

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission**From: Claude Baxter****Dated: 16 September 2024****Submission:**

Submission by the Great Great Grandson of a 'Settler' Different branches of my family arrived in Australia in the early nineteenth century. I had heard little or nothing of their early years within my family circle. Subsequently, I read a family history written by my great aunt, Nancy Adams (nee Mitchell) – Family Fresco, written in the 1960s. Her family was responsible for the importation of Saxon merino sheep to Tasmania 1960s. Her family was responsible for the importation of Saxon merino sheep to Tasmania (and later Victoria) in the 1830s.

#1 My great great grandfather William Henry Fancourt Mitchell (1811–1884) was a noted colonist. In 1852 Lt Governor LaTrobe asked Mitchell to become Chief Commissioner of Police. He was also briefed with establishing the site for Kyneton. He later became Chairman of Goldsborough Mort and President of the Legislative Council (1871-74).

In 1842, he had purchased a property called Barfold, (16 km from Kyneton) from William Henry Yaldwin. Yaldwin (later a member of the Queensland Legislative Council) had acquired Barfold in 1838 for ten pounds per annum. He engaged his manager at a property in Yass (John Coppock) to bring 4,000 sheep to Barfold.

On 9 June 1838, there was a report of stolen Aboriginal women and a demand from the local Aboriginal people for justice. Following some random shootings, 1,200 sheep were missing and later found in pens. There was a presumption (or empty allegation) that some hutkeepers were dead. (Perhaps, as was common, the ticket-of-leavers had simply absconded.) Coppock, with 16-19 convicts launched a night time surprise attack.

According to various reports between 7 and 23 Djadjawurrung were killed and their bodies partly burnt. In August, another 213 killed close by. These killings became known as the Waterloo Plains massacre. Knowing that Barfold was the site of the Waterloo Plains massacre, I was curious to find out more about how the family benefitted from the massacre.

On page nine of Family Frescoe, Nancy Adams makes her sole reference to the Indigenous people whose country it had been. She mentioned how the prior owner (William Henry Yaldwin) '[...] had some trouble with the Blacks [and] the station manager had been sent to Sydney in order to stand trial for murder. But his ship had been lost with all hands on the voyage around the coast.' I remain stunned that my great aunt could describe the circumstances of my family's acquisition of Barfold in such terms. 'Some trouble with the Blacks' is, even by the standards of the day, a grave betrayal of ethics and morality.

It is a common example of the way in which British colonists chose to sweep away their moral responsibility in favour of the benefits of greed. I am sickened by such a representation. Even though the acquisition by my forebears came some four years after the massacre, ignoring its occurrence (and the subsequent financial benefit) is shocking.

#2 Nancy Adams also wrote a novel, Saxon Sheep, that deals with similar material. In Saxon Sheep, Nancy Adams made just one fleeting reference (p184) to William Mitchell's first journey

to Barfold where she mentions 'the Macedon natives [being] said to be savage...' In the same novel, dealing with another wing of her forebears, she mentions how William Forlong acquired Seven Creeks station from Barnes and Holland. Whilst this purchase was made 12-15 years later than the relevant events, again, there is no mention of the first inhabitants. This was despite the property being the site of the first well-known resistance in Victoria by Aboriginal people to the colonial invaders; the Faithfulls' staff were killed and sheep dispersed in April 1838.

No reference to Aboriginal inhabitants whatsoever is made in this novel. Again, whilst the circumstances of 'settlement' may not have suited Nancy Adams' prime objectives in terms of a family history, not describing important aspects of the socio-political context appears like white-washing. I find the absence of any discussion in the novel to the context surrounding early 'settlement' to be a serious failing. ***

I am a person who suffered severe physical and sexual abuse as a child. I have grown to develop an ability to keep an open mind in the face of any person who has suffered injustice, especially where such injustice is deemed something the person should simply 'get over it'. Intergenerational trauma is real but most people seem to have no way of engaging with it.

Aboriginal people in Australia are an example of people who often suffer intergenerational trauma, not least because the past has been hidden. Quite coincidentally, I have spent years seeking to understand Indigenous people and their connection to country.

I teach 'Indigenous Studies' at several Universities of the Third Age. I have developed an enormous respect for their culture. In very many ways, I have come to respect their culture as superior to that of capitalist 'civilisation'. I offer my sincere apologies respect their culture as superior to that of capitalist 'civilisation'. I offer my sincere apologies to all Indigenous people who have had to suffer from being asked to keep silent.

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