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Decolonising Data

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Abstract

The colonisation of Australia from the late–1700s to the early to mid–1800s erased traditional story and mythology from geographic names through the renaming efforts of surveyors and explorers, who were intent on bringing an Anglo-European view to the new colony. Many of the geographic names we see in modern maps and datasets contain this appropriated history and are thus devoid of the rich cultural heritage and mythology of the Traditional Custodians. Can maps and data be enriched through a deeper cultural understanding of place? Moreover, ethically which history should cartographers be telling when we add a geographic name to a map?

This paper reports on an examination of the history and local context of geographic names from an historical, personal and local viewpoint. Craig Molyneux, a Gunditjmara man, calls the area of southwest Victoria, Australia his Country[1], and he is connected through his ancestors for millennia. It is Gunditjmara Country that provides a focus for this geographic names study.

Western culture names places after people and events. The naming of places by First Nations peoples[2] is connected with story and mythology. First Nations peoples use place as art — from dot paintings in the Central Desert, to designs on possum skin cloaks in southwest Victoria. This examination considers the idea of place and ownership for First Nations peoples as being quite different to that of Western cultures. It addresses geographic names from the viewpoint of how First Nations peoples believe that the Country owns them, rather than they own the Country.

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[1] “Country is the term often used by Aboriginal peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity.” (AIATSIS, n.d.)
[2] The term ‘First Nations peoples’ refers to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia (Korff, 2021). Historical references throughout this document may use other terms.

Keywords: Cultural identity; geographic names; ethical cartography

CULTURAL WARNING: This paper contains racist and offensive language and images. For First Nations peoples, there are names and references to people who have died.

Author Biographies

Craig Molyneux MSc

Craig Molyneux is a geospatial and visualisation expert. He is the owner and manager of CartDeco, a freelance geo-visualisation company. Craig is a proud Gunditjmara man from southwest Victoria. His indigenous heritage guides and informs him and his continuous research into his heritage and connection with his wider family has developed a deeper connection to his Country. Craig is also a professional cartographer of nearly 40 years experience and runs his own business providing consultancy services to industry leaders.

William Cartwright AM PhD EdD

William Cartwright is Honorary Professor, and formerly Professor of Cartography in the School of Science at RMIT University. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy, a Doctor of Education and six other university qualifications — in the fields of cartography, applied science, education, media studies, information & communication technology and graphic design. He has held the positions of President of the *International Cartographic Association*, Chair of the *Joint Board of Geospatial Information Societies* (now *UN-GGIM: Geospatial Societies*) and President of the *Mapping Sciences Institute, Australia*. He is Co-Editor of the *International Journal of Cartography*. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for service to cartography and geospatial science as an academic, researcher and educator.

Craig Sandy LS

Craig Sandy as the Surveyor-General of Victoria, Australia is a highly experienced leader in the surveying, mapping and spatial sciences industry. He was appointed as the Registrar of Geographic Names at the same time. This role is responsible for administering the geographic naming regulatory framework.

Geographic Names Victoria have two major initiatives, diversity in geographic naming with targets in commemorating women and Indigenous naming, and protecting culture through re-invigorating language.

Previously, as the Surveyor-General for the Northern Territory (2014–2017), he was involved in Indigenous naming processes and supporting remote communities with self-determination through geographic naming. He is the only person to have held the role of Surveyor-General across two Australian jurisdictions and is the Chair of the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM), a collaborative government organisation that sets standards and best practice for surveying, mapping and charting activity, including geographic place naming.

Rafe Benli
Rafe is a physical scientist, and enjoys explaining the significance of place, place names, and addressing protocols, drawing from his experiences both locally, within the State of Victoria, nationally, and internationally. He ensures compliance with relevant policies, procedures, legislation, and best practices. Driven by a proactive stance, Rafe is determined in his mission to enhance citizens' lives by fostering clear and precise addressing while safeguarding cultural heritage through place naming. His initiatives facilitate community connectivity to geographical locations, crucial for connecting communities to place, emergency response and the seamless delivery of goods and services by both public and private entities.

Introduction

Data is the source of truth for modern map products. From the ubiquitous mobile map to the once-ubiquitous sheet map or atlas, data informs the features that are displayed on the map. The lines, the polygons, the symbols and the labels, are all drawn from a data source. As mapping is now done by large multinational companies to support mobile technology, modern data collection is being drawn from optical character recognition of photographs or ground-truthing. Machine learning algorithms pull data from sensor-collected information to populate a database. But the source of this sensor-collected data is often lost. The rich history and cultural meaning behind a geographic name is not collected. The source and attribution of that geographic name is not collected. Sensor-collected data is just a series of letters and numbers with no context. A soulless truth.

Authoritative mapping bodies, such as national, state and local agencies, are the point of truth for geographic names and their tangible histories. As such, some of these agencies have been collecting historical and cultural information about geographic names. In Victoria, Australia, for example, Geographic Names Victoria (Department of Transport and Planning,

Victoria, 2023) is entrusted with collecting and maintaining a Register of Geographic Names — VICNAMES — containing sources, historic references and names for roads, localities, geographic features, etc. (See Figure 19, later in this manuscript, for a specific example of information stored in the VICNAMES database).

The importance of geographic names cannot be understated. In First Nations people's cultures, geographic names and language are central to cultural identity and "contribute to understandings of our shared history and knowledge of the land and seas." (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2020 p. 12). The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM, nd) described geographic names as a way to, "provide orientation and identity to places." (Global Geospatial Information Management Secretariat, 2019). Identity can take many forms. In the history of white settlement in Victoria geographic names were conferred by early explorers and surveyors, oftentimes naming a place after a person who had never set foot on the land. The First Nations peoples of the land, who had occupied the Country for around 50,000 years (Malaspinas *et al.*, 2016), linked story to place. Gammage (2011, p.130.) described that, "Every hill, plain, rock and tree is alive with story and imagery, and filled with presences." The differing paradigms of place between Western and First Nations peoples were noted by McBryde (2011, p. 156) when she travelled with elders through Country around Kati-Thanda / Lake Eyre in 1982. "Different sets of values and meanings thus emerged, intangible and tangible, for components of the landscape we crossed together, derived from intangible and tangible evidence. Yet each had validity. They established complementary sets, both vital to understanding a multi-layered past and its present significance." She noted the Country was 'mapped by stories', citing Salman Rushdie (1991), when he travelled through the same area.

Geographic names hold profound significance for First Nations peoples, encompassing cultural, spiritual, historical, and social connections. This includes connection to dreamtime stories, sacred sites, lineage and heritage and oral stories. The use of language in bestowing names to places is vitally important for First Nations peoples. The Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM) acknowledges in its *Principles for the Consistent Use of Place Names* (2016, p. 13) that First Nations people's link to land are "the names given to features on the land that relate to the ancestors, stories, song and dance." Hence, "it is fitting then, to acknowledge Aboriginal footprints in the sands of time by preparing these principles which are designed to encourage Naming Authorities throughout Australia to recognise the validity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names and to assist in the more frequent and official use of these names."

Defining Geographic names

The naming of places ensures that heritage can be preserved and communities are protected, this has not always been the case. Benefits to the community include:

- recognition and identification;
- connection to Country and place;
- culture;
- emergency service response and natural disaster relief;
- heritage;
- landscape;
- communications, including postal and news services;
- trade and commerce;
- population censuses and statistics;
- property rights and cadastre;
- urban and regional planning;
- environmental management;
- map and atlas production;
- navigation; and
- tourism

Naming of any place enables it to be clearly identified, which means its precise location can be determined. The uniqueness and accuracy of a place name reduces the likelihood of delaying an emergency services vehicle due to inadequate or confusing location details, which might have life threatening consequences. Proper naming also assists with service delivery by other agencies and companies (Geographic Names Victoria, 2022, p. 9).

Internationally, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/) is one of the nine expert groups of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and deals with the national and international standardisation of geographical names.

UNGEGN and the work of naming authorities is important as the standardisation of geographic names provide orientation and identification of places. UNGEGN ensures a standardised approach by all countries to the naming of places.

The assignment of names complies with several international resolutions and goals outlined by the United Nations (Natural Resources Canada, 2017). This includes:

- UNGEGN Resolution – I/4 (national) standardisation;
- UNGEGN Resolution V/22 Aboriginal/ native geographical names[3];
- UNGEGN Resolution VIII/1 Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names[4];
- UNGEGN Resolution VIII/2 Commemorative naming practices for geographical features;
- UNGEGN Resolution X/4 Discouraging the commercialisation of geographical names; and
- UNGEGN Resolution IX/5 Promotion of the recording and use of indigenous minority and regional language group geographical names.

State of Victoria and Geographic Naming

Within Victoria the formal naming of places is covered by the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998,* which allows for the creation of guidelines, currently known as the *Naming rules for places in Victoria 2022* (Geographic Names Victoria, *op. cit.*).

The process of geographic naming is undertaken by naming authorities, which are typically municipal councils and/or government departments and agencies, and in some cases private organisations.

The following process is typically followed to name roads, features and localities.

Step 1 The area to be named, a road, geographic feature or locality is determined.

Step 2 If the use of Traditional Owner language is appropriate, approval is sought from a Registered Aboriginal Party prior to any wider community consultation.

[3] Recognising also that aboriginal/native people have an inherent interest in having their geographical nomenclature recognised as important:

1. Recommends that all countries having groups of aboriginal/native people make a special effort to collect their geographical names along with other appropriate information;
2. Recommends also that, whenever possible and appropriate, a written form of those names be adopted for official use on maps and other publications;
3. Recommends further that regional and international meetings be held to discuss the methodology for collecting and recording aboriginal/native geographical names.

[4] Recommends that geographical names authorities throughout the world be invited to present a summary of such activities for inclusion in a general report, scheduled to appear in 2007, on these activities to be prepared by the United Nations for subsequent dissemination to all interested parties.

Step 3 Duplication of the proposed name is determined, and, if duplicated, an alternative name is considered.

Step 4 Consultation begins with the wider community.

Step 5 The wider community is consulted and responses made to the community.

Step 6 A proposal is prepared, appropriate approval sought and a proposal lodged with Geographic Names Victoria.

Geographic names legislation

The first Act dealing specifically with geographic names in Victoria was the *Survey Co-ordination (Place Names) Act 1965* (State of Victoria, 1965). The Act dealt with the establishment of a Place Names Committee and the functions of that committee. There were no legal mechanisms for dealing with First Nations people's geographic names. With the creation of the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998* legislation for the naming of places was covered by guidelines, the first of which were known as the *Guidelines for the consistent use of place*, subsequently known as the *Guidelines for geographic names* and renamed as the *Naming rules for places in Victoria* (Geographic Names Victoria, *op. cit.*).

In all the iterations the Act states that the 'guidelines in force':

(a) must set out the rules and process to be followed in selecting, assigning or amending a name of a place;
(b) must set out the process to be followed before selecting or assigning an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander name of a place;
(c) must specify criteria for the assessment of cultural heritage or other significance in relation to the naming of places;
(d) must set out requirements for consultation before a name of a place is selected, assigned or amended; and
(e) may specify any other matter or thing appropriate in relation to the naming of places.

Prior to the creation of the current *Geographic Place Names Act 1998* the naming of places was managed by the Place Names Committee under the *Survey and Coordination Act 1957*.

Upon the collection of names, these were incorporated into maps and registers and over the years that followed these names have stuck and become commonly used. We see this in exercises by the government to create spatial data layers/products which can underpin society's requirements and needs, everything from titling of land, creating land parcels, to

enabling provision of emergency services and the delivery of goods and services. This cannot be done without names.

Importantly, locality names and boundaries were created spatially/digitally from 1999 and roads in the early 2000's, this led to the creation of an address layer. Historical geographic names that appeared on printed maps were formally adopted and became part of the data used today.

Legislation and guidelines have been established to ensure that the naming of geographical features is done with due respect to First Nations peoples. However, at the time of first European contact in the Australian continent early explorers, including the Dutch, French and English, considered the continent to be *terra nullius*, that is a "land belonging to no one". Geographical naming was imposed 'from without', with no consideration given to the First Nations people's naming of the land.

Terra nullius

European sovereign states considered themselves free to take possession of lands described as *terra nullius* — lands not being under any sovereignty (one of the eight types of territorial acquisition under international law (Kim, 2021))[5]. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English and French, and seven others claimed large tracts of land in Asia, Africa, America and Australasia during the 16th–18th centuries (Scott, 1940).

What Boisen (2012, p.338) has said about *terra nullius* and European land claims is:

> *"The first question to ask is why was* terra nullius *important for European expansionism? The answer is that it provided the conceptual link between property rights and the moral obligation to prosper. The right of Europeans to appropriate land was a right derived from a duty; that is, the duty imposed by God to make the ground productive, thereby giving prominence to cultivation and the labour associated with it."*

Additionally, relating to the continent of New Holland (now Australia), British colonial law vested ownership of the entire continent in the British government and gave First Nations peoples no property rights (Banner, n.d.).

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[5] This could be traced to 1454, when Pope Nicholas V, issued a 'Papal Bull' (Winchester, 2021, pp 131-132).

Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, undertaking his voyage of discovery in 1642, was directed to take possession of territories discovered, considered to be inhabited by savages. After landing in what is now Tasmania, on 3 December 1642, he wrote in his Journal: *"We took with us a pole with the Company's mark carved upon it and a flag of the Prince to be set up there, and have taken possession of the said land as our lawful property"* (Scott, 1940).

Similarly, the English Admiralty instructed Captain James Cook, before his voyage and discovery of the east coast of Australia in 1770, to *"take possession for His Majesty by setting up proper marks and inscriptions as first discoverers and possessors"* (Scott, 1940). When he landed in Botany Bay, he "*caused the English Colours to be display'd ashore every day, and an inscription to be cut upon one of the Trees near the Watching place, setting forth the Ship's Secret Instructions*" (Cook's Journal — edited by Wharton, 1893 p. 189).

However, French explorer Nicholas Baudin took a different position on this and, in correspondence in 1802 to Governor Philip Gidley King, Third Governor of New South Wales, he reproached King for "seizing the soil which they own and which has given them birth." Baudin to King, 23 Dec. 1802, Historical Records of New South Wales, 5:830 (Banner, n.d.).

The *New South Wales Court Act 1787*, dated 2 April 1787, provided for the establishment of the first New South Wales Courts by executive action, achieved with the issue of these Letters Patent (Supreme Court of New South Wales collection).

> *"Wee* [sic] *do hereby give full power and Authority to hold plea of and to hear and determine in a summary way all pleas concerning Lands Houses Tenements and Hereditaments and all manner of interests therein…"*

The Governor Bourke declaration of 26 August 1835, confirmed *terra nullius* and the right of the British Crown to declare ownership of New South Wales[6].

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[6] Governor Bourke's declaration:
"Whereas, it has been represented to me, that divers of His Majesty's Subjects have taken possession of vacant Lands of the Crown, within the limits of this Colony, under the pretence of a treaty, bargain, or contract, for the purchase thereof, with the Aboriginal Natives; Now therefore, I, the Governor, in virtue and in exercise of the power and authority in me vested, do hereby proclaim and notify to all His Majesty's Subjects, and others whom it may concern, that every such treaty, bargain, and contract with the Aboriginal Natives, as aforesaid, for the possession, title, or claim to any Lands lying and being within the limits of the Government of the Colony of New South Wales, as the same are laid down and defined by His Majesty's Commission; that is to say, extending from the Northern Cape, or extremity of the Coast called Cape York, in the latitude of ten degrees thirty seven minutes South, to the Southern extremity of the said Territory of New South Wales, or Wilson's Promontory, in the latitude of thirty nine degrees twelve minutes South, and embracing all the Country inland to the

It wasn't until 1992 that *terra nullius* was legally overturned by the High Court of Australia, with *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*, that recognised the past and continuing connection that Indigenous people have to the land. This also led to the creation of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cwlth) ('Native Title Act') (Parliament of Australia, n.d.). Prior to the High Court of Australia decision, in 1980, Gunditjmara women Sandra Onus and Christina Frankland began legal action in the Victorian Supreme Court to prevent Alcoa of Australia Ltd. from building an aluminium smelter near Portland, Victoria, which would damage or interfere with Gunditjmara cultural sites. They were required to prove they had a 'special interest' in protecting their cultural heritage under the *Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act 1972* (Vic). After being rejected by hearings in the Victorian Supreme Court, they took their case to the High Court, where they were successful. The 1984 High Court *Onus v Alcoa* judgement was a landmark precedent for heritage protection by Indigenous people (Weir, 2009), which had informed the 1992 High Court decision.

Earliest examples of European geographic naming in Australia

It is important to understand how the original geographic naming of places was created and why. From a colonial aspect, it was important in claiming territory to supplant new feature names on an already rich landscape. Harley (1988, p. 279) suggests that "Cartography, too, can be 'a form of knowledge and a form of power'." Further, Harley stated that, "...maps were used in colonial promotion, and lands claimed on paper before they were effectively occupied, maps anticipated empire…Maps were used to legitimise the reality of conquest and empire." (*op. cit.* p. 282.)

Before first settlement geographic names on maps were generally determined without due consideration to other ways of thinking, such as First Nations people's cultural references. European representations of geography via maps conform to defining lines or edges where one geographic feature stops and another begins (Cartwright, 2012).

Westward, as far as the one hundred and twenty ninth degree of east longitude, reckoning from the meridian of Greenwich, including all the Islands adjacent, in the Pacific Ocean within the latitude aforesaid, and including also Norfolk Island, is void and of no effect against the rights of the Crown; and that all Persons who shall be found in possession of any such Lands as aforesaid, without the license or authority of His Majesty's Government, for such purpose, first had and obtained, will be considered as trespassers, and liable to be dealt with in like manner as other intruders upon the vacant Lands of the Crown within the said Colony."
https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/nsw7_doc_1835.pdf

What is purported to be the first European naming of geographical locations on the Australian continent was when Dutch explorers Willem Janszoon (commander of the *Duyfken* or Little Dove) and Jan Lodewijkszoon van Roseingeyn, who made the first recorded European landfall at what they named *R. met het Bosch* ('R[iver] with Bush/Forest', now Pennefather River) on the north-west coast of Cape York Peninsula (Figure 1). This is the first of the seven place names given by the explorers (Tent, 2006). The 'Duyfken Chart' (Figure 2), created by the crew of the *Duyfken* — the first known map of any part of Australia — shows the naming of *Cape Keerweer* (Cape Turn-again/Turn-about in Dutch) (Tent and Slatyer, 2009) (Figure 3), where, after members of the crew were killed in a confrontation with the Wik people, the expedition 'turned around' and headed back to Java. Some of the crew were trying to abduct members of the Wik people (National Museum Australia, 2023).

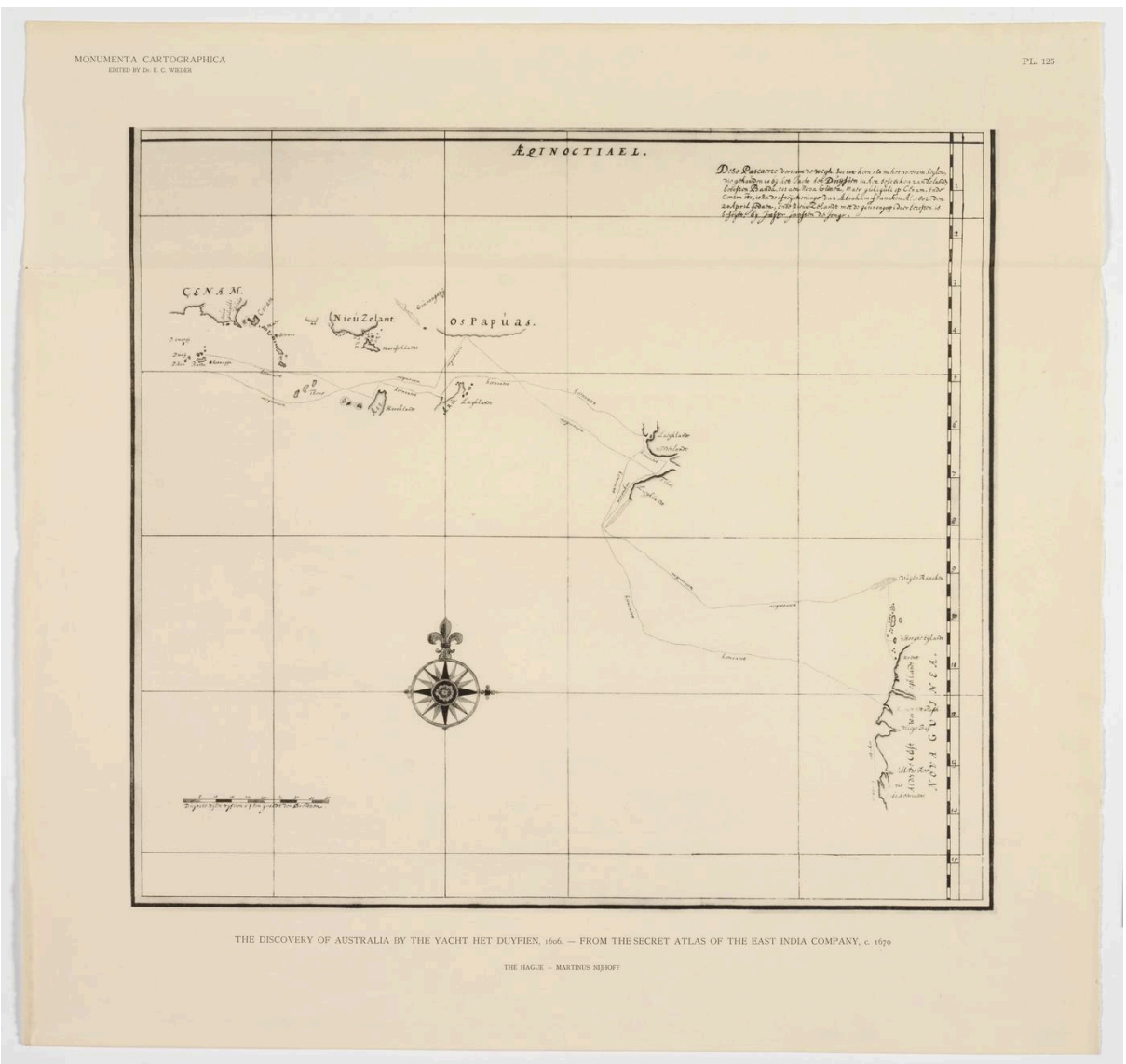

Figure 1. Wieder, F. C., and Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. Dese Pascaerte Vertoont de Wegh, Soo Int Heen Als in Het Weerom Seylen, Die Gehouden Is Bij Het Jacht Het Duijfien [Cartographic Material] / Willem Janszoon. Martinus Nijhoff, 1606.

Translation: "This map shows the route taken by the pinnace Duifien on the outward as well as on the return voyage when she visited the countries east of Banda up to New Guinea".

Source: State Library of New South Wales (Mitchell Collection).

Persistent link: https://search.sl.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1hn22i6/SLNSW_ALMA2193092120002626

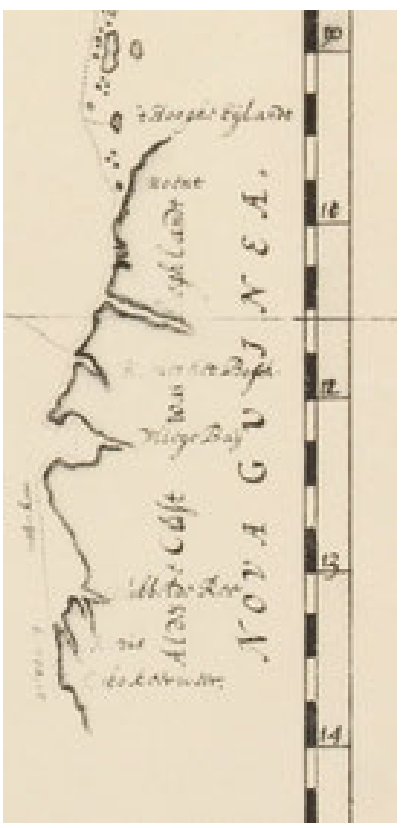

Figure 2. Extract from: Wieder, F. C., and Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. Dese Pascaerte Vertoont de Wegh, Soo Int Heen Als in Het Weerom Seylen, Die Gehouden Is Bij Het Jacht Het Duijfien [Cartographic Material] / Willem Janszoon. Martinus Nijhoff, 1606.

Dutch explorers rarely recorded Indigenous names on their charts (Tent, 2021). The main reason for this, according to Ormeling (2004), was that extensive contact between the Dutch and Indigenous peoples did not occur. When Tasman discovered the southernmost tip of what is now Australia he named it Van Diemen's Land, after the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, Anthony van Diemen. As noted by Tent (*op. cit.*), the naming of places and topographical features was not the main task allocated to Tasman, and other Dutch explorers. They were directed to record "detailed descriptions in their journals and on their charts of hither to unknown lands and coastlines" (Tent, *op. cit.,* p. 2).

Tent and Slatyer (2009) reported that the first British explorer to make contact with the Southland was John Brookes, Captain of the British East Indiaman *Tryall* in 1622, which gave its name to Tryall Rocks in the Montebello Islands, where his ship foundered. William

Dampier, on his second voyage in 1699, allocated two geographic names (Shark's Bay[7] (Burney, 1803; Dampier, 1729) (see Dampier's map of part of New Holland (Figure 3)) and Roebuck Bay (named after HMS Roebuck, the ship he captained) (Wikipedia, 2004). James Cook, after discovering the east coast of Australia in 1770, named 134 places (Moran, 2020), the first being Point Hicks (April 19, 1770) (McDermott, 1878). Cook named Point Hicks after Lieutenant Hicks, who first sighted the eastern coast of the continent. He later named Port Jackson after Sir George Jackson, one of the Lord Commissioners of the British Admiralty, and the Judge Advocate of the Fleet (and a mentor to Cook)[8] (See Figure 4 — a tracing of the Chart of Richard Pickersgill, Master's Mate on the Endeavour, 1893. The chart shows three placenames — Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Red Point). On his second voyage (1772–1775), charting the east coast of Tasmania, Cook gave names to a further 13 places (McDermott, 1878).

[7] "The 6th of August in the morning we saw an opening in the land and we ran into it, and anchored in seven and a half fathom-water, 2 miles from the Shore, clean sand. It was somewhat difficult getting in here, by reason of many Shoals we met with: But I sent my boat sounding before me. The Mouth of this Sound, which I call'd *Shark's Bay*, lies in about 25 deg. S. Lat. and our Reckoning made its Longitude from the C. of *Good Hope* to be about 87 Degrees; which is less by 195 leagues than is usually laid down in our common Draughts, if our Reckoning was right and our Glasses did not deceive us." Dampier, W., 1729, *A Voyage to New Holland, Etc. in the Year 1699*. Third Edition. London: James and John Knapton. Chapter 3.

[8] Cook also named Cape Jackson in New Zealand after Jackson.

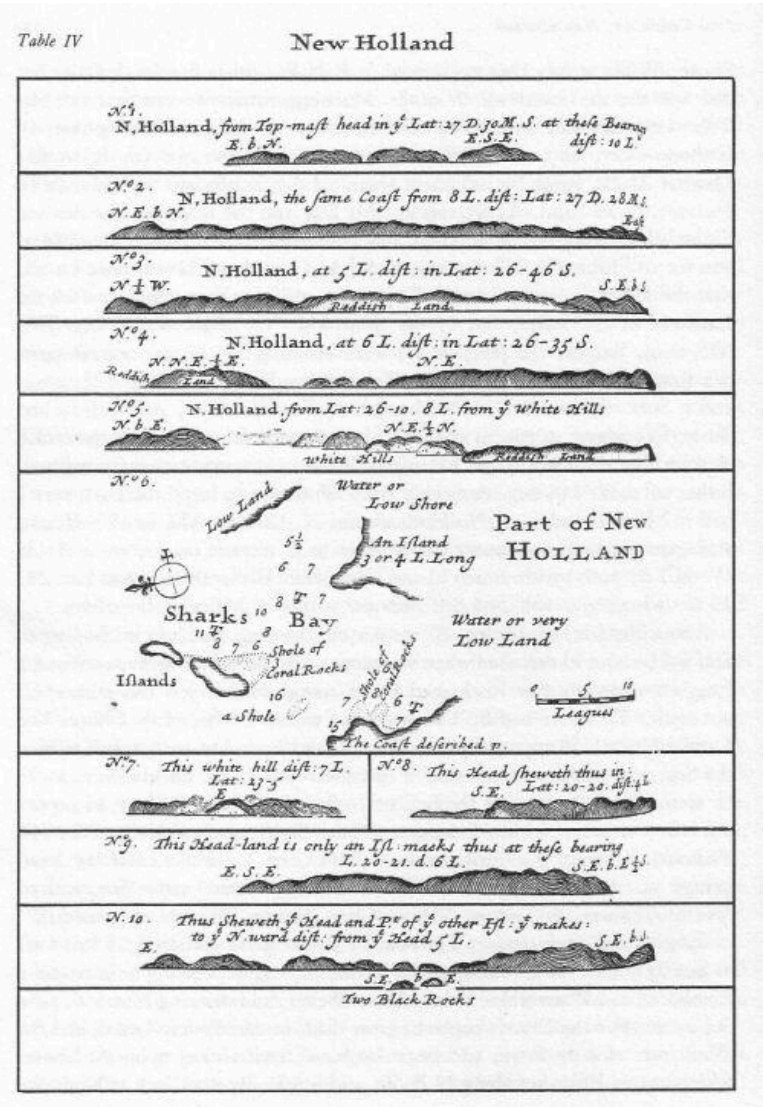

Figure 3. New Holland map by William Dampier (1651-1715) 1699.

Source: William Dampier, “A Voyage to New Holland, Etc. in the Year 1699”, Third Edition, 1729,. Table 4.

Persistent link: Project Gutenberg - https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/15675/pg15675-images.html

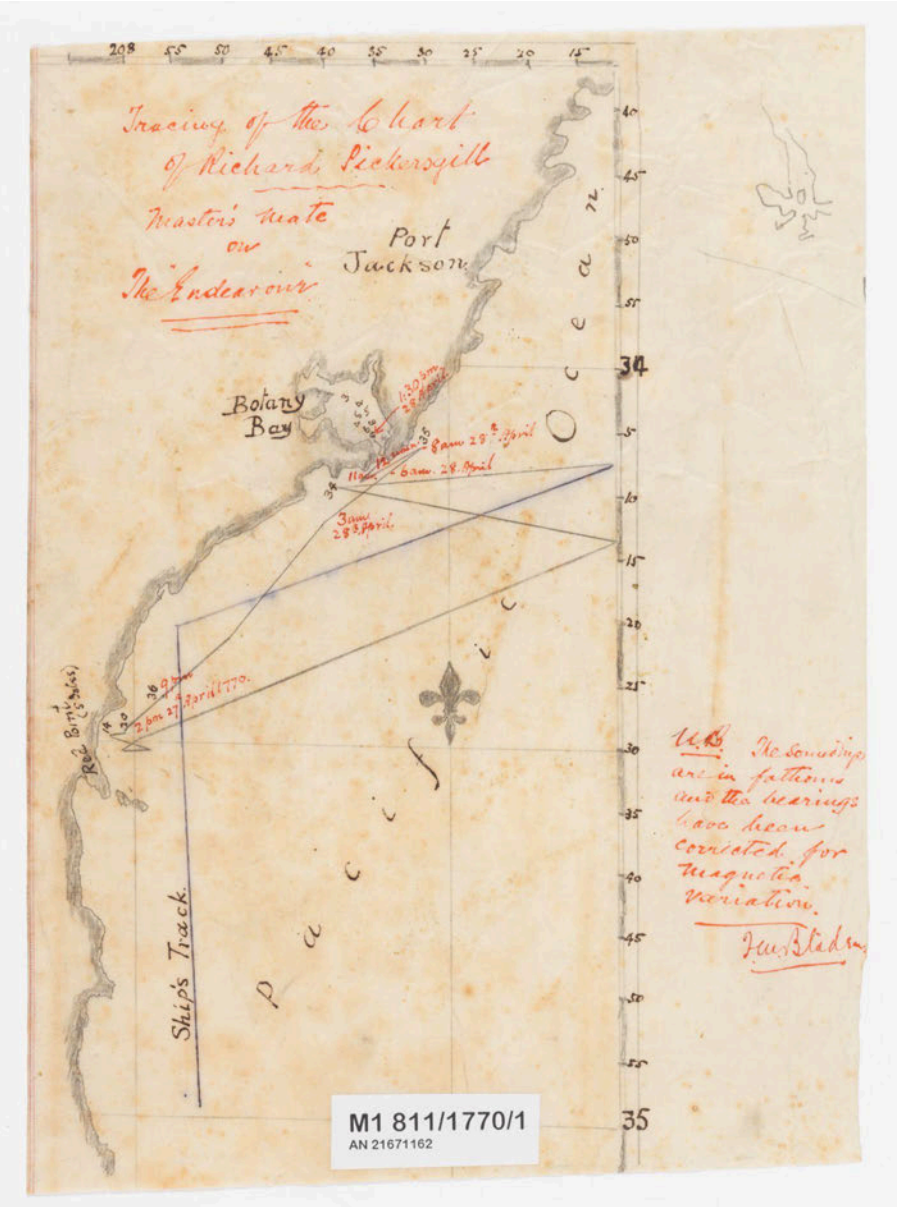

Figure 4. Tracing of the Chart of Richard Pickersgill, Master's Mate on the Endeavour, 1893.
Based on Pickersgill's ms. chart "A Mercator's chart of Part of the East coast of New-Holland discoverd [sic] in his Maj.ts. Bark Endeavour in 1770 by Rich.d Pickersgill". Original in the British Museum press no. 541/2 Shelf Xo.
Source: State Library of New South Wales (Mitchell Collection).
Persistent link: https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/74VvNq7Jm0rA#viewer

In 1772, Louis Francois Marie Alesno de St. Alloüarn, commander of *Le Gros Ventre* in Kerguelen-Tre´marec's expedition, gave the first French names on the continent (a total of 17 in present-day Western Australia). Antoine Raymond Joseph de Bruni d'Entrecasteaux was dispatched in 1792 to find Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de la Perouse, whose two ships disappeared after leaving Botany Bay in 1788 (State Library of NSW, 2024). d'Entrecasteaux charted south-east Tasmania and parts of the south and west coasts of Australia. He named 49 geographical locations. But it was the Nicolas Baudin expedition of

1880 that saw the greatest number of French geographic names given — 410 (Tent and Slatyer, 2009). A map of Australia from Baudin's expedition by Louis de Freycinet is shown in Figure 5. The legacy of French expeditions include many geographic names that still exist today — for example the Freycinet Peninsula, d'Entrecasteaux River, Recherché Bay[9] and the Labillardiere Peninsula in Tasmania, Baudin Beach on Kangaroo Island, South Australia, and the suburb of La Perouse in Sydney.

Figure 5. Carte generale de la Nouvelle Hollande / dressee par M. L. Freycinet, Comandant la Goelette le Casuarina, an 1808

Source: National Library of Australia — Freycinet, Louis Claude Desaulses de, 1779-1842.

Persistent link: https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-230971556/view

Legacy of European geographic naming

In the days of first settlement there appears to have been a concerted effort by early British explorers and surveyors to ascribe names of famous English peers to cities, towns and landmarks. The people and places used for geographic naming had little or no relevance to the Australian landscape nor to the First Nations peoples of the land.

[9] Named after one of d'Entrecasteaux's ships (Atkinson, 2016).

Historically in Western culture, geographic names were ascribed with a meaning in mind, perhaps named after a significant person or event. Consider Melbourne[10], the capital city of Victoria (named after Queen Victoria, the reigning monarch of the day (1851)). The city was proclaimed a town in March 1837[11] (Melbourne Museum, 2024; Boyce 2015). In addition, the naming of streets was done by Governor Bourke with the imposition of English names (including his own) — for example King, William, Queen, Elizabeth and Bourke[12] streets (Figure 6). The use of the names of peers on this blank canvas could be interpreted as supporting “Europe’s God-given right to territorial appropriation.” (Harley, 1988). Mongibello also suggests that the European “practice of naming places after people often entails a conception of place as a site of ‘belonging’”. Regardless of the imposition of European geographic names, Carter (2007) acknowledges that ongoing First Nations people’s narratives of place do not disappear simply because the ground is occupied by an imposed landscape aesthetic which has migrated from Europe.

[10] Named after Lord Melbourne, the British Prime Minister at the time.
[11] Formally proclaimed on 10th April 1837. NSW Government Gazette, 1837, p.303. The same proclamation named and proposed a new settlement of Williams Town (now Williamstown) to be laid out, located to the west of Melbourne. It was named after the reigning monarch of the time, King William IV.
[12] Governor Bourke was the instigator of the street names of Melbourne and therefore the reason his name appears on the largest and central street.

Figure 6. Map shewing the site of Melbourne and the position of the huts & buildings previous to the foundation of the township by Sir Richard Bourke in 1837. Surveyed & drawn by Robert Russell.
Source: State Library of Victoria. Out of Copyright.
Persistent link: http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/74744

As the early landscape was explored, surveyors instructed their juniors to, as much as possible, retain First Nations people's geographic names for features. The Colonial Secretary for New South Wales instructed Police Magistrate, William Lonsdale, on 5 April 1838 with the following:

> *"With reference to your letter of the 8th February last, requesting that names might be given to the two districts already appointed in the County of Bourke; I am directed by the Governor to inform you, that in all cases where names are to be given, His Excellency wishes as far as possible to adopt those already used by the natives, and to avoid the use of names already appropriated in other countries. The name of Geelong is therefore to be retained, as well as Melbourne, the latter having been already fixed*." (PROV, 1988. p. xviii).

This did not evidently flow through to all staff as can be seen in the following examples.

Figure 7 comes from a map entitled 'The South Eastern Portion of Australia Shewing the routes of the three Expeditions, and the surveyed territory.' The routes in question are those of Thomas Mitchell, where he traversed through Gunditjmara Country. Of note are the lack of First Nations people's traditional names. There are only two features — *Mt. Napier or Murroa* and *Cockajemmy Lakes* — that allude to traditional First Nations people's names, whilst every other river, cape, mountain or range has been given a European appellation. Birch (1992) described Mitchell's approach thus: "By naming features, he placed a symbolic British flag on each of them … His maps conceal the presence and histories of the indigenous people." However, Mitchell and Hoddle are both documented as trying to collect indigenous language for their use as geographic names (Colville, 2004; Wallace, 2018).

Figure 7. Section of 'The South Eastern Portion of Australia Shewing the routes of the three Expeditions, and the surveyed territory.'

Source: State Library of New South Wales. Mitchell, Thomas, et al. The South Eastern Portion of Australia Shewing the Routes of the Three Expeditions and the Surveyed Territory [Cartographic Material] / T.L. Mitchell, Del. ; B.R. Davies, Sculpt., 16 George Str. Eusten Squ. T. & W. Boone, 29 New Bond Street, 1838. Out of copyright.

Moving now to a more recent European settlement on Gunditjmara Country, an early map of the Portland Bay area from 1840 (Figure 8) shows the first idea of where a settlement may be established. Prior to this the town had been a camp for sealers and whalers that had plied their trade along Bass Strait. There were some crudely constructed huts for the semi-permanent whalers and small jetties and piers. By 1835 the Henty family and their sundry employees arrived with ships, supplies and stock to establish a permanent settlement, thereby being officially recognised as the first settlers in the soon-to-be-established Colony of Port Phillip[13] (Learmonth, 1960). They brought with them guns and ammunition to protect themselves and their stock from the First Nations peoples.

[13] Later to become the State of Victoria in 1851.

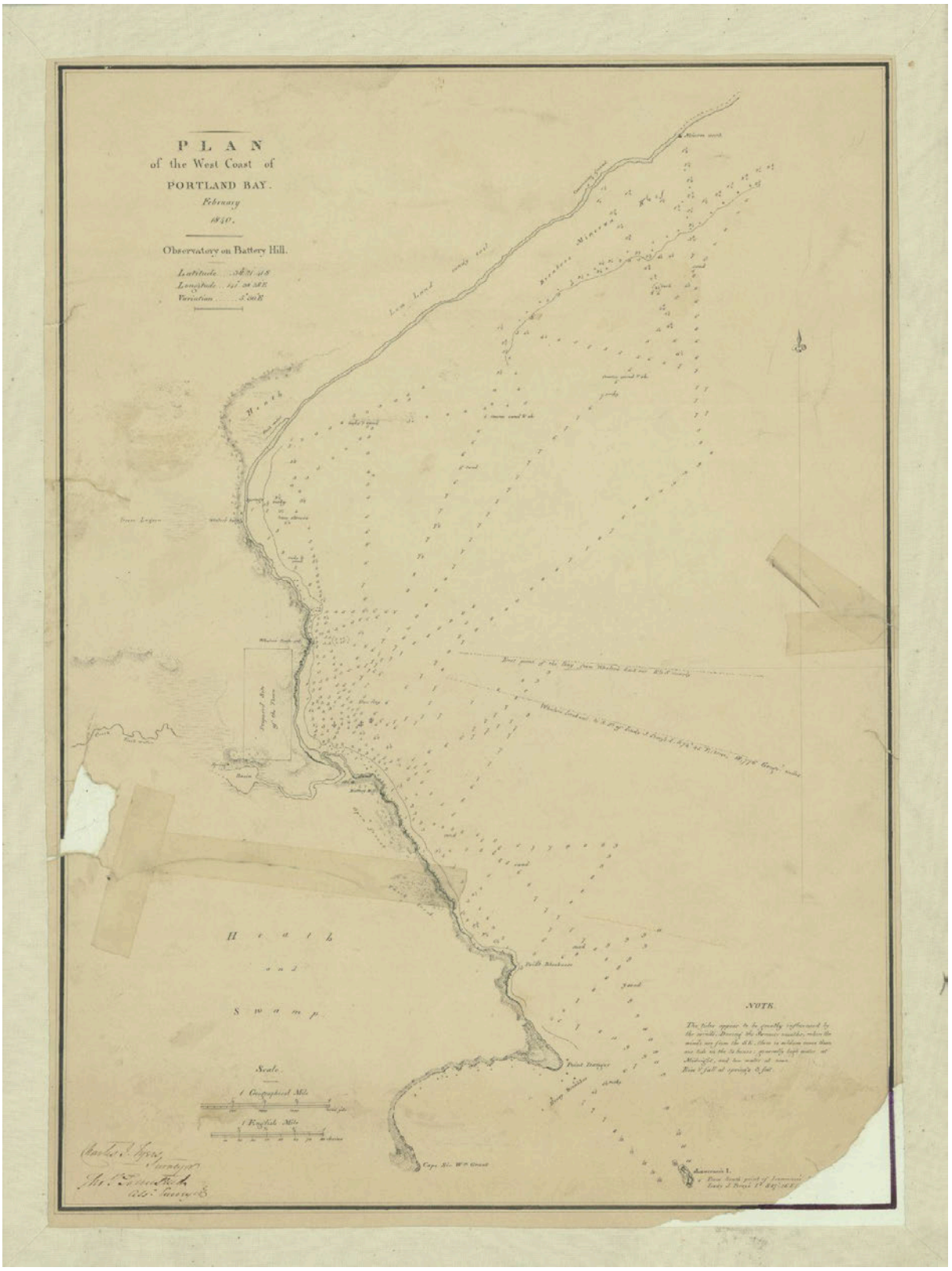

Figure 8. Plan of the West Coast of Portland Bay. February 1840. Public Record Office of Victoria, VPRS 8168/P0002, MCS; PORTLAND; TYERS C;

https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/7B6A6C01-F843-11E9-AE98-691A88C8B5BA?image=1

The town of Portland, in south-western Victoria, was named after William Bentinck, the 3rd Duke of Portland, Prime Minister of Great Britain (1783) and the United Kingdom (1807–1809) (Wilkinson, 2003), on the 5th December 1800 by Lieutenant James Grant. Grant was sailing through the area in the *Lady Nelson*, on his way from London to Sydney (Learmonth, 1960). As well as the town being named Portland, a main street in Portland is named ‘Bentinck’. See Figure 9.

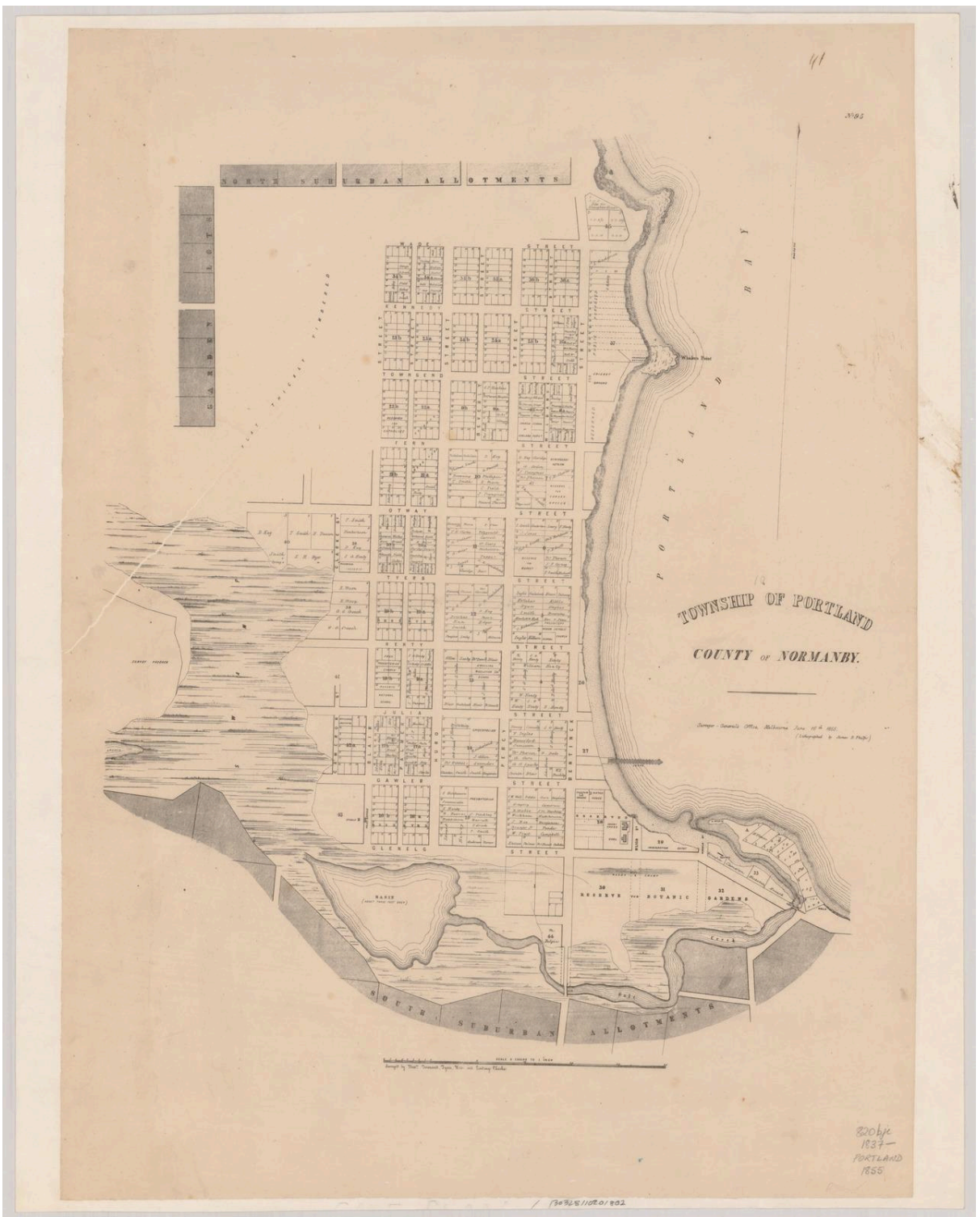

Figure 9. Township of Portland, County of Normanby [cartographic material] / surveyed by Mess.rs Townsend Tyres, Wade and Lindsay Clarke ; Surveyor General's Office, Melbourne, June 16th 1855 ; lithographed by James B. Philp. (1855). Melbourne: Surveyor General's Office.

Source: State Library of Victoria.

Persistent link:https://find.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/61SLV_INST/1sev8ar/alma9920299663607636

Geographic naming was not limited to surveyors and explorers. First settlers also provided input to the naming of features. An example of this was the naming of a culturally significant site on the western edge of the Gariwerd / Grampians range renamed as Mount Talbot (named after William Talbot, the son of the youngest brother of the Lord Talbot de Malahide, of Ireland, who had passed away in late 1845 in Fingal, Tasmania (*The Courier*, Sat 27 Dec 1845, p. 2)). On 4 June 1846 local landholder J. M. Airey wrote to C. J. La Trobe, the Superintendent of the Colony of Port Phillip:

> *"Sir,*
> *I should feel much obliged if you would be kind enough to furnish the Northern Point of The Black Range, to the Westward of the Grampian Hills, and at the foot of which my station is situated, to be called Mount Talbot after my late uncle The Hon.ble William Talbot.*
> *I have the honor to be*
> *Sir*
> *Your most obed. Serv.*
> *J. M. Airey"*

PROV. VPRS 19/P0000, 46/845, 1846-06-04 Requests that I would allow the Black range to the westward of the Grampian Hills to be called Mount Talbot
https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/680C3821-BEE6-11ED-8BFF-DD48B887721A?image=1

In 1848 an attempt was made by surveyor William Wells to compile a gazetteer of Australian place names. He drew upon many sources, including some of those previously described in this manuscript, such as William Dampier, James Cook, Matthew Flinders, Thomas Mitchell and many others (Wells, 1848). By documenting and publishing these geographic names Wells was further reinforcing the coloniser's view of the land and giving them a permanency that would make them difficult to erase.

Offensive geographic names

First Nations peoples find some geographic names offensive. The use of racist terminology, the memorialisation of first settlers who perpetrated violence, and geographic names that

celebrate violent acts, all cause deep offence. The geographic names have ‘stuck’ because they appeared on early maps prepared by surveyors and were then formalised into spatial data. Through this process there has been no consultation with First Nations peoples. Those without a lived experience had little inkling as to the offence that some of these geographic names caused.

There has been a push in recent times to remove offensive geographic names in Victoria by First Nations peoples, including references to first settlers. Gunditjmara man Shea Rotumah explained that, “It’s an insult to steal someone’s land and name it after them[selves]...These are the micro-aggressions we deal with every day.” (Priess, 2024). Dja Dja wurrung man Rodney Carter explained the effects upon him about the geographic name Jim Crow Creek, “It's been incarcerated. It's been suffocated. It's been imposed upon. And maybe for my people, it's easily said because this is the idea of oppression, displacement, colonisation.” (Melville, 2021). Jim Crow refers to a derogatory phrase from the American south and the creek was renamed Larni Barramal Yaluk[14] in 2023. In 2020, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, the King Leopold Ranges in Western Australia were renamed Wunaamin Miliwundi Ranges, due to the brutal colonial regime of the Belgian monarch (1865–1909) in Africa (Wahlquist, 2021).

Recently the University of Melbourne has been grappling with its colonial origins. In the book *Dhoombak Goobgoowana* (meaning ‘truth-telling’ in the Woi Wurrung language of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people) (Jones *et al.*, 2024) the university confronts its colonial past and is part of its pledge, “to engage in full and honest truth-telling about its history.” One of the architects of the university’s buildings, “Anketell Henderson, the first architecture graduate of the University, argued that his creations expressed the racial superiority of the white race, with the ‘yellow races’ well behind and the ‘black races’ last.” (Jones *et al.*, *op. cit.* p. 4)

How and why offensive geographic names were accepted we can only speculate, though some may argue they are an echo to another time and social morays. The racist societal views may have been an expression of the times, particularly post the abolition of slavery in the 1820s through to Australia’s White Australia Policy (Willard, 1967) in the early 20th century.

[14] The traditional name of the creek in Dja Dja wurrung language was either Jumcra or Lalgambook.

On Gunditjmara Country there is a geographic name with a dark history. Lubra Creek, near Caramut, Victoria, is named for the First Nations women who were murdered at that location in 1842 (Clark, 1995). Lubra Creek quickly found its name onto a map in 1845 — a property map of the Mustons Creek run Figure 10, thus establishing its permanency.

Figure 10. Detail from Loubra Creek, from Sydney M19; Mustons Creek; Pickering; (1845),
Source: Public Record Office of Victoria. VPRS 8168/P0002, SYDNEY M19; MUSTONS CREEK; PICKERING;
https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/0B57F8C1-F844-11E9-AE98-F1CE9C833AE8?image=1

Why was an offensive name, such as Lubra Creek — which referenced a massacre — considered acceptable by the local inhabitants? Was it to memorialise the event of the conqueror, or to send a dire warning to the subjugated?

In the *Gazetteer of Australia* (Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM), 2021), the term ‘Lubra’ can be found in 12 locations across the country. Until now, there has been little effort to change the geographic names of these locations and return them to their traditional names.

Offensive terms for First Nations peoples, like ‘Lubra’, became part of the Australian vernacular and were reinforced through the media. Broome (2024) states, “Advertising in the interwar period made much play on Aboriginal ‘primitiveness’.” An example of this was the term ‘Lubra Kate’, which was variously used to brand oil, named a racing greyhound, and

was even presented as a play (Figures 11 and 12). The term ‘Lubra’ was described by Conor (2013) as, “a primary term in the lexicon of Australian racism.” Further, she indicated that the women she spoke to from various First Nations communities found the term, “still causes considerable distress to the ‘old people’”.

ABORIGINAL MOTIFS AT DENTAL BALL

"ORTHO 'ORACE," a little nigger boy doll, with six "buck" teeth (modelled at the Dental Hospital) was presented last night to the Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry at the Sydney University, Professor A. J. Arnott, at the dental ball.

The doll, and the decorations—two nine-feet tall witchdoctors painted on cardboard spears and shields—were in keeping with the ballet "Lubra Kate," which was written and produced by a dentist, Mr. Gerry Donovan, and performed by a corps of eight dental students against a background of Ayer's Rock, also painted on cardboard.

More than 1,000 people who attended the ball at the Trocadero, swung Chinese lanterns in a special lantern dance in the darkened ballroom.

The ball was arranged by a committee of men and women of the Sydney University Dental Undergraduates' Association, and staff members of the United Dental Hospital.

Figures 11 and 12. Examples of the use of the term ‘Lubra’.

National Museum of Australia

https://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/icons/piction/kaui2/index.html#/home?usr=CE&umo=56116777

Aboriginal Motifs at Dental Ball. *Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 10 July 1953, page 5

Work in Victoria is already afoot to support diversity in naming and language revival. The name ‘Lubra Creek’, located on Eastern Maar Country, is at the time of writing under review by the Moyne Shire (the local governing body) and is proposed to be changed to Thanampool Thookay Creek — a Dhauwurd wurrung[15] language term that means ‘Aboriginal woman and child’ (Bissland and Bell, 2024). The name has been chosen to reflect on the First Nations women and children murdered at the site in 1842.

[15] Dhauwurd wurrung is the language of the Gunditjmara people, west of the Hopkins River.

In 2021, the Mornington Peninsula Shire, which falls on Bunurong Country, changed the names of Blacks Camp Road, Blacks Camp Reserve and Blacks Camp Pre-School in the town of Somerville because of their derogatory moniker. As part of the Shire's Reconciliation Action Plan they felt that the derogatory term was "inappropriate to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community" (Mornington Peninsula Shire, 2021). Blacks Camp Road was replaced with Worwong[16] Avenue, Blacks Camp Reserve was replaced with Beek Beek[17] Reserve, and Blacks Camp Pre-School was replaced with Tillerkite[18] Pre-School.

Return of geographic names

There are locations across the state that have been named after early pioneers, English peers, and prominent Victorians. The use of names of people that have had a detrimental impact on the lives of First Nations peoples, or are associated with these impacts is regarded as deeply offensive. The use of these names is problematic when further historical information comes to light. For example, the name change for the Moreland City Council to Merri-bek City Council in 2021 came about when it was discovered that 'Moreland' had "deeply racist associations" (Merri-bek City Council, 2024), as Moreland was the name of a Jamaican slave estate. The council worked with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners to develop a name that, "honours the Traditional Owners connection to, and both historical and ongoing care of the land known as 'Moreland'." (Merri-bek City Council, *op. cit.* 2024). The council recognised that changing the name, "acknowledge[d] past violence and displacement endured by our local Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people [and] is a great step towards reconciliation and collective healing." (Merri-bek City Council, *op. cit.* 2024).

Traditional owners lost some of their histories through colonial settlement. When First Nations peoples were forcibly moved onto missions and reserves (Broome, 2024) they were no longer permitted to speak their language or practise their customs. Some traditional language remained, and geographic names were an important part in keeping that language alive. For example, the town of Caramut, near Lubra Creek, is made up of two traditional words — *cara*, meaning 'cut', and *mut*, meaning 'chest'. Cut chest. Indicating that the place was an initiation site for the local Gunditjmara people.

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[16] Worwong is the traditional Bunurong name for the local area.
[17] Beek Beek is the Bunurong phrase for 'earth'.
[18] Tillerkite is a Bunurong word for 'play'.

Appropriation of geographic names

After exploration by surveyors, the first settlers arrived on Gunditjmara Country and began to place their own stamp on geographic naming. Many of the first immigrants in the Portland Bay district came from England, Scotland and Ireland, bringing with them their own histories and memories from their homelands. These imported histories found their way into place names, either of localities, towns and cities, or for their newly acquired properties. Remarkably, many properties were given traditional names by the new immigrants. Cahir (2014, p. 235) concluded that an “unconscious transmogrification occurred amongst the squatters, the early usurpers of Aboriginal land in Victoria that invoked the linking of Aboriginal placenames to land and a sense of belonging.” By using traditional names for places the early settlers brought a new sense of belonging for themselves, and also used the names to ingratiate themselves with the traditional owners. Birch (2003) suggested that, “the colonisers, having altered or destroyed the culture of the ‘other’, then appropriate it for their own gain, whilst at the same time denying their own complicity in the often aggressive devastation of the culture they have displaced.” This cultural appropriation of traditional geographic names may salve a guilty conscience, but without the input of First Nations peoples a broader cultural understanding and a richer context of place can be missed.

As has been described, at the time of first settlement Land Surveyors were sent out by the Surveyor-General and asked to collect the names of places from First Nations peoples — this saw the creation of some interesting geographic names, for example Yarra Yarra, or as it is locally known the Yarra River (Department of Transport and Planning, 2024):

> *The more commonly known name "Yarra" came from surveyor John Helder Wedge, who upon asking a Wathawurrung speaker from the Geelong area what the cascading waters on a lower section of the river were called, exclaimed "Yanna Yanna", meaning "it flows". Wedge’s mishearing and misunderstanding became the accepted name of Melbourne’s iconic waterway* (Gibson *et. al*, 2018).

There are instances in Victoria where a geographic name for a feature has been changed to a European name, whilst the traditional name has been retained for the urban centre that surrounds it. For example, the volcanic cones of Mount Elephant and Tower Hill had their names changed from Derrinallum and Koroit (or Koroitj). The towns at the foot of these hills have retained their traditional names. Mount Elephant was given the name because its appearance from certain angles looked like a seated elephant (Figure 13), whilst Tower Hill

is believed to have got its name from its resemblance to a moated castle (Department of Transport and Planning, 2024) (See Figure 14).

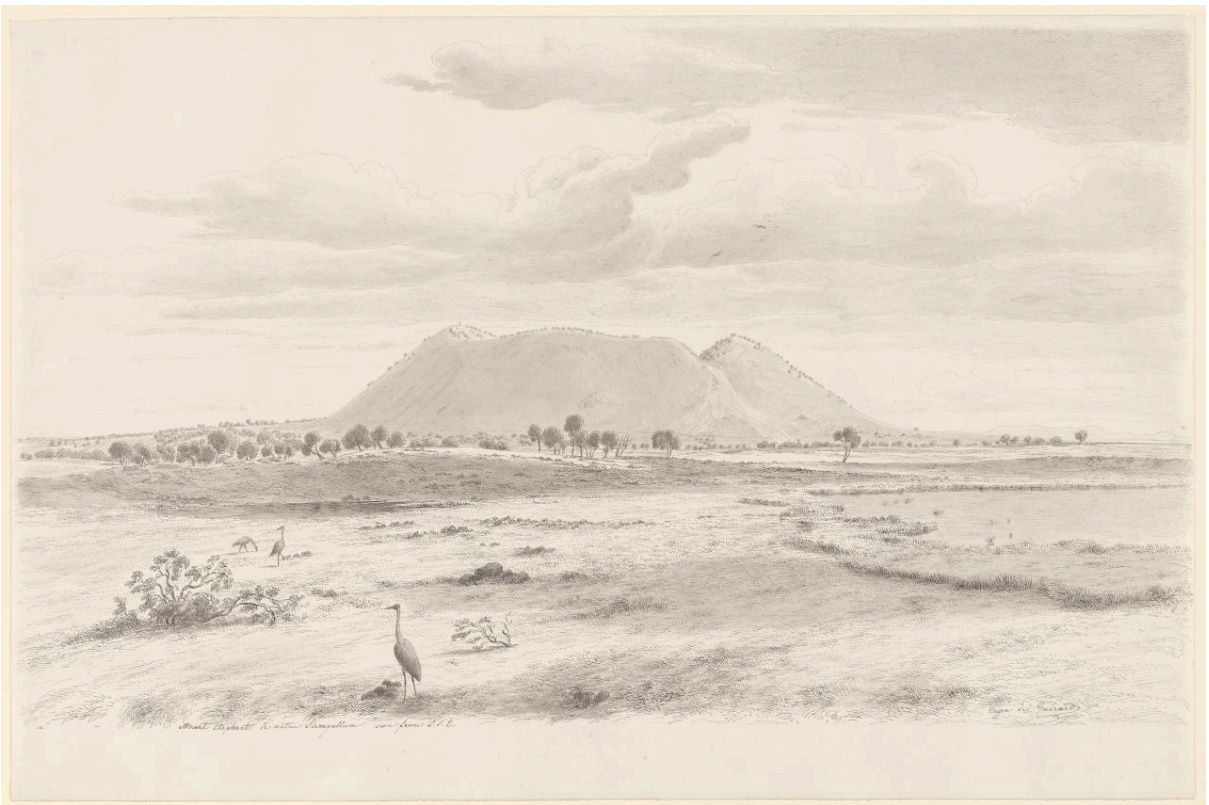

Figure 13. Mount Elephant, Eugene von Guerard (1811-1901) 1858.

Source: https://uploads8.wikiart.org/images/eugene-von-guerard/mount-elephant-1858.jpg

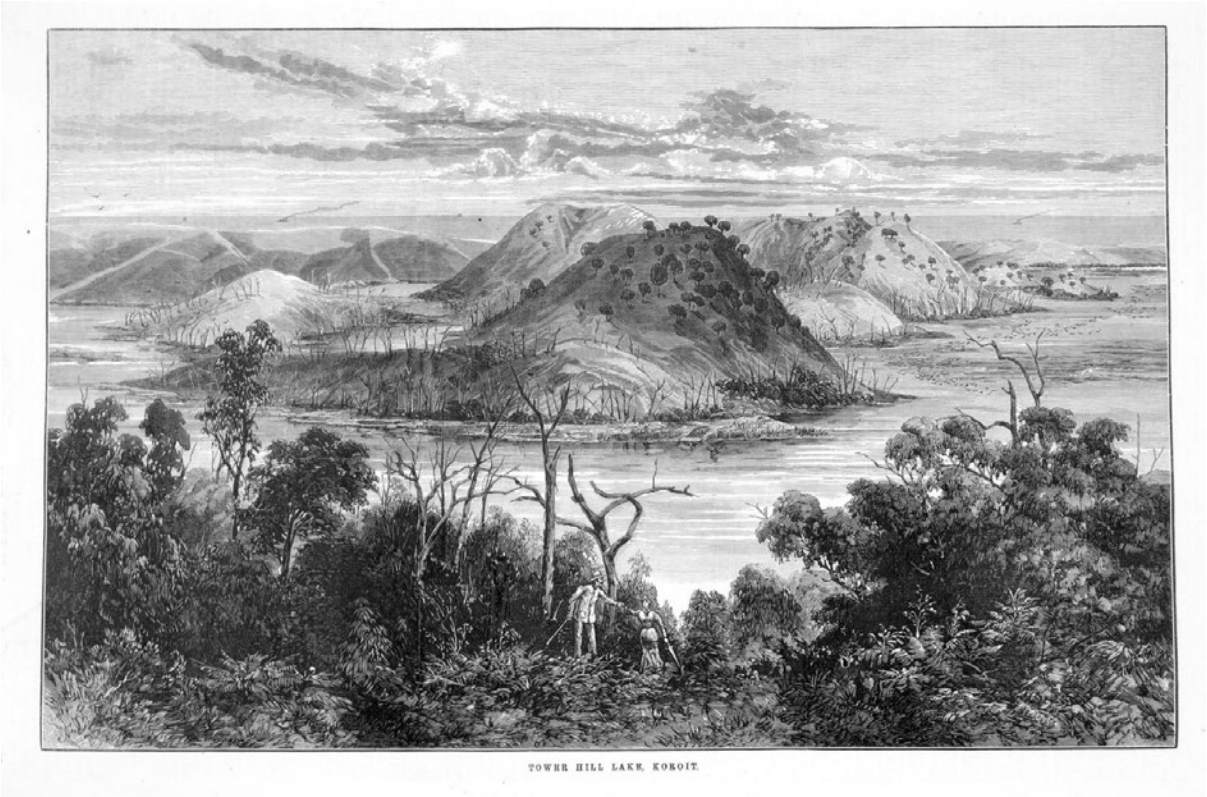

Figure 14.

Tower Hill Lake, Koroit. Albert Charles Cooke (1836-1902) March 21, 1883.

Publisher: Melbourne : David Syme and Co.

Source: State Library of Victoria.

Persistent link:https://find.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/61SLV_INST/1sev8ar/alma9917649023607636

It is unclear why the hills had their names changed whilst the towns were appropriated from the feature. Both hills are culturally significant to their respective First Nations peoples. A map of Tower Hill from 1846 clearly shows that the ‘native name KOROIT’ (Figure 15) was known to the early surveyors, yet a European name was used in its stead.

Figure 15. Tower Hill with annotation of 'native name KOROIT', 1846.
VPRS 8168/P0002, SYDNEYK3; WARNAMBOOL BAY PORT FAIRY SPECIAL SURVEY; PICKERING;
https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/0B2CA2E3-F844-11E9-AE98-25B886BBF0FE?image=1
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Gunditjmara Country — a personal story

Gunditjmara Country extends from the present-day Hopkins River in the east of Victoria, to the present-day Glenelg River in the west, and from the Southern Ocean in the south to the present-day Wannon River in the north (see Figure 16). Gunditjmara people have cared for this Country for at least 37,000 years. Their connection to Country is deep and profound and has been recognised with a Native Title determination in 2007 and World Heritage listing in 2019 (Weir, 2009). Co-author Craig Molyneux's ancestors managed the resources of the land by creating a series of aquaculture systems used for harvesting *kooyang* (short-finned eels) and fish along the volcanic landscape created by the creator-being *Budj Bim*, after whom the local volcano is named (Builth et al., 2008).

Figure 16. Gunditjmara Country, shown as the Dhauwurd wurrung language area. (CartDeco, 2020).

First Nations people's geographic names often-times had a practical purpose. For example, the creek now known as Darlot Creek is known by the Gunditjmara people as Killara, meaning 'ever flowing' or 'always flowing'. The creek flows from underneath the Budj Bim lava flow and forms Tae Rak[19] (Lake Condah) and feeds the ancient aquaculture systems.

When Thomas Mitchell walked through the area in 1836 he named the volcanic cone Mount Eeles, after a colleague, Charles Eeles, from the Peninsular War (Andrews, 1986). Later, a cartographer mis-read the spelling of Eeles and the mountain became Eccles — etched into copper plate and then into data. The rich cultural history of the volcano was lost and thus missing from data, and hence from maps, leaving users ignorant as a result of these omissions. In 2017 the geographic name was returned to its traditional name Budj Bim[20].

[19] Also known as *Koon doon* and *Kerup.*

[20] The story of how it acquired its geographic name is a unique one. Around 36,900 years ago the volcanic cone of Budj Bim erupted (Matchan et al., 2020). In Gunditjmara lore Budj Bim was a giant creator-being. He walked across the plains with three other giants and he lay down on the ground. The earth began to tremble and Budj Bim spewed his blood and teeth across the landscape, creating lakes and diverting watercourses. The volcanic cone we see rising above the landscape is his forehead. Budj Bim literally means 'high head'. The lava country that spreads out across the plain is called tungatt mirring or Stone Country. Tungatt literally means 'teeth'. Matchan et al. (op. cit.) discovered a stone axe head underneath the lava flow, confirming that Gunditjmara people had been in the area at least 36,900 years ago. Further, they believe that this story is the oldest known to human-kind.

The coloniser's view of the landscape persists in the data and without the input of Traditional Owners perspectives, stories and myths we are left with a lopsided and soulless compilation of bits and bytes.

Likewise, the Glenelg River, a mighty waterway that flows from the Gariwerd / Grampians southward to the coast, was named by Thomas Mitchell (Andrews, 1986) on his third overland expedition in 1836, after the then Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Baron Glenelg. The traditional name for the Glenelg River was *Bochara*[21], which was also the name of Craig's ancestor. In Gunditjmara culture, people could be named after places, rather than in Western culture where places are named after people.

On Gunditjmara Country, near the current town of Portland (noted in a previous section of this manuscript) there were a number of 'collisions'[22] occurring between the Henty's shepherds and the Gunditjmara people which amounted to many deaths. One such 'collision' is notable, for the place where it occurred was given the name the 'Convincing Ground'[23].

The story of the Convincing Ground came to light in 1841, when the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the colony of Port Phillip, George Augustus Robinson, visited the area and met with Edward Henty and James Blair (Clark, 2011). Henty described the event over dinner:

> *"...some time ago, I suppose two or three years, a whale broke from her moorings and went on shore. And the boats went in to get it off, when they were attack* [sic] *by the natives who drove them off. He said the men were so enraged that they went to the head station for their firearms and then returned to the whale, when the natives again attack* [sic] *them. And the whalers then let fly, to use his expression, right and left upon the natives. He said the natives did not go away but got behind trees and threw spears and stones. They, however, did not much molest them after that."*

Robinson wrote the next day in his journal about the origin of the name 'Convincing Ground', "It was the first year of the fishery, and the whalers having used their guns beat them off and

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[21] In 2024 the name *Bochara* was added to the GEBCO Gazetteer of Undersea Features for the Bocara Canyon, which extends undersea from the mouth of the Glenelg River into the Southern Ocean (Secretariat, I. H. O., 2024).
[22] The term 'collision' was a euphemism for a murder or massacre.
[23] Near the present day locality of Allestree.

hence called the spot the Convincing Ground. That was because they convinced them of their mistake and which, but for their firearms, they perhaps could not have done."

Five years after the establishment of Portland, the name 'Convincing Ground' appeared on a map prepared by surveyor C. J. Tyers from 1840 (Figure 17).

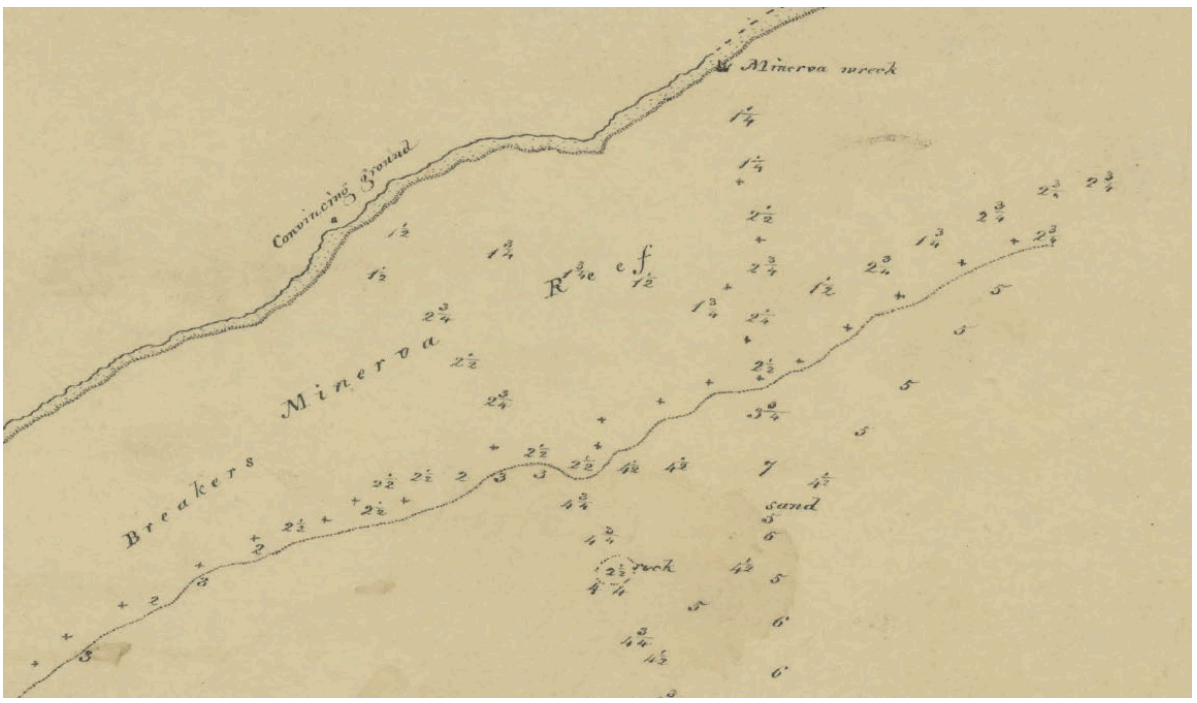


Figure 17. Section of Plan of the West Coast of Portland Bay. February 1840. Public Record Office of Victoria, VPRS 8168/P0002, MCS; PORTLAND; TYERS C;
https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/7B6A6C01-F843-11E9-AE98-691A88C8B5BA?image=1
Out of copyright.

By the 1860s the Convincing Ground was removed from maps (Figure 18), for reasons unknown. To this day the geographic name does not exist on any modern map, physical or digital, nor any signage in the area.

Figure 18. Section of Portland Bay. Surveyed by Navg. Lieut. H. J. Stanley R. N. 1869. VPRS 8168/P0002, CS38-1; PORTLAND BAY; STANLEY;
https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/540E9DE0-F840-11E9-AE98-8DA523EC3BE0?image=1
Out of copyright.

The Gunditjmara people however do remember the location and speak of its dark history. The oral history of the Convincing Ground is not dissimilar to George Augustus Robinson's description. There were two survivors of the massacre of the *Kilcarer gunditj* clan who escaped to nearby Mount Clay[24] and took refuge, which is how the story of the massacre has been handed down. They said almost 200 of their people were killed by the *ngamatitj* [white men].

The numbers killed in the massacre vary, however, with Robinson stating that, "a large number" were killed (Clark, 2011 p. 99), whilst Clark acknowledges that, "we will never know the precise numbers of Aboriginal people killed in this massacre." (p. 101)

Geographic names such as the Convincing Ground are a part of truth-telling. By adding the geographic name and its history to a map or dataset, the story of the place can be captured and memorialised. The dark history of the place can also be exposed and a retelling of its history can begin. The importance of a geographic name cannot be underestimated.

[24] Another feature named by Thomas Mitchell after a Peninsula War veteran. Its Dhauwurd wurrung name is *Pinnambul kang*.

In First Nations people's culture, place can be both tangible and intangible. Many landscape features will have a geographical name, but equally an intangible place can have a location and name. R. H. Mathews (1905, p. 85), when writing about the 'tribes' of New South Wales and Victoria, noted that in Western Victoria, "every clan has its own spirit-land, called *mi'-yur*, a native word signifying "home" or final resting place, to which the shades of all its members depart after death. … These miyurs are located in certain fixed directions from the territory of the tribe, some being situated toward one point of the compass and some another. Every man knows the direction of all the miyurs of his tribe in addition to his own."

In more modern times, informal geographic names were also attached to place to identify and remember an event, in much the same way Western cultures have. Similar to the Convincing Ground, Gunditjmara elder Aunty[25] Iris Lovett-Gardiner (1997, p. 17) remembered a place near the Lake Condah Mission "called Murderer's Flat, where the settlers murdered our people. They brought them out of the stones with flour and my people were starving by then because they were the hunted. They gave them flour with arsenic and then they shot the others — men, women and children. Hundreds of them." This oral history was also handed down through Craig's family. It's important to note the difference between **remembering** an event connected to a place, such as a massacre, and **celebrating** the event. There can be two different cultural perspectives of the same event and place.

There has been a backlash of sorts in Australia against the reclamation and use of First Nations people's languages, both in the spoken and written word. Roche (2024) details some of the online commentary from this backlash. He found terms like, 'woke symbolism', 'virtue signalling', 'tokenism', and 'shameful vanity project' among other more offensive terms that were used to describe the return of First Nations people's languages in more mainstream usage. Other comments from Roche's study, which he referred to as 'vigilante discourse', were around First Nations peoples conforming to Western culture. For example, "They need English not a language restricted to a Stone Age vocabulary and concepts to be able to move away from abuse, idleness, squalor and government dependency." The move to change geographic names from European to First Nations peoples has received similar backlash.

[25] Aunty or Uncle are terms given to Elders as a form of respect and don't necessarily refer to a familial connection.

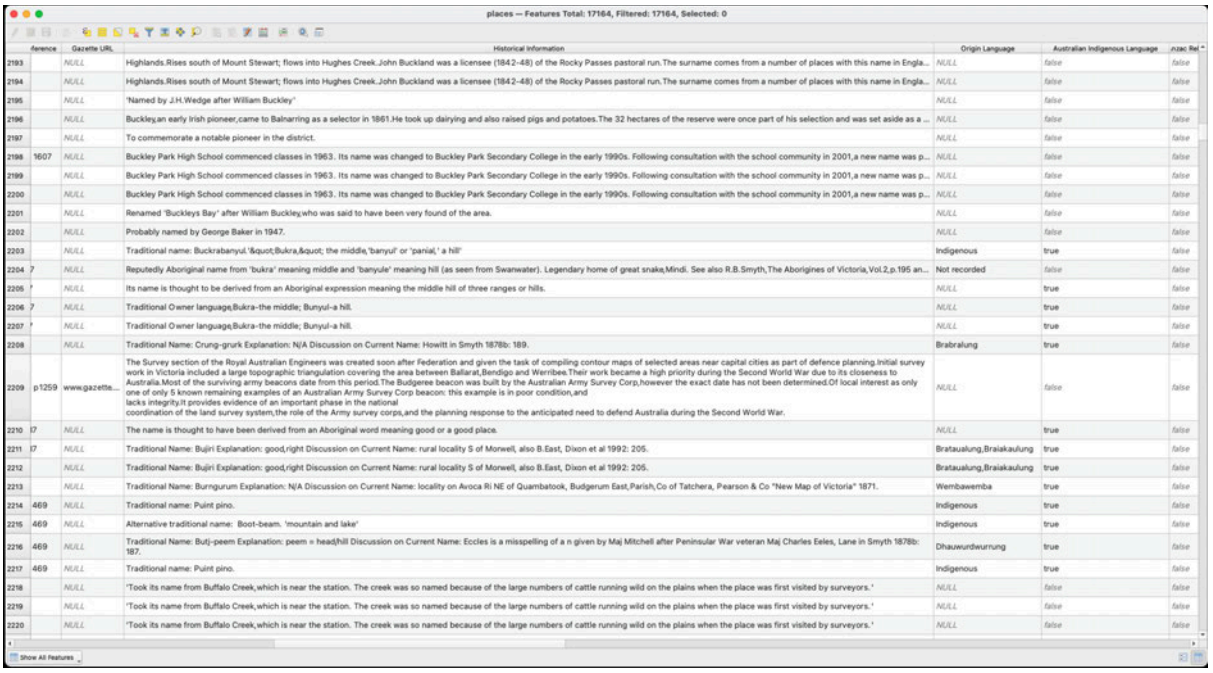
Language is important and rebuilding lost languages is doubly so. As Dr. Lou Bennett AM said in her 2019 Lin Onus Oration, “Language in this country comes from the country. … It stays in our body, and it stays in the body of the country.”

Way forward

Formal perspective

The Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM), in its *Principles for the Consistent Use of Place Names* (2023), states that the main objective of the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander geographic names is, “To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names are recognised by all Australia as being part of Australian heritage and need to be preserved.” This motherhood statement appears fine at first glance, but does not deal with the existence of offensive or racist place names and how they should be replaced. A secondary principle of the ICSM is, “That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names be preferred as the name to be used for any feature that does not have a name recognised by the relevant place name authority.” This principle further embeds the colonial view of the landscape, leaving only unnamed features with the opportunity to adopt a traditional name. Replacement of colonisers’ geographic names and reverting to traditional names would better recognise the “vibrant interests” of Traditional Owners of the Country they reside on.

Ian D. Clark (2014, p. 251) posed the rhetorical question, “Who is the custodian of toponymic histories and who keeps alive the history and memory of placename making at the local level?” Presently we would have to say that state or national Geographic Names agencies are the custodians of geographic name toponymy. However the data they hold for the name of a place, whether of European origin or of indigenous origin, is a mere citation to a source and a brief description. It is worth noting that of the 48,345 features in the VICNAMES database only 4,564 geographic names and their history or meaning were sourced from a First Nations organisation or person (Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and the Koorie Heritage Trust (Department of Transport and Planning (2024)), again reinforcing the paternalistic colonial point of view of the data used. (See Figure 19 for a data extract from the VICNAMES database.



places — Features Total: 17164, Filtered: 17164, Selected: 0

	ference	Gazette URL	Historical Information	Origin Language	Australian Indigenous Language	nzac Rel
2193		NULL	Highlands.Rises south of Mount Stewart; flows into Hughes Creek.John Buckland was a licensee (1842-48) of the Rocky Passes pastoral run.The surname comes from a number of places with this name in Engla...	NULL	false	false
2194		NULL	Highlands.Rises south of Mount Stewart; flows into Hughes Creek.John Buckland was a licensee (1842-48) of the Rocky Passes pastoral run.The surname comes from a number of places with this name in Engla...	NULL	false	false
2195		NULL	'Named by J.H.Wedge after William Buckley'	NULL	false	false
2196		NULL	Buckley,an early Irish pioneer,came to Balnarring as a selector in 1861.He took up dairying and also raised pigs and potatoes.The 32 hectares of the reserve were once part of his selection and was set aside as a ...	NULL	false	false
2197		NULL	To commemorate a notable pioneer in the district.	NULL	false	false
2198	1607	NULL	Buckley Park High School commenced classes in 1963. Its name was changed to Buckley Park Secondary College in the early 1990s. Following consultation with the school community in 2001,a new name was p...	NULL	false	false
2199		NULL	Buckley Park High School commenced classes in 1963. Its name was changed to Buckley Park Secondary College in the early 1990s. Following consultation with the school community in 2001,a new name was p...	NULL	false	false
2200		NULL	Buckley Park High School commenced classes in 1963. Its name was changed to Buckley Park Secondary College in the early 1990s. Following consultation with the school community in 2001,a new name was p...	NULL	false	false
2201		NULL	Renamed 'Buckleys Bay' after William Buckley,who was said to have been very found of the area.	NULL	false	false
2202		NULL	Probably named by George Baker in 1947.	NULL	false	false
2203		NULL	Traditional name: Buckrabanyul.'"Bukra," the middle,'banyul' or 'panial,' a hill'	Indigenous	true	false
2204	7	NULL	Reputedly Aboriginal name from 'bukra' meaning middle and 'banyule' meaning hill (as seen from Swanwater). Legendary home of great snake,Mindi. See also R.B.Smyth,The Aborigines of Victoria,Vol.2,p.195 an...	Not recorded	false	false
2205	?	NULL	Its name is thought to be derived from an Aboriginal expression meaning the middle hill of three ranges or hills.	NULL	true	false
2206	7	NULL	Traditional Owner language,Bukra-the middle; Bunyul-a hill.	NULL	true	false
2207	?	NULL	Traditional Owner language,Bukra-the middle; Bunyul-a hill.	NULL	true	false
2208		NULL	Traditional Name: Crung-grurk Explanation: N/A Discussion on Current Name: Howitt in Smyth 1878b: 189.	Brabralung	true	false
2209	p1259	www.gazette...	The Survey section of the Royal Australian Engineers was created soon after Federation and given the task of compiling contour maps of selected areas near capital cities as part of defence planning.Initial survey work in Victoria included a large topographic triangulation covering the area between Ballarat,Bendigo and Werribee.Their work became a high priority during the Second World War due to its closeness to Australia.Most of the surviving army beacons date from this period.The Budgeree beacon was built by the Australian Army Survey Corp,however the exact date has not been determined.Of local interest as only one of only 5 known remaining examples of an Australian Army Survey Corp beacon: this example is in poor condition,and lacks integrity.It provides evidence of an important phase in the national coordination of the land survey system,the role of the Army survey corps,and the planning response to the anticipated need to defend Australia during the Second World War.	NULL	false	false
2210	17	NULL	The name is thought to have been derived from an Aboriginal word meaning good or a good place.	NULL	true	false
2211	17	NULL	Traditional Name: Bujiri Explanation: good,right Discussion on Current Name: rural locality S of Morwell, also B.East, Dixon et al 1992: 205.	Brataualung,Braiakaulung	true	false
2212		NULL	Traditional Name: Bujiri Explanation: good,right Discussion on Current Name: rural locality S of Morwell, also B.East, Dixon et al 1992: 205.	Brataualung,Braiakaulung	true	false
2213		NULL	Traditional Name: Burngurum Explanation: N/A Discussion on Current Name: locality on Avoca Ri NE of Quambatook, Budgerum East,Parish,Co of Tatchera, Pearson & Co "New Map of Victoria" 1871.	Wembawemba	true	false
2214	469	NULL	Traditional name: Puint pino.	Indigenous	true	false
2215	469	NULL	Alternative traditional name: Boot-beam. 'mountain and lake'	Indigenous	true	false
2216	469	NULL	Traditional Name: Butj-peem Explanation: peem = head/hill Discussion on Current Name: Eccles is a misspelling of a n given by Maj Mitchell after Peninsular War veteran Maj Charles Eeles, Lane in Smyth 1878b: 187.	Dhauwurdwurrung	true	false
2217	469	NULL	Traditional name: Puint pino.	Indigenous	true	false
2218		NULL	'Took its name from Buffalo Creek,which is near the station. The creek was so named because of the large numbers of cattle running wild on the plains when the place was first visited by surveyors.'	NULL	false	false
2219		NULL	'Took its name from Buffalo Creek,which is near the station. The creek was so named because of the large numbers of cattle running wild on the plains when the place was first visited by surveyors.'	NULL	false	false
2220		NULL	'Took its name from Buffalo Creek,which is near the station. The creek was so named because of the large numbers of cattle running wild on the plains when the place was first visited by surveyors.'	NULL	false	false

Show All Features

Figure 19. Data extract from Victoria's VICNAMES Register of Geographic Names database, showing historical information collected. Source: Department of Transport and Planning (2024).

Victoria has implemented numerous initiatives to support and harness the significance of geographic names, recognising their role in connecting communities and impacts on our daily lives. These initiatives range from requesting municipal councils to confirm locality (suburb) names and boundaries, as well as road names and extents. It has also supported self-determination and language revival through the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages, extending now into the Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032). Refer to the infographic below for more details.

Figure 20. Infographic: Victoria's International Year of Indigenous Language 2019, Geographic Names Victoria.

A recent announcement by the Surveyor-General of Victoria at the Yoorrook Justice Commission[26] [27], along with Victoria's Treaty process (First Peoples State Relations, 2024[28]), is expected to further promote self-determination in the use of First Peoples languages.

Cultural perspective

As traditional geographic names are returned to features on the landscape there is an opportunity for administrators to recognise the past wrongs of colonisation. In Victoria we are moving towards a Treaty with First Nations peoples across the State (First Peoples State Relations, 2024). Treaty provides a moment in time where the return of geographic names to their original names — names spoken for nearly 50,000 years — can help to heal the intergenerational trauma of colonisation and dispossession. Removal of offensive geographic names demonstrates that governments are listening to the First Nations peoples and are understanding of their hurt. Retaining these offensive names only ensures that past racist attitudes are approved of. By making these changes First Nations peoples are

[26] https://yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au/
[27] https://yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au/video/surveyor-general-of-victoria-craig-sandy-apology/
[28] https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/treaty-process

anticipated to feel that they are being heard, that their culture is recognised as important, and colonial attitudes of the past are being shown as repugnant in modern society.

In Australia, many traditional languages have either died out or only remnant words remain. Currently, all traditional languages are under threat (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, 2020). The use of traditional geographic names is an important way to keep language and story alive, particularly where, “traditional languages have been severely affected by cultural imperialism.” (Mongibello, 2020 p. 115). Capturing stories and the rich cultural heritage of a place imbues a deeper understanding and connection to a location. Storing this in data for more considered and ethical cartography reinforces the deeper history of place. Songs, stories, mythology, people, and art all contribute to the rich tapestry of place.

The Yoorrook Justice Commission truth-telling hearings in Victoria have inquired into historical land injustice to Aboriginal people. During the inquiry co-author and Victoria’s Surveyor-General, Craig Sandy, was asked about whether the State had mapped the rights and interests of First Nations peoples prior to colonisation. The answer was ‘no’. Further, when probed about whether this could be done, to capture the, “vibrant interests, replete with culture and stories and art” of First Nations peoples, the answer was ‘yes’, with the proviso that it had to be requested by the government (Yoorrook Justice Commission, 2024). Political will and funding is one barrier to the restitution of traditional geographic names and the removal of offensive ones. To date, the process of change has been slow.

Young (2022) investigated the process of changing colonial geographic names to their traditional First Nations people’s names, in particular the changes to Moreland / Merri-bek and Mount Eccles / Budj Bim. Critical to these geographic name changes was the relationship-based approach to consultation and engagement. In both cases Traditional Owner groups were involved and ‘truth-telling’ was integral in gaining community support. Young identified that a “systems-based transactional approach was designed and is widely used across Victoria for the purposes of avoiding discrimination and creating fairness in opportunity to engage in the process. However, it can often have the opposite effect when progress is based on relationships, trust and mutual benefit.” Further work can be done by geographic naming authorities to genuinely include First Nations peoples to assist in the engagement process to decolonise geographic names.

An opportunity presents itself to geographic naming authorities to establish standards for the capture and storage of the rich cultural heritage of place. Working with First Nations peoples, the cultural historiography of place, including geographic names, can be stored for all Australians to garner a deeper understanding of the storied Country that they live on.

Conclusion

Early exploration and surveying of Australia was done through the religious and legal prism of *terra nullius* – a “land belonging to no one”. The blank map sheet of Australia became populated with Dutch, French and English geographic names that had little connection to the First Nations peoples of the land, but rather connected back to people, places and experiences of the explorers and colonisers. Once drawn on a map they became adopted and ratified as being the accepted geographic name with no discussion or acceptance by First Nations peoples.

Early legislators and surveyors were encouraged to use traditional geographic names wherever possible. It is fair to say that there are many geographic names in Australia that continue to carry traditional language names, however there are still many more that carry the scars of the colonial past and continue to inflict pain on First Nations peoples because of the events or people that they memorialise.

What is broadly missing from our data is the rich intangible cultural heritage that is contained in traditional geographic names. Stories that have been handed down over millennia, songs that connect place and art that describes place, are missing. Some elders describe traditional Country as a library — with places full of stories. Geospatial data could be seen as the index to this library. By expanding our data in ways that encapsulate location, oral history, mythology, song, dance and art we can celebrate the rich cultural heritage of place. By removing colonial toponyms, particularly offensive ones, we can begin to heal the wounds of colonisation on First Nations peoples. This is an easy path to reconciliation and understanding and, for some places, a path to truth-telling.

W. E. H. Stanner (1969) coined the phrase, ‘the great Australian silence’ when referencing Australia’s inability to acknowledge its colonial past and the many atrocities that accompanied it. Further, he called this wilful disregard of the past the ‘cult of forgetfulness.’ By enabling, recording and storing traditional geographic names we not only give them voice, but we also preserve their memory.

Addendum

Figure 21. Locations of places mentioned in the text.

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