well refer to Boney Point”. Aside from noting I had written on all this many years ago the timing of these events and the need for secrecy meant that most of them were committed before the arrival of C.J. Tyers in 1844. Also the Native Police were not active in Gippsland until after Tyers arrival and the incident he describes had nothing to do with Boney Point.

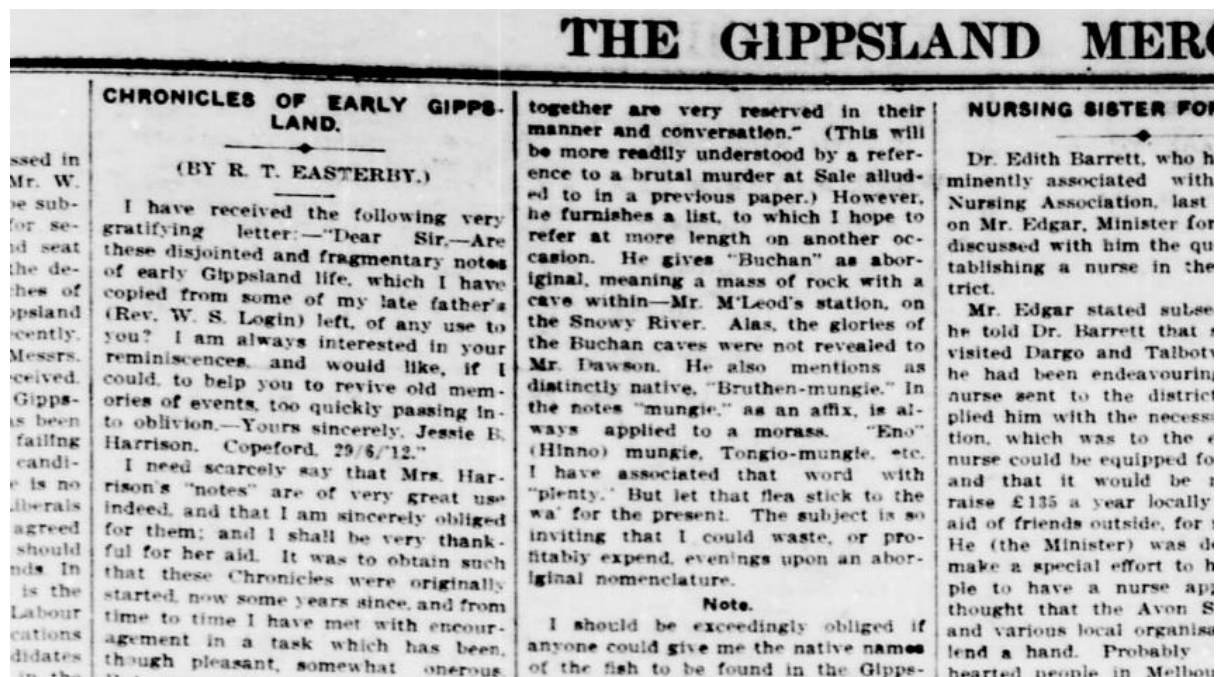
With regards Warrigal Creek Christie argued that my ‘belief’ that ‘definite proof that McMillan was the Butcher of Gippsland’ was provided by the Gippslander account of the massacre. This is incorrect. In fact aside from the hyperbole of titles and chapter headings what I provided was a range of cumulative evidence gathered over a number of years to support the proposition. Christie then describes in detail different accounts of Macalister’s murder none of which is disputed. The argument put forward by Wayne Caldwell in his political attack on my work, where Hatcher’s claim that the massacre occurred at Bruthen Creek, is adopted by Christie who states that Bruthen Creek was “a significant” distance from Warrigal Creek. In fact Warrigal Creek, Gammon Creek and Bruthen Creek are adjacent watersheds. It is a shame that Christie used Caldwell at all – his work hovers between denying completely the frontier violence and massacres, and then offering other options for the demise of the Kurnai – runaway convicts, tribal warfare and the Native Police – for which there is only substantial evidence against the Native Police.

Christie then examines Butcher’s Creek and other massacres. Maffra as a possible massacre site is dismissed although the location was probably given by McMillan himself. Caroline Dexter is given as a credible source, although unlike many, Christie did not claim this as primary evidence. I have dealt with Dexter’s evidence several times previously¹⁹. He also used Ian Howden’s book which as outlined above was ‘creative fiction’²⁰. Howden’s positive attributes of McMillan were probably influenced by the diary of the Rev. W.S. Login who was a relative by marriage of the Howdens. Unfortunately it is not evidence of any kind.

One of the problems with collating a range of information on the frontier wars is trying to resolve some of the contradictions between the accounts. This has enabled some critics to ‘cherry pick’ and emphasize facts of their choice they claim spoils my narrative. Another major problem for Christie and other critics of the massacre thesis is the chronology involved. When did these events occur, as Christie assures us they did, and how were such momentous events able to escape relatively unreported? The answer must be that they occurred in the very early period of occupation between 1840 and 1844 in south and central

Gippsland before the arrival of Tyers. These notes refer to Christie's La Trobeana article only.

5. The Macalister Murder, McMillan and Warrigal Creek: an impeccable source



Facebook Gippsland History writer Andrew Wrathall recently (Feb 24) sent me a quote from a 1912 article 'The Chronicles of Early Gippsland' by R.T. Easterby. The quote originated from the diary of the Rev. W.S. Login and was amongst the notes supplied to the 'Chronicler' by his daughter Jessie Harrison. I certainly had not seen the quote before and doubt whether many others had seen it, and of those that have seen it few would have recognised its significance. The quote went as follows:

"About the same time Ronald Macalister was murdered by two blackfellows about five miles from Port Arthur on the west side of Tarra Creek. He was on his way to Mason's Station, known as Green Mount. A party got up by McMillan went in pursuit of the murderers, to avenge Macalister's death. After an absence of some weeks they returned. John Campbell and some others went out and captured a number of canoes. Robert Buntine, when playing in one, picked up a garment, which proved to be a woman's chemise, and which had been used, with some clay, to stop a leak in the canoe. (Here end Mrs Harrison's present notes)." ²¹

The article is significant because it mentions firstly the murder of Macalister and then a sentence later directly states that a party of revenge was organised by McMillan and that the avenging party did not return for some weeks. This is the first time any source has identified McMillan as the organiser, and presumably the leader, of the retaliation after Macalister's murder. It does not name the 'Highland Brigade' or identify the massacre location of Warrigal Creek as 'Gippslander' was to do 13 years later, but clearly the accounts are complementary.

It appears that Jessie Harrison, the daughter of the Rev. W.S. Login, as well as having her father's diaries, was compiling her own notes in the early part of the twentieth century. The

Login family was in Gippsland by the end of 1853 and Jessie was then four or five years old. Easterby quotes Jessie Harrison's full letter in his introduction: "Dear Sir, are these disjointed and fragmentary notes of early Gippsland life, which I have copied from my late father's (Rev. W.S. Login) [diary he] left any use to you? I am always interested in your reminiscences, and would like, if I could, to help you revive old memories of events too quickly passing to oblivion. Yours sincerely, Jessie B. Harrison. Copeford 29.6.1912". Easterby replied that the notes were of "very great use" and published them – variously about Hugh Buntine, an early bushranging incident and concluding with the quote above.

This was the first time any part of Login's diaries or Harrison's notes had been published. Andrew Wrathall recognised the significance of the article. When he realised that the 1912 Gippsland Mercury was one of the years not yet surveyed by TROVE and that as the Easterby article was not readily available online, he sent it to me.

Mrs Harrison continued her work on her notes and in 1925 published *Some Memories of Old Gippsland and its Earliest Pioneers*, a copy of which is held by the State Library of Victoria. After the war a series of extracts from this book were published in the 'Kirk Chronicles' of the Sale Presbyterian Church and in 1973 Leslie & Cowie (eds) *The Wind Still Blows* was published²². Analysis and comparisons of the 1925 and 1973 publications by historians on the Gippsland History facebook page indicates that whilst the content of the two are similar the order of material has been rearranged in the second. A careful examination of *The Wind Still Blows* reveals that neither the murder of Ronald Macalister nor the revenge organised by McMillan were mentioned. Thus news of these events only appeared in the 1912 Gippsland Mercury and not in the later publications, and has until now remained obscure and unrecognised.

In *The Wind Still Blows* McMillan was pictured as a friend of the Rev. Login with whom he, and his family, had stayed with as guests on a number of occasions. He had obviously seen at least some of McMillan's journals and made notes in his diary of his exploration activities and claims. Of all the early explorer's claims Login noted that "MacMillan was the first to enter Gippsland there can be no doubt..." and generally he thought McMillan was "possessed [of] a kindly spirit". However the "lurking blacks were always a menace, though the genial MacMillan advanced, and invariably sought their friendship." But, Login wrote, "MacMillan's Highland followers, also carrying firearms, hating the wily ways of the blacks, and not as patient as their leader, often brought trouble on themselves" implying that McMillan was not responsible for any of the harsh treatment of the Kurnai, but his men may well have been.

There can be no doubt that the Rev. Login was well aware of the frontier conflict and the 'troubled times':

"Further there were among the white population many stories of tragic happenings both here in Gippsland and elsewhere of tribal risings and wholesale butchery, and of murders in lonely huts by the wayside. But for the death of every white the blacks suffered terrible reprisals and were now a conquered race."

These sentences describe the murder of Macalister and the 'terrible reprisals' that were subsequently inflicted on the Kurnai, without giving the details that the two sentences in the

Easterby article provided – that the organiser of the ‘avenging’ party in response to the murder of Ronald Macalister was Angus McMillan. In the meantime, whilst this may not be a primary source, it is an impeccable one, predating ‘Gippslander’ by more than a decade, and adding substantial detail to the Warrigal Creek massacre file.

6. The Origins of a Controversial Title

Fifty years ago when I had been living in Gippsland barely a year I wrote and had published a popular article entitled ‘Our Murdering Founding Fathers’. The article was published in *The Living Daylights* – a short lived, racy counterculture newspaper published by *The Nation Review* – in the February-March issue of 1974. A variation of this title I then adopted for my ‘alternative’ biography of McMillan fourteen years later. Whilst the original article had no impact, and to which there was no feedback whatsoever, its successor *Our Founding Murdering Father* (1988) is still making waves. And whilst this book preceded Mr Howard’s ‘history wars’ by a decade it seems as though it is now a part of it. In my first year as a secondary teacher at Swifts Creek Higher Elementary School I immersed myself in local and regional history and by the end of 1973 I had gathered enough information for my article.

The article mainly concentrated on McMillan and the Warrigal Creek massacre using quotes from ‘Gippslander’ and Dunderdale and mentioned Henry Meyrick and Robinson. Much of the information probably came from an article in the *Gap* magazine by Frank Midlin²³. The article also suggested unnamed McMillan ‘stockmen’ were responsible for the Butchers Creek massacre and similar unidentified ‘stockmen’ from Macleod’s Orbost and Buchan stations were responsible for massacres on the Brodribb River south-east of Orbost and ‘the Slaughterhouse’ north of Buchan. The article compared these massacres with the then recent massacre of innocents at My Lai in Vietnam.

The timing of all this was relevant. In 1973 the new Labour government had removed its last troops from Vietnam. I had been politicised by conscription and from the second draft in 1965 onwards I was a somewhat disorganised opponent of the war - disorganised because my efforts were so ineffectual. Also at no stage was I ever a member of the Labour Club at Monash University as some right wing critics infer. My perspective whilst writing the article was both non-violent and near pacifist and I could see many similarities between the current war and a not too distant time in the past in Gippsland when crimes similar to My Lai were committed.

I remain unsure as to whether the original headline of the ‘The Living Daylights’ article was mine or the editors. With a change of adjectives it became the provocative title of my second book more than a decade later. Within two years of the 1974 publication the Vietnam War had ended disastrously for the United States and by then I had commenced writing other articles on teaching, the environment and history.

7. My writing history

Following on from this popular essay for the next ten years I studied various aspects of the Kurnai tribe(s) and wrote and had published essays and papers on this subject. These essays plus some lectures became the chapters in my first book *Gippsland Massacres* designed for senior secondary students and published by the Warrigal Education Centre. As the title says it was principally about frontier conflict. McMillan featured and was involved in three of the five massacres studied in some depth, as well there was a chapter on the white woman episode and another on recent information and other massacres. The aim of the work was to establish beyond doubt that these violent events had definitely occurred.

My Kurnai studies continued on what was to become *Through Foreign Eyes* subtitled 'European perceptions of the Kurnai Tribes of Gippsland' - much of it had already been written. The subject matter was much broader and about late 1986 The Centre for Gippsland Studies decided to publish the work sub edited by Patrick Morgan. The manuscript went back and forth through 1987 between Patrick in Churchill and me in Ensay with Paddy correcting grammar and spelling mistakes, changing chapter headings and together we added a final chapter.

At the same time I was also working on my third 'Kurnai' volume *Our Founding Murdering Father* which I wrote fairly quickly and realised that I was unlikely to get a publisher for it. Impatient as I was I decided to self-publish it, which caused a few ructions with the Centre for Gippsland Studies camp. The book, full of spelling and other errors, appeared early in 1988, became, and still remains, my best known publication. *Through Foreign Eyes* appeared later in the year and thanks to the work of Paddy Morgan is by far the most sophisticated of the three volumes. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, this did not translate into sales.

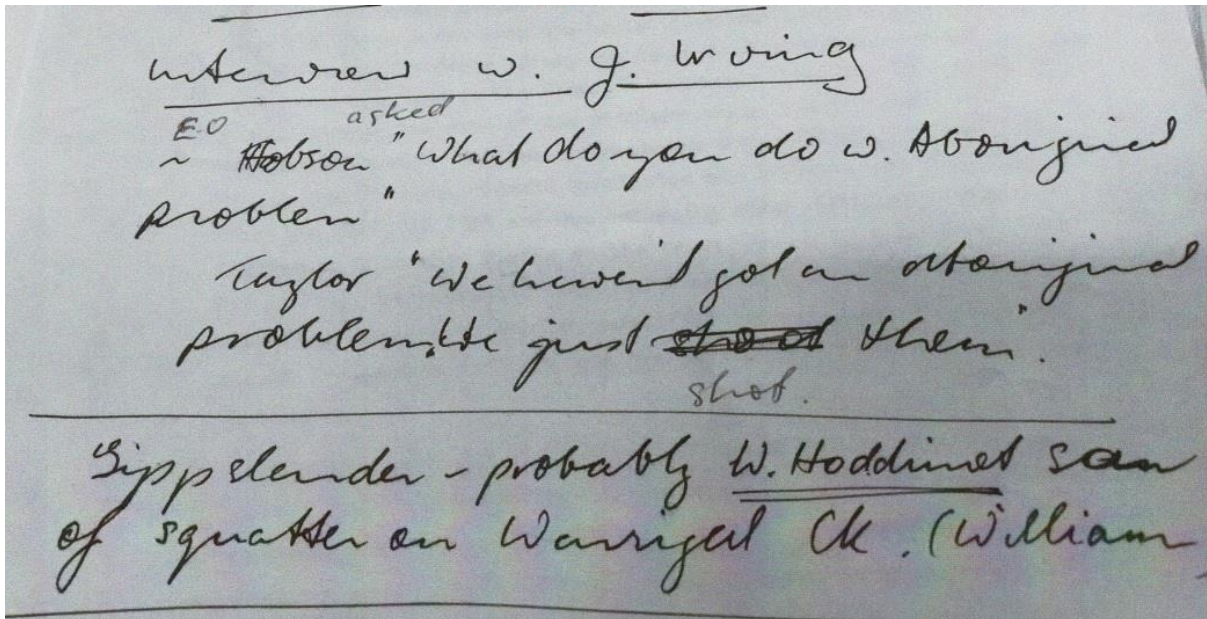
From 1988 to 2004 my studies were centred on the black coal mining industry in south Gippsland and the formation and growth of its union. Similarly I wrote a number of articles for journals – three of which were published in a small booklet I called *The Scab Train*. This was followed by another booklet with another sensational title, *Too Old to Rat* (1994) taken from a Henry Lawson poem. Finally in 2004 my full length coal book – principally about the 1903 strike - appeared as the sedately titled *A Gippsland Union*. Twenty years later there are still copies for sale around Korumburra and there has been little interest in this area of study.

After *A Gippsland Union* I continued my studies into Gippsland coal mining capital and the capitalists. This became focused on WL Baillieu – a director of one of the Gippsland coal mining companies – and eventually the Victorian Historical Magazine published my 'Brief' notes on the secret compositions of 'Baillieu and friends'²⁴. This was followed up with research on Baillieu - Fink connections and the Creswick Deep Leads which led to my essay on the 'Egerton Ring' presented to the AHA conference in Ballarat in 2016²⁵. The latter is mostly 'economic history', nothing to do with Gippsland, and is some of my best work.

By this time I had my own website on which I began publishing some old unpublished essays and adding new ones. There are now more than 40 free essays here. This collection may well

be one of my last. I prefer to be known as a "Gippsland historian" or a local historian but my use of sensational titles and chapter headings of thirty years ago may decide otherwise.

8. The Jack Irving interview and his paper



When historian Shane Rees started work on frontier conflict in Gippsland he systematically went through the end note references in my publications. He also visited the East Gippsland History Society (EGHS) where I had deposited some of my papers. He then sent me copies of a quote I had jotted down during my interview with Jack Irving in 1976 and a copy of an essay Jack had written in 1974 which I had kept in my files but never used. It was a bit of a surprise to me that the EGHS held these as I had forgotten about them completely. I only remembered taking handwritten notes, the copy of which Shane Rees could not find at this location.

The quote from the Irving interview I jotted down was as follows: "E.O. Hobson [asked Taylor] 'What do you do w[ith the] Aboriginal problem?'" to which "Taylor [replied] 'We haven't got an aboriginal problem. We just shot them.'" In my notes I originally used the verb 'shoot' which I changed from present to past tense. See image above. I appear to have written this and another note on Willy Hoddinott at the last minute on the back (?) of Jack's essay.

The 6 page typed essay Jack gave me was entitled 'Warrigal Creek' and written in 1974. I made a few rough notes on the essay at the time but in retrospect left a fair bit out as I was only interested in the massacre account. In the essay Jack used two main sources on the Warrigal Creek massacre – the Rev. G.S. Cox who was writing on Gippsland history prior to World War 1 and McMillan's biographer Kenneth Cox. I have no idea whether these individuals were related, but this must be a distinct possibility. Also I have written

extensively about Kenneth Cox's *Angus McMillan: Pathfinder* (1973) and my *Our Founding Murdering Father* was a direct, if delayed, response to his book.

What was of interest in Jack's paper and which I appear to have ignored or overlooked was his account from the Rev. Cox papers. One of Cox's sources was Charles Lucas who in turn got his information from an Aboriginal 'called Darkie' – this was probably an error of transcription on Jack's part as the individual concerned was most likely called 'Darby'. Rev. Cox then details the circumstances and the locations leading up to Macalister's murder stating: "Macalister was riding from the hut at Alberton East to go through the bush at Greenmount had not proceeded far when he was set upon by two blacks and speared with 10 spears, the body also being mutilated." However we know from the journal of GA Robinson, who came through south Gippsland the following year, that Macalister had not been speared and that there was no evidence that his death was caused by the Kurnai²⁶. Robinson's account also negates other adjectives used to describe Macalister's demise including "brutally murdered" and his corpse "disfigured" or "mutilated". Rev Cox continued: "This led to a punitive expedition and a great massacre of blacks followed" and that "William Lucas stated that they were shot by hundreds." Jack added to these accounts that the "dead are reputed to buried on the Red Hill, near Ninety Mile Beach, and certainly many bones of blacks have been found there."

Aside from the massacre most of the essay was about the landholdings in an around the station beginning with James Taylor taking up the run in 1845. From the account offered by Jack above Taylor could well have been at the massacre though it is more likely he was repeating or summarising the story. By 1865 Taylor's holding had been reduced from the original 15,360 acres to 5660 acres including a 480 acre pre-emptive right. The same year 22,000 acres of free selection or leasehold at Darriman was opened up and this must have had some impact on the station acreage.

The Irving brothers were in the locality by 1881 purchasing selector blocks. In 1888 they purchased Warrigal Creek station of 2060 acres but were forced to relinquish it by 1894 in the depression. In 1910 George Irving repurchased the homestead block, now of 1268 acres, and purchased adjoining blocks as they became available. Since then Warrigal Creek has remained in the Irving family hands. In my interview of 1976 I recall that Jack mentioned that the family had an association - which I presumed meant ownership – with Warrigal Creek since 1896. I may have the date wrong too but the point of him emphasizing this was the long and strong association of his family with the area, and in particular its history.

I recall from the interview that Jack thought then that the number of casualties at Warrigal Creek was a conservative 'about thirty' but when I saw him again at a history conference held in Sale in the 1980s he thought that the much higher estimates of both the Coxes more likely. I also have a vague memory of coming across more recent writing on this by Jack – probably in a publication of the Yarram Historical Society – but my study interests at the time must have been elsewhere. My thanks to Shane Rees for his recovery of all this.

End Notes

1. Gippsland Farmers 'Journal, (21 April 1899), p3, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/264443491>
2. Morwell Advertiser (6 Aug 1942) p8 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/65857831>
3. The Morwell Historical Society News, Vol.4, (1965), p.20 retrieved in Wikipedia
4. Billis & Kenyon, *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip*, Stockyard Press, Melbourne 1974. Andrew Wrathall pointed out that the error in location was most likely B&Ks. Also that Ken was the son of William Bennett.
5. I originally accessed the so called W.B Howden Reminiscences here <https://wbhowden.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/the-life-of-wb-howden-part3-learning-a-new-lifestyle-good.pdf>
Full copy by Howden, Ian C. here *William Balleny Howden: the triumphs and tears of an Australian pioneer*, Bloomington, Ind. Balboa Press, 2017.
6. Philip G Gittins *Where the Pelicans Fish: a brief history of the Loch Sport area of Gippsland*, Gittins Publications, Melbourne, 1992 pp.22-3
7. Billis & Kenyon, *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip*... Mosquito Point was held by James Aitken in 1858.
8. Gardner, P.D. *Through Foreign Eyes*, Centre for Gippsland Studies, Churchill, 1987 p.57
9. La Trobeana Journal of the C J La Trobe Society Inc Vol 22, No 2, July 2023 p.36
10. <https://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Our-Founding-Murdering-Father-Revisited-2016.pdf>
11. McMillan's Popularity: discoverer and local hero. Essay in Notes on Massacres 2022 <https://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Notes-on-Massacres-22.pdf>
12. The Gippsland Times 30.5.2020
13. Richard Broome and the Statistics of Frontier Conflict (2005?). Essay in Notes on Massacres https://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Notes-on-Massacres-rev.ed_.pdf Note that I also had a chapter on Meyrick in *Through Foreign Eyes*.
14. My long and detailed criticism of Caldwell's article <https://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Warrigal-Creek-Massacre-a-reply-to-Wayne-Caldow.pdf>
15. Gardner, P.D. *Our Founding Murdering Father*, Ngarak Press, 1990 p. 42. Interestingly on this page is the fourth factual error in the book whereby Ronald and others were "sons and nephews" of Lachlan, where current genealogy indicates he had no sons. To further complicate things some sources also indicate there was a 'junior' Lachlan Macalister.
16. Who was in the Highland Brigade? Essay in Notes on Massacres 2022 <https://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Notes-on-Massacres-22.pdf>
17. Google gives the road distance between Stratford and Perry Bridge at 17.3 km. A more direct route south of the road may be shorter. Rev. W.S. Login has the location as "Nuntin on the Avon" Leslie & Cowie (eds) *The Wind Still Blows* (privately published, Sale, 1973) p.41
18. Christie has the massacre locations of Butchers Creek and the Slaughterhouse wrong. In end note 52 he states "Butcher's Creek flows into Slaughterhouse Creek before entering the Lakes". Butchers Creek is the inlet in Lake King known as Boxes Creek immediately to the east of Metung, the Slaughterhouse is to be found many miles away, north of present day Buchan.
19. See my Some Notes on a Review of Cal Flynn's Thicker than Water by Dr Peter Crowley https://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Notes-on-a-McMillan-Review-rev.ed_.pdf
20. Howden, Ian C. *William Balleny Howden*...
21. Easterby R.T. Chronicles of Early Gippsland - an article in the Gippsland Mercury 12.7.1912
22. Leslie & Cowie (eds) *The Wind Still Blows: extracts from the Diaries of Rev. W.S. Login, Mrs. H. Harrison, Mrs. W. Montgomery*, privately published, Sale, 1973. The following quotes from the Rev. Login all from here.
23. Midlin F.T. 'Angus McMillan Pathfinder' an article in the 1964 Gap magazine p.6
24. Gardner, P.D. Brief notes on some fraudulent aspects of the secret compositions of William Lawrence Baillieu and friends 1892, Victorian Historical Journal, v.80, no.1, June 2009, p.61-75
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/158881899?q=William%20Lawrence%20Baillieu%20&c=article&versionId=173184743>
25. Gardner, P.D. presented to the AHA conference in Ballarat in 2016. Now online at <https://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Egerton-Ring-3rd-ed.pdf>
26. Clark, Ian D. (ed.) *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, chief protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, Melbourne, Vic. : Heritage Matters, 2000, vol. 4 p.88