

## **APPENDIX 2**

# **Historical Sources Relevant to the Story of “The Message Tree” of Williamstown**

by

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**Introduction:**

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

The aims of the project are to:

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

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

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

## Andrew. A. Curtain's 1889 Essay:

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

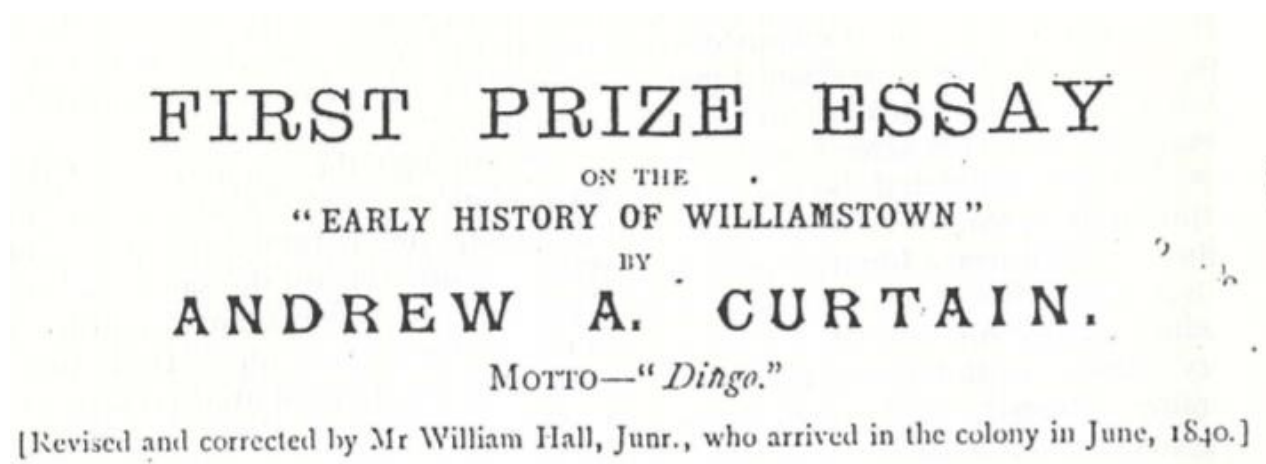
Curtain cites William Hall Jnr, who arrived in Williamstown in June 1840, as his main collaborator. He also reports stories involving other residents who were alive in the town at the time of publication. It is reasonable to believe he may have interviewed these residents in preparation for writing the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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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papers either popular or useful, and an ingenious device was hit upon by which news reached those interested in a cheap and efficacious manner. A giant tree grew on a spot adjacent "Craigantina" buildings, and was used both as an advertising medium and an organ of public opinion. Did anyone want a servant? He posted a notice on the tree. Had he a horse for sale or a job to be done by tender? Forthwith he posted for a purchaser or a tenderer to the tree. Was a dog lost or boat tackle stolen? The public were made aware of the accident or the theft by a poster on the tree. The tree thus became not only a medium of information, but a market where labor and property were bought and sold and all sorts of ideas ventilated. I have been extremely fortunate in receiving from the facile pen of an early colonist the following humorous but eloquent description of this tree. It is almost needless to say it is from the pen of a poet; poetasters are generally recognised by their prose.

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

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

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

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

especially the wood-carter, Mick Ryan, and the policeman, Ned Stanley, where they smoked their pipes, and spun their yarns, and if the schoolmaster happened to join the party the subject of conversation was elevated to the consideration of the merits of the universe as a work of art, as to whether it made itself or was made by some one else, and if so, who was "on the job?"

But these good old times of Arcadian simplicity having passed away, and the gold fever having set in, the land became inundated by a crowd of human locusts from all points of the compass, and Williamstown, in common with other tumble down villages, suddenly became an important town, and was afflicted with an instrument of torture called a municipal council.

At the same time it was discovered by a number of unimaginative matter-of-fact citizens, who were the fortunate owners of a variety of vehicles, such as butcher's and baker's carts, wheelbarrows, &c., that since the highly enlightened members who constituted the municipal grinding-machine were sufficient ornaments to the town, the services of the Old She-oak Tree, in that capacity, was no longer required, and as it was an object of vehicular obstruction, the council was called upon to have it removed. Upon the question, "to be or not to be" regarding its further existence, the council became divided. The members who owned, or had an interest in wheelbarrows, portable baked potato institutions, baker, butcher or dung carts, were resolved that it should be cut down and then cut up; sold for firewood and the money sent home to England to benefit the poor. The other portion of the council, who were sadly in the minority, being of a aesthetical turn of mind, and ardent admirers of the "sublime and the beautiful", resolved to stand up in defence of this venerable arbor town ornament, though it should cost them the last shred of their popularity. Outside and inside the council chamber the question was so violently debated that it created quite a hurricane in the Williamstown social teapot. A report was current and passed from mouth to ears, through the medium of whispers, that certain members of the council, remarkable for pugnacity and bloodthirstiness, went to the council chambers secretly armed with daggers and revolvers. Another report took wing and flew about to the effect that a number of the "sub-

lime and beautiful" party concocted the design of borrowing the loan of Captain Burrell's old rusty cannon, which he kept as an ornament in front of his marine store, in Nelson parade, then to charge it with powder and red wine grapes instead of grapeshot to the muzzle, so that when discharged among the enemy the red juice of the grape, being mistaken for their own blood, would make each think himself mortally wounded, and flying in consternation, leave the aesthetic philosophers masters of the situation. While all this agitation was in operation, causing widely spread consternation, I arose one morning, and while taking my usual

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

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

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



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

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

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

Who could think his rough bosom so tender  
could be,

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

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

Though dull Williamstownians appear not to  
know it ;

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

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

When sable-skinned heroes sat round me and  
boasted,

While feasting on foes they had vanquished  
and roasted.

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

But, now I must fall by the axe of improve-  
ment,

While none but wise Moxham opposes the  
movement.

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

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

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

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

While the woods echoed round with joyous  
corobberie ;

It grieves me to think, I must now fall a  
 martyr,  
 To suit every fish-hawker, butcher, and  
 carter.

Ere I kiss mother earth, let me utter this pray'r,  
 That Clodson, nor Verdon, may never be  
 Mayor ;  
 May the rude fist of politics smashingly box  
 them.  
 For opposing the motion of chivalrous Mox-  
 ham.

Magnanimous Moxham, thou noble of soul,  
 May thy name ever stand at the top of the  
 pole ;  
 May eloquence flow from thy persuasive  
 tongue,  
 'Till applause from the lips of opponents be  
 wrung.  
 And when thou has reached the proud zenith  
 of fame,  
 When knighthood's bright halo encircles  
 thy name,  
 Let me beg that the crest on thy chariot shall  
 be,  
 Nine placards stuck round on an Old She-  
 Oak Tree.

Jack Armstrong, where is thy goodness of  
 heart,  
 So famous for taking a poor fellow's part ;  
 How oft 'neath my shade after daily turmoil  
 You indulged in a yarn, a smoke, and a coil,  
 With my last dying breath let me claim your  
 protection,  
 Don't give me to Dr Maclean for dissection ;  
 That versatile bright esculapion spark,  
 Would convert my old hide into Peruvian  
 bark.

And though it may render his patients more ill,  
 'Twill also assist to elongate his bill ;  
 Enigmatical Wallace, whom "clods" deem  
 insane,  
 Too stupid to fathom his erratic brain  
 At the next random visit thy Muse to thee pays,  
 O ! hand down my sad fate to the latest of  
 days ;  
 Since I know thou wilt shed briny tears for my  
 sake,  
 This request with my last failing breath I  
 now make.

JAMES WALLACE.

## The Boonwurrung Connection to the Message Tree:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE OLD TREE.

[To the Editor of the WILLIAMSTOWN CHRONICLE]

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

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

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

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

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

## More from the Williamstown Chronicle

### From 1856-57:

#### Council Unanimous on Keeping Streets Clear of Encroachments:

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

#### REPORTS OF COMMITTEE

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

**the' 21st Report of this Committee;**

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

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

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

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

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

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

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

**PETITION.**

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

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

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

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

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

**NOTICES OF MOTION.**

By Councillor Verdon: To move—

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

By Councillor Moxham : To move—

2. That the Contractor for No.1 contract be requested to stop all is work near the Old **Tree**, until he be instructed by this Council to carry on the same.

## The Message Tree: Neither Useful Nor Ornamental

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

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

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



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

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

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

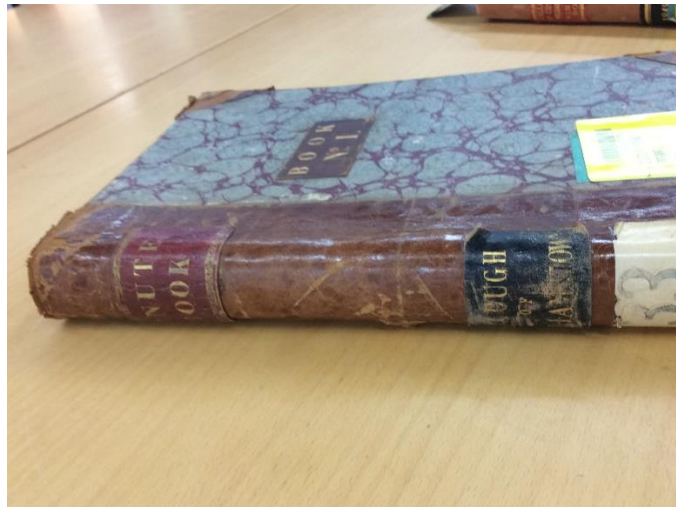
This story suggests She-oak was an important and venerated species with an important cultural value to the Boonwurrung. Its information adds to the evidence supporting the strong connection of the Boonwurrung to the She-oaks of Koort Boork Boork and The Message Tree in particular. It seems fair to conclude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

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

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

## PROV (Public Records Office of Victoria) Sources:

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



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

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

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

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

### *Petition*

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The tree was soon after this meeting.

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

### **And Ironic Post-script:**

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

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

## Other Relevant Accounts from after 1857:

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

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

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

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*Recollections from 1911 – From a Mrs Murray*

Published in the Williamstown Chronicle of 1 April 1911

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

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

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

---

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

*In the Williamstown Chronicle of 29 March 1910.*

Regarding Early Days of Williamstown.

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

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

"Sage Councillor Moxham sincerely I thank  
Although I'm not long destined to stand on my shank-....  
Who could dream that his bosom so tender could be,  
As to plead for the life of an **old** she-oak tree"

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

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

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

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

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Memories from Miss Emma Sutton (100 year in Feb 1940) in the Williamstown Chronicle of 9 December 1939, page 3 on the Early Williamstown Days. (A nice picture of the town in 1840)

MEMORIES BY-- MISS -  
SUTTON.

EARLY WILLIAMSTOWN DAYS. t  
Miss Emma Sutton, who will be 100 years **old** next February, wrote some interesting memories some time ago of her early life in Williamstown, v where she was brought as an infant j in 1840. She writes:

The writer remembers' just one long street in the pretty little "Fish-ling Village," so called in those days. There were very few houses in the 3 front street-Butler's and Liarlet's inns, a general store, a butcher's I shop and a few cottages. Capta'n Lovell lived in one, and at the back of his premises there was \*. large 4 stone building which was the stock ade, where prisoners were confined. : The Lovells were very kind and fre- I quently gave parties to the young people. The post office was at the general store, and everyone had to call for their letters.

Access to Melbourne was very diffi cult; the only way was by boat, ur I driving overland which took a very long time, end= if you happened to be late leaving the city you would have most likely to camp under Batman's Hill, as the writer had to do on one occasion.

The principal and most agreeable way to Melbourne was by boat; a boat kept entirely for. passengers ano carrying goods to this town. It was owned by two brothers, Messrs James and William Hall, who went to Melbourne every morning and returned in the evening loaded with goods, for that was the only way that this town could be supplied.

When the sunny days came and melted the snow on the mountains, and the rivers and the streams over flowed, we had our little wharf al most covered with water, so that it was not an easy thing for the fishermen to get to their boats. The small steamer Vesta was a great

boon to the 'town, but the fare to Melbourne was so high at first that only a few people travelled in her. I think, if I remember rightly, the fare was 5/. In those primitive days there were stocks used as a punishment, but only for a short time. They were soon done away with.

The first collector of Customs was Mr MacKay. Part of his house is still standing in Thompson-street. Dr. Hunt and Dr. Wilkins were the first doctors to practice in Williamstown. Drs. Maclean and Figg followed. The latter were kind and clever, and ever ready to support anything that was for the benefit, of the people.

There were three denominational day schools. I mention Wesleyan first because Mr Stone, from Brighton, in 1842 opened a day school in the little wooden building which was used for divine service on the Sabbath. Mr and Mrs Bromilow were the first teachers of the Church of England day school, Mr Summerville being the first clergyman, Mr Wallace the first master of the Catholic school, Father Geoghegan the first priest. Perhaps someone will remember the quaint little houses that Captain Thomas built. These were called "Thomas Square." They were built just opposite where the Market 1 Reserve is now. The goats had plenty of shelter under these places of abode, and one had to climb several steps before they could enter the front door; but for all that they were always let.

**We had three wells between the back beach-and Hannan's farm. From these the people of Williamstown were supplied with fresh water,** and the charge for a cask of water being sometimes one pound, but never less than ten shillings. In the early days nearly every householder kept a cow, so we had plenty of fresh milk with cream on the top. Separators were unknown then.

No one could ever imagine that this town was hilly, but memory takes me back to the billowy mass of little hills 'from the end of Ann street to the **old** cemetery. This was a favorite walk through the trees to the cemetery, and then to the flag staff, which was erected near where the lighthouse is. Near by was a lovely garden, enclosed by a stone

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

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

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

Hoping that my recollections may be a little interesting, I will now say 'Au revoir.'

From the *Williamstown Chronicle of 17 November 1928, Page 4.* Memories of George Spotswood  
Age 83 years.

PIONEER WHITE MAN.

"The Herald," October 9, 1924.

BORN AT WILLIAMSTOWN 83 YEARS AGO.

DECEMBER 30, 1840. MEMORIES OF EARLY DAYS.

Living quietly in an **old-fashioned**

cottage at Spotswood is Williamstown's first native-born white man.

He is Mr. George Spotswood, after whose father the suburb was named as a mark of respect to his earnest work in developing the locality.

Mr. Spotswood was born in Little Nelson-street, on December 30, 1840, between Thompson and Ann streets.

He is looking hale and hearty....

**In those days trees drooping over the lower reaches of the Yarra and thick bushes adorning its banks made it one of the prettiest spots Mr.**

**Spotswood had ever seen. Native companions, wild turkey, wild cats, and wild duck abounded in the district. At times flights of wild duck were so thick that they used to shade the sun for as long as a minute, says Mr. Spotswood.....**

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Williamstown's Poet Laureate  
 PAPER eR Ma. A. McALISTER.  
 ON Saturday evening, 20th inst, an interesting paper was read before the Presbyterian Literary Society by Mr A. McAlister. His subject was, " Mr James Wallace, Williamstown's Poet Laureate in the Fifties." Quite a number of interesting reminiscences were recalled by the writer of the paper, and the members showed their appreciation by a unanimous vote of thanks, which was moved by Mr Don. Murray, seconded by Mr John Cameron and supported by Messrs Jas Scott, D. Livingstone, L. Hansen, W. Regan and the chairman. Mr McAlister made a fitting reply.

**Reference was made to a giant she oak tree (which grew on a spot adjacent to Craigantina Buildings, in Nelson place), as an advertising medium and an organ of public opinion. Did any one want a servant, they pasted a notice on the tree, had a horse for sale, or a job to be done by tender, dog-lost, boat tackle stolen, the public were made aware of it by a poster on the tree. Mr Wallace had immortalised this tree in prose. He was the oldest school master in the colony and the teacher of- the first public school opened in Williamstown. He landed here in 1841, and afterwards took charge of the children of the Roman Catholic denomination, until he was removed to Geelong in the sixties, to take charge of the school there. Mr Wallace's earliest traditions regarding the old -tree is that long before this country was colonised, it was held in almost religious veneration by the aboriginals, that it was beneath its umbrageous shade they held their councils, and that after a battle with a hostile tribe it was at the foot of this tree they regaled upon their roasted captives. The next item of tradition is that upon one grand joyous occasion all the white men in the colony assembled beneath it, and drank undiluted rum out of**

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

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

#### EARLY WILLIAMSTOWN.

Miss Sutton, whose residence in this city goes back for 81 years, is the oldest recorded resident.

Mrs. Wilkinson, of Ascot Vale, who is the mother-in-law of Mr. H. Stewart, Nelson-place, was born on November 5, 1842, at the corner of Thompson and Nelson-streets.

Mr. F. S. Young, "Chronicle" Office, desires to record the names of any **old** residents or natives of the city.

In our reference to Mrs. Rees last week, we should have stated that her parents were Mr. and Mrs. McMahan, who for some years kept a hotel at Deer Park. Her grandparents were named Fitzgerald.

Miss E. Sutton, of 4 Dover-road, writes:—"I am glad to find there is someone taking an interest in the doings of early residents. Some of us do not forget the pleasing and graceful act of the ex-Mayor and Mayoress, who invited all the **old** folks in Williamstown to a pleasant musical afternoon in the Town Hall. Some who were there have passed away, but those remaining will never forget that afternoon. I have been in Williamstown 81 years, so that I have known this town in its infancy."

Mrs. Elsum, of 190 Osborne-street, has lived in Williamstown since 1853. In that year there was no council, and, consequently, there were no roads or paths except a few which were made by the convicts, and **all the land from Beach station northwards to Melbourne was a large sheoak forest. The sand from the beach came up over the land to where Osborne-street now stands.** Where Fort Gellibrand and the Drill Hall are now was a convict station. The convicts came to work from the "hulks" (ships anchored between Williamstown and Port Melbourne). They were engaged making roads, etc., until they had "served their time," when they were shipped back to England and given a

"free ticket." The road from the Fort past the cricket ground, the Break water pier and the Time Ball Tower (then a lighthouse) are results of convict labor. One day, Capt. Price who was officer in charge of a party of convicts, when one of them, whom Price had previously wronged, struck him on the head with a pick. In the excitement that followed several of the prisoners escaped to the bush. For a few days the residents of the town were forced to remain indoors as much as possible, for fear of being robbed or murdered. However, the escaped men were soon recaptured by some warders, who found them hiding in some thick bush near the beach.

**In those days the people did not have a water supply from the Yan Yean, and, consequently, they had to buy water, which sometimes cost as much as ten to twelve shillings a cask. At the spot where the Thompson-street bridge is now was a water hole, from which the townspeople drew their supplies, but this was stopped when a drunken man drowned himself there.**

Sometimes, when the water casks would crack or the seams open, the precious liquid began to leak out, and Mrs. Elstum (then Miss Eldershaw) remembers often filling up the cracks and seams with soap. The taste of the water after these remedial measures had been applied may be better left to the reader's imagination than described.

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

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

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

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

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

#### THE CITY'S COAT OF ARMS

ADDRESS BY REV. J. T. KELLY.

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

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

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

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

On the left top. quarter is a ship a sailing ship. On the left bottom quarter the sun and a lighthouse.

The story of the city has always been associated with shipping, with pilots and the naval reserve. It was the first seaport of the colony. Brigs, cutters and schooners with little of comfort (none of them more than 50 or 60 tons) arrived at Point Gellibrand after days and weeks of storms in the treacherous shales and uncharted waters.

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

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

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

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

"Our city was called after a King., and the King's motto is 'God and my right.' He asks for an allegiance and lcyalty. Of the two flags on the crest, one is the Union Jack--the symbol of patriotism and lyoalty, and that we belong to a great Empire and Commonwealth, and we cannot expect God's guidance and blessing un

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

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

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

Sage Councillor' Moxham sincerely I thank  
Though I'm not long destined to stand on my shank  
Who would think his rough bosom so tender could be  
As to plead for the life of an old sheoak tree !



It proves that he owns the bright soul of a poet  
 Though dull Williamstonians appear not to know it ;  
 His love of the beautiful and the sublime.  
 Being rather ecstasies for blank verse or rhyme.  
 Ere Bret with his placards disfigured my trunk,  
 Or Christian new chums 'neath my shade got dead drunk,  
**When sable-skinned heroes sat round me and boasted,**  
**While feasting on foes they had' vanquished and roasted, -**

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

**When I think on the .war-dances, feasting and bobbery,**  
**While the woods and shores echoed the joyous corrobory,**  
 It grieves me to think that I must fall a martyr  
 To suite the convenience of fishman and carter.  
 Jack Armstrong where is thy goodness of heart  
 So famously taking a poor fellows part?  
 How oft 'neath my shade after daily turmoil,  
 You indulge in a yarn, in a smoke and a coil,

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

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

The Lyre of Old Port Phillip. January 19<sup>th</sup>. [1857]

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

### EARLY WILLIAMSTOWN

By W. R. Hall, F.R.A.S.

No 1.

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

Rules and regulations to be observed on the jetty at Williamstown 5, William 4th, No. 13, 1840:

- No. 1. No wheel carriage of any description, and no horse or cattle, are permitted to be upon the jetty for any purpose whatever.
- No. 2. No nuisance is to be permitted, nor any filth or rubbish to be laid on the jetty.
- No. 3. No person to loiter on the jetty or to remain there except to embark or land.
- No. 4. No vessel or boat is to be made fast to the jetty.
- No. 5. Any goods landed on the jetty are to be immediately removed.
- No. 6. No goods are to be landed on the jetty after sunset.
- No. 7. Any person committing a violation of any of the above regulations is subject to a fine of Twenty (20) shillings.

Signed,

W. LONSDALE, P.M.

THOS. WILLS, J.P.

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

There is a doubt as to where the first decent building was erected. Some say that Mr. Hugh McLean has the credit—while others, that the building near the corner of Cole and Little Nelson-streets (bought by Capt. W. Leard, for £46), which was built of hardwood, with partitions of wattle or basket work of long young saplings of ti-tree, daubed or plastered over on both sides, and the roof of thatch. It was the first substantial building in the town, and the original "Ship Inn," and known as Captain Bowden's, though he did not have the license in his name, but that of Fawn's. On the 17th April, 1840, the license was renewed in the name of James Muir, from Van Dieman's Land.

In 1842 Mr. Butler then became the licensee. He was a single man, but some time afterwards married. Later, he bought the property where the Commercial Bank stood in 1889, and removed there, taking the license with him; so the newly-acquired property became the "Ship Inn," and the original building became a boarding house for some years, and occupied by, William Outin, a boatman. In 1850, Mr. Edward Jenniings became the tenant, and started a bakery, in opposition to Geo. Wilsmore and James Conroy. Jennings also obtained a license for the old building, and called it the "Steam Packet" Hotel. John Levien started the first butchering business in Williamstown, near the "Woolpack Hotel."

The first land sales took place at Melbourne on June 1, 1837. Mr. Hugh McLean bought Allotment 3, Block 3, for £50; R. S. Webb, Allotment 4, for £40 J.

McNamara, Allotment 5, for £45; William Hutton, Allotment 6, for £45; James Simpson Allotment 7, for £47; J. F. Strachan, Allotment 8, for £52; William Leard, Allotment, 9, for £46. All these lots faced Nelson-parade, between Thompson-street and Cole-street.

Another sale, this time at Sydney, September 13, 1838. The following were the prices realised:—

Ann-street to Thompson-street, Block 2, Allotment 1, W. J. Cape, £68/8/-; Allotment 2, W. J. Cape, £39/18/-; Allotment 3, J. J. Smith, £32/6/-; Allotment, 4, H. Davis, £30/8/-; Allotment 5, W. Leard, £26/12/-; Allotment 6, W. Kerr, £51/6/-; Allotment 7, J. Stafford, £19; Allotment 8, S. J. Brown, £72/4/-; Allotment 9, Geo. James, £30/8/-; Allotment 20, J. P. Smith, £30/8/-.

Block 4, between Parker and Pascoe - streets: Allotments 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, Hughes and Hoskings, from £39/18/- down to £30/8/-; Allotment 7, E. D.

O'Reilly, £49/8/-; Allotments 8, 9, to 20, Hughes and Hoskings, £117/16/- to £39/18/-. The prices realised at this Sydney sale were higher than the Melbourne one.

In 1840 it was rumored that Hughes and Hoskings suspended payments, and that an extensive sale of land belonging to them would take place, nearly 26,000 acres.

On Thursday, September 10, 1840, the Auction Company, through Mr. Brodie, disposed of 27 allotments, proceeds of sale being £6,488.

The allotment at the corner of Cecil and Parker-streets was bought by James Purves for £354.

The writer was born on this allotment. In 1847 the Government sold Allotment 9, Block 2, north of Ferguson-street, 80 acres 3 roods 4 perches, to Mr. Avery, the Crown Lands Commissioner, at £2 per acre, which price probably Mr. Avery considered too much, so he forfeited his deposit, and in

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

Recollections of Mr Hall published in the Williamstown Chronicle on 13 March 1920

## EARLY WILLIAMSTOWN.

By W. A. Hall, F. R. A. S.

No 2.

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

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

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

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

The building known as the brewery was built by Langhorne Brothers as wool stores, and this store was afterwards used as a stockade for prisoners.

When my father landed, Williamstown consisted of two (2) hotels - the "Ship Inn" and "Woolpack;" another called the "Albion" opened later - a portion of the present watch-house, one general store and bakery, some half-dozen weatherboard houses, a few tents and a few sod and turf huts. Many other buildings were put up before the end of the year. There was great stagnation of trade before the end of 1841, and many insolvencies. Cot-

tages in course of erection were left unfinished, business quickly sprung into existence, and quickly closed, real estate dropping to about its former value. The first land boom was in 1840.

In Kerr's Directory of Port Phillip, 1841, the following names of residents appear :- J. Dawson, hotelkeeper ; J. Hill, auctioneer ; W. Lair, settler ; Langhorne Bros., merchants ; J. Levien, butcher ; A. McNaughton, lighthouse keeper ; Alex. McPherson, pilot ; J. Stafford, landing waiter ; W. Timothy, pilot ; J. Trundell, pilot ; Captain Lewes ; harbor master ; and W. Hall.

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

slaughter house at the bottom end of Gifford steet. There was also a belt of trees skirting the bay and river, from Gellibrand Point to the mouth of Stony Creek, near where Yarraville is. This belt of trees extended back from the shore, varying half a mile to one mile, the greatest distance being about the Newport Station. In defining the area covered with trees of Williamstown proper, the boundary was, say, from the bay along Gifford-street, thence along Lyons-street, up to Ferguson street to Melbourne-road, Betwixt Lyons-street and the bay, by the bathing ground, there was a plain, except a small clump not far from where the back of the Mechanics' Institute now is. There was also a strip of land covered with trees, from Melbourne-road, top of Stevedore street, down Victoria-street, west side, to near the beach. This strip, between North Williamstown station and the beach, was purchased, part in 1847 and part in 1848, at 30/- and 31/- per acre, by Mr. Michael Hannan and Mr. John O'Neil, and farmed by them for many years. Among the trees were a good variety of small birds and a great number of magpies. Woe betide the person that went near their nest. The male bird would fly down, snap his beak, or may ascend on high and dart down with great force and pierce through a person's hat into the skull, causing the blood to flow. Should a hawk come near, the magpies would treat him in a aimilar manner, and so hunt him from the neighborhood. **Beyond this belt of trees was another plain to the mouth of the ti-tree or Kororoit Creek. A few dingoes or wild dogs might be seen in search of prey, so a shepherd had to keep a sharp lookout.**

## Further Research:

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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