Towns and mission stations in Gippsland

OFF THE MISSION STATIONS: ABORIGINES IN GIPPSLAND 1860 – 1890

Bain Attwood

During the post-frontier years, throughout southeastern Australia, many Aborigines were confined on mission stations or government reserves by force or circumstance. But some scholars have overemphasised this process,¹ ignoring the refusal of other Aborigines to live on missions in their struggle to survive. A close study of the Kurnai people of Gippsland in the last third of the nineteenth century reveals that many Aborigines continued to shape their own lives, some of which were lived away from the missions.

The first contact between Aborigines and Europeans in Gippsland took place in the late eighteenth century and was followed by further fleeting encounters on the coast. It was not until the late 1830s that prolonged contact with Europeans began, as explorers and adventurers pushed into the area, and pastoralists rapidly took up large parcels of land. As elsewhere, Aborigines mounted staunch resistance, and bitter conflict ensued with considerable loss of Aboriginal life. However, the nature of the European pastoral economy and the topography of the area also allowed Aborigines to move away from Europeans, and a decade or so elapsed before they began once again to range over their traditional land and go into European settlements. It was not until the 1850s that the Kurnai worked and begged for food and money from the European settlers on a regular basis, but even then they continued to live according to Aboriginal mores and beliefs.²

In the 1860s a major transformation of Kurnai society began, with the coming of Christian missionaries, Friedrich August Hagenauer (1829-1908) and John Bulmer (1833-1913). In 1861 Hagenauer and Bulmer went to Gippsland to assess the potential for missionary work among the Aborigines. Hagenauer was a Moravian who had been working in the Wimmera (near Lake Hindmarsh) since January 1859, with a fellow missionary, F.W. Spieseke. In 1860 he had preliminary discussions with representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Victoria, which wanted to start a mission to Aborigines. Bulmer too had been a missionary, with the Church of England on the Murray River at Yelta. By 1860 the Anglicans were looking to start another mission, and regarded Gippsland as a possible field for this endeavour.³

Bain Attwood teaches Australian history at Monash University, and recently completed a thesis on contact between Aborigines and Europeans in Gippsland in the nineteenth century. He is now working on aspects of post-frontier Aboriginal society, with particular emphasis on missionaries and mission stations.

I am indebted to Richard Broome, Tess Moloney and Alan Crooke for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ See for example Christie 1979:ch.5; Haviland and Haviland 1980:119.

² See Attwood 1984:chs 1-3.

³ Rev. A.J. Campbell, letter 24 July 1860, Report of the Presbyterian General Assembly Committee on Missions to the Heathen, 1861, Rev. F.A. Hagenauer to Br L.T. Reichel, 16 July 1861 (Moravian Mission, MF166); Church of England *Annual Report* 1855:6 and 1861:4-5, 10.

After preliminary visits to the area, Hagenauer and Bulmer returned with their wives, Louise and Caroline, to establish missions in 1862. On his first visit Bulmer had stayed for eight to nine months, during which time some Aborigines had helped him choose a site at Lake Tyers. In 1863 Aborigines also played a crucial role in the selection of the site for the other mission station, on the Avon River near Lake Wellington. They agreed to call the station 'Ramahyuck' – the scriptural name 'Ramah' was suggested by the convener of the Presbyterian Missions to the Heathen, with Aborigines adding 'yuck', to denote 'home'.⁴

Both these mission stations were located in out-of-the-way places, isolated from European settlement. Ramahyuck was fifteen miles from Sale, the nearest big town; Lake Tyers Mission Station, surrounded by heavy bush on a peninsula five miles east of the entrance to the Gippsland Lakes, was twenty miles from the nearest town.⁵

By the early 1870s most of the Kurnai Aborigines (who numbered about two hundred) lived on these remote mission stations, which they regarded as 'home'. On Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers a largely enclosed and socially self-sufficient world had evolved, in which the missionary men had acquired tremendous power and influence over the Aborigines. Hagenauer and Bulmer had purposely organised the environment and structure of mission life in accordance with their desire that traditional Aboriginal culture be destroyed, and with their paternalistic principle that Aborigines had to be 'carefully and kindly guided'. Each day a strict, orderly routine, arranged by the clock, was enforced with rules, religious observances, and work set by the missionaries.⁶

However, although the missionary-ruled stations dominated the Aboriginal milieu in the 1870s and 1880s, there was a small group of Aborigines who never 'settled down' on Ramahyuck or Lake Tyers, while those on the mission stations were not wholly insulated from the outside world, many continuing to move in the wider community, working, drinking and holidaying. Both these phenomena will be examined.

At least two Aborigines chose to live away from the mission stations altogether; they were Charles and Annabella Hammond. Although Charles, like other young Aboriginal men, went to Lake Tyers Mission Station when Bulmer founded it in 1862, he was reluctant to stay there. Charles was unwilling 'to mingle with other Aborigines', apparently regarding them with disdain. This is not altogether surprising; as a young child he had been taken away by Europeans and not allowed 'to associate with his tribe', and had probably become imbued with some of the settlers' denigratory attitudes to 'wild blacks'. In 1864 he married Annabella, a woman of mixed descent. She was possibly one of a small group of mixed-descent girls whom Aborigines had allowed Bulmer to teach when he began his mission at Lake Tyers.

⁴ Hagenauer to Reichel, 17 July and 19 September 1862, 18 June 1864; Hagenauer to Campbell, 10 October 1862 (Moravian Mission, MF 166); *Further Facts*, paper 4:4-7, paper 5:9, 12; Central Board . . . (CBPA), 4th Report 1864:9; *Illustrated Australia News*, 1 January 1869:5; Campbell 1889:159; Bulmer Papers: papers 1, 2, 3, 7, 13; Pepper 1980:38-9.

⁵ *Gippsland Times*, 20 May 1864, 13 January 1874; Surveyor-General 1874:10; Royal Commission 1877:viii; John Bulmer to Dr A. Morrison, 7 April 1885 (Australian Archives (AA) Brighton, Series B356, Item 11); *Argus*, 2 January 1886:4.

⁶ See Attwood 1984:ch.5.

Bulmer described Charles as an intelligent, industrious man who had 'evinced a desire to maintain himself by labour'; to do this he wanted a piece of land that he and Annabella could work and make their home. He sought the missionary's help, and in July 1864 a willing Bulmer petitioned the Central Board for the Protection of the Aborigines for some land on the Hammonds's behalf. The Board supported Bulmer's request, and he was directed to apply formally to the Board of Lands and Works. In the meantime, the Hammonds moved to Bruthen on the Tambo River, where they chose a ten-acre block; Charles began work, driving bullocks and doing odd jobs around the town. The Board refused their application for the block, as the land could not be legally granted either to them or to any non-Aboriginal.⁷

Whatever their disappointment at this rebuff the Hammonds, after a time at Bruthen, moved to Omeo, where Charles worked for many years on Tongio and other stations. Bulmer repeatedly urged them to return to Lake Tyers, but for twenty years they preferred to work and live amidst Europeans, never going 'among their people'. They were both very hard workers, and reared a large family of seven children who were educated at the local school.⁸

There were other Aborigines in Gippsland who led lives independent of the missionaries, but who spent some time on the two mission stations. Their number is somewhat difficult to assess. The missionaries consistently underestimated the size of this group, asserting that Aborigines had given up 'their wandering lives' and that 'all the blacks' resided at the stations. However the missionaries occasionally admitted that there were exceptions.⁹ It seems that these 'habitual wanderers' — as the missionaries labelled them — numbered about fifteen.¹⁰ They moved on and off the missions as they pleased, staying on Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers 'perhaps for a fortnight at a time' but 'never . . . more than two months'.¹¹

The 'habitual wanderers' tended to be men rather than women; they had mostly been born before prolonged European contact in the area, and by 1860 were in their thirties and forties, or older. These Aborigines opted to live away from the stations for several inter-related reasons. Generally they found Christianity, the paternalistic missionaries, and the ordered regime of mission life, distasteful or even intolerable. Most importantly they were traditionalists, seeking to live in a world defined by long-standing Aboriginal social and religious beliefs. Although Hagenauer contended that 'the old manners and customs . . . [had] entirely disappeared',¹² (as a result of the missionaries' attempts to break down the

⁷ CBPA, 4th Report 1864:8; Minutes of the CBPA, 15 August 1864 (AA Brighton, Series B314, Item 2); Bulmer to President of Lands and Works, 21 November 1864, J1864/11341 (Public Record Office of Victoria (PROVic), Series 2896).

⁸ *Gippsland Times*, 31 January 1871; Bulmer to Secretary, Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA), 15 October 1883 (AA Brighton, Series B356, Item 9).

⁹ Hagenauer to Rev. Robert Hamilton, 11 February 1876 (Hagenauer 1875-85); Church of England *Annual Report* 1875:7; Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 6 March 1877 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 171); Royal Commission 1877:36, 50.

¹⁰ Barwick 1963:97 may exaggerate the number of Aborigines in the area who refused to go onto the mission stations.

¹¹ Royal Commission 1877:36, 50.

¹² Report for Ramahyuck Mission Station, 1868, Queries and answers about Aborigines of Gippsland [c. December 1868] (Hagenauer 1865-72); Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 2 January 1888 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 181); Report for Ramahyuck Mission Station, 1888 (Moravian Mission MF 175); BPA, 28th Report 1892:9.

traditional ways and 'civilise and christianise' the Aborigines), this was clearly not the case.

These Aborigines shunned permanent residence on the missions as it interfered with their links with their land, 'The Dreaming' and some kin, and hindered their practice of sorcery and other customary beliefs opposed by the missionaries.¹³ One elderly man, for example, would often tell Hagenauer: 'Upon Mount Wellington is my home, give me a little ration'. Hagenauer recalled in 1877: 'he would travel home, see his country, and in a fortnight he would come back'.¹⁴

Many but not all of these men and women also had a considerable 'love of drink'. The missionaries and others explicitly identified 'those who may be termed wandering Aborigines . . . [as] very much given to drink', and argued too simply that they stayed away from the mission stations because of this.¹⁵ Many undoubtedly were heavy drinkers; one man was given the name 'Bunjil Bottle' by his fellow blacks, 'on account of his propensity to empty bottles containing strong waters', as one observer expressed it. ('Bunjil' was a term used frequently by the Kurnai to describe anything remarkable).¹⁶

Some of these men and women had also developed a strong association with European culture before the missionary incursion, as the life-story of one Aboriginal man, Tulaba or Billy Macleod, clearly illustrates. Billy was a Brabiralung man, born near Bruthen in the early 1830s. He could recall having seen Europeans for the first time at Swan Reach in the early 1840s; he was very frightened, thinking they were *mrarts* (ghosts) and had run off. Later in the decade, presumably after violent clashes between Brabiralung people and Europeans, Billy and several young boys were taken by some squatters, Archibald and John Macleod, and raised on one of their stations on the Mitchell River. At the time, Billy later recalled, he was 'not little boy — not big boy — only little big boy'.¹⁷

As he grew up, Billy and other young Aborigines on the Macleods' Mitchell River stations, and near Buchan and Orbost, worked as stockriders and drovers, performing the work with great proficiency. They enjoyed the pastoral life. These station workers also identified closely with their employers, and most followed, 'in many particulars', the manner of the Europeans. Indeed by the 1860s John Bulmer claimed they tried to 'imitate "white fellows" in everything'. Most could speak English, a few could read and write a little, and they wore European clothes. When they had money they bought themselves hats and shoes.¹⁸ One observer remarked that some of these young men were 'generally dandies in a small way, taking great pains with their hair, wearing cheap rings, and exhibiting, perhaps, their photograph'.¹⁹ A few of them owned their own stock. One man, Jemmy Gimblet — who worked

¹³ Report for Ramahyuck Mission Station, 1868 (Hagenauer 1865-72); Howitt to Anna Mary Watts, 20 January and 5 October 1871, 24 January 1872 (Howitt Papers 1047/1b and 2a); Royal Commission 1877:41; Fison and Howitt 1880:191, 246; Howitt 1884:186-9, 191; Howitt 1887:27-8, 32, 34, 51-2.

¹⁴ Report for Ramahyuck Mission Station, 1868 (Hagenauer 1865-72); Royal Commission 1877:41.

¹⁵ BPA, 7th Report 1871:17; BPA, 8th Report 1872:20; BPA, 10th Report 1874:18; BPA, 13th Report 1877:7; *Gippsland Times*, 13 January 1874; Royal Commission 1877:34, 36, 50.

¹⁶ Smyth 1878, I:246.

¹⁷ Howitt to Watts, 5 October 1871; Howitt, Notes on the Kurnai, Tulaba's reminiscences (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b, 1053/3b).

¹⁸ Bulmer Papers: papers 1, 7, 12; CBPA, 5th Report 1866:10.

¹⁹ *Gippsland Times*, 30 October 1863.

for Dalmahoy Macleod at Orbost — owned some cattle and horses, and when he died prematurely in 1866 he had property worth £20. (He had asked Macleod to sell it and pass the money to Bulmer for the mission.)²⁰

The relationship between the Aborigines and the Macleods went beyond one of employer and employee. These were not isolated cases, for other Brabiralung congregated at Bairnsdale and Lindenow stations in the 1850s. In their struggle to survive on the fringes of settler society, they attempted to establish a close relationship with the Macleods (and others), trying to assert the principles of sharing and reciprocity which were central to their own social system, in order to gain access to food and other things, as well as to ensure that Europeans treated them with care and respect.

They attempted to do this in a number of ways. As well as doing casual and seasonal jobs, they probably also exchanged food items with the Macleods, providing seafood and game in return for flour, tea, sugar and tobacco. The Brabiralung also sought to incorporate the Europeans into their kinship system by exchanging names with the Macleods and their workers. Thus it was that Tulaba became Billy Macleod. Aboriginal women were offered as sexual partners for the European men on the stations, while the Brabiralung also sought to cement kinship ties and reciprocal relationships by revealing their spiritual/religious beliefs to the Macleods. Both Archibald and John Macleod seem to have been regarded as men of status comparable to initiated Brabiralung men, unlike the missionaries later on, who, according to Billy Macleod, were unable to grasp Aboriginal religious notions. Billy once argued in reference to European views of sorcery that 'Mr B and H (meaning the missionaries) very stupid — not know this are murrawun [i.e. a throwing stick believed to contain special power] — but Mr Archie and Mr John [Macleod] (two squatters near) cabon [much] know in this murrawun'.²¹

In doing these things, the Aborigines believed they had entered into a relationship with the Macleods which entailed certain mutual obligations and benefits. The Macleods for their part seem to have accepted this. Indeed they took considerable interest in their Aboriginal workforce and John C. Macleod became 'tolerably acquainted' with the local Aboriginal language. The Macleods paid the stockmen and drovers good wages, encouraged them to buy stock, and also urged the Brabiralung men to plough some land and plant vegetables. The women of the Macleod clan taught some of the Aboriginal women sewing and other domestic tasks. These 'intruders' also dispensed medical supplies to the Aborigines, calling in more professional help when necessary.²² They became an even better source of food and clothing in 1860 when, under the newly-created Central Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, John C. Macleod became a Guardian of Aborigines and set up a depot to supply them.²³

The Macleods' pastoral stations gave the Brabiralung some breathing space and a time to

²⁰ Church of England *Annual Report* 1866:8.

²¹ Howitt to Watts, 5 October 1871 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b); Howitt 1887:28.

²² Archibald Macleod to Deputy Surveyor General, 15 May 1860, A1860/2670 (PROVic, Series 2896); William Thomas, *Journal of Gippsland Visit*, 31 December 1860 (Thomas Papers, Item 16); Notes (Howitt Papers, 1053/3b); Bulmer Papers: papers 1 and 7.

²³ CBPA, 1st Report 1861:33.

become accustomed to European settlement. They also provided opportunities to retain some of the Kurnai social and cultural order. A strong traditionalist such as Billy Macleod was able to maintain a powerful attachment to his own country as the Mitchell River stations lay within its bounds. While he tended stock he also moved about his familiar and traditional world. His life had a dual character — a mix of the old and new — similar to that enjoyed by other Aboriginal men such as George Dutton in northern New South Wales and Aborigines in the Northern Territory cattle industry in the twentieth century.²⁴

For some time after the coming of the missionaries, the Brabiralung and other Aboriginal groups were able to remain largely independent of the newly-founded mission stations. However they came under increasing pressure from Hagenauer and Bulmer to move onto the stations permanently and stop their 'restless wandering'. This pressure, part of which took the form of the closure of the Board food depots (at the request of the missionaries), along with the breaking up of the large pastoral properties, compelled most Aborigines in the area to move onto either Ramahyuck or Lake Tyers by the early 1870s.²⁵

Billy Macleod and others, however, stayed away. Billy never 'settled' on the mission stations, only going there occasionally. At the direction of the Macleods, Billy went to Melbourne in 1861 to guide John Bulmer over the rough road to Gippsland. However he took little interest in the missionaries or their faith.²⁶ Other Aboriginal stockmen too were, as Bulmer once noted, 'always busy with their employer's business', and seldom went to the missions except 'for a spell' when they were not needed on the pastoral runs.²⁷

They lived by begging food and money, using the remaining traditional food sources, and by working as bark-strippers, stockmen, shearers, reapers, maize-pickers and hop-pickers.²⁸ John Bulmer believed they survived by 'begging generally and working occasionally'.²⁹ He was to some extent correct in that assessment, as the 'wanderers' preferred not to be involved in regular wage labour, and they believed that Europeans had an obligation to share, in accordance with traditional Aboriginal values. As Alfred Howitt noted of Kurnai society:

There . . . [is] a common obligation upon all to share food, and to afford personal aid and succour. The food, the clothes, the medical attendance which the Kurnai receive from the whites, they take in the accustomed manner; and . . . the donors are regarded as having unlimited resources. They cannot be supposed by the Kurnai to be doing anything but giving out of their abundance.³⁰

Many Aborigines were very persistent in begging food from Europeans, and in some instances, angered by the settlers' failure to share their 'wealth', they were aggressive and

²⁴ See McGrath 1983:ch.8 and Beckett 1978.

²⁵ Minutes of the CBPA, 22 October 1862, 12 January 1863 (AA Brighton, Series B314, Item 2); CBPA, 3rd Report 1863:4, 7, 8; *Weekly Review and Messenger*, 27 August 1864:10; Royal Commission 1877:41-2.

²⁶ Bulmer Papers:paper 13.

²⁷ Bulmer Papers:paper 7; Church of England *Annual Report* 1863:11; CBPA, 4th Report 1864:8; CBPA, 5th Report 1866:10.

²⁸ *Gippsland Times*, 15 October 1872, 13 September 1876, 4 May 1877, 3 June 1878; Royal Commission 1877:36, 50.

²⁹ Royal Commission 1877:36, 50.

³⁰ Fison and Howitt 1880:257.

abusive towards them. In early 1859, for example, an Aboriginal man, Big Joe, threatened a European woman named Harding at Swan Reach, demanding food and clothing. Harding reluctantly agreed, but asked that he cut wood in return. Big Joe became annoyed at her parsimonious response, struck her on the throat, and made off with some goods. He was later convicted of aggravated assault.³¹

Big Joe was a powerfully-built man, with a gruff manner and a very abrupt way of speaking. As a result of the incident in 1859, and his abrasive disposition, he acquired an 'unenviable reputation' among the settlers. In Bairnsdale he was regarded as 'a dread to everyone in the neighbourhood'. He often begged food from shopkeepers, but when they were not very generous Big Joe threw his weight around. On one occasion he again went too far, trying to carry off 30 lb of beef from a butcher, and was charged with larceny and assault.³²

The methods of other Aborigines were more subtle. One local newspaper reported that they were 'highly accomplished' in 'the art of begging', commenting: 'it is difficult even for those accustomed to their ways to resist their entreaties for "one little sixpence", just to buy a loaf or some other necessary of existence'.³³ Strangers and holiday-makers in the district seem to have been regarded as an 'easy touch', Cunninghame being a favourite haunt in the summer. Aborigines also frequented pleasure-steamer landings and railway stations.³⁴

Not surprisingly some Aboriginal men and women became well known in the small towns of Sale and Bairnsdale. For some, their fame or notoriety was related to the number of appearances in court for 'the old complaint' — being drunk and disorderly. Bobby Brown, for example, was 'a noted character among the Europeans'; indeed, they bestowed upon him, as was common practice, a 'monarchic title', and gave him a brass plate with a chain. According to Howitt and others, this plate was 'much prized' by Bobby; undoubtedly it was, for its utilitarian value in 'exploiting the exploiters'. As one newspaper noted in 1906 on Bobby's death, 'his appeal for a "tikpens" as some consolation for having been deprived of his birthright was seldom refused'.³⁵

Another traditionalist, James MacKay, was marked out by his dress as much as anything, although he too had an 'artistically engraved brass plate'; he wore a coat and a boxer hat, and always carried a tucker box, in which he had flour, potatoes, bread, and a tomahawk. (Like Billy Macleod, he had acted as a guide for the missionaries in the early 1860s. In 1862 he had taken Hagenauer through the district, and actually saved the missionary's life on one occasion, something both he and Hagenauer reminisced about late in their lives.)³⁶

These Aborigines, who depended upon traditional food sources, begging, and occasional wage labour, had a tenuous economic existence and so were forced to rely on the settlers in order to survive. During the 1870s they formed a relationship with Alfred and Liney Howitt

³¹ *Gippsland Guardian*, 29 March 1861.

³² *Gippsland Times*, 15 March 1865; Minutes of the CBPA, 22 May 1865 (AA Brighton, Series B314, Item 2); Bulmer Papers: paper 7.

³³ *Gippsland Times*, 15 October 1872.

³⁴ *Gippsland Times*, 26 September 1867; Bulmer Papers: paper 13.

³⁵ Howitt to Mary Howitt, 20 January 1871 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b); *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 8 November 1906; Bulmer Papers: paper 13.

³⁶ *Gippsland Times*, 29 December 1886; *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 6 August 1903; Hagenauer to Br P. La Trobe, 18 September 1903 (Moravian Mission MF 186).

which resembled the earlier one with the Macleods.

Alfred Howitt was appointed Police Magistrate and Warden to the Omeo Goldfields in 1863, and was transferred to Bairnsdale in 1866, where he later also became a local Guardian for the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines. He and his wife, Liney, settled at Eastwood on the Mitchell River, near Bairnsdale.³⁷ In the late 1860s, encouraged by his sister Anna Mary Watts, Howitt began to take a deep interest in traditional Aboriginal society, embarking on work which helped lay the foundations of anthropology in Australia.³⁸

Billy and Mary Macleod were at the centre of the network of relationships which developed between Aborigines and the Howitts on Eastwood. Their association with the Howitts began in the late 1860s; in subsequent years they spent long periods on Eastwood, which, like the Macleods' pastoral runs, was set within Billy's own country. By 1871 Billy was referred to by the Howitts as 'our blackfellow', and 'our Man Friday'; and for Billy, it seems, Howitt was 'master'. Howitt built them a bark hut, and they began doing some odd jobs for the Howitts. Most importantly, they began to work frequently on what was to become a prosperous hop-ground on the property.³⁹ Yet in the early 1870s Billy seemed intent on continuing his work as a stockman. In April 1871 he left some of his savings from hop-work with Liney Howitt, who wrote:

Of course, he is going to buy a horse with it — To be possessed of a horse is the height of a Black's ambition. Some time ago Howitt suggested to the Government that they should allow the 'natives' to keep any of the wild cattle they can get in. (There are great numbers of these cattle in the hill country east of this — by the Snowy River.) I believe the blacks are very pleased at this and are eager to get horses now.⁴⁰

When nothing came of this proposal Billy turned his attention to the hop industry. The first Victorian hops were grown in Gippsland; between 1866 and 1870 several settlers experimented successfully with the crop, and later established gardens. The area around Bairnsdale and along the Mitchell River became one of the four major hop-growing areas in the colony. By late 1876 Billy was apparently 'making his living out of hops', probably contracting himself out to various hop-growers who needed his skill and experience. Nevertheless, he mostly worked on Eastwood, which by 1877 was one of the largest fields in Gippsland, needing sixty to seventy workers to harvest its ten acres of hops.⁴¹ Some of the pickers were Aborigines and each year Billy acted as foreman, showing them the ropes.

As well as working on the hop-ground, Billy and other Aboriginal men acted as 'guides' for Howitt. In January 1875, for example, two of them accompanied Howitt on 'a little

³⁷ For a biography of Howitt, see Walker 1971.

³⁸ For a useful assessment of Howitt's anthropological work, see Mulvaney 1971 and Stanner 1972.

³⁹ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 18 April and 8 September 1872; Howitt to William Howitt, 21 April 1872; Liney Howitt to Watts, 22 February 1873; Howitt to Watts, 10 June 1873 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b, 2a, 2b).

⁴⁰ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 18 April 1871; Liney Howitt to Watts, 23 November 1876 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b, 1048/1b).

⁴¹ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 23 November 1872:16; Howitt to Watts, 2 September 1872; Liney Howitt to Watts, 23 November 1876, Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 10 March 1885 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2a, 1048/1b, 10a); Howitt 1882; Pearce 1976:1, 73, 81.

adventurous trip' for some geological research. Howitt wrote to his father:

I wanted to examine a long portion of the Mitchell River which runs through horizontal strata and which are almost unknown. I therefore sent up two black-fellows "Long Harry" and "Charley Boy" under the care of a trustworthy man to Tabberabbera station at the head of the Gorges. Here they made two bark canoes by the time I arrived from Crooked River and the following morning we started on our voyage . . . Long Harry [sat] behind with a piece of green wattle bark in each hand about 6 in. x 12 in. which he used as a paddle — he also sat cross legged. The other canoe contained Charley and the provisions for three days.⁴²

These Aborigines established a reciprocal kin relationship with the Howitts as they had earlier with the Macleods. Howitt became Billy Macleod's *brogan* (brother) and, as Howitt noted, 'it followed . . . that a particular relationship was established, and in accordance with the custom, his wife often addressed me as "bra bittel" (my husband), whilst I spoke to her as "rukut bittel"'.⁴³ As a result, Billy and Mary Macleod and other Aborigines expected the Howitts to share food, clothing and money in times of need and emergency. Howitt, as a local Guardian for the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, could authorise medical help and distribute medicine, food, clothes and blankets. Throughout the 1870s several Aborigines were cared for by the Howitts, who encouraged those who were unwell and needing care to camp close to the house at Eastwood or to occupy the bark hut they had built for Billy and Mary Macleod.⁴⁴

The relationship between the Howitts and the Aborigines may have been buttressed by other factors. For example, the Aborigines may have felt they shared a common concern for the land, their country on the Mitchell River, and Howitt seemed aware of that common bond. When he visited Ramahyuck in 1871 he renewed his acquaintance with a Brabiralung man who told him: 'Mine most not see you at first — I know you — my country down a long a Mitchell'. Howitt replied: 'That my country too King Jemmy'.⁴⁵

Perhaps the key to the complex relationship was Howitt's deepening interest in Kurnai society and the willingness of these Aborigines to share some of their knowledge. Billy Macleod was the 'son' of a tribal elder, Bruthen Munjie, and had considerable knowledge of the traditional Aboriginal world. Over several years Howitt, who acquired a 'slight knowledge' of the local languages, questioned him, Mary Macleod, Long Harry, Bobby Brown, and others.⁴⁶ They spent long hours with Howitt sharing some of their knowledge. At the end of one particularly gruelling session, which had lasted two days, a weary Billy Macleod told

⁴² Howitt to Watts, 5 October 1871; Howitt to William Howitt, 25 January 1875 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b, 3b); Howitt 1891:17-18.

⁴³ Fison and Howitt 1880:186-7, 198-9.

⁴⁴ Secretary, BPA to Howitt, 5 March 1874 (AA Brighton, Series B329, Item 2); Liney Howitt to Watts, 23 November 1876 (Howitt Papers, 1048/1b); Howitt to Secretary, BPA, 25 November 1876, 13 January and 5 February 1877, 25 April 1878 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 12).

⁴⁵ Howitt to Mary Howitt, 20 January 1871 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b).

⁴⁶ Fison and Howitt 1880:186-98.

Howitt: 'You tell Mr. Governor, spose he no send me down clothes, nartburra (not) me gib — it any more long word — too much berry hard work'. Howitt reckoned 'everything done in the way of writing down about blacks' customs is supposed by Toolabar to be for and at the instance of the "Mr. Governor"'.⁴⁷ Given Howitt's position as a local Guardian, and the obvious logistical support he received from the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines for his anthropological work, Billy's misapprehension was quite understandable. It was partly through his official status as a guardian, Howitt believed, that he gained the confidence and trust of Tulaba and other Aboriginal informants.⁴⁸

Howitt's anthropological work gave these Aborigines an opportunity to recreate the traditional world and pass on some of their knowledge. In the 1870s they gave Howitt information about initiation ceremonies and agreed to perform part of these.⁴⁹ Indeed in April-May 1883 Howitt decided to organise an initiation ceremony in Gippsland, having sponsored one at Bega in southern New South Wales. In this remarkable initiative, he sent off a 'messenger' to the mission stations to call on all Aboriginal men to gather together to initiate some boys. The older men welcomed the move, telling Howitt that the youths 'were now growing wild. They had been too much with the whites, so that now they paid no attention to the words of the old men . . .'.⁵⁰ They probably also saw it as another opportunity to counter the religious power and authority of the missionaries.⁵¹

Many Aborigines on the Stations responded eagerly to Howitt's call. In January 1884 a large group gathered near Lake Victoria, and the *Jeraeil*, or initiation ceremony, was held. However, many of the older men were at first very suspicious of Howitt. Indeed most had been extremely careful in the past not to disclose any secret knowledge to him. The most wary was Tulaba, who had withheld much information when telling Howitt earlier about the *Jeraeil*, revealing only the public aspect and nothing of the secret ritual. Over the years Tulaba and most of the Kurnai men had maintained their silence on these matters.⁵² Howitt seemed unaware of this, remarking in 1880 that he believed he 'had gained their confidence through mutual acquaintance'; 'they regarded me as one of themselves and as affiliated to them, or, as they express it, a brogan'.⁵³ At the initiation ceremony, once the preliminary part was concluded, Tulaba and the other elders demanded an assurance from Howitt that he had been fully initiated. Howitt produced a bull-roarer or *turndun* as proof, but they wanted to know the identity of the 'wicked man' who had betrayed 'the secrets of the

⁴⁷ Howitt to Watts, 10 June 1873 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2b).

⁴⁸ Secretary, BPA to Howitt, 12 August 1874, 11 and 26 September 1882 (AA Brighton, Series B329, Items 2 and 3); Fison and Howitt 1880:186-7; Howitt to Watts, 1 March 1881; Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 16 January 1886 (Howitt Papers, 1046/6a, 9a); Howitt to Secretary, BPA, 10 July 1885 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 178).

⁴⁹ Smyth 1878, I:62-4.

⁵⁰ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 23 April, 21 May, 14 June 1883; Howitt to Watts, 14 and 29 July 1883 (Howitt Papers, 1048/8a, 8b); *Gippsland Times*, 27 April and 6 June 1883; Howitt 1904:617-18.

⁵¹ Hagenauer to Rev. S.L. Chase, 10 July 1866; Hagenauer to Rev. A.J. Campbell, 13 August 1866; Hagenauer, Annual Report, 1866 (Hagenauer 1865-72); Report of Ramahyuck Mission Station, 1874 (Moravian Mission MF 175); *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 14 March 1911.

⁵² Smyth 1878, I:63; Mulvaney 1970:208.

⁵³ Fison and Howitt 1880:186-7.

The initiation ceremony at Lake Victoria in January, 1884, photographed by its convener, Alfred Howitt. Billy Madeod or Tulaba stands on the left, his arm upraised, twirling a bull-roarer (courtesy late Mary Howitt Walker)

Turndun. Howitt had actually learnt some of it from Long Harry or Turlburn, who had died in 1881, and from another man who was absent from the ceremony, 'ostensibly through sickness, but really from consciousness of tribal treachery, and fear of the consequences if it was brought home to him'. Howitt explained that the man who first told him had died. The Kurrai were not completely satisfied but nevertheless decided to continue the ceremony: It lasted for five days — usually it would have taken two to three weeks but it was compressed at Howitt's insistence — and six young men were initiated.⁵⁴

Over the next few years Howitt encouraged Aborigines to engage in further ceremonies, but his anthropological work and the eagerness of Aborigines to leave the mission stations to participate drew the anger and censure of the missionaries at Ramahyuck. In January 1884 Hagenauer protested vehemently to the Board: 'Mr. Howitt's party or what you may call it', he reported on 20 January, 'is a great attraction . . . [A] great lot of Blacks [have] gathered . . . it will last several days after which the blacks will not feel inclined to return at once'. A few days later he returned to the subject again, dismissing Howitt's work, and ridiculing the notion of Aborigines on Ramahyuck having any knowledge of Kurnai law: 'It seems as if Mr Howitt is becoming a Black brother himself for verily these men here know nothing of what he collects, but they will always go for the fun's sake; still it will be an interesting book

⁵⁴ Howitt 1904:616-42.

when it is finished'.⁵⁵ When Howitt attempted to arrange more ceremonies, the missionaries and the Board intervened and put a stop to them.⁵⁶

The relationship between these Aborigines and Howitt was not without considerable tension and inequality, which reflected race relations generally. Aboriginal men, such as Long Harry, faced Howitt in his magisterial capacity in the local court when they were charged for being drunk and disorderly.⁵⁷ On other occasions the Aborigines upbraided Howitt when he transgressed *their* laws or customary rules of social behaviour. Howitt recalled the time when he forgot the customary law relating to conversing with one's mother-in-law:

A Brabrolung [i.e. Brabiralung] . . . was one day talking to me. His wife's mother was passing at some little distance, and I called to her. Suffering at the time from [a] cold, I could not make her hear, and said to the Brabrolung "Call Mary, I want to speak to her". He took no notice whatever, but looked vacantly on the ground. I then said, "What do you mean by taking no notice of me?" He thereupon called out to his wife's brother, who was at a little distance, "Tell Mary Mr. Howitt wants her" and, turning to me, continued reproachfully, "You know very well I *could not* do that — you know I cannot speak to that old woman".⁵⁸

Howitt's ethnocentrism was another possible source of conflict. As Mulvaney has already noted of Howitt (and of his fellow researcher Lorimer Fison): 'the implicit assumptions of white racial superiority and the perfection of Anglo-Saxon social institutions are manifest in their thought, while they explicitly assented to current doctrines of Aboriginal racial extinction . . .'.⁵⁹ Like the missionaries and other Europeans, Alfred (and Liney) Howitt saw 'the niggers' as big children and 'savages' by nature. Writing to his sister in April 1869 after visiting Lake Tyers, Howitt said: 'I have now seen a good deal of these mission stations and I arrive at the conclusion that the Australian black is a "wildman" by nature and that you cannot "wash a blackamoor" . . . They have the minds of children and the bodies of adults'.⁶⁰

Neither Howitt's beliefs concerning the 'civilising' of 'the blacks' nor his frank indifference about the radical transformation of traditional Aboriginal culture was moderated by the years, although he grew less contemptuous of Aborigines as he became more familiar with those at Eastwood.⁶¹ Further, one cannot overlook that Howitt had quite different motivations from the Aborigines in the various activities which formed the basis of their relationship; that they had mutual interests was fortuitous rather than the result of any particularly benevolent attitude or behaviour on Howitt's part.

⁵⁵ Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 20 and 24 January, 2 February 1884 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 178).

⁵⁶ For a more detailed discussion of these initiation ceremonies and the conflict between Hagenauer, the Board, and Howitt, see Mulvaney 1970.

⁵⁷ *Bairnsdale Courier*, 2 December 1876.

⁵⁸ Fison and Howitt 1880:203; Howitt 1884:190-91.

⁵⁹ Mulvaney 1971:285.

⁶⁰ Howitt to Watts, 18 April 1869 (Howitt Papers, 1046/3b).

⁶¹ Howitt to Watts, 10 August 1873, 1 September 1874 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2b, 3a).

The Easwood hop-field was also central to the occasional movement of Aborigines off Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers mission stations. These Aborigines fell broadly into two groups. First, there was a small number who had embraced Christianity and identified with the European world of the missionaries, its ideas, aspirations and bourgeois way of life. These Christian converts worked off the stations each year with the blessing of the missionaries, doing such tasks as bark-stripping, shearing and stockwork.⁶² They sought to earn money to buy clothes and household goods, and the frequency with which they took such employment depended on their assessment of work prospects on the missions. All Aborigines on the mission stations were called upon 'to work for their bread', they were employed clearing the land, fencing, building, growing vegetables and cultivating arrowroot and hops. In return they received rations as well as small wages, but the latter depended on the meagre resources of the missionaries and the state of the mission finances.⁶³

In the early 1870s Aborigines occasionally worked off Ramahyuck, saying they 'did not care about doing any work on the station, because they could not get any money'. Some were accustomed to European wage labour and to receiving both rations and wages.⁶⁴ By the mid-1870s, however, some had decided to forgo work in the hop-fields and elsewhere because, as Hagenauer told the 1877 Royal Commission on the Aborigines in Victoria, 'they see they can earn more at the station with the rations and money, and have all the comforts of a home'.⁶⁵ By the mid-1880s this situation had again altered. The converts were by then inclined to work off the mission, as hop and arrowroot cultivation on Ramahyuck had fallen off because of a shortage of labour, unfavourable markets, and drought.⁶⁶ At Lake Tyers, however, many Aboriginal men regularly worked off the station as stockmen, shearers, reapers and hop-pickers; they could thus earn more money than in the struggling mission economy.⁶⁷

However most of the Aborigines who went off the mission stations did so for reasons other than wages. Money was a relatively unimportant consideration for them, and they usually returned poorer than they left, having spent all their wages.⁶⁸ They mainly left 'in order to be free and without control', getting away from the paternalistic missionaries and

⁶² CBPA, 6th Report 1869:10; *Gippsland Times*, 13 January 1874; Royal Commission 1877:3.

⁶³ Church of England *Annual Report* 1871:7; Hagenauer to Rev. R. Hamilton, 19 June 1875; Hagenauer to Rev. Murdoch MacDonald, 28 May 1878 and 3 March 1882 (Hagenauer 1875-85).

⁶⁴ BPA, 8th Report 1872:6.

⁶⁵ Royal Commission 1877:34,47.

⁶⁶ Hagenauer to MacDonald, 5 January 1883 (Hagenauer 1875-85); *Argus*, 2 January 1886:4; Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 1 November 1887, 2 January 1888 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 181).

⁶⁷ Church of England *Annual Report* 1870:7, 1872:7, 1873:9, 1875:7-8, 1877:8; Report of Lake Tyers Mission Station, 1873-74 (Moravian Mission, MF 175); Hagenauer to Rev. W.E. Morris, Hagenauer to Rev. A. French, 31 December 1881; Report of Lake Tyers Mission Station, 1883 (Hagenauer 1875-85); *Gippsland Times*, 8 June 1883; Samuel Richardson, *Diaries*, entry 14 May 1879, cited by Gilbert 1972:33.

⁶⁸ Hagenauer to Morris, 3 April 1876 (Hagenauer 1875-85); BPA, 12th Report 1876:18; BPA, 14th Report 1878:9.

the closely-ordered regime of the mission stations — asserting their independence.⁶⁹

Throughout the 1870s and much of the 1880s Bulmer and Hagenauer generally attempted to prevent Aborigines moving from the stations. They believed these sojourns were 'incompatible with a proper control of them', and claimed that the Aborigines lacked sufficient 'strength of character' to survive in the white community. Whenever 'the blacks' did go off the stations, the missionaries claimed, they returned the worse for it as they squandered their money, got drunk, picked up 'their old habits', and returned to the stations sick. Furthermore, because of the way they often 'behaved' on these excursions, they were said to bring discredit to the missions, undoing a hard-won reputation. The economic development of the stations was also endangered by the loss of Aboriginal labourers to outside farms.⁷⁰

The missionaries' persuasion was tinged with threats and warnings about what would befall those who went off the stations, but this was backed up by other, more insidious methods. Higher wages were also offered to the Aboriginal workers when their labour was needed. On a few occasions, when all else failed, the missionaries resorted to provisions contained in the Victorian *Aborigines Act* of 1870, whereby Orders in Council could be obtained which prescribed the places where any Aboriginal person could reside, and which required any employer of Aboriginal labour to have a certificate from the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines. Very few employers ever got these and the Board seldom attempted to enforce the law. Both Bulmer and Hagenauer sought a strengthening of this certificate system, and pressed for sole authority to issue or renew certificates. They also contemplated a suggestion made at the 1877 Royal Commission that wages earned off the stations be sent to the missionaries, but they realised this could not be carried out successfully. Indeed, on occasion, they reluctantly resigned themselves to Aborigines going off, and attempted to save face, maintaining that the Aborigines left with their permission.⁷¹

Aborigines insisted on making their own terms when they worked off the stations, and the conditions of work and pay they negotiated were something they did not reveal to the missionaries. They made it quite clear that they would not tolerate any interference. As Hagenauer told the Board in 1875: 'In reference to the income of the Aborigines when they work away from the station . . . I am not able to give even an estimate . . . as they would never tell . . . I am quite sure that if I would try to press them for information on this point these men would never come near me at all'.⁷² Hagenauer later noted that the men would leave the station if he pressed the point.⁷³

⁶⁹ Hagenauer to Morris, 3 April 1876; Hagenauer to MacDonald, 8 February 1882 (Hagenauer 1875-85).

⁷⁰ Report for Lake Tyers Mission Station, 1873-74 (Moravian Mission, MF 175); Hagenauer to Morris, 3 April 1876 (Hagenauer 1875-85); Royal Commission 1877:35, 49; *Church of England Messenger*, 23 December 1882 (supplement):25.

⁷¹ Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 16 September 1876, 6 March and 21 November 1877, 20 July 1878, 12 January, 28 February and 6 March 1882; Report of a conference of managers of Aboriginal stations, 18 August 1882 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Items 170, 171, 172, 174, 176, 229); Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 14 December 1877; Hagenauer to MacDonald, 25 December 1877, 9 January 1880, 3 March 1882 (Hagenauer 1875-85); Royal Commission 1877:35, 48; BPA, 14th Report 1878:9; Secretary, BPA to Hagenauer, 2 March 1882; Secretary, BPA to Charles Barton, 2 March 1882 (AA Brighton, Series B329, Item 3).

⁷² Queries and answers about Aborigines of Gippsland [c. December 1868] (Hagenauer 1865-72); *Christian Review*, June 1873:7.

⁷³ Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 1 May 1875 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 168); BPA, 12th Report 1876:17, 18.

Aborigines picking hops at Eastwood in 1872. (*Illustrated Sydney News*, 23 November 1872, p.16)

The most common work undertaken by Aborigines was hop-picking. Many were employed in the hop-fields throughout the 1870s and 1880s, and at the harvest their labour was regarded by Howitt and others as 'very valuable'. They enjoyed this work, which was described by newspapermen as 'nice easy employment' and 'a most healthy, pleasant kind of labour'. Pickers with 'very nimble figures' and a good eye were of more use than workers with 'brawny muscles', as clean picking, free of leaves and twigs, was very important.⁷⁴

The Aborigines worked mostly for the Howitts, who employed a 'mixed', 'motley' collection of workers: Danes, Germans, Englishmen, Chinese, and Aborigines. Sometimes Aborigines made up half the pickers on Eastwood.⁷⁵ They were very fine pickers, and as far as the Howitts were concerned they compared 'very favourably with the whites'; indeed they were regarded as the best pickers.⁷⁶ Liney Howitt commented in March 1873: 'we have principally black pickers — but not so many as we could do with. They are certainly the best

⁷⁴ Howitt 1882; *Gippsland Times*, 12 March 1883; *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 19 and 22 April 1884.

⁷⁵ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 8 September 1872, 25 March and 7 September 1873; Howitt to Watts, 22 February 1873; Howitt to William Howitt, 26 February 1873; Howitt and Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 11 March 1884 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2a, 2b, 1048/9a); *Gippsland Times*, 28 March 1877.

⁷⁶ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 18 April 1871 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b); BPA, 8th Report 1872:24; Royal Commission 1877:35; Belcher, 8 March 1882 (Diaries, 233/2).

pickers, not a leaf left in their bins — quite [superior] to the white pickers in that respect'.⁷⁷ The Aboriginal pickers took tremendous 'pride in making a clean bin, picking out the leaves and twigs that fall in', Liney Howitt noted. Not only were they 'very clean pickers', they were also very fast.⁷⁸ One Aboriginal couple was particularly proficient, 'known to pick 30 bushels per day'; most averaged twelve to twenty bushels. As a result of their speed, the Aborigines would have earned more than others. The better pickers could earn as much as ten shillings a day, and the average picker four to six shillings.⁷⁹ These wages were much better than Aborigines received for other work in the area; they usually worked for very small wages, reportedly about '5 or 6 or 7s. a week and rations', although some stockmen got as much as ten shillings a week.⁸⁰

In the labour-intensive hop industry, pickers were for much of the 1870s and 1880s in short supply, and there was considerable competition for them. Consequently Aborigines were not exploited as they were by many other employers. In fact the Howitts would have liked to pay their Aboriginal pickers a higher rate than European pickers, but racist attitudes apparently deterred them. Liney Howitt confided to her mother-in-law in 1883: 'They really make the best pickers . . . It would pay us to pay them 1d a bushel more but the whites would feel dreadfully insulted'.⁸¹

The Howitts tried to make it up to the Aborigines by various perks, such as 'giving them a good dinner on the Sundays', and plum puddings at the end-of-harvest feasts. (The Howitts often spent their summer holidays near Cunninghame, and Liney had seen Aborigines devour plum pudding on Christmas Day at Lake Tyers Mission Station.)⁸² At one harvest it seems that the Aborigines got two 'bites' at the puddings. Liney had made 'three immense plum puddings', and left them in the kitchen overnight after taking them out of the boiler, but, she wrote:

The next morning they were not to be found. We have not been able to trace them at all. Luckily the thieves took nothing else — indeed their hands must have been pretty full for the puddings must have weighed 30lbs at the least — of course I had to set to work and make another lot for the Blacks — who I think rather gained on the whole, as they had two dinners instead of . . . [one]!⁸³

The Kurnai were regarded as a very reliable workforce. In the 1880s the Howitts and other hop-growers had considerable trouble with pickers 'imported' from Melbourne to help with the harvest. In 1884, for example, some went on strike at Eastwood; the thirty-odd

⁷⁷ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 25 March 1873 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2b).

⁷⁸ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 2 January 1883 (Howitt Papers, 1048/8a).

⁷⁹ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 18 April 1871 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1b); *Gippsland Times*, 28 March 1877; *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 1 March 1883, 22 April 1884.

⁸⁰ Queries and answers about Aborigines of Gippsland [c. December 1868] (Hagenauer 1865-72); *Christian Review*, June 1873:7; Hagenauer to Secretary, BPA, 1 July 1874 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 164); BPA, 12th Report 1876:18; Royal Commission 1877:47, 48.

⁸¹ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 2 January 1883 (Howitt Papers, 1048/8a).

⁸² Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 26 December 1870, 18 December 1876, 2 January 1883 (Howitt Papers, 1047/1a, 1048/1b, 8a).

⁸³ Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 12 April 1877 (Howitt Papers, 1048/2a).

'sturdy' Aborigines worked on, and the 'whites got the sack'.⁸⁴

However the Aborigines were not necessarily compliant workers. Each season they waited for a call from Howitt; they knew they were valued workers and that the Howitts depended on them. In February 1874, for instance, a concerned Howitt wrote: 'I do not know how we shall get on for pickers as our blackfellows have not mustered this year as well as formerly. If they don't turn up next week I must go and look for them'.⁸⁵ As a result of this Aboriginal 'stand-off', Howitt thereafter had to go each year to the mission stations to arrange for pickers. In 1879 he wrote to his father: 'I am about to go down on my *annual mission* to round up my aboriginal friends who never will think of moving until I go and say to them "come"'.⁸⁶ Once they had received the call, they converged on Eastwood, arriving in twos and threes, and were sent off to Billy Macleod.

The Aborigines would not tolerate any imperious behaviour on the part of the Howitts. Their unwillingness to 'muster' in 1874 might have been a reaction to the Howitts' paternalistic action the previous season, when they had arranged with the missionaries to withhold the Aborigines' wages. Instead they had supplied them with stores such as flour, sugar, tobacco and tea, and had sent the remainder of their earnings to the missionaries to be paid to them when they were 'out of the reach of the Public Houses'. The Aboriginal workers had also been reprimanded for drinking and for rowdy behaviour.⁸⁷ This was unacceptable to them, as it smacked of the missionary control they endured the rest of the year.

Hop-picking was a time for holidaying as well as for working. Both men and women and often entire families went to pick. Just as they had traditionally gathered during the late summer to share the seasonal abundance and to conduct ceremonies, settle disputes and arrange marriages, so now they came together on the hop-fields.⁸⁸ At harvest time the weather was warm and sunny, the fields were beautiful and the air was fragrant with the aroma of the ripened crop. Aborigines looked forward to hop-picking as an opportunity to camp outside in the open air, enjoy each other's company, and eat and drink. At night they could be heard relaxing and enjoying themselves, 'hooting, yelling and screaming', away from the overbearing missionaries. They returned to the mission stations penniless, but refreshed and happy at heart.⁸⁹

Hop-picking on properties such as Eastwood saw Aborigines working alongside other ethnic groups, but there seems to have been little interaction between them. This is reflected in the Howitts's practice of holding two 'feasts' at the end of the picking — one for the Europeans and one for the Aborigines. While the Aborigines had little to do with the European workers, they may well have gained some satisfaction from proving themselves to be

⁸⁴ Howitt and Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 11 March 1884 (Howitt Papers, 1048/9a); *Gippsland Times*, 19 March 1884, 27 March 1885.

⁸⁵ Howitt to Mary Howitt, 22 February 1874 (Howitt Papers, 1047/3a).

⁸⁶ Howitt to William Howitt, 20 February 1879 (Howitt Papers, 1048/8a).

⁸⁷ Howitt to William Howitt, 26 February 1873, Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 25 March 1873 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2b).

⁸⁸ Bulmer Papers: paper 3; BPA, 8th Report 1872:24; Pepper 1980:54.

⁸⁹ Howitt to William Howitt, 26 February 1873, Howitt and Liney Howitt to Mary Howitt, 11 March 1884 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2b, 1048/9a); *Gippsland Times*, 4 January 1882.

faster and cleaner pickers than the so-called superior race, and from being held in higher regard as workers. Here on the hop-fields they could hold their heads high and proud.

In other respects too some Europeans seem to have held the Aboriginal pickers in higher regard than the 'whitefellows'. On a hop-field on the Snowy River in the 1880s Aborigines were called upon by a preacher to perform as a choir, because the European workers did not know any hymns. 'Three of them soon came, one raised the tunes and others helped in singing', a local newspaper correspondent reported. He continued:

I should think some of that congregation never had attended divine worship before; some behaved very well, others kept their hats on, others were smoking, others kept a muttering conversation and laughing, and walked about as it suited them. The blackfellows, as is their usual custom in Church, set an example to the rest.⁹⁰

It was the Chinese workers rather than the Europeans who caught the Aborigines' interest. In September 1872 Billy Macleod worked with a Chinese man, extending the hop-plantation at Eastwood. He had difficulty fitting him into his schema of 'blackfellows' and 'whitefellows'. Howitt wrote to his sister: 'You would have laughed the other day if you had seen 'Billy Toolabar' trying to talk with one of the Chinamen. They both seemed to think the other deaf and shouted at each other so . . . [loud] that you might have heard them a mile [away]'. A puzzled Billy later spoke to Howitt about his fellow worker: 'Can't me think what that Chinamen [is] — baal [not] white and baal Kurni (blackfellow) — I believe that fellow most like it — mrart (ghost)'.⁹¹ Next year the Howitts employed three Chinese men, who, because they wore queues, were 'christened by the blacks, with some sense of humour, 'worragl' — meaning Lyrebird because the China . . . men [are] like the 'worragl' — [with] long tails'.⁹²

The Howitts and the hop-picking at Eastwood were an important part of the rhythm of the Aborigines' year. It was a spell from the strict regime of the mission stations, a time to reassert a sense of themselves unfettered by missionary perceptions, an opportunity to reaffirm links with the traditional world, and a period of unrestrained enjoyment and companionship. It also provided friendship of a sort with Europeans outside the mission stations. Although the Howitts were undoubtedly ethnocentric, and paternalistic towards the Aborigines, they were regarded warmly by them, and were always welcome at Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers.⁹³

However much they were respected on Eastwood, the Aborigines were not always accorded similar regard in the small townships and on the road. Many Europeans saw Aborigines as the local newspapers sometimes demeaningly portrayed them — as indolent, slothful, useless 'savages', dangerous when on the grog.⁹⁴ John Bulmer noted that the Aborigines were

⁹⁰ *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 22 April 1884.

⁹¹ Howitt to Watts, 2 September 1872 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2a).

⁹² Howitt to William Howitt, 26 February 1873 (Howitt Papers, 1047/2a).

⁹³ Howitt to Mary Howitt, 18 December 1876 (Howitt Papers, 1048/1b).

⁹⁴ *Gippsland Times*, 15 October 1872, 13 January 1874.

well aware that many Europeans treated them as an 'inferior class', and they were 'very sensitive' to 'marked contempt'.⁹⁵ Partly as a result of this prejudice, most Aborigines were quite happy to return, after their 'working holidays', to the mission stations which were now their homes.

By the 1890s both of the Aborigines' European worlds – the secure but over-regulated missions and the freer, more perilous, wider community – were undergoing fundamental change. The 1886 Victorian 'Half-Caste Act' forced many Aborigines off the missions on the eve of a severe depression, while controls over Aborigines on the missions were tightened as never before.⁹⁶

The younger generation, born and reared under tight missionary control, knew no way of life other than that of the mission stations; they had little experience of the wider community, and even less ability to move in such an unfamiliar environment. They were acutely conscious of living in a world not of their own choosing; they felt hopeless, and grew bored and apathetic. Many wanted to throw off the yoke of missionary authority, and leave the stations to work, play sport and obtain access to alcohol. The aged Hagenauer and Bulmer were troubled by these younger Aborigines, and compared them unfavourably with the older, traditionally-oriented generation and the early converts. Most of these men and women were now dead, and the missionaries lamented that they had 'left behind them a nondescript lot of men who were neither fish flesh nor good red herring'. They were unable to recognise that this was the fruit of their own lifelong work. Sadly, their paternalistic system of management had created a community dependent on government hand-outs, adept at milking officials and missionaries, often hostile to any imposed order or control, and resentful of the lack of opportunities and experience in European society.⁹⁷

Off the stations these Aborigines faced a hardening of attitudes in a society becoming more conscious of 'race' and 'racial struggle'. Where their parents and grandparents had met with at least some tolerance and acceptance, they now found overt hostility. By the 1900s, furthermore, the once secure refuges of the mission stations were threatened with closure.⁹⁸ The missionary rule was ending. In 1908 Ramahyuck was shut down, and Aborigines there were moved, by persuasion or force, to Lake Tyers, where Bulmer had been replaced by a new manager – the first in a succession of harsh and unsympathetic men.⁹⁹ Subsequently, the era of the mission stations, and the Aboriginal movement to the outside community to retain their traditional culture, to work and to holiday, would come to be remembered as something of a golden age.¹⁰⁰ However, this nostalgia – admittedly understandable – tends

⁹⁵ Royal Commission 1877:50.

⁹⁶ See Attwood 1984:ch.7.

⁹⁷ Church of England *Annual Report* 1898:7-8; Hagenauer to La Trobe, 18 September 1903 (Moravian Mission, MF 186); Bulmer Papers: papers 7 and 13.

⁹⁸ BPA Minutes, 6 November and 4 December 1901, 8 January, 5 February, 5 March and 24 April 1902 (AA Brighton, Series B314, Item 5); Secretary, BPA to Under Secretary, 8 and 16 January 1902; Secretary, BPA to Chief Secretary, 6 February 1902 (AA Brighton, Series B313, Item 227); *Age* 24 March 1902:6; *Gippsland Times*, 3 and 7 April 1902; BPA, 38th Report 1902:6-7, 11.

⁹⁹ BPA Minutes, 20 September and 5 December 1907, 15 January, 11 March, 13 May and 14 June 1908 (AA Brighton, Series B314, Item 6); BPA, 44th Report 1908:5.

¹⁰⁰ Pepper 1980:20, 83; Carter 1979:75.

to obscure some of the harsh realities of mission life, the desperately hard struggle to survive in the European economy and community, and the trauma of cultural breakdown. These 'halcyon days' proved to be but a pause, a momentary respite, in the history of the European colonisation of Aboriginal Australia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Attwood, B.M. Blacks and Lohans: a study of Aboriginal-European relationships in Gippsland in the 19th century. Ph.D. thesis, La Trobe University, 1984.
- Australian Archives, Brighton, Series B313, B314, B329 and B356.
- Barwick, D.E. A little more than kin: regional affiliation and group identity among Aboriginal migrants in Melbourne. Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1963.
- Beckett, Jeremy, 'George Dutton's country: portrait of an Aboriginal drover'. *Aboriginal History*, 2(1), 1978:2-31.
- Belcher, George Frederick. Diaries. La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria, MS 6219.
- Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria (BPA), formerly Central Board appointed to watch over the interests of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria. *Annual Reports*. Australian Archives, Brighton, Series B332 (also published in *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*).
- Bulmer, John. Papers. Museum of Victoria, Box 11, Folder 1.
- Campbell, A.J. *Fifty years of Presbyterianism in Victoria*. Melbourne, [1889].
- Carter, Mervyn. Acculturation at Lake Tyers Mission Station 1862-1913. BA Hons thesis, La Trobe University, 1979.
- Central Board appointed to watch over the interests of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria (CBPA). See Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria.
- Christie, Michael. *Aborigines in colonial Victoria 1835-86*. Sydney, 1979.
- Church of England of Victoria, Mission to the Aborigines. *Annual Reports* 1855, 1861, 1863, 1866, 1870-73, 1875, 1877, 1898.
- Fison, Lorimer and A.W. Howitt. *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*. London, 1880.
- Further facts relating to the Moravian Mission*, papers 4 and 5. Melbourne, 1863, 1864.
- Gilbert, Mary. *Personalities and stories of the early Orbost District*. Orbost, 1972.
- Hagenauer, F.A. Letterbooks, 1865-72 and 1875-85. National Library of Australia, MS 3343.
- Haviland, John and Leslie Haviland. 'How much food will there be in heaven?': Lutherans and Aborigines around Cooktown before 1900'. *Aboriginal History*, 4(2), 1980:119-49.
- Howitt, A.W. Papers. La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria, MS 9356.
- 'Hop cultivation in Gippsland'. *Gippsland Times*, 23 October 1882.
- *The native tribes of south-east Australia*. London, 1904.
- 'On some Australian beliefs'. *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 13, 1884:185-98.
- 'On some Australian medicine men: or, doctors and wizards of some Australian tribes'. *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 16, 1887:25-59.
- A.H.S. Lucas and Arthur Dendy. 'A visit to Lake Nigathoruk and the Mount Wellington District, Gippsland'. *Victorian Naturalist*, VIII(2-3), 1891:17-44.
- McGrath, Ann. 'We grew up the stations': Europeans, Aborigines and cattle in the Northern Territory. Ph.D. thesis, La Trobe University, 1983.
- Moravian Mission in Australia. Papers, correspondence, transactions, diaries and related material. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, MF 166, 175 and 186.
- Mulvaney, D.J. 'The anthropologist as tribal elder'. *Mankind*, 7(3), 1970:205-17.
- 'The ascent of man: Howitt as anthropologist', in Mary Walker Howitt, *Come wind, come weather: a biography of Alfred Howitt*. Melbourne, 1971:285-312.
- Pearce, Helen R. *The hop industry in Australia*. Melbourne, 1976.
- Pepper, Phillip. *You are what you make yourself to be: the story of a Victorian Aboriginal family, 1842-1980*. Melbourne, 1980.

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Public Record Office of Victoria (PROVic), Series 2896.

Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1877. *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1877-78, vol.3.

Smyth, Robert Brough. *The Aborigines of Victoria*, 2 vols. Melbourne, 1878.

Stanner, W.E.H. 'Alfred Howitt'. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1851-90, vol. 4. Melbourne, 1972: 432-5.

Surveyor-General and the Secretary for Mines. *Report on the physical character and resources of Gippsland*. Melbourne, 1874.

Thomas, William. Papers. Mitchell Library, uncatalogued MSS, set 214, Item 16.

Walker, Mary Howitt. *Come wind, come weather: a biography of Alfred Howitt*. Melbourne, 1971.

WALAWURRU, THE GIANT EAGLEHAWK:

A NOTE ON THE IDENTITY OF KUNKI

R.G. Kimber

In 1982 I had an article published in *Aboriginal History* entitled 'Walawurru, the giant eaglehawk: Aboriginal reminiscences of aircraft in central Australia 1921-1931'.¹ Since publication I have discovered an error, which in turn promoted some incorrect estimations of the ages of some Aborigines. The following note corrects these errors.

Joe Brown, a bushman, was known to some Pintubi, but he was not the key European known as Kunki, as suggested.² The bushman Sam Hazlett, who travelled in the general Kintore area 1934-36, is undoubtedly the Kunki clearly recalled.³

As I knew that Joe Brown had died in 1928, I had estimated some of the Aboriginal dates of birth on the basis of this date and other events in Joe Brown's life, as well as on descriptions of their own physical development and ritual instruction by the Aborigines at the time that they recalled the coming of Kunki. This error necessitates a re-estimate of some of the Aborigines' dates of birth. In particular, I now believe that Old Tapa Tapa Tjangala was born c.1918 and Nosepeg Tjupurrula c.1920. George Tjangala and Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula may be a little younger than their estimated dates of birth — respectively c.1920 and c.1922 — suggest, but not by more than perhaps three years.⁴

¹ *Aboriginal History* 6(1), 1982:49-60.

² *ibid*:49

³ Mark Chambers, pers. comm., 1985.

⁴ *Aboriginal History* 6(1):59.