The Message Tree Project

(2018-2019)



Williamstown

Outcomes Report

for

Handover

to

Hobsons Bay City Council 11 July 2019

Prepared by

Greg Thorpe

Shared History Facilitator

Yalukit Marnang Pty Ltd

Funded by a

Vibrant Community Grant

Provided by

Hobsons Bay City Council

"Fostering respect for First Nations Peoples histories and cultures is important to Council because we want to build a place in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples can feel pride in sharing the richness of their culture in a community that understands, appreciates and values this heritage"

Innovation Reconciliation Action Plan
January 2019 – January 2021
Hobsons Bay City Council

"Greg...I am 100% supportive of this project and absolutely humbled that the many who will be joining you in conversation tomorrow have taken the time out of their busy day to consider 'Our Shared History' and my Boonwurrung Ancestors and my family's continued connection to place, our now shared home by Nairm, the Bay".

Caroline Martin, Director, Yalukit Marnang 27 Feburary 2019

Special Acknowledgement of Country:

This report was prepared in the City of Hobsons Bay on the lands of the Yalukit Weelam Clan of the Boonwurrung Language Group. Most of the work of this project was conducted at Koort Boork Boork (also known as Williamstown).

Acknowledging Elders Past:

We pay our respects to the spirit and memory of the very many Boonwurrung Elders past. Particularly those who carefully governed this place they called Koort Boork Boork. We especially acknowledge N'Arweet Boollutt (King Benbow) who was seen to lead ceremonies around The Message Tree and in Thompson Street. We acknowledge the deep Boonwurrung suffering and dehumanisation that flowed from colonisation and the invasion of their country by the British from 1835.

Elders Present:

We acknowledge the on-going daily commitment and struggle of Present-day Boonwurrung Elders. Such as N'Arweet Carolyn Briggs whose work to renew Boonwurrung culture, history and community is providing a gift we can all share in. We acknowledge the incredible social, cultural and structural barriers Present-day Elders continue to work to overcome.

Elders Future:

We also acknowledge all Boonwurrung children who we hope to see emerge strong in their cultural identity and emerge as strong Boonwurrung Elders of the future. We respectfully hope our shared celebration of Boonwurrung histories help to foster a growing sense of pride in the Boonwurrung history of cultural, social and economic achievements in the Hobsons Bay area over thousands of years.

All First Peoples:

Finally, we acknowledge all First Peoples living, working or visiting Hobsons Bay and hope that renewed and respectful celebration of our local First Peoples stories creates culturally-safe, healthy, accepting and informed communities for you and for us all.

Executive Summary:

23 individual stakeholders linked to 14 local organisations participated in 4 stakeholder workshops investing a total of 140 unpaid volunteer hours to consider how best to respectfully celebrate The Message Tree story and its connection to Hobsons Bay's First Peoples (the Boonwurrung Language Group) close to the site of the original tree.

The stakeholder group recommended Hobsons Bay City Council:

- Use text provided for three interpretive panels covering three main historical themes within the story for Council to consider.
- Replant a 'New Message Tree' at (or very near) to the site of the original tree.
- Construct a special history and reconciliation node surrounding a 'New Message Tree' at the Foot of Thompson Street in Nelson Place.
- Adopt the concept plan provided to guide construction planning for the history and reconciliation node in Nelson Place.

Important Historical Findings:

- Strong social and ceremonial connections exist for Boonwurrung people at The Message Tree site, going back thousands of years before British arrival.
- Early colonists used the tree as a community meeting place and information exchange, particularly prior to Williamstown's first local newspaper.
- The British and the Boonwurrung both gathered under The Message Tree during the first 15 years of colonial Williamstown.
- 50 Williamstown residents fought Council's decision to remove the tree in 1856 requesting Nelson Place be surveyed to 'bend' around the tree.
- The Message Tree issue was the first ever 'heritage' campaign in Williamstown Council's history and the first non-unanimous Council decision, being supported by only two of seven Councillors.
- The 1856 'save the tree' campaigners who valued The Message Tree as the 'ancient' meeting place for Boonwurrung may be a very significant historical record. This valuing by British colonists of the 1850s of a place for its First Peoples heritage is rare if not unique.

Special Thanks to Project Participants:

Core Project Partners:

Special thanks to Snr Sgt Chris Allen and his team at Victoria Police, Williamstown for championing this project and contributing so much time, effort, leadership and support to the project facilitator.

Thanks also to Jenni Mitchell (OA) and Rosa McKenna from Hobsons Bay's local Reconciliation Action Group, Get Up Out West, for their leadership as the lead partner for our grant.

Thanks also to Rosa McKenna and the Spotswood-Kingsville RSL for their auspice of the grant with Get Up Out West.

Very special thanks to Yalukit Marnang Director and Yalukit Weelam Clan woman, Caroline Martin for providing a significant amount of time via phone contacts with the Project Facilitator Greg Thorpe at 'no cost' to the project. Her commitment to support this project despite being heavily committed with a new role as the Creative Director of Melbourne's YIRRAMBOI First Nations Festival was central to the success of this project.

Thanks to Greg Thorpe (Yalukit Marnang) as the Project Facilitator. His leadership has delivered an accessible community collaborative approach which is now the template for a local Shared History Alliance to pursue more shared-history projects together. Thanks also for the many additional hours he contributed to the project 'pro bono' including making himself available to share the story of this project with local community groups at no charge.

Participating Stakeholders:

Many thanks to all of the community stakeholders who attended and participated at our 4 community stakeholder workshops. Your voluntary attendance, input and enthusiasm has been vital to the success of this project. It is sincerely hoped our collective efforts result in long-lasting tangible outcomes that themselves become a new chapter in the Message Tree story. The following list of workshop members and the organisations and/or interests they represent are as follows:

Community Sponsorship Partners:

The generosity and community-mindedness of those organisations that provided sponsorship to this community project was very important and built important bridges.

Your provision of in-kind contributions such as meeting rooms, function space, food and administrative supports (such as printing) were much appreciated and added significant additional value to the project.

The following list of sponsoring partners is as follows:

- The Hobsons Bay Yacht Club: provision of a meeting room and coffee facilities for our 1st Workshop meeting.
- The Victoria Police Williamstown: provision of a meeting room for our 2nd workshop meeting, the provision of refreshments at our 3rd workshop meeting, tangible administrative supports such as printing of minutes and agendas, contribution of hours of labour in the drafting of the grant application and monitoring of project outcomes.
- The Williamstown Library: provision of a meeting room for our 3rd workshop meeting.
- The Royal Yacht Club of Victoria (Williamstown): provision of their conference room for our 4th workshop meeting and provision of their main function room for our Handover Ceremony.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	Page	1
Special Acknowledgement of Country	Page	3
Executive Summary	Page	4
Special Thanks to Project Participants	Page	5
INTRODUCTION	Page	9
A Time for 'Shared History'	Page	9
First Peoples & Second Peoples	Page	11
THE MESSAGE TREE PROJECT	Page	12
Core Project Partners	Page	12
Choice of Yalukit Marnang to Lead	Page	12
Project Facilitator Selection	Page	13
Archival Research Outcomes	Page	13
Reaching Out to Potential Stakeholders	Page	13
Stakeholders Engaged	Page	14
Sponsor-Partners	Page	15
PROJECT OUTCOMES	Page	16
Themes for Interpretive Panels	Page	16
Recommended Text for Interpretive Panels	Page	16
Images	Page	17
The 4 th Interpretive Panel	Page	17
Panel No 1	Page	18
Panel No 2	Page	19
Panel No 3	Page	20
A 'New Message Tree' at a Special Place	Page	21
Key Interpretive Node & Siting Recommendations	Page	22
From Concept Plan to Construction	Page	22
Installing Temporary Interpretive Panels	Page	22

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(continued)

... Page 23

Potential Sources for Future Project Funding	Page 23
Additional Community Engagements	Page 24
Local Media	Page 24
Heritage Hobsons Bay	Page 24
Potential Other 'Spin-Offs' from this Project	Page 25
References	Page 26
APPENDICES	
Professional Bio – Caroline Martin, Yalukit Marnang	Appendix 1
Historical Sources- March 2019	Appendix 2
Stakeholder Workshops – Agendas and Minutes	Appendix 3
Historical Sources Support Text for 3 Interpretive Panels	Appendix 4

POTENTIAL FUTURE SHARED HISTORY PROJECTS

INTRODUCTION:

A Time for 'Shared History'

The Message Tree Project came about because a small group of like-minded people got together around the idea that it was time to do more to 'break the public silence' surrounding the existence of our First Peoples, the Yalukit Weelam Clan of the Boonwurrung Language Group. Their rich culture and very long history in Koort Boork Boork (now known as Williamstown) sadly remains a deep mystery for far too many people living in the City of Hobson's Bay.

This silence is not unique to Hobsons Bay by any means. It is a now long-standing national phenomena that is only beginning to shift as Australians come to terms with important new information. Like the defeat of the British colonial legal fantasy of 'empty land' (Terra Nullius) with the Wik Decision in the Australian High Court in 1996.

The idea that Australia's history does not, as so many of us were taught at school, 'begin' with the arrival of the British to our shores has opened the door for an apparently increasing number of Australians to explore the history of our First Peoples more deeply. What is a being discovered is that our human histories extend well beyond British arrival in 1788 and, as books like Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* are revealing, it is a history of significant cultural richness and human achievement spanning many thousands of years.

Only this week, on 8 July 2019, the United Nations recognised our Gunditjmara people won World Heritage recognition for their ancient aquiculture site at Budj Bim on the banks of Lake Condah in south-western Victoria. Most Victorian school children remain oblivious to the knowledge that Budj Bim has a town of stone houses where 5,000 Gunditjmara were seen living. A town older than the pyramids in Egypt (Pascoe, 2014). This example of sedentary occupation by really intelligent and creative human beings achieving great civilisation long before 1788, is sadly still not a routine part of learning in Victorian schools.

Even so, our national awareness of these things is now growing, and an increasing number of us no longer accept the words in our National Anthem of "young & free" to accurate describe what we now know to be land with a very old human history. Increasingly we know that our country is the only country where the oldest living human cultures on Earth are found. Knowledge like this naturally creates a 'thirst' to know the whole history of our First Peoples, especially those who lived for thousands of years where we are currently living today.

It is a thirst for information that is still often met by what has been called "The Great Australian Silence". It was in 1968 that that Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the Institute of Advanced Studies at the Australian National University, W.E.H. Stanner, coined the term 'The Great Australian Silence' to describe a national tendency to 'forget' about our First Peoples.

Stanner said

"It is a structural matter, a view from a window that had been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale." (Stanner, 1969, p.25).

He went on to say:

"We have been able for so long to disremember the aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so....I am no historian...but the history I would like to see written would bring into the main flow of its narrative the life and times of men like David Uniapon, Albert Namatjira, Robert Tudawali, Durmugam, Douglas Nicholls, Dexter Daniels and many others. Not to scrape up significance for them but because they typify so vividly the other side of a story over which the great Australian silence reigns." (Stanner, 1969, p.25).

In a desire to show 'respect' to our First Peoples, break the 'Great Australian Silence' and publicly celebrate more of our shared history, Hobson's Bay City Council is now committing to lead through their recently-released *Innovative Reconciliation Action Plan 2019-2021* which states that

"Fostering respect for First Nations Peoples histories and cultures is important to Council because we want to build a place in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can feel pride in sharing the richness of their culture in a community that understands, appreciates and values this heritage" (p.30).

This idea of 'respect' has been central to the Message Tree Project and our approach to this particular shared history has been innovative. Importantly, this project was built around the idea that Boonwurrung history needed a Boonwurrung 'voice' close to the centre of the project. Getting the Boonwurrung-owned Yalukit Marnang consultancy to facilitate the process with our local community was fundamental to this approach. We also 'threw open the doors' to invite and include as many local story-tellers, history-keepers and other interested groups and individuals to join the stakeholder workshops and contribute to finding a respectful, accurate and sensitive re-telling of the Message Tree story.

The outcomes embodied in this report present an opportunity for the City of Hobsons Bay to now take over implementation to replant a New Message Tree and recreate for us a special place for reconciliation at the public 'heart' of Williamstown.

The location identified by this report, at the 'foot' of Thompson Street in the main tourist precinct was not 'selected' but 'rediscovered' by the journey into our shared history.

It is a history that tells of the Boonwurrung people who loved an important tree at an important place named Koort Boork Boork and the first British people to love that same tree and the same important place we now know as Williamstown.

All people in the City of Hobson's Bay deserve to know who our First Peoples are and to have the opportunity to celebrate The Message Tree story and the special place where it

stood. The time to publicly celebrate our local shared histories has come. May we all soon gather together around the New Message Tree in Nelson Place to do just that.

We now invite Council to embrace our recommendations and our collective 'vision' and prepare this 'special place' to the benefit of all, especially for our First Peoples who have waited so very long for the public silence about their existence in our land to finally end.

First Peoples & Second Peoples:

This report adopts the terms 'First Peoples' or 'First Nations peoples' to define those in our community who may otherwise identify (or be identified) as 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander' or 'Koorie'.

'First peoples' or 'First Nations peoples' refers to Australia's entire spectrum of multicultural first peoples (nations) who owned, governed, farmed, managed and controlled the Australian continent, over many thousands of years, before the entire landmass was colonised for the British Empire from 1788 onwards. These terms are chosen for their capacity to acknowledging the multi-national and multi-cultural nature of the human civilisations that controlled our continent before 1788. The term 'peoples' serves to humanise those peoples who have often been de-humanised and objectified by mainstream British (and Australian) commentators since 1788. The term 'nations' acknowledges the many sovereign national entities that existed on the Australian continent at the commencement of British colonisation in 1788 and that their sovereign rights are still being claimed.

The First Peoples of Hobsons Bay are mostly referred to more specifically by their language group name, Boonwurrung, or at times using their local clan group name of Yalukit Weelam (or Yalukit Willam), or both.

For those who arrived in Australia as migrants, or whose forebears arrived as migrants, after 1788 the term 'Second Nations peoples' or 'Second Peoples' is applied. This allows those Australians who embody cultural identities that link them to their migrant heritage to also be included and humanised on an equal footing. The defining and dividing moment in our combined histories is the year 1788 as this was the year that the British Empire arrived on the lands of the Eora peoples around Botany Bay (Sydney) with no intention of ever leaving. It was the year Britain took the 'possession' of their 'Terra Nullius' (Empty Land) as James Cook had declared the Australian continent, some 18 years earlier at 'Possession Island' in what is today Queensland.

All Australians belong to either our First Peoples story, our Second Peoples story or both as it is a simple function of heredity. Our story is our story and the existence of more than one stories, or even more than one perspective on a story, is not new to our multicultural continent. It is rightly often held up as one of our national strengths.

To realise the strength of our rich, diverse and very long human history in Australia (including having the world's oldest living cultures), it is important that we overcome the inhumanity and arrogance reflected in much of our documented colonial history. The terminology for this report seeks to contribute respectfully to that aim.

THE MESSAGE TREE PROJECT:

Core Project Partners:

The Message Tree Project had its inception at the Laverton Hub during NAIDOC celebrations on Mabo Day in 2018. It was in a casual conversation between Jena Galvin and Greg Thorpe that it became clear there were two community organisations looking for local Shared History. Greg had participated in a discussion about a year earlier at Get Up Out West (Hobsons Bay's Reconciliation Action Group) where members were keen to refocus the group around local Boonwurrung histories. On this basis, Greg had engaged a conversation with the Briggs family and, with their blessing set about researching local stories relating to King Benbow (N'Arweet Boollutt). Jena, a Wiradjuri woman, working at Williamstown Police Station was keen to find a way to bring Boonwurrung histories out in public as a project Victoria Police could employ to support community well-being and their engagement with local First Nations groups in our community. Greg told Jena that The Message Tree story was very close to the Williamstown Police station and Jena set up a meeting between Greg and her boss, Snr Sgt. Chris Allen.

On hearing the story, Snr Sgt. Allen immediately wanted the police to take a leadership role in getting a project up to celebrate this story. The police put forward the idea of a Community Grant from Hobsons Bay and began writing the application while Greg brokered the formal involvement of Caroline Martin (Yalukit Marnang) and Rosa McKenna (Get Up Out West & Spotwood-Kingsville RSL). From here a partnership was formed and a clear project conceived and put forward as a grant application for a 'Vibrant Communities Grant' under the 2018 round of Hobsons Bay Community Grants.

Choice of Yalukit Marnang to Lead.

In keeping with the principles of Shared History being a collaborative process, all partners agreed that to ensure Boonwurrung 'voice' was given maximum space, Yalukit Marnang should receive the funding to provide a project facilitator. This way, everyone involved could be assured that Caroline Martin would not only have a voice but could have agency in the direction of the community process. In addition, Caroline Martin's extensive professional background working with First People's histories and the process of story-telling from the shared-history-approach only strengthened this rationale. In effect, what the project is now beginning to do is to connect our local history stakeholders with the Boonwurrung (via Yalukit Marnang) in a way that can prove mutually beneficial and allow us to all move from this first project to future similar projects within Williamstown and eventually elsewhere in Hobsons Bay. (Caroline Martin's Profession Bio is attached in Appendix 1).

Project Facilitator Selection:

Caroline Martin (Yalukit Marnang) nominated Greg Thorpe to lead the community process and create for her a feedback loop to ensure the Boonwurrung 'voice', while still somewhat distant from the project, would remain central.

Greg is a Shared History Facilitator with a professional background as a Cultural Interpreter of Historic Places, primarily on public lands. He lives in Hobsons Bay and has worked closely with Caroline Martin uncovering hidden Boonwurrung histories relevant to the Boonwurrung Estate to the western side of the Maribyrnong River. Greg and Caroline's families have enjoyed a close social connection for many years. Greg's heritage is French, Irish, Scottish and English.

It is from their shared professional interests in Shared History and through their personal social relationship that Caroline has looked to Greg to represent Yalukit Marnang as the Shared History Facilitator for The Message Tree Project.

Archival Research Outcomes:

In preparation for the first stakeholder workshop, archival research was undertaken to produce a 41 page 'Historical Sources Document' which was tabled in draft form at the 1st Stakeholder Workshop and published to the group as a final copy prior to the 2nd Meeting.

A copy of this document is included as *Appendix 2* at the rear of this report.

Reaching Out to Potential Stakeholders:

Prior to the 1st Stakeholder workshop (28 February 2019) Yalukit Marnang, Williamstown Police and Get Up Out West worked on developing a list of key stakeholders. Anyone likely to have a role in local history either as a tour guide, journalist or local historian was approached to contribute to the process.

Approaches were made to anyone with and obvious link to the story, such as St.Mary's Primary School who have a link to a former Head Teacher, James Wallace, who features in the history.

Immediate neighbours to the site of the original Message Tree were also approached. These included the Lumineer Academy (in the Old Customs House Building) and the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria.

The Williamstown Community and Education Centre Inc were approached as an organisation running regular local history walks and dedicated to community education within Thompson Street and close to the Message Tree site.

Other Stakeholders emerged by word of mouth, such as members from the Conversations of the Curious group and a member of the Friends of Stoney Creek, Phillip Hitchcock. Phillips original interest in the story came from his enthusiasm for She-oak Trees and his interest in The Message Tree as an important She-oak in Williamstown. Phillip volunteered his services to the group as minute-taker a valued service he did excellently.

Some outreach failed such as attempts to invite secondary schools into the process, however overall this face to face outreach proved highly effective at establishing strong interest in the project for the 1st Stakeholder Workshop on 28 February 2019.

This part of the project was not funded by the community grant and thanks must go out to Snr Sgt Chris Allen, Greg Thorpe and Rosa McKenna for this early contribution to the success of the project.

Stakeholders Engaged:

The following is a list of Stakeholder workshop participants who attended one or more of the stakeholder workshops. Each person who joined the group also joined the group email list to receive agendas and minutes. Participants and the organisations they were connected to are as follows:

- Greg Thorpe, Project Facilitator, Yalukit Marnang.
- Marbee Williams, Boonwurrung descendant, Yalukit Marnang.
- Snr Sgt Chris Allen, Victoria Police, Williamstown.
- Jenni Mitchell, Get Up Out West.
- Rosa McKenna, Get Up Out West & Spotswood-Kingsville RSL
- Phillip Hitchcock, Friends of Stony Creek & She-oak Enthusiast.
- Brian Haynes, Local Historian, Moderator of Williamstown History Facebook Page.
- Janet Long, Williamstown Historical Society.
- Pam Kadow, Heritage Librarian, Williamstown Library, City of Hobsons Bay.
- Peter Dewar, Freelance Journalist. Also: local walking group leader at Williamstown Community & Education Centre.
- Tania Blackwell, Coordinator Arts & Culture, Cultural & Economic Development, Hobsons Bay City Council.
- Toni Burton, Arts and Culture Officer, Cultural & Economic Development, Hobsons Bay City Council.
- Mayor, Cr. Jonathon Marsden, City of Hobsons Bay.
- Mark Brophy, CEO, Williamstown Community & Education Centre.
- Sgt Glynn Woolley, Acting Snr Sgt, Victoria Police, Williamstown.
- Uncle Keith Randall, Aboriginal Cultural Liaison Officer, Victoria Police.
- Michael Neumann, Manager, Royal Yacht Club of Victoria, Williamstown.
- Ann Goodwin, Archivist, Royal Yacht Club of Victoria, Williamstown.
- Anthony Hockey, Principal, St.Mary's Catholic Primary School, Williamstown.
- Marise de Quadros, Conversations for the Curious, Williamstown.
- Sgt Paul Menz, Victoria Police, Williamstown.
- Sgt Deb Jecks, Victoria Police, Williamstown.
- Cindy Wright, Get Up Out West.

Sponsor-Partners:

Sponsor-Partners were invited to join the Message Tree Project with in-kind contributions. These sponsor organisations were invited to also sit in at stakeholder workshops if they were not already attending. The in-kind contributions allowed the small project budget to stretch and achieve more than the original budget allowed for.

Our Sponsor-Partners were:

- The Hobsons Bay Yacht Club: provision of a meeting room and coffee facilities for our 1st Workshop meeting.
- The Victoria Police Williamstown: provision of a meeting room for our 2nd workshop meeting, the provision of refreshments at our 3rd workshop meeting, tangible administrative supports such as printing of minutes and agendas, contribution of hours of labour in the drafting of the grant application and monitoring of project outcomes.
- The Williamstown Library: provision of a meeting room for our 3rd workshop meeting.
- The Royal Yacht Club of Victoria (Williamstown): provision of their conference room for our 4th workshop meeting and provision of their main function room for our Handover Ceremony.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

The four stakeholder workshops took place between 28 February 2019 and 30 May 2019.

Workshop documents in the form of Agendas and Minutes are attached at the rear of this document and marked Appendix 3.

Themes for Interpretive Panels:

The history of The Message Tree was reviewed at the 2nd workshop on 28 March 2019 based on the findings of the Historical Sources Document. Here the group worked through the history to identify 3 themes which were all considered important to the overall story.

The three themes selected were:

- 1. **The long history of She-oaks** at Koort Boork Boork (before Williamstown) and the Boonwurrung. In particular, their connection with The Message Tree as a special place.
- 2. **The Early Colonial Years** where the tree becomes known as The Message Tree (Notice Tree) and is shared by the Boonwurrung and the colonists
- 3. **The fight to save the tree** in 1856 and 1857 and the Boonwurrung connection being remembered by the campaigners.

It was agreed that the three themes selected would each be worked into its own interpretive panel consisting of no more than 300 words.

Recommended wording for three panels were submitted to the 3rd Stakeholder Workshop on 2 May 2019.

Recommended Text for Interpretive Panels:

At the 3rd Stakeholder Workshop all three panels were reviewed and adopted by the group in line with the following statement:

Group Recommendations on Draft Text for Three Panels:

- The three panel drafts presented are a good telling of the key themes in the story and are told respectfully and with sensitivity to the Boonwurrung perspective.
- The text would need additional professional edits to tighten the wording prior to arriving at final text for the panels. The text may also need to be chunked to sit around images.
- In keeping with this project's commitment to a respectful shared-history approach, any final changes to the wording of the panels should be run past Yalukit Marnang for Caroline Martin, to provide comment from a Boonwurrung perspective, prior to production of the panels.

Images:

It was agreed that images would be important to break up the text and help the in telling the story and while no group decision was reached on this question a number of positive suggestions are included in the minutes in Appendix 3.

The 4th Interpretive Panel:

The third workshop also considered an idea put forward to include a 4th interpretive panel at the Message Tree site to tell "...the story of the message tree project, the revival of this shared-history and giving present-day Boonwurrung voice a place to be heard on the cultural importance of this history and it's revival to Boonwurrung today...the group felt it would be a good way of moving the history into the present day while reminding the public that Boonwurrung are not 'gone' from Williamstown but have returned and are working to reclaim, strengthen and share their culture and history again." (from workshop minutes). This led to the following group decision:

Recommendation for a 4th Panel:

• Text for a 4th Interpretive Panel, in line with the above [see minutes for full version], should be developed by Council with Yalukit Marnang and provided for in the on-site design.

Each panel is designed to be read either as an individual 'element' of the overall story or together to understand all the key themes.

The recommended text for the first three Interpretive panels is shown on pages 18, 19, and 20.

NOTE: Full referencing and in-depth discussion of the historical sources underpinning the text for all three interpretive panels recommended this report is contained in Appendix 4 at the end of this document.

You are standing at a significant site for the Yalukit Willam Clan of the Boonwurrung language group, the First Peoples of Hobson's Bay.

An old She-oak Tree stood here long before British colonisation and was removed in 1857. Around this tree early colonists saw the Yalukit Willam, led by N'Arweet Boollutt (also called "King Benbow"), as they conducted ceremonies and counsels here. This makes this a special place for Boonwurrung people still today.

She-oak are sacred trees to the Boonwurrung. They are associated with the power of Boonwurrung men and it is remembered that when early colonists cut down She-oak Trees Boonwurrung men would feel unhealthy.

The ancient name for this area is Koort Boork Boork, meaning 'clumps of many she-oaks'. A name indicating the importance of She-oak Trees to Boonwurrung here.

In 1837 this place was re-named William's Town by British colonist to honour their King. British invasion of the Boonwurrung Estate was a catastrophic event that caused the rapid decline of Boonwurrung people. West of the Maribyrnong River Boonwurrung women farmed a small sweet potato called *Murnong* on the grassy basalt plains, a very important staple food. Colonists landed thousands of sheep only metres from here and herded them west onto the Boonwurrung's Murnong fields. The sheep soon ate the Murnong crop and quickly sent the Boonwurrung toward starvation, malnutrition and disease.

Stealthily spearing British sheep or taking rice, flour or oats from colonists to replace disappearing Murnong wild game, inevitably led to violent conflicts and the death of Boonwurrung people across their Estates. Clashes with other First Peoples, facing similar pressures from colonisation, also led to Boonwurrung deaths.

Nearly all our First Peoples died under British rule. Here only one resilient family survived to represent the Boonwurrung language group, share the history and continue cultural practices today.

(300 words)

Title: The Boonwurrung People and the Ancient Sheoak

Panel No 1

British colonisation began here in 1835 when two private companies from Tasmania invaded the Estates of our First Peoples the Yalukit Willam Clan of the Boonwurrung language group. The Estates of other language groups on either side of the Werribee River were also invaded.

Williamstown became the deep-water anchorage for British ships and gave rise to a 'tiny village' that sat alone on the edge of a vast grassy plain to the west. The main British settlement was established near plentiful freshwater on the banks of the Yarra River (now called Central Melbourne).

In the first years of the colony, Melbourne newspapers arrived far too late in Williamstown to be useful, so the townsfolk used the old She-oak tree that once stood here as their 'Message Tree'. News, advertising and public opinions were written on placards and nailed to the tree. Whether seeking a servant or some lost item; selling a horse; needing a job done; reporting an accident or a theft; sharing a new idea or expressing an opinion; the message would go up on the old tree.

Prior to its removal in 1857, the 'Ancient She-oak' had become a town meeting place where a seat had been built around its trunk. Early colonists understood the importance of the tree to the Boonwurrung who still used it. A local poet and teacher between 1847 and 1863, James Wallace, recited poems under its branches and wrote that "The earliest tradition regarding the Old Tree is to the effect that long before this country was colonised it was held in almost religious veneration by the aboriginals; that it was beneath its umbrageous shade they held their councils..."

So between 1835 to 1845 a growing British population and a declining Boonwurrung population both used and expressed their connection to The Message Tree.

(300 words)

Heading: "The Boonwurrung and the British - Under 'The Message Tree'

Panel No. 2

The Message Tree (or 'Notice Tree') was removed by Williamstown Council as part of road construction works in Nelson Place in early 1857 but not before Council's first public campaign on a heritage issue. At least fifty locals fought to save the old tree arguing it was an important place in the early life of the town but also a special place to our First Peoples, an uncommon consideration among British colonists of the 1850s.

1856 was Williamstown Council's first year. Population was booming following the discovery of gold from 1850. In 1849 the town had "about five hundred people" and by 1857 over 3500. Traffic was turning informal dirt roads to thick mud after rain so, in December 1856, Council unanimously decided to formally mark-out street widths, create gutters and surface roads with crushed rock.

It was soon-after realised these works would endanger the much-loved Message Tree so within six days 55 residents, led by James Wallace a local teacher and poet petitioned Council requesting "... a diversion in the roadway ... to leave the Notice Tree situated at the foot of Thompson Street undisturbed".

Councillors Moxham and Langford supported efforts to save the tree but were outnumbered on the seven-member Council.

One local who conducted "research" among the protestors to "discover what qualities this tree has apart from other trees...", found how they valued the tree's ancient link to the Boonwurrung stating:

"It appears that many long years before the arrival of a white man upon these shores, that this part of the colony which we now call Williamstown was selected by the aboriginies as their place of rendezvous every month; and beneath the foliage of that old tree have sat the King...Numerous too have been the corroborees which have taken place on the same spot ..."

(298 Words)

Heading: The Fight to Save the Message Tree

Panel No. 3

A 'New Message Tree' at a Special Place:

By the 3rd Stakeholder workshop on 2 May 2019, stakeholders had formed a strong desire to see the site of the original Message Tree celebrated as more than a place to read history.

It had become clear that there was a strong desire to see a New Message Tree planted and for it to become a focal point for this history of the Boonwurrung of Koort Boork Boork, the early colonial days of co-habitation and to remember those locals from 1856 who fought valiantly to remember the Boonwurrung and retain a tree which whose charm had connected them all.

The placement of the site on the northern side of the intersection of Thompson Street and Nelson Place was seen to have strong potential to be a dedicated space for National Reconciliation within Williamstown. The intersection itself was seen to offer opportunities for temporary street closure and festivals or public ceremonies to again take place around The Message Tree on special occasions. This led to the 3rd workshop arriving at the following recommendation:

Recommendation for a 'New Message Tree':

- A New Message Tree be replanted at the 'foot' of Thompson Street on the north side of the intersection in front of the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria in the approximate location of the original Message Tree.
- This tree would become the centre-point of an interpretive node for sharing the story of The Message Tree and its association to both the British colonists and the Boonwurrung.
- An appropriately young Drooping She-oak should be planted and an
 effective protective barrier be erected to allow the tree protection from
 urban movements while young and small.
- The two juvenile Elm Trees at the western end of the line of elms be removed and transplanted to make space for a Message Tree node.

This issue was re-visited and re-confirmed as a recommendation at the 4th and final stakeholder workshop on 30 May 2019, which took place on-site at the 'foot' of Thompson Street in Nelson Place. This workshop took the idea of a special interpretive node centred around a New Message Tree into the realm of a collaborative conceptual design. From that workshop the following recommendations were discussed and agreed to by the group.

Key Interpretive Node & Siting Recommendations:

- a) The location at which to plant the New Message Tree was at the place currently occupied by the juvenile Elm Tree (closest to the mature Elm) at the 'Foot' of Thompson Street.
- b) The New Message Tree should be a Drooping She-oak (*Allocasuarina verticulata*)
- c) This site should become the centre-point for a special node specifically dedicated to telling The Message Tree story and its links to the Boonwurrung.
- d) The special node be designed as a place for gathering, festivals and public ceremony.
- e) The node be designed as a 10 metre circle centred on the New Message Tree with its southern limit extending into the current roadway to the limit of the parking pay and the street be 'bent' around the tree in honour of the 1856 request that this be done for the original tree.
- f) The 4 Interpretive Panels recommended in this report be sited in a circle around the New Message Tree and incorporated in the design of a protective fence/barrier around the juvenile tree.

(Note: Further information is recorded in the minutes of the 4th Stakeholder Workshop – see Appendix 3, attached).

From Concept Plan to Construction:

The 4th workshop agreed to recommend that:

Council to take the recommendations from our 4th Stakeholder Meeting and consider it a concept plan from which to work collaboratively with Yalukit Marnang and this group to create a detailed final plan for construction applying Council's technical and design expertise.

Installing Temporary Interpetive Panels

The 4th workshop agreed to recommend that:

As an interim measure, while construction plans for the interpretive node are being developed, it was suggested that the three interpretive panels be finalised (per recommendation at previous meeting) and placed at the Message Tree site along with information about plans in progress to construct a special node with a 'New Message Tree' at it centre.

POTENTIAL FUTURE SHARED HISTORY PROJECTS:

At the 3rd Stakeholder meeting on 2 May 2019, a decision was reached to keep the stakeholder group together under the group title 'Shared History Alliance' and to use the group email list to invite current project members to this forum.

It was agreed that a number of additional potential shared history projects could be identified around Williamstown and elsewhere in the City of Hobsons Bay, each deserving of a project like The Message Tree Project.

The aim of the Shared History Alliance would be to begin work on researching the historical sources for these stories and identifying potential funding sources to conduct further projects.

The potential projects identified were:

- Story of Baby Anne Jordan & N'Arweet Boollutt
- Story of the Shelly Beach Camp (Commonwealth Park area) and the Boonwurrung
- First Nations men held in Williamstown Prison Hulks?
- Careful re-internment of Boonwurrung Remains Williamstown Cemetery.
- Schools especially primary schools (where the curriculum is more flexible) need information, local stories to tell and curriculum guides.
- Occupation sites could form a trail; Jawbone, Willi racecourse, Queen St Altona.

It was widely agreed that the next project for the group to focus on would be the story of Baby Anne Jordan and N'Arweet Boollutt.

Potential Sources for Future Project Funding:

This question was examined at the 3rd stakeholder workshop where Mark Brophy from Williamstown Community & Education Centre advised there would be a number of philanthropic or government small grant sources available once a clear project outline had been developed by the Shared History Alliance.

Additional Community Engagements:

As a result of this project, the following groups and individuals outside of the project were engaged in the knowledge of the project:

Local Media:

The following news article about the project was published on 8 April in the Star Weekly reaching thousands of homes within the City of Hobsons Bay:

STARWEEKLY.COM.AU NEWS

Tree's story a unifying message

By Goya Dmytryshchak

The story of an ancient sheoak in Williamstown significant to the Boonwurrung indigen people and known as The Message Tree to

European settlers – is being brought to life. Indigenous community members, historians and police are searching for descendants of historical figures who tried to save the tree, which stood at the foot of Thompson Street between the Old Customs House and Williamstown police station.

The tree was used by Europeans to post messages and share news, while the Boonwarrung conducted formal ceremonies at the site.

The Message Tree project is being led by Williamstown police and Hobsons Bay reconcilation group Get Up Out West, who have partnered with consultant company Yalukit Marnang, owned by descendants of the

Boonwurrung. Yalukit Marnang's Greg Thorpe said the tree stood in Nelson Place until 1856, when it was removed to build the roadway.

Local residents fought to save the tree, partly because of its ancient association as a ceremonial place for the first people of Hobsons Bay, the Yalukit willam clan of the

Boonwurrung language group.
"This story is important to Boonwurrung people who want to meet the descendants of those who fought to save the tree or record its history," Mr Thorpe said.

"The project is really about rediscovering a story about a tree that was special to the Boonwurrung people and then it was special to the first colonists in Williamstown.

"In 1856, in the first year of Williamstown council, it was removed to make way for Nelson Place to be built.



sa McKenna, Acting Senior Sergeant Glyn Woolley, Greg Thorpe, Senior Sergeant Chris Allen and Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer Keith Rand. are appealing for descendants of historical figures associated with "The Message Tree". (Dam

"One of things that comes out in the history very strongly is that one of the things that's valued about the tree by the colonists is its strong association and connection to the Boonwurrung people.

Senior Sergeant Chris Allen of Williamstown police said the story, which unfolded virtually on the station's doorstep, struck a chord.

"Respectfully sharing first peoples' histories ands to contribute to the sense of wellbeing our community, especially for First Nations" Williamstown police station on 93939546. in our community, especially for First Nations Australians," he said.

Descendants of the following historical figures associated with the tree are being sought: James Wallace, Cr James Moxham, Captain Langford, William Hall jnr and Ann

Yalukit Marnang will lead a Message Tree history walk in Williamstown, for Heritage Hobsons Bay, on Saturday, May 4, from 3pm To book, visit eventbrite.com.au/o/heritagehobsons-bay-15832480968

Link to article: https://www.starweekly.com.au/news/trees-story-unifying-message/

Heritage Hobsons Bay:

An on-site walk to share the Message Tree story was included within the Heritage Hobsons Bay festival resulting in a successful event of 4 May, led by Boonwurrung descendant Steve Parker and Message Tree Project Facilitator, Greg Thorpe, on behalf of Yalukit Marnang.



Talks to Local Community Groups:

As a result of the growing local community interest in the Message Tree Project, the Project Facilitator has been approached to speak to a number of local Wiliamstown community groups about the history, including Conversations for the Curious, the Williamstown Historical Society and the Rotary Club of Williamstown.

Potential Other 'Spin-Offs' from this Project:

Message Tree Song: Inspired by the Message Tree story and the role of James Wallace, a former Head Teacher at St.Marys Primary School (Williamstown) the school is developing a project to have a song about this story for the school choir to sing.

Audio visual capture of Boonwurrung Descendant's Voice: This potential film production project would aim to capture Boonwurrung descendants at the site of the Message Tree giving their view on the revival of this story and its links to their ancestors.

Message Tree web-page content: A potential project for Hobsons Bay Libraries (or another appropriate agency) to develop and maintain web-pages that hold Message Tree story content (such as film of Boonwurrung descendants) which can be linked to technology (such as QR Codes) that enable access from the Message Tree interpretive node (via private smartphone technologies) or accessed directly via a web-browser, or both.

Message Tree Book: A potential project with Yalukit Marnang to prepare the story of Message Tree and the Boonwurrung of Williamstown as a short publication for community education.

Message Tree Schools Kit: A potential project involving Yalukit Marnang to work with local schools to prepare a curriculum kit that supports local schools to teach the Message Tree story and story of the Boonwurrung in Williamstown.

Boonwurrung Art: a project within the construction of the Message Tree interpretive node, to find and commission a Boonwurrung artist (or other First Nations artists chosen by Boonwurrung) to reflect Boonwurrung art as part of the pavement, fence or other appropriate element of the node design.

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APPENDIX 2

Historical Sources Relevant to the Story of "The Message Tree" of Williamstown

by

Greg Thorpe

Message Tree Project Facilitator
Yalukit Marnang

March 2019

Introduction:

The Message Tree Project is a shared-history project funded by the City of Hobsons Bay under a Vibrant Communities Grant. Shared histories relate to our First Peoples, especially from the time after colonisation of their lands commenced.

The aims of the project are to:

- a. Conduct preliminary archival research on history of The Message Tree, the association with the tree and their presence in Williamstown prior to 1856 (when the tree was removed).
- b. Bring together stakeholders with a discernible interest in the story of The Message Tree and the presenting of shared-histories within Williamstown.
- c. Ensure the 'voice' of Boonwurrung descendants are central through the role of Yalukit Marnang Pty Ltd as the project facilitator.
- d. Conduct 4 meetings with stakeholders to arrive at recommendations regarding:
 - a. The previous location of The Message Tree in Nelson Street
 - b. The key themes for historical interpretation of the story
 - c. A proposed text for an on-site interpretive panel(s)
 - d. Recommendations on potential for additional interpretive mediums to tell the story.
 - e. Recommendation of potential additional projects for this story or other shared-history projects within Hobsons Bay.
- e. Prepare these recommendations through an Outcomes Report to the City of Hobson's Bay.
- f. Hand-over the Report at an official Handover Ceremony.

This document reports on the historical sources relating to the project relevant to the Message Tree only. It covers historical accounts of the Boonwurrung connection to the tree and its precinct at 'the foot' of Thompson Street.

A second report being prepared by Yalukit Marnang will be tabled later. This relates to the general history of the Boonwurrung in Wiliamstown and historical context surrounding life for the Yalukit william clan during the first 15 years of the British colony up to their disappearance from the life of Williamstown around 1850. This will involve close the Briggs family of the Boonwurrung via Yalukit Marnang Director, Caroline Martin.

Andrew. A. Curtain's 1889 Essay:

Andrew Curtain's Essay of 1889 is arguably the most significant record of the early history of colonial Williamstown but it is not a primary source. It is a secondary source in the journalistic style, drawing from oral accounts from those who lived in the town during its first 15 years.

Curtain cites William Hall Jnr, who arrived in Williamstown in June 1840, as his main collaborator. He also reports stories involving other residents who were alive in the town at the time of publication. It is reasonable to believe he may have interviewed these residents in preparation for writing the essay. Curtain himself did not live through these early years and was probably a student at the time of writing.

Copies of the essay are held by Hobson Bay Library in Williamstown and also in the National Library of Australia (available in digital form via Trove.nla.gov.au).

Curtain's essay was published in 1889 as the first prize winner in an essay competition on the subject of Williamstown's Early History initiated by a Williamstown newspaper. The second prize entry was also published but makes no mention of the Message Tree or the First People's of Hobson's Bay (the Yalukit weelam clan of the Boonwurrung Language Group). For this reason, Curtain's essay is the focus of our interest for the Message Tree Project.

To examine Curtain's essay only those sections considered relevant to our understanding of the Message Tree and our shared-history with the Boonwurrung are shown in this document. The entire essay runs to 23 pages. The relevant excerpts have been cut from a digital version of the original published essay and pasted into this document to be preceded or followed by analysis and explanation.

Page 1

FIRST PRIZE ESSAY

ON THE .

"EARLY HISTORY OF WILLIAMSTOWN"

CURTAIN.

Morro-" Dingo."

ANDREW

[Revised and corrected by Mr William Hall, Junr., who arrived in the colony in June, 1840.]

The Message Tree at the 'Foot' of Thompson Street.

The Message Tree (also called the Notice Tree) stood at the foot of Thompson Street at the intersection with Nelson Place.

It was a feature of town life for the early colonists for whom it became a much-loved focal point in the first 15 years of the colony of Victoria. This She-oak Tree was, in effect, Williamstown's first 'newspaper', used to post local messages, hence becoming known as 'The Message Tree'.

For the townsfolk, it was under 'The Message Tree' that people would meet, talk, catch-up on news and sometimes have a drink or two. Functioning like a sort of centre-point for the community. At some point prior to 1856, a seat was built around its so folk could linger under the shade of old tree.

Seen sitting under the tree on a regular basis in those very early years also Hobsons Bay's First People, the Yalukit willam clan of the Boonwurrung (Clark and Briggs, 2011). In an unrelated section of Curtain's essay, 'King Benbow' is named as the Boonwurrung leader of an auspicious visit held in the town, close to The Message Tree in August 1840. King Benbow was a nickname, for the Boonwurrung man who was the N'Arweet (clan leader) of the Yalukit willam clan. His real name was N'Arweet Boollutt (Fels, 2011, pp.337-381).

The memory of the Boonwurrung connection to The Message Tree comes through strongly in a public campaign to save the tree from removal in 1856. The newly formed Williamstown Council made a decision to mark out and 'metal' the streets of the town, to help cope with the rapidly growing population arriving for the Victorian Gold Rush. It soon came to light that The Message Tree stood within the 75 ft. roadway and was to be felled to ensure a clear roadway. This met with a strong public outcry from those colonists who had valued The Message Tree during the first 20 years of the town. During the public campaign to save the tree, its strong importance to the Boonwurrung and the memory of their connection to it, is raised as one of the special virtues of the tree.

The story of the message tree comes through strongly in Curtain's essay in words taken from the writing of one of leaders the campaign to save the tree. This was the first environmental campaign to ever confront Williamstown Council and the writer Curtain quotes is Mr James Wallace, who was the Principal of St. Mary's Catholic Primary School in Williamstown between 1847 and 1863 (Gibson, 1992, p. 93). Wallace was known to write and publish local stories and write verse. The primary source of Wallace's writing on The Message Tree is not cited but it seems credible enough that Wallace did write down his memories of the campaign to save The Message Tree. Whether that original source survives anywhere today is unknown but we have significant extract of Wallace's story reproduced within Curtain's essay of 1889. Here Curtain and Wallace provide insight into the importance of the 'ancient tree' to many of the Williamstown residents before its removal.

The means of communication between Melbourne and Williamstown were too slow to render the Melbourne

Page 13

papers either popular or useful, and an ingenious device was hit upon by which news reached those interested in a cheap and efficacious manner. A giant tree grew on a spot adjacent "Craigantina" buildings, and was used both as an advertising medium and an organ of public opinion. Did anyone want a servant? He posted a notice on the tree. Had he a horse for sale or a job to be done by tender? Forthwith he posted for a purchaser or a tenderer to the tree. Was a dog lost or boat tackle stolen? The public were made aware of the accident or the theft by a poster

on the tree. The tree thus became not only a medium of information, but a market where labor and property were bought and sold and all sorts of ideas ventilated. I have been extremely fortunate in receiving from the facile pen of an early colonist the following humorous but eloquent description of this tree. It is almost needless to say it is from the pen of a poet; poetasters are generally recognised by their prose.

The poet is Mr James Wallace, now of Geclong, the oldest schoolmaster in the colony, and the teacher of the first public school opened in Williamstown. He landed here in 1841, and is a warm friend of Mr M. Brew, of the Stag's Head hotel, whose parents arrived in Williamstown in 1839, and to whom I am largely indebted for the lines. Mr Wallace says:—

The earliest tradition regarding the Old Tree is to the effect that long before this country was colonised it was held in almost religious veneration by the aboriginals; that it was beneath its umbrageous shade they held their councils, and that after a battle with a hostile tribe it was at the foot of this tree they regaled upon their roasted captives.

The next item of tradition is, that upon one grand joyous occasion, all the white men in the colony assembled beneath it and drank undiluted rum out of government pannikins, until they became so overwhelmingly joyful that they lay down and sought refuge from the burthen of their bliss in the regions of Somnus.

From the period of this remarkable event all that happened worth historical notice was that a circular seat being fixed around it, it became the favorite resting place of the permanently unemployed, vulgarly called "loafers", and also the toil-wearied speculative boatmen and other philosophical operatives,

especially the wood-carter, Mick Ryan, and the policeman. Ned Stanley, where they smoked their pipes, and spun their yarns, and if the schoolmaster happened to join the party the subject of conversation was elevated to the consideration of the merits of the universe as a work of art, as to whether it made itself or was made by some one else, and if so, who was "on the job?" But these good old times of Arcadian simplicity having passed away, and the gold fever having set in, the land became inundated by a crowd of human locusts from all points of the compass, and Williamstown, in common with other tumble down villages, suddenly became an important town, and was afflicted with an instrument of torture called a municipal coun-

cil. At the same time it was discovered by a number of unimaginative matter-of-fact citit zens, who were the fortunate owners of a variety of vehicles, such as butcher's and baker's carts, wheelbarrows, &c., that since the highly enlightened members who constituted the municipal grinding-machine were sufficient ornaments to the town, the services of the Old She-oak Tree, in that capacity, was no longer required, and as it was an object of vehicular obstruction, the council was called upon to have it removed. Upon the question, "to be or not to be" regarding its further existence, the coun-

cil became divided. The members who owned. or had an interest in wheelbarrows, portable baked potato institutions, baker, butcher or dung carts, were resolved that it should be cut. down and then cut up; sold for firewood and the money sent home to England to benefit the poor. The other portion of the council, who were sadly in the minority, being of a aesthetical turn of mind, and ardent admirers of the "sublime and the beautiful", resolved to stand up in defence of this venerable arbor town ornament, though it should cost them the last shred of their popularity. Outside and inside the counc'l chamber the question was so vio lently debated that it created quite a hurricane in the Williamstown social teapot. A report was current and passed from mouth to ears, through the medium of whispers, that certain members of the council, remarkable for pugnacity and bloodthirstiness, went to the council chambers secretly armed with daggers and revolvers. Another report took wing and flew about to the effect that a number of the " sublime and beautiful" party concocted the design of borrowing the loan of Captain Burrell's old rusty cannon, which he kept as an ornament in front of his marine store, in Nelson parade, then to charge it with powder and red wine grapes instead of grapeshot to the muzzle, so that when discharged among the enemy the red juice of the grape, being mistaken for their own blood, would make each think himself mortally wounded, and flying in consternation, leave the aesthetic philosophers masters of the situation. While all this agitation was in operation, causing widely spread consternation, I arose one morning, and while taking my usual

Page 14

walk along the "front", having reached the spot where had stood the "pride of the village" in ancient times, horror of horrors what did I see? Why, there lay the severed trunk and broken limbs of the object of their contest strewn o'er the ground, where from prehistoric times it had been, both by the savage and the civilised, regarded as an object of veneration and ornamentation. Verily, in this tragical instance, the oft-repeated words of tha poet were falsified, who has said that

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

I the self-appointed, self-paid, self-praised Poet Laureate of the village or the ill-to-do town, as it cocknosedly presumed to call itself, felt it my duty to take down my harp from its peg and instead of the Nine Muses, who had not emigrated to Austarlia, having invoked the spirit of darkness to my aid, who promptly appeared in the attractive shape of a bottle of dark brandy, the following perpetration was the result:—

THD LAST DYING SPEECH OF THE OLD SHE-OAK TREE.

Addressed to the Williamstown Council, A.D. 1857.

Sage Councillor Moxham sincerely I thank, Though I'm not long destined to stand on my shank;

Who could think his rough bosom so tender could be.

As to plead for the life of an Old She-Oak Tree.

This proves that he owns the bright soul of a poet,

Though dull Williamstownians appear not to know it:

His love of the "Beautiful and the Sublime", Being rather ecstatic for blank verse or rhyme,

E're Brett with his placards disfigured my trunk, Or Christian new chums 'neath my shade got mad drunk;

When sable-skinned heroes sat round me and boasted,

While feasting on foes they had vanquished and roasted.

Often, if you saw me, you'd fall on your knees And pay me due homage as Queen of Oak-Trees:

But, now I must fall by the axe of improvement,

While none but wise Moxham opposes the movement.

'Tis true, he was backed by dear kind Captain Langford,

But, candidly speaking he scarce can be thanked for't:

His heart is so kind, and his manner so civil, He seconds all motions, for good or for evil

When I think of the war-dances, feasting and bobbery,

While the woods echoed round with joyous corobberie;

It grieves me to think, I must now fall a martyr,

To suit every fish-hawker, butcher, and carter.

Ere I kiss mother earth, let me utter this pray'r, That Clodson, nor Verdon, may never be 'Mayor;

May the rude fist of politics smashingly box them,

For opposing the motion of chivalrous Moxham.

Magnanimous Moxham, thou noble of soul,
May thy name ever stand at the top of the
pole;

May eloquence flow from thy persuasive tongue,

'Till applause from the lips of opponents be wrung.

And when thou has reached the proud zenith of fame,

When knighthood's bright halo encircles thy name,

Let me beg that the crest on thy chariot shall

Nine placards stuck round on an Old She-Oak Tree.

Jack Armstrong, where is thy goodness of heart,

So famous for taking a poor fellow's part; How oft 'neath my shade after daily turmoil You indulged in a yarn, a smoke, and a coil'

With my last dying breath let me claim your protection,

Don't give me to Dr Maclean for dissection;

That versatile bright esculapion spark,

Would convert my old hide into Peruvlan bark.

And though it may render his patients more ill, 'Twill also assist to elongate his bill;

Enigmatical Wallace, whom "clods" deem insane,

Too stupid to fathom his erratic brain

At the next random visit thy Muse to thee pays,
O! hand down my sad fate to the latest of
days;

Since I know thou wilt shed briny tears for my sake.

This request with my last failing breath I now make.

JAMES WALLACE.

The Boonwurrung Connection to the Message Tree:

James Wallace begins his story, in Curtain's essay, describing the 'traditional' value of the Message Tree as object of "veneration" by the Boonwurrung. He talks to its importance to them long before the colony and reports that "councils" had been held beneath its shade, stories told and celebrations held.

It is a theme he weaves into this protest poem entitled "The Last Dying Speech of the Old She-oak Tree" with the following verse:

When I think of the war-dances, feasting and bobbery, While the woods echoed round with joyous corobberie:

As a man who lived in the town during the 1840s, Wallace may himself have seen the Boonwurrung gather under the tree. It is unlikely, however, that he ever witnessed a Boonwurrung war dance in Williamstown. No record of Boonwurrung ever making war against the British exists.

Despite this, in 1857, there is a clear collective memory in Williamstown of the Boonwurrung having a strong connection to the Message Tree and some townsfolk valuing the tree more because of this history.

Of course, by 1856, the Boonwurrung voice is no long present in Williamstown to be heard as part of the campaign to save the tree. N'Arweet Boollutt is last recorded in Williamstown in January 1845. He had come to wave good-bye to George H. Haydon, a man whose life he had saved and later befriended (Whitlock, unpubl., in Fels, 2012, p.379). By August 1850 the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, William Thomas, counts only 26 surviving members of the Boonwurrung language group (representing 6 clan groups) (Fels, 2012, p.149). By July 1852 N'Arweet Boollut himself was dead (Fels, 2012, p.381).

Despite the absence of Boonwurrung people in Williamstown in 1856 the memory of their presence around The Message Tree remains strong. One source, written at the time of the campaign to save the tree, provide support to Wallace's memory that the tree had a strong Boonwurrung connection that was both known about and valued within Williamstown. It comes from an unlikely source, an anonymous supporter of the tree's removal, writing to the Williamstown Chronicle. The letter published on 3 January 1857 reads:

THE OLD TREE.

To the Editor of the WILLIAMSTOWN CHRONICLE1

SIR,—I have been somewhat amused of late by the infatuated love which has been displayed by a few of my fellow-townsmen for the "old oak tree" at the foot of Thompson-street, and the very energetic measures which have been made to secure its preservation and its quiet repose in the

centre of our principal thoroughfare. Like yourself, I was at a loss to discover the qualities which this tree possessed apart from other trees, and it was not until after much research that I have discovered the secret.

It appears that many long years before the arrival of a white man upon these shores,that this part of the colony which we now call Williamstown was selected by the aboriginies as their place of rendezvous every month; and beneath the foliage of that old tree have sat the King of the Cannibals and all his wives and warriors. Numerous, too, have been the corroborees which have taken place on the same spot; and, it is said, that that old tree, if it could speak, might make some "fearful disclosures," more terrible, indeed, than anything that has yet come out about John Price and the hulks. By and by, came the white people, who, strange to say, also took a particular liking to that old tree. Under its shade all the Christians in the colony once got furiously drunk, and then laid them selves down and slept beneath it until they again got sober. This circumstance is given as an indisputable fact, which may account for the undying affection now displayed for this withered stump.

Such are the peculiar features which this old tree possesses apart from other trees. Its claims to our protection are these: it is a relic of the dark ages; it is a monument of savage cruelties and Christian degradation; and it is old, and rotten, and fit for nothing but the fire. I should not have taken the trouble that I have about the matter were it not from the undignified notice which I perceive is now before our Council to stop the contractor's works in the vicinity of the old tree. This motion, I presume, will fall to the ground for want of a seconder. If, however, such should not be the case, I shall be very much mistaken in my estimate of the good sense of those gentlemen who constitute our local government.

Yours, &c. A RATEPAYER. (source: trove.nla.gov.au – digitised newspaper search)

This anonymous 'ratepayer' writing in the chronicle claims to have conducted "much research" around the town seeking to know "what qualities...this tree possessed apart from other trees" and to have "discovered the secret". He then goes on to report that, like Wallace, folk around the town value the tree, in part, because the Boonwurrung had valued it. In attempting to mock these motives of the protestors the anonymous source pronounces the Message Tree to be "a monument to savage cruelties and Christian degradation". This phantom writer inadvertently provides us with strong evidence from his 'research' conducted at the time of the trees removal that there was both a strong Boonwurrung connection to the tree and this was valued by the protestors asking for it to be saved.

More from the Williamstown Chronicle

From 1856-57:

Council Unanimous on Keeping Streets Clear of Encroachments:

Williamstown Council Proceeding reported in the Williamstown Chronicle of 29 November 1856, p. 2

REPORTS OF COMMITTEE

The Public -Works'- Committee furnished their report, No. 25, recommending-[illegible]...within the Melbourne and Williamstown papers, inviting tenders- for Forming and Metalling certain, streets, as recommended in

the' 21st Report of this Committee;

that such Works might be proceeded with as soon as, the assent-of His.- Excellency shall have - been 'obtained thereto:

2. That a Bye law be- prepared to compel the removal of encroachments on Public Streets and Paths.':'

The Standing Orders having been suspended, it was moved by Councillor Moxham and seconded by Councillor Verdon, that the recommendations contained in the 25th Report of the Public Works Committee be adopted..

Carried unanimously.

Call For Message Tree to be Saved: Council's First Split Vote

Williamstown Council Proceedings reported in the Williamstown Chronicle of 27 December 1856, p.3,

Willlamstown Municipal Council. Thursday, December 18th. Present: Thomas Mason Esq., Chairman; Councillors Langford, Stewart, Moxham, Armstrong, Verdon, and Maclean

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

PETITION.

His Worship the Chairman presented a petition signed by fifty-five Ratepayers, praying that the "Notice Tree" situated at the foot of Thompson-street, might remain undisturbed by the works in course of construction in Nelson-place.

The petition having been read, it was— Moved by Councillor Stewart and seconded by Councillor Moxham, that the Standing Orders be suspended to admit of discussion thereon. Carried unanimously.

Moved by Councillor Stewart and seconded by the Chairman, that the Contractor be allowed to proceed with Contract No. 1, in accordance with the specification upon which he framed his tender.

Several amendments having been put, and together with the motion, rejected.

Moved by Councillor Verdon and seconded by Councillor Stewart, that with reference to the petition just received, that the tree be removed, if practicable, to the public gardens, provided that such a course will not interfere with the public works now in progress. Carried.

NOTICES OF MOTION.

By Councillor Verdon: To move—

That where it is deemed necessary to suspend one or more of the Standing Orders
of this Council, the mover shall distinctly specify the number and purport of such Standing Order or
Orders.

By Councillor Moxham: To move-

2. That the Contractor for No.I contract be requested to stop all is work near the Old Tree, until he be instructed by this Council to carry on the same.

The Message Tree: Neither Useful Nor Ornamental

The following is an article written by the Editor of the Williamstown Chronicle in 1856 which mocks the idea of removing The Message Tree to the Williamstown botanical gardens and suggesting the tree is not anything remotely worth preserving. The editor interestingly refers to the tree incorrectly as a 'gum tree'. This possibly exposes a commonly British ignorance regarding Australian trees in 1856. On the other hand, some of the townsfolk correctly identify the tree as a She-oak, including James Wallace a strong proponent of saving the tree.

The She-oak species is today known by its botanical name of *Allocasuarina verticulata*. It has long needle-like 'leaves' that droop giving its common name as the Drooping She-oak. It is a species unlike any British Tree with the erect-needle species of pine or spruce being the closest European reference point. Its evolution can be traced back 70 million years to a time before even insects evolved on earth, making this species one of the oldest species on our continent.

This image of an old Drooping She-oak in South Australia may be of the size and scale similar to what 'The Message Tree' might have looked like during the 1840s. Whether it looked like this in 1856 is unclear. The author of following article refers to the tree as a 'withered gum tree' while a later article, by an anonymous author, attacking the merit of the tree (3 January 1857, discussed on pp 11-12 above) called the tree a "withered stump".



The idea that the tree was unwell may have simply been a lack of appreciation for what is the sparse foliage of a She-oak compared to the dense canopy of a deciduous European tree. James Wallace, on the other hand, in his writing published on page 13 of Curtain's essay (see p.6 above) refers to the "ancient" tree having "umbrageous shade". The health of the tree may have simply been a matter of personal perception, or possibly vested interest surrounding the outcome of the campaign.

For the Boon wurrung, however, it is clear that She-oaks of Williamstown were culturally significant and important to the place that the British named Point Gellibrand. We see this significance through early accounts of their strong connection to The Message Tree but it is also reflected in the Boon wurrung name for Williamstown, "Koort Boork Boork", translated as 'clump of She-oak Trees' (Clark & Briggs, 2011, p.14). This was the name for the place used by the by the Boon wurrung and other language groups in Eastern Kulin Nation, presumably for many thousands of years.

At the first stakeholder meeting for The Message Tree Project in Williamstown on 28 February 2019, Boonwurrung man, Marbee Williams, shared a story that tells of a strong connection between Boonwurrung men's lore and She-oak trees. Marbee said that the story tells of how the power (or Moong) of Boonwurrung men was connected to the She-oak and that when the British colonists cut so many down it made Boonwurrung men sad and "a crazy".

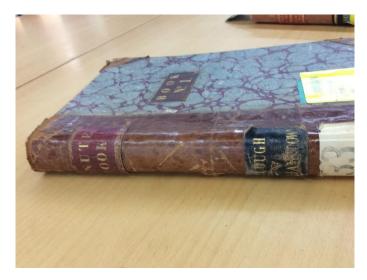
This story suggests She-oak was an important and venerated species with an important cultural value to the Boonwurrung. Its information adds to the evidence supporting the strong connection of the Boonwurrung to the She-oaks of Koort Boork Boork and The Message Tree in particular. It seems fair to conclude is that the Boonwurrung would never have declared The Message Tree as "neither useful nor ornamental" as the 1856 Editor of the Williamstown Chronicle states in the following editorial:

The Editorial on the Williamstown Council Proceedings reported in the Williamstown Chronicle of 27 December 1856, page 3

WOODMAN, SPARE THAT TREE- In the report of the proceedings of the last meeting of our Municipal Council, published this day, we observe that a petition was presented to that body signed by fifty-five rate-payers of Williamstown, praying "that the Notice Tree," situated the foot of Thompson-street, might remain undisturbed by the works in course of construction in Nelson-place," and we find that the disposal of this petition was not affected without some difficulty. It appears, however, that the Council after several motions had been put and rejected, came to the conclusion that " the tree be removed, if practicable, to the public gardens, provided that such removal would not interfere with the works in progress." We are not in the habit of laughing at people when they happen to differ with us in opinion upon any point, nor are we given to fault-finding with the decisions of our Council in the performance of their duties. The former have a perfect right to think as they please, and the latter have, we I believe, generally adopted such measures for the public good as were judicious and practicable. But, in the present instance, we must say, that if the petitioning for the undisturbed repose of a withered gum-tree in the centre of our principal street is not sufficient to create a smile, then we do not know what is: and if there is one thing which is calculated to place our risibles in a state of rebellion, it is the idea of transmitting the old **gum-tree** to our public gardens. Does this **gum-tree** possess any peculiar qualities which are distinct from other gum-trees? If so, we would like to have these qualities defined. But if, on the other hand, this old tree has nothing more than its age and blighted aspect to recommend its existence, we say, by all means cut it down. We are quite certain that, as it now stands, it is neither useful nor ornamental, and the sooner it is removed out of the way the better. If we desire to plant trees in our streets or gardens, let us have trees that will be of use and worth looking at, and not such a wretched-looking thing as this.

PROV (Public Records Office of Victoria) Sources:

A search of PROV for records potentially referring to The Message Tree yields one important source from 43 relevant items. This was a hand-written minute book for the Borough of Williamstown for 1856-57. This was the first ever minute book for municipal governance in Hobson's Bay.



The minute book provides the official record of the Council proceeding involving matters such as the decision to let tenders to mark out and 'metal' the roads of the town as one of the first decision. Like all decisions in the first months of the Council this was a unanimous decision.

This record also confirms that the plan to remove the Message Tree followed behind unanimous decisions to proceed with construction of the streets and the introduction of bylaws to ensure streets were kept clear of any 'encroachment'.

The tender for the work to mark out and 'metal' Nelson Parade was unanimously approved on 12 December 1856. The street width had been set by the colonial government on 4 May 1855, prior to the creation of Williamstown Council. It seems that no one on Council had foreseen or anticipated a public outcry as a result of these decision. This came in the form of a spirited petition and campaign to alter the roadway to pass around the Ancient Sheoak.

The public petition to suspend the works came only 6 days later at the meeting of the 18th of December 1856. The minutes read:

Petition

The Chairman presented a petition from fifty-five ratepayers of the district praying the Council to instruct their Surveyor of the advisability of making a diversion in the roadway

now in course of construction in Nelson Place so as to leave the <u>Notice Tree</u> situated at the foot of Thompson Street undisturbed.

This immediately led Cr Stewart (Mover) and Cr Moxham (Seconder) to request the Standing Orders (usual order of Council business) be suspended to allow the matter to be discussed.

Presumably some discussion took place, which was not recorded in minutes, followed by this motion by **Cr Stewart** (Mover) and seconded by the Chairman, Cr Mason:

That the contractor be allow to proceed with Contract no 1 in accordance with the specification upon which he framed his tender.

Contract No 1 was, of course, the tender that included the plan to remove The Message Tree.

This then led to **Cr Moxham** (Mover) and Cr Langford (Seconder) putting forward an amendment as follows:

That the tree standing in Nelson Place remain in its present place until the road is more required.

This then led to a further amendment from **Cr Verdon** (Mover) and Cr Armstrong (Seconder) as follows:

That the petition be received and that the tree be preserved and removed to the Public Gardens if practicable.

Cr Vernon's motion (the last one put) **lost:** Mover and seconder for and Cr Langford and Cr Steward against.

Cr Moxham's motion (the one to save the tree) was **lost**: Mover and seconder for and Crs Maclean, Stewart, Verdon and Armstrong against.

Cr Stewart's initial motion was also **lost**: Crs Maclean, Mason (Chairman) and Steward for with Crs Verdon, Armstrong, Landford and Moxham against.

This then gave rise to a fourth motion moved by Cr Verdon with Cr Stewart (seconder):

That with reference to the petition just received; the tree be removed if practicable to the Public Gardens, provided that such a course will not interfere with the Public Works now in progress.

This immediately gave rise to another amendment from Cr Maclean (Mover) and Chairman Mason (seconder):

That the contractor be instructed to suspend the removal of the Notice Tree for a week to enable its admirers to remove it to the public gardens.

Cr Maclean's motion was **lost** with only the mover and seconder for and Crs Verdon, Armstrong, Stewart, Langford and Moxham against.

Cr Verdon's initial motion was **carried** with Crs Verdon, Stewart, Armstrong for and Cr Maclean and Langford against.

Interestingly Cr Moxham does not show us as a vote against the initial motion which would have tied the vote and required Cr Mason's vote.

So, the Council decision became to instruct the contractor "to suspend the removal of the Notice Tree for a week to enable its admirers to remove it to the public gardens".

Then during a part of the night dedicated to the Public Works Committee Cr Moxham (mover) and Cr Langford (seconder) comes back with a motion to suspend the Standing Orders of that committee to allow consideration of another motion regarding the Notice Tree.

In response the Chairman (Cr Mason) moves a motion seconded by Cr Stewart that Standing Orders NOT be suspended.

For Cr Mason's amendment Crs Stewart, Maclean, Verdon and Armstrong stood in favour For the motion by Cr Moxham only the Crs Moxham and Langford stood in favour.

Standing Orders were therefore not suspended to admit further discussion on the Notice Tree.

Then at the end of the meeting Cr Moxham put forward a 'Notice of Motion' to be considered as follows:

To move that the contractor for contractor no 1 be requested to stay all his work near the old tree until he be instructed b Council to carry out the same.

The contest continued at the next Council meeting on the 29th of December 1856. At this meeting the Chairman, Cr Mason, was absent at an official function leaving Cr Vernon taking the Chair for the night and only six councillors for any vote.

Cr Moxham's notice of motion from the last meeting received a seconder from Cr Langford as was put forward again in this form of wording:

That the contractor for No 1 Contract be requested to stay all works near the old tree in Nelson Place until he shall be instructed by this Council to carry on the same.

The motion was **lost** with only Crs Moxham and Langford voting for while Crs Maclean, Armstrong and Verdon (the Acting Chairman) voted against.

The tree was soon after this meeting.

The decision to remove the Message Tree from Nelson Place created the very first ever divided vote in the Williamstown Council chamber.

And Ironic Post-script:

An ironic post to the story of the campaign to retain the Message Tree and move the divert the roadway around it come through a careful analysis of street measurements. In 1856 the Road Easement for Nelson Place was planned and surveyed to be 99 feet from building to building (Elsum, 1934, p.69). Of this the road was to be 75 feet and the footpath 12 feet either side. This is how the road was therefore constructed in 1856. It can be therefore safely assumed that the Message Tree Stood within the 75 foot of the roadway, thus requiring its removal.

As time moved on, however, the 75 foot roadway was reduced to enable a nature strip to be constructed in which Council then planted English Elm Trees. This effectively means that the Message Tree may have occupied the same position in the current nature strip where the English Elms now stand.

Other Relevant Accounts from after 1857:

THE DYING SPEECHE OF THE OLD SHEOAK TREE.
ADDRESSED TO THIE WILLIAMSTOWN COUNCIL.

The following effusion, written '25 years ago, recently came into the hand of an old resident, who gave it to us for publication.

[what followed in this article was the poet by James Wallace as published in the 1889 Essay by Andrew Curtain]

Recollections from 1911 – From a Mrs Murray

Published in the Williamstown Chronicle of 1 April 1911

... The blacks held corroborees near Goble's hotel, near where the fire station now is...

The boats of Hall, the carrier, used to come alongside the old Gem pier. It was then only a small jetty and the waves used to break over it. There was an old sheoak tree there, where notices

used to be posted up. The old Chronicle office in Ann street, kept by Mr Stephens, I can remember well. On the corner opposite the Customs House, I have often seen men in the stocks, and I lived for some time at the water police station near by, in the time of Captain Harvey.

From W. Cheney of 12 Kent St Richmond to the Editor

In the Williamstown Chronicle of 29 March 1910.

Regarding Early Days of Williamstown.

A school was established in con nection with St. Mary's, and Mr James Wallace was appointed head teacher. This gentleman was a frequent contributor to the old Chronicle, and sometimes he in dulged in the "Poet's Corner," and was rather inclined to satirical humour now and again. Near where the Customs-house now stands there existed a spreading old she-oak tree, surrounded with seats, and being the favorite resort of the watermen they were naturally indignant when the borough council decided to cut it down.

One councillor pleaded hard for the preservation of the old land-mark, and Mr Wallace sympathized with him after this fashion in the columns of The Chronicle:

"Sage Councillor Moxham sincerly I thank

Although I'm not long destined to stand on my shank-....

Who could dream that his bosom so tender could be,

As to plead for the life of an old she-oak tree"

The following recollection by Miss Emma Sutton describes a number of trees existing in the early years of Williamstown including She-oak but also gum, wattle, wild cherry and ti-tree. Emma Sutton remembers ti-tree as most abundant.

Given that She-oak was not the only tree in existence at Koort Boork Boork, and possibly less abundant than Ti-tree, the naming of the place by the Boonwurrung as a place of "she oaks" adds to the picture of how much the importance the Boonwurrung placed on the tree.

It may also be fair to assume that in the late 1830s when British colonists were mostly constructing dwellings from local bush timbers, that She-oak may have, in these years, been favoured. One of the features of She-oak timber was it has straight grained timber conducive to both splitting and squaring with an adze. This made it useful to shape into posts or rails, roofing shingles or simply to split as firewood. It was, however, less durable in the ground compared to some gum species.

At Woodlands Historic Park in Oaklands Junction (near Melbourne Airport) there is a surviving building thought to be from the early 1840s with a She-oak Shingle Roof which was later preserved by a layer of galvanised roofing iron being laid over the shingles. The growth rings on these shingles indicate very large She-oak Trees existed in that part of Melbourne at the time of construction but were apparently absent from the landscape some 30 years later. This suggests that large She-oaks were used up quickly in the first years of colonisation. This may have fundamentally changed the proportion of She-oaks to other species in Williamstown very quickly, as it did elsewhere around Melbourne.

Memories from Miss Emma Sutton (100 year in Feb 1940) in the Williamstown Chronicle of 9

December 1939, page 3 on the Early Williamstown Days. (A nice picture of the town in 1840)

MEMORIES BY-- MISS -SUTTON. EARLY WILLIAMSTOWN DAYS. t Miss Emma Sutton, who will be 100 years old next February, wrote some interesting memories some time ago of her early life in Williamstown, v where she was brought as an infant j in 1840. She writes: The writer remembers' just one long street in the pretty little "Fish-I ing Village," so called in those days There were very few houses in the 3 front street-Butler's and Liarlet's inns, a general store, a butcher's I shop and a few cottages. Capta'n Lovell lived in one, and at the back of his premises there was *.. large 4 stone building which was the stock ade, where prisoners were confined. : The Lovells were very kind and fre- I quently gave parties to the young people. The post office was at the general store, and everyone had to call for their letters. Access to Melbourne was very diffi cult; the only way was by boat, ur I driving overland which took a very long time, end= if you happened to be late leaving the city you would have most likely to camp under Batman's Hill, as the writer had to do on one occasion. The principal and most agreeable way to Melbourne was by boat; a boat kept entirely for. passengers ano carrying goods to this town. It was owned by two brothers, Messrs James and William Hall, who went to Melbourne every morning and returned in the evening loaded with goods, for that was the only way that this town could be supplied. When the sunny days came and melted the snow on the mountains, and the rivers and the streams over flowed, we had our little wharf al most covered with water, so that it

was not an easy thing for the fishermen to get to their boats. The small steamer Vesta was a great

boon to the 'town, but the fare to' Melbourne was so high at first that only a: few people travelled in her. I think, if I remember rightly, the fare was 5/. In those primitive days there were stocks used as a punish ment, but only for a short time. They were soon done away with. The first collector of Customs was Mr MacKay. Part of his house is still standing in Thompson-street. Dr. Hunt and Dr. Wilkins were the first doctors to practice in Williamstown. Drs. Maclean and Figg followed. The. latter were kind and clever, and ever ready to support anything that was for the benefit, of the people. There were three denominational day schools. I mention Wesleyan first because Mr Stone, from Brighton, in 1842 opened a day school in the little wooden building which was used for divine service on the Sabbath. Mr and Mrs Bromilow were the first teachers of the Church of rEngland day school, Mr Summerville being the first clergyman, Mr Wallace the first master of the Catholic school, Father Geoghegan the first priest. Perhaps someone will remember the quaint little houses that Captain Thomas built. These were called "Thomas Square." They were I built just opposite where the Market 1 Reserve is now. The goats had plenty of shelter under these places of abode, and one had to climb several steps before they could enter the front door: but for all that they were always let.

We had three wells between the back beach-and Hannan's farm. From these the people of Williamstown were supplied with fresh water, and the charge for a cask of water be ing sometimes one pound, but never less than ten shillings. In the early days nearly every householder kept a cow, so we had plenty of fresh milk with cream on the top. Separators were unknown then. No one could ever imagine that this town was hilly, but memory takes me back to the billowy mass of little hills 'from the end of Ann street to the old cemetery. This was a favorite walk through the trees to the cemetery, and then to the flag staff, which was erected near where the lighthouse is. Near by was a lovely garden, enclosed by a stone

wall. This garden was made by the prisoners from the hulk Deborah, her moorage being a short distance from the little stone pier.

The native trees were the she-oak, gum, wattle, wild cherry and ti-tree, the latter in great abundance. Native flowers: Violet, daisy, sweet briar, bluebell, convolvulus, all colors of everlasting flowers, and many other small flowers. We had plenty of nettles, but this plant is not a favorite with anyone. Yet they are far from being useless. A noted doctor has made this plant his peculiar study, and states that lint dipped in nettle juice and put up the nose has been known to stay the bleeding of the nose when all other remedies had failed. The very commonest plant in the world speaks of our Heavenly Father's love.

We had some pretty birds, more parrots than others. There was a dear little bird that we called the summer bird, and it used to live in the ti-tree at the back beach. It was very easily caught, which was fine fun for the children when they went to bathe. The magpie and the kookaburra are well known even now. As the town became more populated the birds went- into the interior.

Hoping that my recollections may be a little interesting, I will now say 'Au revoir." From the *Williamstown Chronicle of 17 November 1928, Page 4.* Memories of George Spotswood Age 83 years.

"The Herald," October 9, 1924.
BORN AT WILLIAMSTOWN 83 YEARS AGO.
DECEMBER 30, 1840. MEMORIES OF EARLY DAYS.
Living quietly in an old-fashioned cottage at Spotswood is Williamstown's first native-born white man.
He is Mr. George Spotswood, after whose father the suburb was named as a mark of respect to his earnest work in developing the locality.
Mr. Spotswood was born in Little
Nelson-street, on December 30, 1840, between Thompson and Ann streets.
He is looking hale and hearty....

PIONEER WHITE MAN.

In those days trees drooping over the lower reaches of the Yarra and thick bushes adorning its banks made it one of the prettiest spots Mr. Spotswood had ever seen.
Native companions, wild turkey,
wild cats, and wild duck abounded
in the district. At times flights of
wild duck were so thick that they
used to shade the sun for as long as
a minute, says Mr. Spotswood.....

For many years, according to Mr. Spotswood, the favorite picnicking spot around Melbourne was Fishermen's Bend, the scrub on which was not so dense as elsewhere. He remembers seeing tribes of blacks in this locality, which was a favored camping place.

...Opposite Gem pier there used to be stocks, where offenders were punished. Opposite the present Custom House was a she-oak tree, which was used for advertising any requirements needed in the village.

When Capt. Dalgarno was skipper of the ship "Locknayar," before the departure of the ship, he used to conduct divine service in the old building where the "Advertiser" office is now located, in Nelson-place. The building was used as a school and church, and Mr. Spotswood, as a boy, remembered seeing the black gins swimming in the bay opposite.

Memories of Mrs Mary Siedel of Aitken Street Williamstown, 81 years

Published in the Williamstown Chronicle of 30 November 1935, page 4. (from Trove.nla.gov.au)

Mrs Mary Seidel, of Aitken street, Williamstown, .who' was 81 on Mon-' Cay, and is one of the ,two., oldest?' natives of. that: city. Her first home was . one. of_ several Aronr cottages brought from England a1nd erected on the waterfront .when Williamstown was almost a wilderness. Mrs. Seidel can rer?mmber .when Williamstown's fresh water supply was. drawn from. three private wells and sold at 5/ 'a'cask, and 'when notices of public interest were posted on. the trunk of a large sheoak tree which stood in :the main thoroughfare., ...

Mr R. J. Mooney, "a well-known resident of 'Hyde street, Footscray, and.; also the youngest, son of, Mr J. . E. Mooney, of Kororoit-areek road, is one of the. two candidates contesting 'an. election as representative of railway employees on the State superannua. tion board. Mr Mooney has been president of the Hyde street Central School committee since 1931, and he is also president, of the Yarraville A.L.P., a representative on the. Wil liamstown. Town State . Electrical Council, and a repiesentative on the Federal Campaign Council of' that body. Mr Mooney is also a past presi dent. of the Railway Returned Soldiers and is at. present vice-president.

Report by Mr McAlister remembering James Wallace and the campaign to save the Old Message Tree

In the Williamstown Chronicle of 3 April 1915, page 3 (Source - Trove)

Williamstown's Poet Laureate PAPER eR Ma. A. McALISTER. ON Saturday evening, 20th inst, an interesting paper was read before the Presbyterian Literary Society by Mr A. McAlister. His subject was, " Mr. James Wallace, Williamstown's Poet Laureate in the Fifties." Quite a number of interesting reminiscences were recalled by the writer of the paper, and the members showed their appreciation by a unanimous vote of thanks, which was moved by Mr Don. Murray, seconded by Mr John Cameron and supported by Messrs Jas Scott, D. Livingstone, L. Hansen, W. Regan and the chairman. Mr McAlister made a fitting reply. Reference was made to.a giant she oak tree (which grew on a spot adjacent to Craigantina Buildings, in Nelson place), as an advertising medium and an organ of public opinion. Did any one want a servant, they pasted a notice on the tree, had a horse for sale, or a job to be doneby tender, dog-lost, boat tackle stolen, the public were made aware of it by a poster on the tree. Mr Wallace had immortalised this tree in prose. He was the oldest school master in the colony and the teacher of- the first public school opened in Williamstown. He landed here in 1841, and afterwards took charge of the children of the Roman Catholic denomination, until he was removed to Geelong in the sixties, to take charge of the school there. Mr Wallace's earliest traditions regarding the old -tree is that long before this country was colonised, it was held in almost religious veneration by the aboriginals, that it was beneath its umbrageous shade they held their councils, and that after a battle with a hostile tribe it was at the foot of this tree they regaled upon their roasted captives. The next item of tradition is that upon one grand joyous occasion all the white men in the colony assembled beneath it.. and drank undiluted rum out of

Government pannikins, until they became so joyous that they lay down and sought refuge from the burdens of their bliss. A circular seat was fixed around it later, and it became the favorite resting place of those out .of employment. In 1848 a man named Matthew Luck was murdered-at Stony Creek by a convict, and Mr Wallace passed the spot some hours after and wrote some verses bearing on the murder. Two fishermen were struck by lightning while engaged in the river Yarra, and that also called forth a poem of ten verses. The only road to Melbourne then was over the Stony Creek ford, then across the Saltwater river ferry, where the Footscray bridge now stands. Mr William Hall's boat sailed regularly between Williamstown I and Melbourne on Royal mail service, and used to accommodate a number of passengers at the rate of "a bob a nob," as he jocularly called it. The front beach from Cole street to the Gem pier, in the fifties and sixties, was more like a shipbuilding yard than an open beach. . Messrs Dave and Oswald, McLean and Kilgour, Wright and the White Brothers all had their heavy timber piled up there.

Memories of Miss E. Sutton of 4 Dover-road writes on Early Williamstown in the Williamstown Chronicle of 13 August 1921, page 2 (in Trove)

EARLY WILLIAMSTOWN. Miss Sutton, whose residence in this city goes back for 81 years, is the oldest recorded resident. Mrs. Wilkinson, of Ascot Vale, who is the mother-in-law of Mr. H. Stewart, Nelson-place, was born on November 5, 1842, at the corner of Thompson and Nelson-streets. Mr. F. S. Young, "Chronicle" Office, desires to record the names of any old residents or natives of the city. In our reference to Mrs. Rees last week, we should have stated that her parents were Mr. and Mrs. McMahon, who for some years kept a hotel at Deer Park. Her grandparents were named Fitzgerald. Miss E. Sutton, of 4 Dover-road, writes:--"I am glad to find there is someone taking an interest in the doings of early residents. Some of us do not foreget the pleasing and graceful act of the ex-Mayor and Mayoress, who invited all the old folks in Williamstown to a pleasant musical afternoon in the Town Hall. Some who were there have passed away, but those remaining will never forget that afternoon. I have been in Williamstown 81 years, so that I have known this town in its infancy." Mrs. Elsum. of 190 Osborne-street. has lived in Williamstown since 1853. In that year there was no council, and, consequently, there were no roads or paths except a few which were made by the convicts, and all the land from Beach station northwards to Melbourne was a large sheoak forest. The sand from the beach came up over the land to where Os borne-street now stands. Where Fort Gellibrand and the Drill Hall are now was a convict station. The convicts came to work from the "hulks" (ships anchored between Williamstown and Port Melbourne). They were engaged making roads, etc., until they had "served their time," when they were shipped back to England and given a

"free ticket." The road from the Fort past the cricket ground, the Break water pier and the Time Ball Tower (then a lighthouse) are results of convict labor. One day, Capt. Price who was officer in charge of a party of convicts, when one of them, whom Price had previously wronged, struck him on the head with a pick. In the excitement that followed several of the prisoners escaped to the bush. For a few days the residents of the -town were forced to remain indoors as much as possible, for fear of being robbed or murdered. However, the escaped men were soon recaptured by some warders, who found them hiding in some thick bush near the beach. In those days the people did not have a water supply from the Yan Yean, and, consequently, they had to buy water, which sometimes cost as much as ten to twelve shillings a cask. At the spot where the Thompson-street bridge is now was a water hole, from which the townspeople drew their supplies, but this was stopped when a drunken man drowned himself there. Sometimes, when the water casks would crack or the seams open, the precious liquid began to leak out, and Mrs. Elstum (then Miss Eldershaw) re members often filling up the cracks ind seams with soap. The taste of the water after these remedial measures had been applied may be better left to the reader's imagination than des cribed.

At this time, by the Gem pier, there was a gigantic gum tree, with seats' arranged around it, and on the trunk of this tree was posted the news of the town.

When the then Prince of Wales was marrie d, the people of Williamstown indulged in a great feast, just a little to the rear of where the Mechanics Institute now stands. As the weather was very bad, and rain'had fallen earlier In the day, the ground was anything but pleasant. In spite of these difficulties, however, the men built a huge bon-fire, and got a good supply of logs to keep it going all night. They then killed a bullock and roasted it whole. As someone had contributed

two -barrels of beer, the men were soon drunk. While in this intoxicated. condition they commenced slashing. pieces from the bullock whilst it was only, half-cooked, and eating it like somany savages. This carousal ended far into the morning, and those who took no part in the feast watched it from a respectable distance, Mrs, Elsum being one of the latter. When one wished to go from Williamstown to Melbourne he had to go by boat (up the Yarra) or ferry to Port Melbourne, and either of these methods occupied fully half a day. As the only other way was to walk or drive, the Government eventually laid down a railway line to connect the two places. When this line was completed, the citizens of the town celebrated the event by having a big bonfire on the Ann-street pier.

Reverend J. T. Kelly's Address on the City's Coat of Arms and 'Tree of Knowledge' – the Message Tree from the bottom of Thompson Street.

In the Williamstown Chronicle 24 April 1937, page 2 (in Trove)

THE CITY'S COAT OF **ARMS** ADDRESS BY REV. J. T. KELLY. Addressing the councillors at a civic centenary service at the North Presbyterian Church, on Sunday evening, April 11, Rev. J. T. Kelly, the pastor, gave a most interesting description of the council crest. In the course of his remarks he said: "We, on this 100th anniversary, ascribe thanksgiving and honour to God, not only with our lips but with our hearts. To those who were born or brought up or lived most of their lives here, I can understand the drawing back to the old place with all its varied memories, some of them very sacred and precious. I saw something of that yesterday morning at the mayoral reception to those who had come back. I have been reading the 'History of Williamstown' and have found it is exceptionally inter esting and instructional-it is a book every lover of Williamstown should

have. It goes back to the earliest days of the city and tells of the first industries, of the first shops in Nel son place, of the first tradesmen, of the first government of the city, and of the first councillors. It tells of the first court room and police mag istrate. As there was no accommoda tion for prisoners, the old system of stocks were adopted. These were placed near the corner of Nelson place and Thompson street, and over spreading them was a large sheoak tree which was known as 'the tree of knowledge,' for on it was posted all the public notices.

"It tells of the first newspaper, of the first schools, and also of the first religious services and the gradual growth of the churches. Existing re cords report an open air service held in March, 1838, at which Rev. James Smith officiated, and it is recorded that the whole of the population of the settlement, irrespective of creed or sect, attended.

"The history of the city is a re markable and romantic one, and it has been depicted in its coat of arms. It takes one's thoughts back to the story of the early pioneers. It is surmounted by the Royal coat of arms, for the city was named after the then reigning. King, William IV., who was known as 'the "bluff sailor King.

On the left top. quarter is a ship a sailing ship. On the left bottom quarter the sun and a fighthouse. The story of the city has always been associated with shipping, with pilots and the naval reserve. It' was the first seaport of the colony. Brigs, cutters and schooners with little of comfort (none of them more than 50 or 60 tons) arrived at Point Gellibrand after days and weeks of storms in the treacherous shales and un charted waters.

"The first lighthouse in Victoria, we are told, was a conspicuous feature of the settlement. It consisted of .t rough wooden stagihg with a moaest oil lamp on the top. There has been a light on the point continuously since 1840.

"On the top right quarter is an anchor. The settlement before using

the name of Williamstown was known as 'The Anchorage.' It was the an chorage of the colony. Before the jetty was built, and after, the sheep and cattle were swum ashore, "Also on that top right hand quar ter are two flags,, one of them ap parently the Union Jack. On three "On the bottom left quarter is a locomotive indicative no doubt of the principal industry of this city-symbol of industry. Eighty-one years ago (1856) the workshops of the Victorian Railways were edcted at the end of Nelson parade, and were there for 32 years till the present Newport Work shops were occupied.

"At the bottom of the crest is the mote of the city. It is a short one of two words in Latin, 'In commen dam,' and the best translation are the words 'In trust.' The affairs of this city have been entrusted to us who are the councillors and citizens, Not to councillors only, but to citi zens. We all have the responsibility of doing our part. There is need to day for a civic spirit among our citizens.

"Our city was called after a King., and the King's motto is 'God and my right.' He asks for an allegiance and Icyalty. Of the two flags on the crest, one is the Union Jack--the symbol of patriotism and Iyoalty, and that we belong to a great Empire and

Commonwealth, and we cannot expect God's guidance and blessing un

From the Wiliamstown Chronicle of 9 Feb 1884, page 3 recalling the campaign to save the Message Tree in 1857 by James Wallace. It is a reprint of his address to Council on 19 January 1857, some 27 years earlier. Note that this reprint sets the original year for this poem as 1859, some 25 years earlier but the tree had been cut down before then).

THE DYING SPEECHE OF THE OLD SHEOAK TREE. ADDRESSED TO THIE WILLIAMSTOWN COUNCIL.

[The following effusion, written 25 years ago, recently came into the hand of an old resident, who gave it to us for publication.

Sage Councillor' Moxham sincerely I thank Though I'm not long destined to stand on my shank Who would think his rough bosom so tender could be As to plead for the life of an old sheoak tree! It proves that he owns the bright soul of a poet
Though dull Williamstonians appear not to know it;
His love of the beautiful and the sublime.
Being rather ecstatics for blank verse or rhyme.
Ere Bret with his placards disfigured my trunk,
Or Christian new chums 'neath my shade got dead drunk,
When sable-skinned heroes sat round me and boasted,
While feasting on foes they had' vanquished and roasted,

O then, if you saw me you'd fall on your knees,
And pay me due homage as Queen of Oak Trees!
But now I must fall by the axe of improvement,
While none but brave Moxham opposed the movement.
It is true he was backed by dear kind Captain LangfordBut candidly speaking he scarce can be thanked for't,
His heart is so tender and manners so civil,
He seconds all motions for good or for evil.

When I think on the .war-dances, feasting and bobbery, While the woods and shores echoed the joyous corrobery,

It grieves me to think that I must fall a martyr To suite the convenience of fishman and carter. Jack Armstrong where is thy goodness of heart So famously taking a poor fellows part? How oft neath my shade after daily turmoil, You indulge in a yarn, in a smoke and a coil,

E're I kis Mother Earth let me claim your protection, Don't give me to Doctor MacLean for dissection; That versatile bright Escalapian spark Would convert my old hide to Peruvian bark; And though it might render his patients a pill It would also assist to elongate his bill.

With my last dying breath I will utter this prayer
That Verden or Mason may never be Mayor!
May the rude fist of Politics constantly box them,
That laughed down the motion of chivalrous Moxham.
Magnanimous Moxham thou noble of soul
May thy name ever stand at the top of the poll,
May eloquence flow from thy persuasive tongue,
Till applause from the lips of opponents be wrung;
And when thou hast reached the proud zenith of fame,
And Knighthood's bright halo encircles thy name,
Let me beg that the crest on thy chariot shall be
Nin placards stuck round on an old She-oak tree.

The Lyre of Old Port Phillip. January 19th. [1857]

Recollections of W.R. Hall (whose father was William Hall Jnr) published in the Williamstown Chronicle on 21 February 1920

EARLY WILLIAMSTOWN By W. R. Hall, F.R.A.S. No 1.

Relating to early Williamstown, I have compiled some information from my late father's (William Hall, jun.) books and papers, and my own personal knowledge, which may be of interest to your readers. My father landed with his parents, brothers and sisters (one of the brothers still alive, Thos. Noad Hill, and a resident of Newport), at what is now known as the Gem Pier, on the 23rd June, 1840, from the ship "Andromach" (Thos. New, Captain). The ship sailed from Plymouth on 29th February, 1840. Touching the Gem Pier question, the followiing notices appeared in general orders:-

Rules and regulations to be observed on the jetty at Williamstown 5, William 4th, No. 13, 1840: No. 1. No wheel carriage of any description, and no horse or

description, and no horse or cattle, are permitted to be upon the jetty for any purpose whatever.

No. 2. No nuisance is to be permitted, nor any filth or rubbish to be laid on the jetty.

No. 3. No person to loiter on the jetty or to remain there except to embark or land.

No. 4. No vessel or boat is to be made fast to the jetty.

No. 5. Any goods landed on the jetty are to be immediately removed.

No. 6. No goods are to be landed on the jetty after sunset.

No. 7. Any person committing a violation of any of the above regulations is subject to a fine of Twenty (20) shillings. Signed.

W. LONSDALE, P.M. THOS. WILLS, J.P.

Mr. Thomas Haines, who had a butchering business opposite this pier (Allotment 3, Block 3, purchased by Mr. Hugh McLean, for £50, at the first land sale, June 1, 1837), engaged the whole of the Hall family, at £80 a year and rations.

There is a doubt as to where the first decent building was erected. Some say that Mr. Hugh McLean has the credit—while others, that the building near the corner of Cole and Little Nelsonstreets (bought by Capt. W. Leard, for £46), which was built of hardwood, with partitions of wattle or basket work of long young saplings of ti-tree, daubed or plastered over on both sides, and the roof of thatch. It was the first substantial building in the town, and the original "Ship Inn," and known as Captain Bowden's, though he did not have the license in his name, but that of Fawn's. On the 17th April, 1840, the license was renewed in the name of James Muir, from Van Dieman's Land. In 1842 Mr. Butler then became the licensee. He was a single man, but some time afterwards married. Later, he bought the property where the Commercial Bank stood in 1889, and removed there, taking the license with him; so the newly-acquired property became the "Ship Inn," and the original building became a boarding house for some years, and occupied by, William Outin, a boatman. In 1850, Mr. Edward Jenniings became the tenant, and started a bakery, in opposition to Geo. Wilsmore and James Conroy. Jennings also obtained a license for the old building, and called it the "Steam Packet" Hotel. John Levien started the first butchering business in Williamstown, near the "Woolpack Hotel." The first land sales took place at Melbourne on June 1, 1837. Mr. Hugh McLean bought Allotment 3, Block 3, for £50; R. S.

Webb, Allotment 4, for £40 J.

McNamara, Allotment 5, for £45;

William Hutton, Allotment 6, for

£45; James Simpson Allotment 7,

for £47; J. F. Strachan, Allotment

8, for £52; William Leard, Allotment, 9, for £46. All these lots

faced Nelson-parade, between

Thompson-street and Cole-street.

Another sale, this time at Syd-

ney, September 13,1838. The following were the prices realised:—

Ann-street to Thompson-street,

Block 2, Allotment 1, W. J. Cape,

£68/8/-; Allotment 2, W. J. Cape,

£39/18/-; Allotment 3, J. J: Smith,

£32/6/-; Allotment, 4, H. Davis,

£30/8/-: Allotment 5, W. Leard,

£26/12/-; Allotment 6, W. Kerr,

£51/6/-; Allotment 7, J. Stafford,

£19; Allotment 8, S. J. Brown,

£72/4/-; Allotment 9, Geo. James,

£30/8/-; Allotment 20, J. P.

Smith, £30/8/-.

Block 4, between Parker and

Pascoe - streets: Allotments 1,

2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, Hughes and Hoskings, from £39/18/- down to

£30/8/-: Allotment 7. E. D.

O'Reilly, £49/8/-; Allotments 8,

9, to 20, Hughes and Hoskings,

£117/16/- to £39/18/-. The prices

realised at this Sydney sale were

higher than the Melbourne one.

In 1840 it was rumored that

Hughes and Hoskings suspended

payments, and that an extensive

sale of land belonging to them

would take place, nearly 26,000

acres.

On Thursday, September 10,

1840, the Auction Company,

through Mr. Brodie, disposed of

27 allotments, proceeds of sale being £6,488.

The allotment at the corner of

Cecil and Parker-streets was

bought by James Purves for £354.

The writer was born on this allot-

ment. In 1847 the Government sold

Allotment 9, Block 2, north of

Ferguson-street, 80 acres 3 roods

4 perches, to Mr. Avery, the

Crown Lands Commissioner, at £2

per acre, which price probably

Mr. Avery considered too much, so

he forfeited his deposit, and in

1848 Messrs. Highett and Wiekham, two solicitors, purchased it at about £3/10/- per acre. Williamstown proper at this time did not extend beyond Ferguson street.

EARLY WILLIAMSTOWN.

By W. A. Hall, F. R. A. S. No 2.

The next three (3) blocks, Allotment 10, 91 acres 1 rood 5 perches; Allotment 11, 70 acres 3 roods 32 perches; Allotment 12, 87 acres 3 roods 28 perches, up to Hall's farm - was bought by Capt. Geo. Ward-Cole at all average of about £3 per acre.

The greater portion of Allotment 12 was laid out as a township, called Greenwich, and known as such by the early residents. The first sale, October, 1853, stipulated that no lot of a quarter of an acre would be sold for less than £100.

The triangular block, bounded by Melbourne-road, Station-street and F'erguson-street, was bought by J. Courtis, J. Kingston and J. Moxham.

The greatest drawback to the town had been the want of fresh water. In the latter end of 1839, Messrs. Langhorne and Co. succeeded by sinking a well, and obtained an excellent supply at a depth of about 15 feet from the surface. The position of the well was about 200 feet from the south end of Victoria-street.

The building known as the brewery was built by Langhorne Brothers as wool stores, and this store was afterwards used as a stockade for prisoners. When my father landed, Williamstown consisted of two (2) hotels - the "Ship Inn" and "Woolpack;" another called the "Albion" opened later - a portion of the present watch-house, one general store and bakery, some half-dozen weatherboard houses, a few tents and a few sod and turf huts. Many other buildings were put up before the end of the year. There was great stagnation of trade before the end of 1841, and many insolvencies. Cottages in course of erection were left unfinished, business quickly sprung into existence, and quickly closed, real estate droppitng to about its former value. The first land boom was in 1840. In Kerr's Directory of Port Phillip, 1841, the following names of residents appear :- J. Dawson, hotelkeeper; J. Hill, auctioneer; W. Lair, settler; Langhorne Bros., merchants; J. Levien, butcher; A. McNaughton, lighthouse keeper; Alex. McPherson, pilot; J. Stafford, landing waiter; W. Timothy, pilot; J. Trundell, pilot; Captain Lewes; harbor master; and W.

A Birdseye View of Williamstown in 1840. - The foreshore towards Gellibrand Point, from the Gem pier, was studded with a kind of scrub or bush, called salt bush; on the north side of the pier was another kind called mangrove; between what is now Ann street and Morris-street, and on the verge of the bay, there was a large mud flat, on which large numbers of various wild fowl would sometimes assemble. Along where Nelson-parade is, there was a bank or ridge of black sand and shell, which was covered with fine grass. Immediately behind the bank was a depression, extending from the site of Cole-street to near Gellibrand Point. In these depressions stagnant water would lie for several months; then, inland, a sort of clay soil, thickly studded with sheoak, some native cherry and blackwood - no gums. There was a goodly number of trees blown down, with their roots dragged out of the ground, and branches blown off. Between the branches and trees so felled, the grass was very thick, long and abundant. In the distance it resembled a crop of corn. At this time there was very little stock to consume or trample it down. The trees at the Back Beach, near where the gardens are, were stunted and leaning much from the effects of the north-west wind; the branches were also stripped of their foliage on the sea side. Rocks were also abundant. A crescent route, with a horse and dray, had to be taken to get to a

slaughter house at the bottom end of Gifford steet. There was also a belt of trees skirting the bay and river, from Gellibrand Point to the mouth of Stony Creek, near where Yarraville is. This belt of trees extended back from the shore, varying half a mile to one mile, the greatest distance being about the Newport Station. In defining the area covered with trees of Williamstown proper, the boundary was, say, from the bay along Gifford-street, thence along

Lyons-street, up to Ferguson street to Melbourne-road, Betwixt Lyons-street and the bay, by the bathing ground, there was a

plain, except a small clump not

far from where the back of the

Mechanics' Institute now is.

There was also a strip of land

covered with trees, from Melbourne-road, top of Stevedore street, down Victoria-street, west side, to near the beach. This

strip, between North Williamstown station and the beach, was

purchased, part in 1847 and part

in 1848, at 30/- and 31/- per acre.

by Mr. Michael Hannan and Mr.

John O'Neil, and farmed by them

for many years.

Among the trees were a good variety of small birds and a great number of magpies. Woe betide the person that went near their nest. The male bird would fly down, snap his beak, or may ascend on high and dart down with great force and pierce through a person's hat into the skull, causing the blood to flow. Should a hawk come near, the magpies would treat him in a aimilar manner, and so hunt him from the neighborhood. Beyond this belt of trees was another plain to

the mouth of the ti-tree or Kororoit

Creek. A few dingoes or wild

dogs might be seen in search of

prey, so a shepherd had to keep a sharp lookout.

Further Research:

As is common with historical research projects, locating one source often leads to a search for additional 'leads'. The following is a list of potential sources that are not covered in this document:

Robert Hoddle's Survey of Williamstown 1837: Williamstown Historian Brian Haines has presented this source as one which might help pin-point the location of The Message Tree within Nelson Place. Hoddle's field notes show 6 trees in the relevant area with associated surveyor bearings. This source deserves closer scrutiny.

Unpublished Family Manuscripts for Williamstown: The Williamstown Historical Society holds a number of family manuscripts (diaries, journals, family histories, etc) that are not published in the public domain. These may contain unknown gems relating to memories of The Message Tree and/or the Boonwurrung within Williamstown during the first 15 years of the town. This source may take time to access due to the renovation of the Historical Society building and limited capacity of that organisation to resource as systematic search.

The Story of James Wallace: James Wallace appears as an important figure in The Message Tree story and is credited, in one source, as being the longest serving teacher in the colony of Victoria. We also know that his writings regarding the campaign to save The Message Tree form the backbone of Andrew Curtain's essay account. Locating more information about the life of William Wallace or locating original copies of his writings would add greatly to this project. Some of this work was done by Cliff Gibson for the 150th Anniversary of St. Mary's Catholic Primary School (Gibson, 1992., pp11-14). Importantly Gibson quotes an Education Inspector's report in 1851 s Wallace as aged 35 years and had no formal teacher training but had been a Clerk in Glasgow. Gibson also mentions Wallace's wife, Bridget and two children John Wallace and James Wallace (aged 7.5 and 5 years in 1848).

More information may be held by descendants or the archives of Catholic Education. The path to this information may lay via Geelong where Wallace is reported to have moved to set up catholic education after leaving Williamstown in 1863). Another potential source may be held in the documents of the Presbyterian Literary Society where a paper on James Wallace was delivered in Williamstown on 20 March 1915 (see article "Williamstown's Poet Laureate shown above p.25, this document).

Locating Living Descendants of Key Figures: It is an ambition of this project to locate living descendants of any or all of the key figures who fought to save The Message Tree and/or had a connection to the Boonwurrung. The hope is to find a 'family representative' to invite to the Handover Ceremony. These figures include:

- Boonwurrung Descendants (located).
- James Wallace
- Cr James Moxham
- Cr Captain Langford
- Anne Morgan (nee Jordan) Honoured by the Boonwurrung close to The Message Tree.
- Andrew A. Curtain (Essayist/Journalist)
- William Hall Jnr. (1840s resident and Andrew Curtain's main collaborator)

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Appendix 3

Message Tree Project

Community Stakeholder Forum

28 February 2019

Hobsons Bay Yacht Club 270 Nelson Place Williamstown 10am -12 noon

AGENDA

- 1. Arrival & Housekeeping
- 2. Acknowledgement to Country
- 3. Welcome to the Project Thanks for coming
- 4. Introductions
 - a. Name & Organisation (if you represent one)
 - b. What draws you to take part in the Message Tree Project?
- 5. Background How the Project Was Created.
- 6. Project Aims and Outputs
 - a. Four Stakeholder Forums Planned
 - b. Outcomes Report & Handover Ceremony
 - i. Recommended wording for an Interpretive panel.
 - ii. Recommended siting suggestions.
 - iii. Recommendations on additional interpretive approaches in future
 - iv. Recommendations on future 'shared history' projects
- 7. Research on the Message Tree Story
 - a. Research results so far Greg Thorpe
 - i. Andrew Curtain's 1889 Essay
 - ii. Williamstown Chronicle (Trove)
 - iii. PROV search results
 - iv. Quarrill & Co Image in Timeball Times 253 (Jan 2013).
 - b. Important other sources available needing inclusion in our background research?
 - c. Searching for descendants linked to the Message Tree Story
- 8. General Sharing About the Message Tree Story
 - a. What do we think important about the story so far?
 - b. What might be emerging as important 'themes' so far?
- 9. Next Meeting
 - a. Historical Themes Workshop. Thursday 28 March 2019.

28 February 2019: 10am start

An attendance sheet was circulated. Name, organisation and email address was recorded and given to Snr Sgt Chris.

Attendees: Marbee Williams (Yalukit Marnang), Snr Sgt Chris Allen (Victoria Police), Greg Thorpe (Yalukit Marnang), Sgt Glyn Woolley (Victoria Police), Pamela Kadow (Heritage Librarian, City of Hobsons Bay), Tania Blackwell (Arts and Culture, City of Hobsons Bay), Toni Burton (Arts and Culture, City of Hobsons Bay), Rosa McKenna (Spotswood-Kingsville RSL & Get Up Out West), Anthony Hockey (Principal, St. Mary's Catholic PS), Brian Haynes (Williamstown Historian), Janet Long (Williamstown Historical Society), Jenni Mitchell (Get Up Out West), Marise de Quadros (Conversations of the Curious), Sgt Paul Menz (Victoria Police), Sgt Deb Jecks (Victoria Police), Phillip Hitchcock (Friends of Stony Creek and She-oak Enthusiast), Peter Dewar (Volunteer Historical Guide, Joan Kirner House).

Apologies: Cindy Wright (Get Up Out West)

Welcome to the 1st **Meeting of the Project**: Given by Snr Sgt Chris Allen (Williamstown Police)

Acknowledgement to Boonwurrung Country. Greg Thorpe (Yalukit Marnang) gave an acknowledgement focusing on the history of Mingragon a significant Boonwurrung Elder who was born around the time of the arrival of British colonists at Botany Bay in 1788. Mingranon's whole life involved the impacts of colonisation and the death and dispossession of his people from the colonisation process.

Greg also read a message from Boonwurrung woman and Yalukit Marnang Director, Caroline Martin expressing appreciation for everyone who gave up time to take part in this first meeting of Message Tree Project. Caroline also expressed regret that she could not attend due to her commitments as the Creative Director of the Yirramboi First Peoples Festival and also the death of an important Boonwurrung man within the Briggs family, her uncle Johnny.

At Caroline's request, the meeting took a moment to reflect on the death of Uncle Johnny and the many struggles that continue to afflict Boonwurrung people today.

Welcome to Country: Caroline's son, Marbee Williams, was in attendance and provided a welcome to country. He also expressed his gratitude that so many had come together to help tell the story of *The Message Tree* and of his ancestors in Hobsons Bay.

Marbee shared a story about the significance of She-oak Trees relating in Boonwurrung men's lore. The story told of a strong bond between she-oak trees and the power (or 'moong') of Boonwurrung men. When the British colonists came to Boonwurrung Country and began to cut down She-oaks to build with it is remembered that it negatively impacted the personal-power and the mental health of Boonwurrung men.

Introductions and Reasons for Coming:

Each person present gave a brief introduction and their interest in taking part in the project:

- Marbee Williams, is a Yalukit willam clan and Boonwurrung man, representing the Briggs family, his mother (Caroline Martin) and Yalukit Marnang.
- Glynn Woolley from Victoria Police, wants to build community connections.
- Pamela Kadow, Hobsons Bay Heritage Librarian, met Greg and loved the story.
- Tania Blackwell from Council Parks and Culture, has strong interest in aboriginal heritage, here to support the project on behalf of the council.
- Toni Burton, Council Art and Culture, holds the oversight of Council's Heritage
 projects and has an interested in the interpretation of space. She is fascinated by this
 story and is taking part to support the project on behalf of the council.
- Rosa McKenna, Get Up Out West (GUOW) and Kingsville/Spotswood RSL, helped to host the grant and is keen to contribute.
- Deb Jecky from Williamstown Police wants to build community relationships, lives in Hobson's Bay and wants her kids to know stories about our First Peoples.
- Paul Metz from the Williamstwon Police interested in indigenous heritage.
- Jenny Mitchell (OA) from Get Up Out West spoke about the origins and history of the group. She is keen and excited to help document the history of The Message Tree.
- Marise de Quadros, from Conversation for the Curious, holds an interest in Indigenous heritage projects.
- Anthony Hopkins is the Principal of St Marys Primary School in Williamstown and is representing the school because past Principal, James Wallace, was a documented supporter of The Message Tree in 1856.
- Brian Haines is an active local historian and has his own research of the story and wants to contribute. Brian also moderates a Williamstown History page on Facebook.
- Janet Long from the Williamstown Historical Society was born near the site of the tree, is representing WHS and wants to learn as much as possible about the story.
- Peter Dewar is a freelance writer, he met Greg at Joan Kirner House, is interested in history, keen to see the story be told.
- Philip Hitchcock is from the Friends of Stony Creek, but here very interested in Sheoaks and loves the story had (Roberts) family connections in Williamstown at the time of the tree.
- Greg Thorpe is a Collaborative Shared-History Consultant he Message Tree Project for Yalukit Marnang. His interest in Boonwurrung history of Hobson Bay began after involvement with Get Up Out West. He has family connections to Yarra Street Williamstwon where his family settled in the early 1850s.

Project Background:

Greg talked about the project back having its beginnings at a meeting of Get Up Out West (the local reconciliation action group for Hobson's Bay) and the groups desire to establish a positive process to find and publicly promote local Boonwurrung histories within Hobsons

Bay. This project began with conversations between Greg and Boonwurrung descendants on behalf of GUOW. The interest of Williamstown Police came to light from a chance meeting between Greg and Jenna from Williamstown Police at a Mabo Day celebration at the Laverton Hub in 2018. Jenna introduced Greg to Snr Sgt Chris Allen and together Chris and Greg developed this current shared-history project and the partnership with Get Up Out West and Yalukit Marnang. Greg thanked Chris for his active leadership and enthusiasm in helping apply for this grant and successfully starting the project.

Project Objectives: Greg explained that this meeting was primarily a get to know you meeting and four meetings were planned, every four weeks, until the end of May.

Greg outlined the key outcomes of the project as follows:

- Identify, as close as possible, the former location of the Message Tree
- Propose words for an interpretive panel on or near the site
- Prepare an Outcomes Report for Council: recommendations to council on:
 - Ideas on how else to interpret/tell the Message Tree Story
 - Suggestions for other potential shared history project for Hobsons Bay.
- Expanding the partnerships for shared-history projects.
- Get the story-telling to be respectful and "right" for our times.

Location of the Message Tree:

There was an informal discussion as to the location of the tree led by Brian Haynes. It was noted that there had been some contention about the location over the years. Greg Thorpe described research he had conducted in 2018 based on descriptions of the tree's location from accounts published in the Williamstown Chronicle prior to 1950. Greg acknowledged an article by Brian Haines in issue 253 of the Timeball Times or January 2013 (Williamstown Historical Society Newsletter) citing the location of the trees as on the bay side of Nelson Place at the intersection with Thompson Street (in front of the current car park of the yacht club next to the old Customs House building) as concurring with the outcome of his research in 2018. Brian described that the tree stood outside the Water Police building which used to occupy the site which is now the car park for the yacht club.

Both Brian and Greg agreed that reports the The Message Tree had occupied the site of the Wilkinson Fountain in Commonwealth Reserve were incorrect.

Greg acknowledged Brian's work locating the lithographic image held in the Mitchell Library (Sydney) of Williamstown in 1854, by Snell for Quarrill & Co., which may contain the only visual representation of The Message Tree. Brian spoke about the image and presented some addition analysis of the image to help pin-point which of the trees represented might be The Message Tree.

Brian also tabled Robert Hoddle's field notes from his 1837 survey which shows six trees that stood in the main part of the town. This may help confirm the location of Message Tree.

Greg mentioned an 'ironic post-script' relating to the location of the tree and the original 75 ft width of the roadway in Nelson Place. The Message Tree was removed in 1857 to allow the 75ft road to be built. Since 1856, howver, the road has been narrowed to allow English Elm Trees to be planted on what was the original 75ft roadway. It is therefore possible that, looking back, the The Message Tree, had it not been removed would now stand in the nature strip on Nelson Place where the Elm Trees are now planted.

Research by Yalukit Marnang to Date:

Greg tabled a document outlining historical sources for the Message Tree. This will be shared via email. There were a number of key sources found:

- Council minute book 1856-1857 at the Public Records Office.
- An 1889 essay by Andrew A. Curtain.
- Accounts or both The Message Tree and the Boonwurrung from the Williamstown Chronicle.

Greg stated that he and Caroline Martin would collaborate on a second document regarding the history of the Boonwurrung in the first 15 years of colonisation at Williamstown. This document would provide some additional context to the life of Boonwurrung people in these early colonial times and would be circulated at a later date.

General discussion:

- Are there untapped historical sources we need to look at?
- Can we locate some of descendants of key characters with connection to the story: such as Crs Moxham & Langford, James Wallace, Anne Jordon, Andrew Curtain and William Hall Jnr.
- Brian Haines pointed out that for Boonwurrung history it may be useful to look at the Langhorne family Rev George Langhorne, who was Chief Protector of Aborigines after George Augustus Robinson, lived in Williamstown.

Next meeting:

Historical Themes Workshop, Thursday 28 March 2019

Message Tree Project

Community Stakeholder Forum

28 March 2019

Williamstown Police Station Nelson Place Williamstown 10am -12 noon

AGENDA

- 1. Arrival & Housekeeping
- 2. Acknowledgement to Country
- 3. Re-Introductions for New Attendees
 - a. Name & Organisation (if you represent one)
 - b. What draws you to take part in the Message Tree Project?
- 4. Minutes
 - a. Corrections
 - b. Adoption
- 5. Themes Workshop:
 - a. What are the important themes emerging from the history?
 - b. Key aspects within each theme.
 - c. Do they have a natural order for story-telling/interpretation?
- 6. Next Meeting

Interpretive Panel Wording & Future Project Thursday 2 May 2019.

Williamstown Police Station.

Nelson Place Williamstown

28 March 2018: 10am - 12 noon

Minutes recorded by Philip Hitchcock

An attendance sheet was circulated.

Organisation and email address for new attendees was recorded.

Attendees: Snr Sgt Chris Allen (Victoria Police), Greg Thorpe (Yalukit Marnang), Sgt Glyn Woolley (Victoria Police), Michael Neumann (General Manager, Royal Yacht Club of Victoria), Jenni Mitchell (Get Up Out West), Marise de Quadros (Conversation for the Curious), Pamela Kadow (Heritage Librarian, City of Hobsons Bay), Rosa McKenna (Spotswood-Kingsville RSL & Get Up Out West), Toni Burton (Arts and Culture, City of Hobsons Bay), Peter Dewar (Volunteer Historical Guide, Joan Kirner House), Phillip Hitchcock (Friends of Stony Creek and She-oak Enthusiast) Janet Long (Williamstown Historical Society), Uncle Keith Randall (Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, Victoria Police).

Acknowledgement to Country by Greg Thorpe with a special mention of N'Arweet Boollutt (King Benbow)

Re-Introductions for New Attendees

Greg outlined the purpose of the meeting to identify historical themes to interpret the Message Tree story.

Minutes of the last meeting were previously circulated by email and minor corrections below were noted; Jenni Mitchell's name is spelt with an "i", Brian Haynes surname has a "y" and Marise's organisation is Conversation *for* the Curious. The previous minutes were accepted.

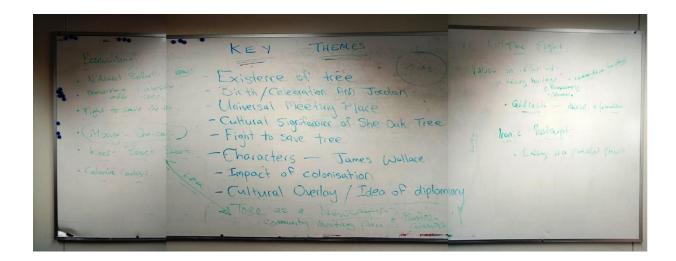
Themes were written on the whiteboard have been reproduced at the end of these minutes. Some of the aspects discussed are elaborated below.

- Boonwurrung ceremony for Anne when she was born is linked to the message tree
 and can be viewed as a diplomatic act, an attempt to educate the settlers. It was
 agreed that the Anne Jordan story was a natural candidate for a new future project
 to analyse and re-tell that shared-history.
- Significance of the tree to both new and old residents
- She-oaks have significance
- Local area name Koort Boork boork
- Williamstown area was surveyed and the position of a very wide road was
 determined by the government. The road alignment required removal of the tree by
 the newly formed council. Ironically road is narrower now.
- Message tree story provides insight and nuanced stories about the lives of people at the time.
- The area surrounding the tree was significant; nearby shelly beach could have been middens and a clearing where Nelson Place is was a known Boonwurrung camp and there was also fresh water in a well nearby in Thompson St. all supporting the theory of occupation by large numbers of people for ceremony.

- Poem by James Wallace
- Rapid decline of the Boonwurrung people
- Themes from both aboriginal and european groups are similar and "line up".
- Newspapers were in Melbourne and none in Williamstown so the message tree was used.
- Seat around the tree
- How big was the tree? Discussion
- Woodlands Historical Park building has she-oak shingles indicating the existence of large trees in the past.
- Size of buildings at the time. Most were shacks and rebuilt as larger buildings later on.
- 300 words is the usual number for a single plaque

WHITEBOARD TRANSCRIPTION

Boonwurrung	KEY THEMES	The Fight	
N'Arweet Bollutt	Existence of the Tree	Values in 1856-57	
Boonwurrung counsels under the tree	Birth/Celebration Ann Jordan	Valuing heritage – connection to place Boonwurrung Colonial	
Fight to save the tree	Universal Meeting Place		
Moong- She Oak	Fight to save the tree	Goldrush- develop and formalise	
Koort Boork Boork	Characters - James Wallace		
Colonial context		Ironic Postscript	
	Impact of colonisation	The ring over powerful places	
	Cultural overlay/Idea of Diplomacy		
	Tree as a newspaper community meeting place		
	British colonist		



Direction on Interpretive Themes - Three Panels:

Create draft text for three interpretive panels (max 300 words each) around the following themes:

- 1. **The long history of She-oaks** at Koort Boork Boork (before Williamstown) and the Boonwurrung. In particulary, their connection with The Message Tree as a special place.
- 2. **The Early Colonial Years** where the tree becomes known as The Message Tree (Notice Tree) and is shared by the Boonwurrung and the colonists
- 3. **The fight to save the tree** in 1856 and 1857 and the Boonwurrung connection being remembered by the campaigners.

(It was agreed that the story of the Boonwurrung connection to the message tree should flow through the timeline of the historical narrative and not just be told within the first panel).

Case for a Fourth and Final Interpretive Panel (Post-script):

Project Coordinator Greg Thorpe received a phone call from Rosa McKenna (GUOW) following the meeting to suggest that there could be a fourth interpretive panel to tell the story about the current project and process to recover and celebrate this shared history. Rosa felt it could be another way to bring the Boonwurrung voice in as a 'present day' voice along side others who have collaborated on bringing the story to light.

Message Tree Project

Community Stakeholder Forum

2 May 2019

Friends Room

Williamstown Library

104 Ferguson Street Williamstown 10am -12 noon

AGENDA

- 1. Arrival & Housekeeping
- 2. Acknowledgement to Country
- 3. Previous Minutes
 - a. Corrections
 - b. Adoption
- 4. Three Interpretive Panels Review Proposed Wording.
- 5. Ideas for interpretive images for panels Discuss.
- 6. Rosa's Suggestion for a Fourth Panel Discuss.
- 7. Idea for a New Message Tree (replanted She-oak) Discuss.
- 8. Potential Future Shared-History Projects Williamstown where to from here?
 - a. Story of Baby Anne Jordan & N'Arweet Boollutt?
 - b. Story of the Shelly Beach Camp (Commonwealth Park area) and the Boonwurrung?
 - c. Careful re-internment of Boonwurrung Remains Williamstown Cemetry.
 - d. First Nations women held on Williamstown Hulks?
- 9. Elsewhere in Hobsons Bay:
 - a. Boonwurrung camp at Jawbone Reserve.
 - b. Boonwurrung camp at Williamstown Racecourse.
 - c. Boonwurrung camp at Queens Street Altona.
 - d. Other stories?
- 10. Finals Steps: Outcomes Report and Handover Ceremony. Greg Thorpe
- 11. Final Workshop Meeting: Panel Siting Workshop On-Site Thursday 30 May 2019.

3rd Project Meeting,, 2 March 2019 Williamstown Library 10am - 12 noon

Minutes recorded from notes taken by Philip Hitchcock and Greg Thorpe

An attendance sheet was circulated. Organisation and email address for new attendees was recorded.

Attendees: Snr Sgt Chris Allen (Victoria Police), Greg Thorpe (Yalukit Marnang), Ann Goodwin (Chair Archives, Royal Yacht Club of Victoria), Jenni Mitchell (Get Up Out West), Marise de Quadros (Conversation for the Curious), Pamela Kadow (Heritage Librarian, City of Hobsons Bay), Rosa McKenna (Spotswood-Kingsville RSL & Get Up Out West), Peter Dewar (Volunteer Historical Guide, Joan Kirner House), Phillip Hitchcock (Friends of Stony Creek and She-oak Enthusiast), Anthony Hockey (Principal, St. Mary's Catholic PS), Mark Brophy, (Williamstown Community and Education Centre), Janet Long (Williamstown Historical Society).

Apologies: Michael Neumann (Royal Yacht Club of Victoria), Brian Haynes (Local Historian), Tania Blackwell (Arts and Culture at Hobsons Bay City Council), Toni Burton (Arts and Culture at Hobsons Bay City Council), Glyn Woolley (Victoria Police), Cindy Wright (Get Up Out West) and Caroline Martin (Yalukit Marnang).

Acknowledgement to Country:

Acknowledgement to Country by Greg Thorpe with a special mention of Caroline Martin's apology (especially due to her leadership as Creative Director of Melbourne's Indigenous Arts Festival Yirramboi which will open tonight).

Re-Introductions for New Attendees.

People briefly introduced themselves and there was also general discussion about books and stories that are now bringing shared histories and our part in this ongoing process.

Previous Minutes:

The minutes of the previous meeting as circulated by email were accepted.

Prosed Text for 3 Interpretive Panels:

Greg explained that the main task of this project and this meeting was to review the proposed wording of the Three Interpretive Panels and arrive a clear recommendation for Council to consider. Guidance from Toni Burton (HBCC) for text of no more than 300 words.

Greg brought the groups attention to the three independent pages of text, each with 300 word or less, covering the three theme areas decided at the previous themes workshop. This text was drafted by Yalukit Marnang with input oversight by Caroline Martin as a Boonwurrung descendant.

It was agreed that the draft text of each panel should be read aloud first, then discussed.

Points of discussion are recorded below as brief dot points.

Panel 1: read aloud

- Editing the text can be tightened and focussed even more.
- 300 words is very limiting: It would be good to add to the story onsite with extra information links to audio visual media accessible on the internet from hand-held devices (eg. use web-links via a Quick Response Code published on the panel).
- Estate with a capital E was discussed: The use of capital was understood as a nuance used to respect the Boonwurrung view that their land remains the source of their sovereignty as Traditional Owners.
- How big will the panels be? It was discussed that they may need to be large and the
 idea of a presentation them in a circle rather than a line was discussed. This design
 might lend itself to both protect and interpret a New Message Tree if a she-oak was
 to again be replanted on the site.
- The site being on an intersection is prominent and lends itself as a focal point for future festival celebrations, commemorations and reconciliation gatherings where the street could be temorarily closed for civic gatherings or cultural ceremony (possibly a revival of Boonwurrung dance and song).
- Images: It was agreed images would need to go with the text to help the story. Graphic design will be needed to refine and support this.
- Broad or Narrow Focus? It was commented that the first panel might not talk about the tree enough. The counter view was that to respectfully introduce and contextualise the Boonwurrung relationship to the tree requires a broader understanding of how Boonwurrung related to Koort Boork Boork as a place, Sheoaks as a species and also what led to the decline, dispossession and ultimate disappearance of the Boonwurrung from Williamstown (for many years). Greg suggested that this context counters the tradition of "silence" in the Australian historical narrative (ie first peoples did not exist) or "incomplete history" (ie. first peoples were here then 'they' just disappeared). The challenge of modern shared histories is to respectfully re-humanise our first peoples and be forthcoming on how 'they' viewed this place and what happened to them. This was commonly not done well in most attempts at telling first peoples histories during the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Have we captured the important aspects of themes for this panel? The group agreed
 the words were a good representation of what needed to in the text but that some
 tightening and professional editing would be needed. It was agreed that as a matter
 of policy and protocol Council should consult with Caroline Martin of Yalukit
 Marnang on any final wording and design before the panels are produced.

Panel 2: read aloud

- It was asked if the word "invaded" was technically correct. Greg made the point that there is enough evidence from a number of modern histories (such as 1835 by Boyce) to support the idea of an "invasion" if not in a military sense then as an act of 'intention to dispossess' the first peoples. From the Boonwurrung perspective the British 'invaded' and broke their laws and ignored their sovereignty in doing so. From an interpretive viewpoint the fact the word is question is a positive as it helps us all have this conversation and see all sides of this history. That process is part of what good shared history should achieve.
- The group is again keen that the words be edited and possibly rearranged for best impact. The text should again be submitted to council for these minor edits and reviewed by the Boonwurrung.
- The group is happy with these draft words to present to Council.

Panel 3: read aloud

- Greg pointed out a unique aspect of the history with potentially national significance being the evidence that the public campaigners seeking to save the tree in 1856 were arguing a heritage value in the old tree which 'included' its value as a place for first peoples. This is confirmed by the 'research letter' by an anonymous proponent of the tree's removal found in the Williamstown Chronicle that year. Greg recently discussed this history with Professor Victoria Hasking and Professor John Maynard (Newcastle University) who thought the story unique within that period of Australia's history.
- Broad discussion about early history of Victoria and the tree story's place in it followed.
- Group was happy with the draft wording but again felt that they need some final editing and final oversight from Yalukit Marnang.

Images

- Do we need an image of a tree?
- Greg suggested that an image of a mature tree with an 8ft tall trunk could be created by an artist working from a photo of an old tree similar to the image of a She-oak in the Historical Sources Document.
- It was suggested it might be good to have an artist create an impression of the tree during this period where Boonwurrung are shown (possibly seated) conducting counsel, with colonists reciting poetry etc. and posting messages on the tree.
- Could Boonwurrung language be used in the panels? It was agreed that this would be good but probably English words would also need to be shown also increasing the number of words. It was acknowledged that the loss extent of the Boonwurrung loss from colonisation is a huge story to tell which makes it a difficult task in few words. Bringing more Boonwurrung 'voice' via internet interactive aspects to the site might help tell culture and language to come through.

Group Recommendations on Draft Text for Three Panels:

- The three panel drafts presented are a good telling of the key themes in the story and are told respectfully and with sensitivity to the Boonwurrung perspective.
- The text would need additional professional edits to tighten the wording prior to arriving at final text for the panels. The text may also need to be chunked to sit around images.
- In keeping with this project's commitment to a respectful shared-history approach, any final changes to the wording of the panels should be run past Yalukit Marnang for Caroline Martin, to provide comment from a Boonwurrung perspective, prior to production of the panels.

Possible Panel 4:

- Rosa Mckenna (GUOW/RSL) suggested the idea of a forth panel which tells the story
 of the message tree project, the revival of this shared-history and giving present-day
 Boonwurrung voice a place to be heard on the cultural importance of this history
 and it's revival to Boonwurrung today.
- It was thought this panel could have web-interactive media with audio-visual of Boonwurrung representatives speaking directly on the subject (again possibly using QR Code Technology).
- The group felt it would be a good way of moving the history into the present day while reminding the public that Boonwurrung are not 'gone' from Williamstown but have returned and are working to re-claim, strengthen and share their culture and history again.

Recommendation for a 4th Panel:

• Text for a 4th Interpretive Panel, in line with the above, should be developed by Council with Yalukit Marnang and provided for in the on-site design.

Graphic design

It was discussed that there would to a graphic designer working with the edited text to produce high quality interpretive panels.

Replanting a New Message Tree

- The group was positive about the idea of planting a replacement Drooping She-oak (Allocasuarina verticillata) or New Message Tree at the Foot of Thompson Street. It is an idea that a number of members had independently and spontaneously raised with Greg as Project Coordinator at the outset of the project.
- It was recognised that a New Message Tree would be small for many years and would need a physical protect in the first 10-20 years.
- It was felt that the line of English Elms would need to be interrupted for this to happen and that it could be sensitively achieved with the two juvenile Elms closest to the Old Customs House being removed from the avenue. As deciduous trees, it was thought that the Elms could be transplanted successfully elsewhere (in winter) once they drop their leaves. This would open space for a Message Tree Node to feature in its own space at the end of the avenue of Elms at the 'foot' of Thompson Street in front of the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria.

Recommendation for a 'New Message Tree':

- A New Message Tree be replanted at the 'foot' of Thompson Street on the north side of the intersection in front of the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria in the approximate location of the original Message Tree.
- This tree would become the centre-point of an interpretive node for sharing the story of The Message Tree and its association to both the British colonists and the Boonwurrung.
- An appropriately young Drooping She-oak should be planted and an effective protective barrier be erected to allow the tree protection from urban movements while young and small.
- The two juvenile Elm Trees at the western end of the line of elms be removed and transplanted to make space for a Message Tree node.

Future directions for the group

- It was proposed that after the project the group continue to meet every 2 months, under the name of "Shared History Alliance" for Hobsons Bay. It was agreed that the email list could be used to invite attendance at the initial meeting and the Greg would put out the call. A meeting place was discussed and Pam Kadow from Williamstown Library said a room could be provided at the library.
- Mark (from the Williamstown Community and Education Centre) said that the centre could potentially partner with a grant and help the group access grant listings.

Future projects were discussed:

- Story of Baby Anne Jordan & N'Arweet Boollutt
- Story of the Shelly Beach Camp (Commonwealth Park area) and the Boonwurrung
- First Nations men held in Williamstown Prison Hulks?
- Careful re-internment of Boonwurrung Remains Williamstown Cemetry.
- Schools especially primary schools (where the curriculum is more flexible) need information, local stories to tell and curriculum guides.
- Occupation sites could form a trail; Jawbone, Willi racecourse, Queen St Altona
- It was widely agreed that the next project to focus on would be the story of Baby Anne Jordan.

Outcomes report

- Outcomes report and handover ceremony with Caroline Martin during NADIOC week in June and handover early July
- Greg will meet with Council before the next meeting to talk about how future projects might be supported by Council including funding.

Next meeting Thursday 30 May 2019

Message Tree Project

Community Stakeholder Forum

30 May 2019

Board Room

Royal Yacht Club of Victoria

120 Nelson Place Williamstown 10am -12 noon

AGENDA

- 1. Arrival & Housekeeping
- 2. Acknowledgement to Country
- 3. Previous Minutes
 - a. Corrections
 - b. Adoption
- 4. Site Visit:
 - a. Interpretive Node:
 - i. As a place for gathering and ceremony?
 - ii. Size of the area?
 - iii. Curving the road edge?
 - iv. Locating the New Message Tree?
 - v. Interpretive Panel Placement?
 - b. Our Recommendation:
 - i. Overall concept/vision
 - ii. Foreseeable issues and potential solutions.
- 5. Finals Steps
 - a. Outcomes Report;
 - i. Content
 - ii. Drafting Process
 - b. Handover Ceremony;
 - i. Date
 - ii. Location
 - iii. Invitations
- 6. Shared History Alliance
 - a. First Meeting
 - b. Current Potential New Project Funding
- 7. Thanks to All Message Tree Project Participants

Royal Yacht Club of Victoria 30 May 2019 10am - 12 noon

Minutes recorded by Philip Hitchcock

An attendance sheet was circulated.

Attendees: Snr Sgt Chris Allen (Victoria Police), Greg Thorpe (Yalukit Marnang), Michael Neumann (General Manager, Royal Yacht Club of Victoria), Ann Goodwin (Chair Archives, Royal Yacht Club of Victoria), Toni Burton (Arts and Culture, City of Hobsons Bay), Cindy Wright (Get Up Out West) Jenni Mitchell (Get Up Out West), Marise de Quadros (Conversation for the Curious), Pamela Kadow (Heritage Librarian, City of Hobsons Bay), Rosa McKenna (Spotswood-Kingsville RSL & Get Up Out West), Peter Dewar (Volunteer Historical Guide, Joan Kirner House), Philip Hitchcock (Friends of Stony Creek and She-oak Enthusiast), Anthony Hockey (Principal, St. Mary's Catholic PS), Mayor Cr Jonathon Marsden.

Welcome to the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria by the General Manager Michael Neumann. Greg thanks Michael and Board of RYCV for their community spirit regarding the Message Tree Project including through sponsorship of the project through the pro-bono contribution to the room for this meeting at no charge to the project.

Acknowledgement to Country was given by Greg Thorpe with a special mention of NAIDOC week, the themes for this year Voice, Treaty, Truth. Greg shared some personal stolen generation stories from his family and called on us all to reflect on the Boonwurrung families impacted by the same stories of stolen children and horrifically impacted by colonisation in many other ways.

- Previous minutes were accepted.
- Kevin Mullins Senior Designer Open Space and City Design, City of Hobsons Bay contacted
 the group by email with his apologies for not attending the meetings as he had been away.
 He said it sounded like an interesting project and he would like to be involved. Greg had
 made contact with him directly prior to this meeting.

On-Site Workshopping:

Greg told the group that (although it was a cold day) it would be ideal to go outside to get a feel for the space where the site of old message tree was thought to have stood. There was some discussion about the points to be decided:

- Curving the road?
- Replanting the two small elm trees elsewhere
- Placement of the replanted She-oak tree
- Interpretive panels and barrier
- Form and species of the tree (Drooping she-oak , Allocasuarina verticillata, some had 8ft trunks in local histories) Canopy of mature tree would at least 10m more probably 15m. The group went outside to the site of the message tree, there was acknowledgement of the significance of a group meeting here in this place again.

The group then went on site and discussed a range of ideas and concepts before unanimously agreeing on the following answers to key site design questions during the site visit:

- Locating the New Message Tree? Location Agreed. It was agreed that the 'exact' location of the original tree could not be determined with pin-point accuracy but that it was known to have stood at the 'foot' of Thompson Street and in front of the Water Police (now the RYCV). From this criterion the area adjacent to the intersection currently occupied by young elm trees was considered both credible and close enough to accurately honour the story. It also offered practical advantages being a prominent location at the end of the shopping precinct in the street.
- Interpretive Node?: Yes. This site should be constructed as a special node specifically for the telling of the Message Tree Story and its links to the Boonwurrung.
- Replant a new Message Tree? Yes a Drooping She-oak (Allocasuarina verticulata) should be replanted and referred to as The New Message Tree in recognition of this new chapter in the Message Tree story. In considering replanting at the site or close to the small elm tree next to the large mature Elm directly opposite the end of Thompson Street is where the group felt the New Message Tree should be planted (i.e the immature Elm second in the line of Elms moving east from Syme Street toward Ann St).
- Should the node be designed as a place for gathering, festivals and public ceremony? Yes. Electrical services for audio or visual broadcasting toward gatherings in the intersection should be included is possible.
- Size of the (Message Tree Node) area and curving the road edge? The New Message Tree should be planted as the centre-point of a 10m diameter circle (or similarly arranged space). As an interpretive device and to honour the 1856 resident request to bend the street around the original Message Tree, the interpretive node should be designed to extend the gutter line of Nelson Place into the roadway to the limits of the existing tourist bus waiting bay (i.e the car park space).
- Interpretive Panel Placement/Style? A design that allows the Message Tree story to be told in 4 panels of text (per previous meeting outcomes) in a circle surrounding the tree and possibly being incorporated into the design of a protective barrier/fence around the New Message Tree.

Points discussed on site are listed below. Potential design challenges are marked in red:

- Intersection of Nelson Place and Thompson Street provides a great opportunity for public
 activity and ceremony to carried out through a controlled closure of the intersection. The
 potential also that Boonwurrung could again use such a space for ceremony around a New
 Message Tree is a reconciliation opportunity worth designing for.
- New Message Tree is the natural centre point of the space as it is the centre point of the story itself. It would also lend itself a potentially unifying anchor for an historic precinct that contains other important shared Boonwurrung histories close to the end of Thompson Street such as the Anne Jordan story, Woolpack Inn and the Shelly Beach Willum/Village (Along Nelson Place west of Thompson Street).
- Space around the New Message Tree: 15 metres diameter is the maximum expected spread of a very old Drooping She-oak but 10 metre is considered adequate. This space would need to be levelled and there is a level drop between the current footpath and the

road that will need treatment. The opportunity to use pavement artwork, or multi-media (including web-interactive) methods on the site to assist or expand the interpretive value of the node

- Tourist bus wait parking to be relocated? It was considered that there should be alternative
 places to provide bus wait parking elsewhere along Nelson Place to the East and that freeing
 this space is very important to the effectiveness of the node which will add to the tourist
 value of the gem pier precinct.
- Disability access, ramps? This was discussed in relation to the slope and different levels between the road the footpath. It was considered the node should be brought to be level with the road and a design solution to allow disability access incorportated.
- Accessing the Yacht Club site behind the node: There is a small gate to the RYCV behind
 where the node would be which is currenly not being used which needs to be considered in
 the final site design. There is also an unused vehicle gate adjacent to the old customs house
 building that needs to be considered and the RYCV consulted.
- Identifiable Underground Services: Some major underground services appear to cross from the road to the RYCV close to the site with drainage or sewer close by in the road.
- Safety of people within the Message Tree Node from road traffic: Bollards were discussed to create separation for pedestrians.
- In 100 years? The group was aware that the long term needs of the site may change leading to different design needs in the long term. It was also clear to the group that replanting the New Message Tree and providing a place for retelling this history was itself an historic step that marks a 'new chapter' in the story.
- Honouring the Place Itself: For First Peoples, including the Boowurrung, the spiritual
 significance of special place often lives in the land itself leading to a downward-focussed
 (Earth-focussed) reflection whereas most monotheistic religions (colonial religions) look to a
 separate power seen to be above or beyond Earth (unearthly). The recognition of the
 Message Tree location as a special place is therefore naturally of potentially spiritual
 importance to the Boonwurrung.

Very cold, raining and windy day so the group adjourned back to the Yacht club to finalise the concept planning process as a white-board workshopping exercise.

In-door Whiteboard Workshopping:

Greg drew a diagram on the whiteboard (see last page) representing what had already been agreed and this was added to. The following opportunities and issues (in red) were discussed:

- Can the bus stop be relocated (important)?
- Services stormwater pipes and etc.
- Can the site be raised to be level with the road?
- Deviating the gutter to be curved would be an important symbolic guesture
- Concept plan (could be our whiteboard drawing)
- Fence around the tree to protect it incoporating text panels and art.
- Interpreting the site
- Tube stock or mature tree. The point was made that tubestock trees have been shown to outgrow more advanced trees. It was accepted that either way a replanted tree would not be of significant size for the first 20 years and would require good physical protection.

- Name of the tree. It was acknowledged that this should be the "new" message tree. Greg also mentioned that Caroline Martin (Yalukit Marnang) had shown some interest in finding an appropriate location west of the Maribyrnong to receive a name in honour N'Arweet Boollutt (King Benbow) and Greg and Caroline had wondered if this node deserves to be considered further in this. Greg talked about the importance of N'Arweet (clan leader) and the differential treatment throughout our colonial history afforded to N'Arweet Derrimut compared
- This public node has a strong potential to be a focal point for national reconciliation for the City of Hobsons Bay.
- Ground around the tree should be a hard level surface as soft landscaping
 is likely to create maintenance issues and limit the use of the node as a
 gathering space for groups (eg. tour groups).
- Can we ask the council to take our recommendations as a concept plan and collaboratively
 work with Yalukit Marnang and this group to further this to a plan for construction using
 Council's technical design expertise? Yes Agreed.
- QR codes could be used as one possible web-interactive technology to link a person at the
 node to online content thus expanding on the limits of the interpretive panels at the site.
 The Hobsons Bay library (Williamstown) was considered the most likely appropriate place to
 host and maintain web-based content while the potential to use A/V of Boonwurrung
 descendants (eg. use of this technology could importantly open additional space for
 contemporary Boonwurrung 'voice' to be heard as oral history given directly in person).
- The concept of seating around the tree was discussed. It was suggested that a curved seat to the roadside of the circular node could be used as an alternative to bollards to help protect pedestrians on and in the node from road traffic. The importance of maintaining visual connection for potential speakers standing in the node but presenting outwards (southward) to toward the intersection at a festival needed to be maintained. For this it was considered a backless or low back seat on the roadside of the node would achieve that design outcome.
- Not too much structure. Apart from the seat, the tree, the fence/interpretive panels, artworks and QR code points, the site needs to remain an open space to gather in.
- Tree needs to be the focus of attention.

to N'Arweet Boollutt.

- The idea of including more First Peoples in the design and construction phase of this node
 was put forward and broadly supported. It was suggested this should be discussed with
 Yalukit Marnang further too.
- Maintaining the momentum of the project: It was accepted Council will need to continue to
 develop the detailed construction plans from our concept plan for a special node which will
 take time. As an interim measure it was suggested that the three interpretive panels could
 be finalised (per recommendation at previous meeting) and placed on site along with
 information about plans in progress to construct a special node with a New Message Tree to
 be developed later.

Concluding a Successful Project:

- It was noted that this project appears to have successfully engaged all the key stakeholders in The Message Tree Story but also provided a unique approach to reviving or telling a shared history story.
- Our process is unique for placing Boonwurrung descendants (via Yalukit Marnang) in the project facilitation role and conducting the project as a community collaboration for find the respectful story-telling approach.

- We have successfully engaged a wide range of local Williamstown story tellers, story keepers as well as those with a close geographic the Message Tree or to with historical links to key characters in the story (eg. St.Marys Primary School and James Wallace).
- The relationships formed in this project now stand to potentially work a similar process on other shared histories in Williamstown.
- These outcomes have amounted to an interesting new approach and if implemented by Council stand as an important step toward reconciliation and a greater sense of community well-being (especially for our First Peoples).
- Everyone who has contributed to this project in such good will has been part of this first success using this approach.

Outcomes Report:

Greg presented an outline of the draft table of contents for the Outcomes Report that will now be prepared by Yalukit Marnang along with Get Up Out West and Williamstown Police (as grant application partners). Edits or additions were offered but none forthcoming from the group who supported Greg's outline. Greg invited any other group member who was keen to get involved in this process to contact him. A draft of the report would be emailed to group members prior to the handover ceremony.

Special Thanks:

- Greg took the opportunity to thank everyone for their active participation in the project commenting on the significant volunteer commitment made by all who have taken part at meetings.
- He offered special thanks to Get Up Out West and specifically Snr Sgt Chris Allen and Victoria Police (Williamstown) for championing this project from the very start and being instrumental in pulling together the grant application and the core partnerships.
- Council's active participation as the funding body but also the role of officers from Arts and Culture on the project group were acknowledged with special thanks to Hobsons Bay City Council Mayor, Jonathan Marsden for his interest in the project and his attendance that this fourth meeting.
- Thanks were also extended to those community organisations who sponsored the project with in-kind contributions such as meeting rooms at no charge including The Royal Yacht of Victoria, Hobsons Bay Yacht Club, Williamstown Police and Williamstown Library.

Handover Ceremony and Potential Spin-off Projects:

This will take place on Thursday 11 July 2019 from 10am and will form part of Hobsons Bay's National NAIDOC week celebration. A location is yet to be determined but emails will go out.

In reflecting on the NAIDOC theme for this year Greg Thorpe drew a connection with our project and the theme of Voice, Treaty and Truth, submitting that in our project the central role of Yalukit Marnang has helped us discover and celebrate Boonwurrung Voice, while our deeper understanding

of the plight of the Boonwurrung in the period 1835-1860 has brought greater truth to our local historical narrative. Both of these steps go some way in the direction of acknowledging Boonwurrung people as our local sovereign people. This notion of unextinguished sovereignty is now at the heart of renewed calls for Victoria to complete a Treaty with its First Peoples.

We may need to create another "moment" to tell this stories to schools and other key story-tellers who have not been able to attend all meetings here but who will have an on-going story-teller role in Williamstown. The potential for a schools curriculum guide was briefly discussed.

Anthony Hockey (Principal, St. Mary's Catholic PS) presented the idea developed at the school for a Song about the Message Tree story that could be performed by his school choir, which was widely approved. Anthony is in contact with Yalukit Marnang via Greg and the project is in the process of being built.

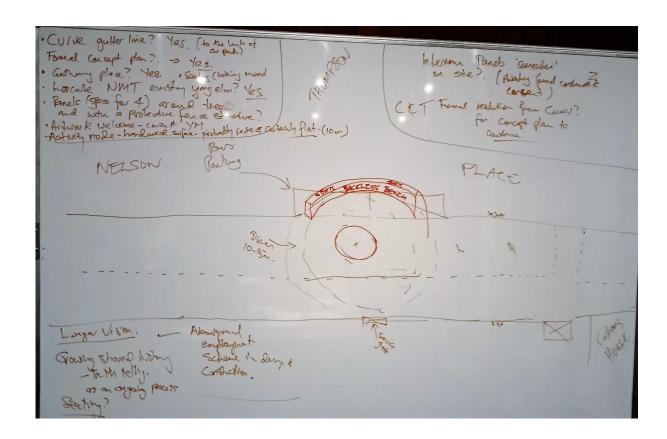
Shared History Alliance

The group re-confirmed the agreement to use the group's email list to call the first Shared History Alliance meeting for Williamstown, probably in the 8 weeks following the Handover Ceremony. The group again reconfirmed an eagerness to move on to our second project focussing on the Boonwurrung and the British baby girl, Anne Jordan at the Woolpack in during August 1840. Greg reported that Council's Arts and Culture Group are seeking internal funds to contribute to this project.

Final Special Mentions:

Greg acknowledged Jenna Galvin from Williamston Police as a key instigator of this project with Snr Sgt Chris Allen who extended a further acknowledgement to Greg Thorpe for his facilitation of the project and for mediating the involvement of Caroline Martin and Yalukit Marnang which has been central to the success of the project.

Greg also thanked Phil Hitchcock for doing the minute-taking and being our resident 'She-oak Enthusiast' on the project. Phil responded by saying that since he planted a drooping she-oak in his backyard and he has never been the same...(in a good way).



White Board from Workshopping Process.

You are standing at a significant site for the Yalukit Willam Clan of the Boonwurrung language group, the First Peoples of Hobson's Bay.

An old She-oak Tree stood here long before British colonisation and was removed in 1857. Around this tree early colonists saw the Yalukit willam, led by N'Arweet Boollutt (also called "King Benbow")¹, as they conducted ceremonies and counsels here². This makes this a special place for Boonwurrung people still today.

She-oak are sacred trees to the Boonwurrung. They are associated with the power of Boonwurrung men and it is remembered that when early colonists cut down She-oak Trees Boonwurrung men would feel unhealthy.³

The ancient name for this area is Koort Boork Boork, meaning 'clumps of many she-oaks'⁴. A name indicating the importance of She-oak Trees to Boonwurrung here.

In 1837 this place was re-named William's Town by British colonist to honour their King.⁵ British invasion⁶ of the Boonwurrung Estate was a catastrophic event that caused the rapid decline of Boonwurrung people⁷. West of the Maribyrnong River Boonwurrung women farmed a small sweet potato called *Murnong* on the grassy basalt plains, a very important staple food⁸. Colonists landed thousands of sheep only metres from here⁹ and herded them west onto the Boonwurrung's Murnong fields. The sheep soon ate the Murnong crop¹⁰ and quickly sent the Boonwurrung toward starvation, malnutrition and disease¹¹.

Stealthily spearing British sheep or taking rice, flour or oats from colonists to replace disappearing Murnong wild game, inevitably led to violent conflicts and the death of Boonwurrung people across their Estates^{12 13}. Clashes with other First Peoples, facing similar pressures from colonisation, also led to Boonwurrung deaths.¹⁴

Nearly all our First Peoples died under British rule. Here only one resilient family survived to represent the Boonwurrung language group, share the history and continue cultural practices today¹⁵.

(300 words)

Title: The Boonwurrung People and the Ancient Sheoak

Panel No 1.

British colonisation began here in 1835 when two private companies from Tasmania invaded the Estates of our First Peoples the Yalukit Willam Clan of the Boonwurrung language group. The Estates of other language groups on either side of the Werribee River were also invaded¹⁶.

Williamstown became the deep-water anchorage for British ships and gave rise to a 'tiny village' that sat alone on the edge of a vast grassy plain to the west. The main British settlement was established near plentiful freshwater on the banks of the Yarra River (now called Central Melbourne).

In the first years of the colony, Melbourne newspapers arrived far too late in Williamstown to be useful, so the townsfolk used the old She-oak tree that once stood here as their 'Message Tree'. News, advertising and public opinions were written on placards and nailed to the tree. Whether seeking a servant or some lost item; selling a horse; needing a job done; reporting an accident or a theft; sharing a new idea or expressing an opinion; the message would go up on the old tree¹⁷.

Prior to its removal in 1857, the 'Ancient She-oak' had become a town meeting place where a seat had been built around its trunk. Early colonists understood the importance of the tree to the Boonwurrung who still used it. A local poet and teacher between 1847 and 1863, James Wallace, recited poems under its branches and wrote that "The earliest tradition regarding the Old Tree is to the effect that long before this country was colonised it was held in almost religious veneration by the aboriginals; that it was beneath its umbrageous shade they held their councils..." 18

So between 1835 to 1845 a growing British population and a declining Boonwurrung population both used and expressed their connection to The Message Tree.

(300 words)

Heading: "The Boonwurrung and the British - Under 'The Message Tree'

Panel No. 2

The Message Tree (or 'Notice Tree') was removed by Williamstown Council as part of road construction works in Nelson Place in early 1857 but not before Council's first public campaign on a heritage issue. At least fifty locals fought to save the old tree arguing it was an important place in the early life of the town¹⁹ but also a special place to our First Peoples, an uncommon consideration among British colonists of the 1850s²⁰.

1856 was Williamstown Council's first year. Population was booming following the discovery of gold from 1850. In 1849 the town had "about five hundred people" and by 1857 over 3500²¹. Traffic was turning informal dirt roads to thick mud after rain so, in December 1856, Council unanimously decided to formally mark-out street widths, create gutters and surface roads with crushed rock²².

It was soon-after realised these works would endanger the much-loved Message Tree so within six days 55 residents, led by James Wallace a local teacher and poet petitioned Council requesting "... a diversion in the roadway ... to leave the Notice Tree situated at the foot of Thompson Street undisturbed"²³.

Councillors Moxham and Langford supported efforts to save the tree but were outnumbered on the seven-member Council.

One local who conducted "research" among the protestors to "discover what qualities this tree has apart from other trees...", found how they valued the tree's ancient link to the Boonwurrung stating:

"It appears that many long years before the arrival of a white man upon these shores, that this part of the colony which we now call Williamstown was selected by the aboriginies as their place of rendezvous every month; and beneath the foliage of that old tree have sat the King...Numerous too have been the corroborees which have taken place on the same spot ...²⁴

298 Words

Heading: The Fight to Save the Message Tree

Panel No. 3

APPENDIX 4

Endnotes Containing Historical Sources and Other Considerations:

1 Fels (2011, pp.377-381) writes about "King Benbow" (also sometimes called Little Benbow) based on her research of the journals of Assistant Protector of Aborigines, Williams Thomas, who had the closest contact with the Boonwurrung of all the 'protectors'. Here Fels discovers a number of spellings of King Benbow's Boonwurrung name of which "Boollutt" (a spelling used by Protector Thomas) is adopted here.

The title "N'Arweet' recognises Boollutt's status as a clan leader or spokesman within his clan (the Yalukit Weelam/Yalukit Willam Clan). This status is recognised by several sources including Fels (2011, p.378) who quotes a close friend of N'Arweet Boollutt in George Henry Haydon who on 19 May 1841 refers to King Benbow as "chief of the Weraby [Werribee] tribe" (one alternative descriptor British colonists used for the Yalukit Weelam Clan). Other contemporary researchers such Presland (2010, p24), Clark & Briggs (2011) commonly identify both Derrimut and King Benbow as clan leaders of the Yalukit Weelam as do Boonwurrung descendents such as N'Arweet Carolyn Briggs.

The evidence that 'King Benbow' was the leader of the Aboriginal clan at Williamstown is unequivocal in Andrew Curtain's Essay (1889, p.3) reflecting the common memory of townsfolk of Williamstown who had known or seen the Boonwurrung during the 1830s and 1840s. Curtain writes "King Benbow, at the head of his tribe of aboriginals, was the unquestioned monarch of this Elysian home jutting out into the sea..."

² The knowledge of Boonwurrung counsels and ceremonies near or at 'The Message Tree' is reported independently by two early sources. The first comes from a leader of the public campaign to save the tree, Head Teacher of St.Mary's Primary School during 1856, James Wallace. Wallace's writings on story of the failed battle to save the tree that year are reproduced in Curtain's (1889, p.13) Essay where Wallace records "The earliest tradition regarding the Old Tree is to the effect that long before this country was colonised it was held in almost religious veneration by the aboriginals; that it was beneath its umbrageous shade they held their councils, and...after a battle...regaled...".

The second source comes from the Williamstown Chronicle of 3 January 1857 and is from an anonymous correspondent who favours the removal of The Message Tree but amused by the fuss conducts 'research' among the protestors to understand the value they place on the tree. Here the correspondent reports his findings in a tone which mocks any British valuing of the Boonwurrung's association with the tree where he states "It appears that many long years before the arrival of a white man upon these shores, that this part of the colony which we now call Williamstown was selected by the aboriginies as their place of rendezvous every month; and beneath the foliage of that old tree have sat the King of the Cannibals and all his wives and warriors. Numerous, too, have been the corroborees which have taken place on the same spot; and, it is said, that that old tree, if it could speak, might make some "fearful disclosures,..." This correspondent's attempt to publicly mock those

protesting the removal of The Message Tree from the proposed roadway in 1857 has inadvertently left us with a credible picture of just how the connection to the 'Old She-oak' was associated with Boonwurrung ceremonies with viewed among the colonists who were petitioning Council. Words like "every month" and "numerous, too have been" regarding this link between the Boonwurrung and the tree indicates a strong memory of close relationship by the to the tree and/or place where it stood.

- This reference comes from a Boonwurrung oral history as shared by Boonwurrung man, Marbee Williams. Marbee told this story while in attendance at the first Message Tree Project meeting at Hobsons Bay Yacht Club on 28 February 2019.
- 4 As outlined in Clark & Briggs (2011, p.14).
- **5** Elsum, (1934, p2-3) credits Governor Bourke of New South Wales for naming the town during 1836 as "Williams Town in honour of the reigning [British] monarch."
- ⁶ The use of the word 'invasion' regarding the colonisation of the Boonwurrung Estate was queried during stakeholder workshop and ultimately adopted for inclusion in this panel by the stakeholder group.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defines invasion as "the act of entering a place by force, often in large numbers" leading to the questions 'what force?' and 'what numbers?' in regards the conquest of the Yalukit Weelam Clan Estate by John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner's parties in 1835 and the New South Wales colonial government (and later Victoria) thereafter.

Modern histories of colonisation tend to align with a First People's view-point sees the arrival of the British as an 'invasion'. The most relevant example regarding colonisation of the Yalukit Weelam Clan Estate comes from Tasmanian history James Boyce (2013). Boyce provides evidence to strongly support the idea that British arrival in 1835 was an extremely calculated land theft perpetrated on the Kulin Nations by the Port Phillip Association and led by John Batman. Boyce argues that this private colonisation venture especially mounted to test and break a British Government policy of 'settler containment' that would allow thousands of potential colonists from Van Diemens Land unrestricted access any and all of the lands of our First Peoples on the Australian mainland. Boyce (2013, p.xxii-xiv) writes "Between 1835 and 1838 alone, more land and more people were conquered than in the preceding half-century. By the end of the 1840s, squatters had seized nearly twenty million hectares of the most productive and best-watered Aboriginal homelands, comprising most of the grasslands in what are now Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland. It was 'one of the fastest land occupations in the history of empires.' In little more than a decade the continental pinpricks which represented the totality of British occupation in 1835 became a sea of red...The catalyst for this momentous change was the founding of Melbourne, the only major Australian city established without government [British] sanction. The movement of men and sheep across Bass Strait from Van Diemen's Land, as Tasmania was known [many to Williamstown], was a private and highly speculative investment. No one was in any doubt that is was also trespass. Consequently, the pioneers' principle challenge was not to subdue the environment

- this was benign grassland country – but to 'fachieve a change in [British] law and policy...The principle obstacle to achieving this was the Aborigines...the squatters themselves were far from passive agents: through their famous treaty with the Aborigines and careful lobbying...the well-connected gentlemen of Van Diemen's Land pursued their profitable cause. The squatters did not win private title, but the open access conceded by the [British] government had more dramatic consequences than even their ambitious scheming could have anticipated. The tsunami generated by the change in...policy in 1835-6 was such that almost every resident of Australia, black and white, was swept up in its tide." This account argues careful premeditated and planned theft of land (if not from the Boonwurrung government then from the British) which led to 'large numbers' of people and that sheep became part of a rapid conquest.

The question of 'force' as an act or as a threat, and its impacts on our First Peoples, another quite recent area of historical research. Some of this comes from studies of the 'Frontier Wars' and of massacres of our First Peoples which have begun emerging as published works by credible authors like Clark (1995).

For the Boonwurrung and other coastal groups, violent contact with the superior lethal technology of the British arriving by sea, either the unofficial colonists (like sealers) or the official such as British naval officers (probably since the end of the 1700s) had given the Kulin Nations clear reason to 'fear' the violent potential British colonists on their soil. The Boonwurrung's first recorded contact with a British Navy vessel, the HMS Lady Nelson is from 17 February 1802 where this early contact resulted in the British shooting a number of Boonwurrung with muskets and then discharging the ships guns "loaded with round and grape..." upon the fleeting Boonwurrung "...to increase their panic..." (from the journal of Acting Lieutenant John Murray in Flannery (2004, p.29). Boyce (2013, p.65) emphasises that the Boonwurrung and other clans around Melbourne had a keen fear of British firearms, violence and potential abduction stating "...sealers, walers and wattle-bark collectors, the first European colonisers...had relations with the Aborigines stretching back over thirty years [prior to 1835]...their knowledge and fear of the effects of firearms [went back] as early as 1803...Indeed the first group of Aborigines Batman encountered in Port Phillip 'was afraid I should take them by force and ill-use them, as some of their tribe had been already'." Presland (2010, pp.83-87) states that "Certainly the coastal areas of Boonwurrung territory were explored by Europeans in the earliest years of the nineteenth century." This included shortlived British government settlements on Boonwurrung lands in Western Port Bay and at Sorrento where some Boonwurrung are known to have been shot during these early contacts. All of this evidence indicates that the fear of 'force', if not its systematic application, was a real and present danger to the Boonwurrung.

Understanding our shared history, the term 'invasion' has a currency in the public discourse from both a First Peoples and Second Peoples history perspective. With this in mind, the 3rd stakeholder workshop that discussed the inclusion of word 'invasion' on 2 May 2019, was comfortable that the word deserves its place in this telling of the Boonwurrung story. It was felt that any potential public discussion the word raises would provide a positive opportunity for those raising the question to journey deeper into the historical evidence provided by Boyce (2013) and others. It was considered a discussion with to potential help end the Great Australian Silence (Stanner, 1969) around this question and assist the enlightenment of our

whole community. Evoking further research and more nuanced public discourse was seen to align with Council's stated commitment to an innovative process of National Reconciliation within Hobons Bay.

⁷ The decline in the numbers of Boonwurrung people was recorded by the colonial 'protectors of Aborigines' from 1839 onwards. Prior to British colonisation from 1835 Boonwurrung numbers are already considered to be have been depleted by British diseases that made their way into the population centres of our First Peoples years before British colonists themselves arrived in their Estates. The main suspect disease is smallpox which arrived in Sydney with the First Fleet and apparently reached Victoria by the end of the 1820s. Presland (2010, p.87) writes "...there is some evidence that smallpox swept through south-east Australia in 1829-32...Aborigines had no natural immunity to [British-introduced] infections...so the death rate where the epidemics occurred...was unusually high. It is estimated [it]...had a fatality rate of 50 per cent of those infected."

After colonisation of Melbourne in 1835 however, the rate of Boonwurrung population decline is startlingly rapid. In a census conducted by Assistant Protector William Thomas in November 1839 the number of Boonwurrung number only 83 individuals (of which the Yalukit Willam Clan would have only represented a proportion of the total) (Stephens, 2014.p.82). Of these 90% of the population (man, woman and child) had been assessed by the Colonial Surgeon as presenting with venereal diseases in that same year with many also found to be suffering from dysentery with insufficient food, blankets and exposure to the cold of the winter of 1839 (Stephens, 2014, p.15). Even so the 1839 census shows a healthy birth rate with 40 of the population of 83 aged under 20 years. (p.82) but as colonisation and its effects deepen untimely adult deaths and childlessness among the Boonwurrung grow in direct relation to the growing British population. The largest Boonwurrung family in this period is that of Mingaragon, a respected Elder and the father of N'Arweet Boollutt. Mingaragon was believed to be in his 60s when the British arrived in 1835. He had three wives (aged approximately 20-40 years old) and at least 10 children. In 1843 to 1844, all three of Mingaragon's wives died and Thomas's census' show a number of his children simply disappear from the records altogether. When Mingaragon himself dies in 1847 the Boonwurrung ceremonially arrange a heptagon made of saplings around his grave. When Protector Thomas asks about the significance of this gesture, the Boonwurrung explain that each side represents one of the seven surviving members of Mingargon's clan (the Yaluit Weelam Clan). (Fels,2011, p.217).

By 1855 the Boonwurrung birth-rate is zero percent for the year as Protector Thomas dolefully records in his journal of 31st December making the simple annual tally "6 Deaths, No Birth" (Stephens, 2014, V3, p.63). Even the death rate tells of a much reduced population given that upon Thomas' arrival in 1839 he witnessed 6 Boonwurrung die in one week (Stephens, 2014, V1, p.15).

From the 1860s onwards, the only survivors of the Boonwurrung living in Victoria were the family of an extremely resilient Yalukit Weelam Clan woman, Louisa Briggs, who had been abducted by sealers as a child, only to return over Bass Strait from the Furneaux Islands, to raise a family in Victoria (Eidelston, 2014, p.20-21). Louisa Briggs' survival is an incredible story of resilience as is her successful raising of a large family and her campaigns for justice

within the racially-based system of incarcerations of our First Peoples in 'Missions' carried out in Victoria. Were it not for this one woman, there would have been no Boonwurrung living in Victoria beyond the 1860s, some 30 years after the arrival of the British colonists of 1835.

Pascoe (2014, p.17) states that "..yam daisy, or Murnong (Microseris lanceolata) tubers – a little sweet potato that was a staple vegetable of the Wathaurong..." [language group of the Eastern Kulin Nations]. The Wathaurong (or Wuddawurrung) language group shares its north-eastern boundary with the Boonwurrung at the Werribee River. Both had close intermarriage relationships and both had Estates with a mix of wide open grassy basalt plains and coastal wetlands along the west of Port Phillip Bay..." Pascoe (2014, p.27) goes on to state that the "...yam was a crucial plant in the economy of pre-colonial Aboriginal Australia...", an agricultural crop that extended across all of Victoria, especially on basalt soils to the west. Pascoe (2014 p.25) cites Frankel (1982, pp.43-44) who draws on the observations of one of Melbourne's colonial naturalist Issac Batey who recorded his observations of the obvious cultivation of Murnong as follows: "...the soil (on a sloping ridge) is rich in basaltic clay, evidently well fitted for the production of myrnongs [Murnong, Microseris lanceolata]. On the spot are numerous mounds with short spaces between each, and as all these are at right angles to the ridge's slope it is conclusive evidence that they were the work of human hands extending over a long series of years. This uprooting of the soil, to apply the best term, was accidental gardening, still it is reasonable to assume that the Aboriginals were quite aware of the fact that turning the earth over in search of yams, instead of diminishing that form of food supply, would have a tendency to increase it. In the very weeks of the Port Phillip Company's incursion into the Estates of Eastern Kulin Nations from Indented Head, during 1835, the company's surveyor John Helder Wedge sketched Wuddawurrung women harvesting Murnong in this image:



I.H.W. Native Women getting Tam bourn Roots 27 August 1835

Pascoe (2014, p. 23) cites the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Port Phillip District of New South Wales [now Victoria], George Augustus Robinson who while travelling across the basalt plains in western Victoria in 1841 recorded scale of harvest for Murnong as follows: "...the native women were spread out over the plain as far as the eye could see, collecting Murnong...I inspected their bags and baskets on return and each had a load as much as she could carry."

"Thousands of sheep only metres from here". Curtains Essay on Early Williamstown tells that the area close to The Message Tree and Gem Pier attracted colonial shipping operations and had a special advantage for landing livestock. He records the beach there was "a shellbank formation" and that some vessels found it "perfectly safe to run in on the sand, remove the sheep into boats to be landed, and compel the cattle to swim ashore" (Curtain, 1889, p.4). Boyce (2013, p. 151) charts the rapid increase in the tally of sheep introduced by the British colonists where he states that the "official estimate of sheep numbers rose from 26,000 in June 1836 to...700,000 in 1840". A the grasslands west and north of Williamstown were the primary target for colonisation by the Port Phillip Association, it can be safely assumed that a large number of these sheep were landed on the beach close near Gem Pier more than likely milling around The Message Tree upon reaching dry land.

10 Colonial naturalist, Issac Batey, who lived near Sunbury noted that after 1846 "...myrnong digging was unknown to us, for the all sufficient reason that livestock seemingly had eaten out that form of vegetation." (in Pascoe, p.25). In addition to the selective grazing of sheep particularly all the hardened hoofed animals introduced by the British fundamentally and permanently changed the very structure of the soil profile on the basalt plains. Apart from removing the grassy overstory by grazing exposing the soil too sun and wind, hoof-compaction destroyed a delicate ecosystem of native herbs. The following description colonist GT Lyod by of the basalt plains west of Geelong, near Colac, provides a glimpse of the biological diversity and fragility of the Murnong fields on the great basalt plains as follows: "The ground had been so protected by mosses and lichens so thick that it was difficult to ride across the country [on horseback] at any place exceeding the "farmers" jog trot...With the onslaught of the sharp little hooves and teeth of...sheep, goats, pigs and cattle driven in by the settlers, the ground covers were destroyed..."(in Pascoe, 2014, pp.25-26). Pascoe (2014, p.26) notes that Loyd reported that in the days before soil compaction by cloven-hooved stock his horses would sink "to the fetlock [effectively ankle deep] into the soil as if it were a sponge." (Pascoe, 2014, p.26).

It is only logical to conclude that this same pattern of colonial destruction that occurred on the rich but fragile native grassland on the great basalt plains began on the Boonwurrung Estate with stock landed in Williamstown from 1836. Not only would the large numbers of sheep released have removed the protective Kangaroo Grass overstory, eating it down to its roots and exposing the mossy soil surface to destruction by the sun, but the Murnong crop that was cultivated between the Kangaroo Grass Tussocks would have selectively grazed as Batey observed.

The loss of Boonwurrung food supply as a result of widespread sheep grazing west of the Maribyrnong from 1836 can not be underestimated. The grasslands provided Murnong as a vital staple but the tall tussocky grass cover provided habitat for abundant small game such as Bush Turkey (Australian Bustard) and Bandicoots (such as the now endangered Eastern-Barred Bandicoot). These too would have lost their protective cover over-night becoming exposed to predation and rapid local decline. Melbourne's first trained theologian was the Wesleyan Methodist Reverend Joseph Orton who arrived in the Port Phillip District as early as 1836, taking an interest in the welfare of both Aborigines and colonist.

In 1839 Orton reflects on the dire situation of the Boonwurrung and other clans find themselves in recording that they are "...almost in a state of starvation and can only obtain food day by day, by begging." He goes on to observe that practice of hunting has been almost "abandoned on account of their game being driven away by the encroachment of settlers, and the roots on which they used partially to feed have been destroyed by the sheep." (Boyce, 2011, p. 164). It is significant that less than four years after the British invasion of the Eastern Kulin Nations Orton can easily link the loss of game and Murnong to the state of starvation facing the Yalukit Weelam and other clans around Melbourne leading to a fundamental forced change of livelihood from farming and hunting to 'begging'.

In 1839, Orton also reflects on the harried landless existence of the Eastern Kulin who must now move from place to place having become unjustly disposed of their sovereign Estates without any just compensation or provision. He records that "The government is fast disposing of their lands...no reserve whatever is made for the provision of the natives, neither in securing to them sufficient portions of their own native land as hunting ground, nor otherwise providing for their necessities. The result of which is that the natives who remain in the neighbourhood of the settled districts become pilfering – starving – obtrusive mendicants, and after enduring incalculable deprivations, abuses and miseries will gradually pine – die away- and become extinct, leaving only an external memento of a blot upon the justice, equity and benevolence of our Christian government, for no adequate provision is made for them."(in Flannery, 2004, p.101).

Boonwurrung, such as N'Arweet Boollutt's mob, from west of the Maribyrnong, having lost their lands to sheep farms immediately upon the invasion of their Estate, quickly found themselves landless, vagrant, starving and in danger of mistreatment by colonists.

1839 was the year Assistant Protector of Aborigines who would befriend the Boonwurrung, William Thomas, arrived in Melbourne from London. He acknowledges the dire plight of our First Peoples at their camp on the site of the current Royal Botanical Gardens on the south bank of the Yarra River. Here he laments the cold-hearted nature of the colonial administration where our First Peoples are concerned and the situation they are in with no land, insufficient shelter, food, clothing and protection from colonists. On his arrival in January 1839 Thomas finds many of the Kulin have left the camp at Melbourne due to a deadly outbreak influenza (Stephens, 2014, p.2) and by May he is deeply frustrated by the lack of funds provided to the protectorate by the colonial government and the homelessness, hunger and disease this is causing the ailing Yalukit Weelam and

neighbouring clans. He writes "A scene presented itself truly appalled, 5 men in the last stage of dysentrery, a piercing cold night to all appearances coming on and not a blanket to cover them, & we their Protectors had not a single blanket at our disposal for these poor creatures. St James the Apostile should have been here. Could the British Parliament or His Excellency have felt our feelings they would certainly never have placed us in such a position without means. They did not however in vain call out plenty cold. I an my colleagues gave them blankets from our own beds... Mr Sievwright's report [another Assistant Protector] has this affecting sentence "9/10 of these poor creatures are labouring under the Venereal Disease which is not confined to age or sex, the Infant at the breast as well as the aged & infirm are infected with it & the Dysentery occasioned no doubt from privation and cold is awfully raging among them, 5 have already been buried & while I am now writing they are burying he 6th". (Stephens, 2014, p. 15). Seivwrights diagnosis is confirmed by the Colonial Surgeon, Dr Cousins who Thomas reports as stating "that in his whole experience of 18 months...that he never visited them in such a diseased & wretched state of want and disease, that 5 or 6 have already died and that 5 or 6 more is at the verge of Death" (Stephens, 2014, p.15). This one event in May 1889 suggesting 10-12 Kulin are expected to die, is an indicator of the rapid rate of population decline at this time around Melbourne in this period. Thomas' census of November that year shows only 124 Woiwurrung and 83 Boonwurrung (Stephens, 2014, pp.76-82) remain alive at this time suggesting that loss of 10-12 individuals represents about 5% of the total population Thomas is charged with 'protecting'. Both Christians, Thomas' view on the injustice of the treatment of the Kulin clans aligns with Orton when, in August 1839 Thomas writes "Poor creatures although Tens of Thousands [pounds] have the last few months months been realised from their land not a Blanket is to be given them in return."

Shortly after 1939, in an undated letter, Geelong magistrate Foster Fyans again comments on the ravages of sexually transmitted diseases, in this case among the Wuddawurrung around Buninyong west of Geelong stating "Large families of natives – husband, wife, boys and girls – were eaten up with venereal disease. The disorder was an introduction from V.D. Land, and I am of opinion that two thirds of the natives of Port Phillip have died from this infection." (Bride, 1969, p.181). His account emphasises the role of disease but as the accounts of Thomas and Orton suggest the health of our First Peoples in this period was fundamentally compromised by the stresses of landlessness and hunger magnified by a callous indifference to their welfare by the colonial penny counters.

The characterisation of landless natives described by Reverend Joseph Orton (in the endnote ix above) aptly describes the context in which early colonial violence toward Boonwurrung undoubtedly occurred. It is easily assumed, even today, that a beggar is a hair-width separated from a thief. In the context of the remote pastoral stations of the late 1830s, where the Yalukit Weelam and other clans would naturally turn to begging food from pastoralist who had taken up tenancy in their Estates. Often these stations were miles distant from colonial law enforcement where the temptation to use violence as a 'pragmatic' solution to what many pastoralist would have viewed a drain on the profits of their lease, could easily result. The evidence that murdering 'the natives' was a widespread

and widely known, yet culturally secretive, practice in Victoria is most accurately described by one pastoralist who took up Boonwurrung lands on the Mornington Pennisula. From here he wrote a shockingly candid letter home to his mother in Britain about the scale and cultural acceptance of cold-blooded murder on the pastoral 'frontiers' of Victoria. He states:

"The blacks are very quiet here now, poor wretches, no wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparing perserverence as they are; men, women, and children are shot where ever they can be met with, some excuse might be found for shooting the men by those who are daily getting their cattle speared, but what they can urge I their excuse who shoot the women and children I cannot conceive. I have protested against it at every station I have been in in Gibbs (Gippsland) in the strongest language but these things are kept very secret as the penalty would certainly be hanging...I remember the time when my blood would have run cold at the bare mention of these things but now I am become so familiarised with scenes of horror, from having murder made a topic of every day conversation. I have heard tales told, and some things I have seen that would form as dark a page as ever you could read in the book of history – but I thank God I have never participated in them – If I could remedy these things I would speak loudly though it cost me all I am worth in the world, but as I cannot I will keep aloof and know nothing and say nothing." (in Clark, 1995, pp.1-2).

Another pastoralist who wrote candidly about the pragmatic nature of massacre and murder as part and parcel of a Victorian pastoral venture was Neil Black from Victoria's Western District. In 1939 he wrote:

"The best way [to procure a run] is to go outside and take up a new run, provided the conscience of the party is sufficiently seared to enable him without remorse to slaughter natives right and left. It is universally and distinctly understood that the chances are very small indeed of a person taking up a new run being able to maintain possession of his place and property without having recourse to such means — sometimes by wholesale . . . (9 December 1839 in Clarke, 1995, pp.1).

The brazen nature of violence against our First Peoples in the early years is mostly recognized as something that happened away from Melbourne where the colonial authorities might see or hear of such cases and investigate.

The Yalukit Weelam Clan, whose Estate includes Melbourne and Williamstown, are often considered to have not faced such gratuitous violence, however one story of mass killing on the western border of the clan estate at the Werribee River exists. This account reflects the classic elements of the dilemma for our First People at his time; the resorting to "stealing" sheep (spearing them) and begging for staples (in this case flour) and then subsequently dying from violent conflict, in this case by arsenic poisoning. The account is recalled in the Werribee Banner in 1924 as part of a local history lecture given by J.J. Ryder in a student if Corpus Christi College at the property now known as Werribee Mansion, now part of Werribee Park. The first British colonists to settle on this property were the Wedge family after the John Heldar Wedge (the surveyor for the Port Phillip Company) took possession of

the land from the Boonwurrung for their pastoral homestead. Ryder recounts the story as follows:

Wedge settled down at Werribee, and built a small house just below the College farm. At this time the natives were very numerous. They held their corroborees down in the orchard, fished in the river, and hunted along its banks. They used to spear Wedge's sheep, and it was not safe for a white man to venture forth without a gun. But the blacks disappeared from the district very suddenly. When asked how this happened, a member of the Wedge family related that one night they stole a bag of flour containing arsenic, and their screams could be heard for a mile away. (Werribee Shire Banner, 1924, p.3).

This story is repeated in James (1985) for the 100 year centenary of the Werribee Shire where he states:

FATE OF ORIGINAL OWNERS OF THE LAND*

The coming of the squatters to Victoria helped bring a rapid end to the aboriginal population. It is true that the Government established aboriginal protectorates with the aim of settling and

"civilizing' such Aborigines as desired to enter the white way of life. The Protectorates, in existance from 1838 to 1849 were unsuccessful. The Aborigines who lived in the Werribee area were to disappear before the squatters. Who were these people?

Initially the contact appears to have been peaceful as they were not yet aware of the fact that they were being dispossessed of their lands. There are plenty of accounts of peaceful relations between white and aborigine. John Helder Wedge had aboriginal companions who kept faith with him, as he with them. Charles Wedge, nephew of John Helder Wedge, who lived on the werribee in the early days later recorded that the Aborigines around the Werribee area were peacefully disposed, doubtless, be said, in great measure because of facilities of communication afforded by the long residence among them of the runaway prisoner of the Crown, William Buckley.

However, it did not take long for the intentions of the squatters to become clear. They now saw the land as legally being theirs and the Aborigines to be trespassers.

The squatter who had come to the Port Phillip district to make his fortune so that he might return home a wealthy man, found in the spearing and running off of sheep and cattle, a threat to his capital. In this situation, his attitude to the Aborigines was often that of open hostility. This led to conflict between these two groups, both of whom saw themselves as being the rightful owners of the land.

If the settlers could tell of stolen sheep and slaughtered shepherds, the Aborigines could tell of unwarranted vice and murder, with the poisoning of many of their people in the Werribee area and elsewhere. In the late 1840's, Ned Wedge, a son of Charles Wedge, explained to one of the new arrivals in the district, Mr. William Ison, probably in answer to a question as to the lack of Aborigines in the district, that in the early days the Aborigines had been so numerous, it was hardly safe to go about without a gun. They used to spear the

hardly safe to go about without a gun. They used to spear the sheep, and if the shepherd left any rations in his hut, the Aborigines were sure to take them. To the question, 'But how is it that none of them are left now'? he replied, 'Oh, they all disappeared one night; they stole a bag of flour containing arsenic; their yells could be heard a mile off'. Ned disassociated his family from this tragedy, a not infrequent incident in early colonial history.

(James, 1985,.pp 10-13)

The word 'Estates' in this sentence is written with a capital 'E'. This is done as a mark of respect to the idea that Boonwurrung sovereignty over their traditional lands is a real and unresolved matter in our history. While the notion of 'Terra Nulleus' was long held as a truism of British law in Australia, it was ultimately dispelled as an obvious fiction by the High Court of Australia in the famous Wik decision in the early 1990s. Historically however, the early colonial record is littered with statements by individuals who are in contact with our First Peoples and who acknowledge their obvious natural claim to be owners of the land that is being colonised. Assistant Protector Thomas himself despairs for the injustice being visited on the sovereign Boonwurrung people when his writes the following statement in his journal "Poor creatures although Tens of Thousands have the last few months been realized"

from their land not a Blanket is to be given them in return." In the Stakeholder discussions about the use of a capital letter it was viewed that if Australia and Victoria receive a capital letter in recognition of their sovereign status as Country or State, it would be most accurate, just and respectful to also place a capital 'E' on the word Estate when referring to the Boonwurrung Estates or the Yalukit Weelam Clan Estate.

In approximately 1836, in the very early days of colonial contact the Yalukit Weelam Clan (and possibly other Boonwurrung) suffered enormous losses in a dawn raid by a group of Gippsland Blacks (of the Gunai-Kurnai Language Group). The attack took place at Middle Brighton which was a favoured campsite of the Boonwurrung and 77 men, women and children are believed to have died in the attack. This story was recorded by a number of sources around Brighton. (Fels, 2011, pp.255-256) and led to pay-back attacks by the Boonwurrung on the Gunai-Kurnai a few years later (Fels, , pp.249-254). It is unknown if such violent raids occurred prior to the period of contact with the British after 1790. Given that the colonial government had formed a Native Police Force staffed by Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung men to conduct raids within Gippsland aimed at protecting the interests of British colonists there, it would be unreasonable to assume that the actions of the British has 'no influence' on the violent actions of our First Peoples in during this early colonial period. Either way, this 'black on black' violence led to the death of many Boonwurrung which only added to the list of challenges their fast declining population was facing from the colonisation of the Boonwurrung Estate.

15 From the 1860s onwards, the only survivors of the Boonwurrung living in Victoria were the family of an extremely resilient Yalukit Weelam Clan woman who had been abducted by sealers as a baby, only to return over Bass Strait from the Furneaux Island to raise a family in Victoria (Eidelston, 2014, p.20-21). Louisa Briggs' survival is an incredible story of resilience as is her successful raising of a large family and her campaigns for justice within the racially-based system of Aboriginal incarceration in 'Missions' carried out in Victoria. Were it not for this one woman, there would have been no Boonwurrung survivors living in Victoria beyond the 1860s, some 30 years after the arrival of the British colonists of 1835. What this also reflects is that all of the Boonwurrung who lived or were born under colonial rule from 1835 onward died. It amounts to what was a total genocide of the Boonwurrung in Victoria which would have remained the final outcome of British conquest of the Boonwurrung Estates had it not been for Louisa returning to Victoria in 1852 and producing children. Louisa's descendants are now representing the history and culture of the Boonwurrung Estates including Caroline Martin and Marbee Williams from Yalukit Marnang who have contributed to this project.

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16 See Boyce, 2011.
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¹⁷ See Curtain, 1889, p.13

¹⁸ See Curtain, 1889, p.13

- The first minute book of Williamstown Borough Council from 1856-57 contains the words of the residents petition on page 210 for the meeting on 18 December 1856 as follows "The Chairman presented a petition from fifty-five ratepayers of the district praying the Council to instruct their Surveyor of the advisability of making a diversion in the roadway now in course of construction in Nelson Place so as to leave the Notice Tree situated at the foot of Thompson Street undisturbed". This record is held in the Public Records Office of Victoria (Location V/AH/023/08/04).
- The strong connection to the location of The Message Tree for Boonwurrung is established by two main sources from 1856, the time of the campaign to save the tree from removal. James Wallace (an account republished in Curtain, 1889) and an anonymous letter writer published in the Williamstown Chronicle on 3 January 1857. Both describe a very long and regular connection to location of the tree for Boonwurrung who were seen there conducting ceremonies and counsels. See Appendix 1 for a fuller analysis.
- 21 Strahan Lynne, 1994, At the Edge of the Centre: A History of Williamstown, Hargreen Publishing, pp 22-24. Strahan quotes W. Cheney recalling in 1909 that he arrived aged seven in 1849 and recalled the town was then small 'approximately 500 people'. An 1846 census quoted in Elsum (1934, p.71) suggests 322 residents in that year, so the 500 figures is adopted as probable. The figure for 1857 of 3536 is quoted by Strahan (p.24) as a number excluding the 'floating population of seamen'.
- Williamstown Borough Council Minute Book, 12 December 1856, pages 203-204, Public Records Office of Victoria (Location V/AH/023/08/04).
- 23 Same as for endnote number 19, above.
- From a letter to the *Williamstown Chronicle on 3 January 1857 on Page 3* from an' anonymous' writer arguing in support of the removal of the Message Tree and clearly mocking the concern of local 'save the tree' campaigners for their interest in the ancient Boonwurrung connections to the tree. This article is available at the National Library of Australia via trove.nla.gov.au using an advanced digitised newspaper search.

REFERENCES:

References provided at the end of the main Outcomes Report Document, p.26