

READINGS IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

-The History you were never taught

THEME 6: FIRST CONTACT IN PORT PHILLIP

Within this section, events are discussed relating to the colonisation of Port Phillip in 1835. The names of the principal characters involved, that of William Buckley, John Batman, John Pascoe Fawkner and William Barak are well known to the public.

However as the saying goes, history is written by the winners. This section therefore endeavours to lift the veil on this period of our colonial history through an understanding of the Aboriginal perspective.

A little understood narrative dictated by William Barak in 1888 is examined to reveal new insights about the influence of William Buckley on Aboriginal thinking, and the location of the 1835 treaty meeting with Batman.

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THEME 6 QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. If Buckley survived 32 years in Aboriginal society, was he as dumb as he was painted by some colonists?
2. If Batman had his treaties signed by eight Aboriginals, in ink, on a log, in middle of winter, how come there is not one ink blot, smudge, fingerprint or raindrop?
3. Who was the nicer person, John Batman or John Pascoe Fawkner?

BUCKLEY'S ADJUSTMENT TO TRIBAL LIFE

William Buckley is of course firmly entrenched in Australian history and folklore as 'The Wild White Man'. A convict, he escaped at age twenty-two from a short-lived colony at Sorrento in 1803. He then spent the next thirty-two years with the Wathurong people at Geelong.

After John Batman's historic meeting with the Woiwuring in June 1835 he returned to Tasmania, leaving his party of three colonists and five Sydney Aboriginals camped at Geelong. To their astonishment the huge and bearded fifty-four year old Buckley walked into the camp on 6th July 1835, wearing a possum skin cloak.

At first he could not understand English, became a bit disoriented and had to sit down. When given a piece of bread he stared at it, then said 'bread' and his language came flooding back. Buckley became a sensation in colonial Australia and everyone wanted to know everything about his life with the natives.

The problem was that whilst Buckley had become fluent in at least five different Aboriginal languages, he remained completely illiterate in English. In agreeing to John Morgan publishing his biography in 1852, Buckley had no way of exercising any editorial control over what Morgan wrote.

In 1856, the same year that Buckley died, James Bonwick wrote another account of his adventures, without him ever having met Buckley. There are also many other documents recounting specific events or experiences with Buckley before he retreated, disillusioned, to Tasmania in 1837. The most illuminating of these was an interview recorded by Reverend Langhorne in 1837. It was not discovered and published until 1911.

Many of the stories attributed to Buckley by these various authors were often aimed at pandering to public interest in the more salacious details of his tribal life. The narratives were also designed to confirm ingrained European assumptions about Aboriginal people as '*simple and child like savages*'. Many of these accounts also included complete fabrications.

However among these many inaccuracies, false assumptions and outright lies, there were also many scattered gems of unfiltered truth. The real problem is in how to sort out the wheat from the chaff and build a more accurate picture of Buckley's tribal life. To do this it requires some basic understanding of Aboriginal culture and mindset.

The first thing that comes through these various accounts is an appreciation of how Buckley's basic personality was a key factor in his survival. Bonwick for instance judged him harshly and considered him to be of 'low intelligence', but this says more about Bonwick's pompous class driven views. Langhorne however simply noted that it was difficult to converse with him, which was understandable given Buckley's thirty-two year divorce from conversational English.

What becomes clear is that despite his huge frame and two-metre height, Buckley was a gentle natured and mild mannered man, who intuitively fitted into the culture of respect that permeated Aboriginal society.

For instance because he had picked up the spear of a deceased man named Murrangurk, he was accepted into the tribe as the reincarnation of Murrangurk, albeit a lot bigger. According to custom he was placed in the care of Murrangurk's brother, then asked if he wanted his widow back. Buckley declined as he did not want to upset existing arrangements or create any ill-will.

Later, another escaped convict found the tribe and soon began abusing women. Buckley consequently ordered him to leave and once he was out of Buckley's protection he was executed. This clearly showed that whilst Buckley might have been mild mannered, he was nonetheless a person of strong principles and firm resolve.

Buckley was also perceptive of the Aboriginal tradition of story-telling and moral parables. So once he became fluent he began telling stories about his experiences in the Napoleonic Wars. He told them about the awesome destructive and killing power of guns and cannons as well as the uncompromising attitude of the White Man.

These incredible hair-raising stories became popular theatre across all the Kulin tribes and Buckley had sell-out tours for over thirty years. The stories were however more than just theatre. In keeping with traditional culture they were morally instructive. Buckley warned that the White Man would inevitably come looking for land, take it and clear all the scrub. He warned that the worst thing they could do was kill one white man, because if they did it would be paid back twentyfold.

Buckley's prophetic message was considered so important that he was given a special role and status across the whole five Kulin Nation tribes in Central Victoria. His title was in effect '*Headman for Education about Whitefellahs*'.

Because of Buckley's warning all five Kulin tribes instituted 'Murrangurk's Law' which forbade any Kulin from killing a White Man. It proved to be a most effective strategy in their future survival, when colonists finally began arriving in plague proportions from mid-1835 onward.

MURRANGURK'S LAW

Murrangurk was the tribal name given to William Buckley, the convict who escaped in 1803 and spent the next 32 years living with the Kulin people in the Port Phillip Bay area. Buckley had a profound but little appreciated impact on the ultimate survival of Aboriginal people in Central Victoria.

After escaping at Sorrento, Buckley walked around the Bay and near Geelong found a spear at a fresh grave, so he used it to catch fish. He was approached and asked if he was the owner of the spear, Murrangurk, come back to life. Buckley was escorted back to the camp and the Elders of course knew he was one of the white men they had heard about.

They appointed a couple of tutors and in less than two months Buckley was fluent in Wathurong. Ultimately he became fluent in at least six Aboriginal languages, even though he was illiterate in English. Buckley had served in the Napoleonic Wars and began telling them many stories about the weapons of destruction and the uncompromising attitude of white people. He was escorted to camps all over the Kulin Federation to tell his stories and effectively had the title of 'Headman for Education on Whitefellahs.

Buckley told them if they ever saw a person with a white face like his, never kill them, because if even one white man was killed, they would *'Hunt down all your mob and shoot you like kangaroos'*. The Kulin therefore passed 'Murrangurk's Law' forbidding anyone in the five Kulin tribes from killing a white man. It is most interesting to see how this law played out in practice locally.

The first settler in this area was Major Charles Newman who claimed land at the junction of Mullum Creek and the Yarra in 1837. From the first he fired with deadly intent at any native who dared cross his land. Despite this severe provocation the Kulin did not seek deadly payback. Instead they conducted an economic guerrilla war against the Major and settlers like him, destroying their fences, setting fire to their paddocks and driving off their stock.

In 1840, my great-grandfather, John Chivers arrived in the colony and was hired by Major Newman to fell trees. Unlike the Major, John established friendly relations with the local people, often trading butter, sugar or tea for game. John learnt the Woiwuring language and as far as I am aware was one of only two settlers to do so. The other was Jimmy Dawson who had also settled at Warrandyte in 1840.

One of the many stories passed down my family is that when it was greying dawn one morning, John was lighting the fire to cook breakfast. As he was doing so, a troop of painted-up natives whom he knew were passing by.

John asked the warriors what was going on and if they wanted to share breakfast with him. They responded that they first had to go and kill the Major, but would come back for breakfast when they had done so. Apparently the Major had shot and killed one of them the previous day while they were in the process of burning his paddocks to drive off his stock.

The troop continued on the four hundred metres or so to the Major's turf-block hut, but the Major's wife, Catherine, had also risen early to light the fire. She saw the troop of natives approaching and realising their intent, roused the Major. It was too late to start shooting from the narrow slit windows of his hut, so Catherine got the Major to hide up the large chimney.

The warriors entered the hut and were of course not interested in exacting any payback on Catherine. She had never fired on them as the Major often did. She had never killed anyone, only the Major had. So their planned payback was directed solely at him. Catherine assured the men that the Major had gone to Melbourne and wouldn't be back for a couple of days. Not necessarily disbelieving her, they searched the one-room hut, but couldn't find him and left to share a hearty breakfast and pot of tea with John.

After the warriors had left, the Major emerged from the chimney with his whiskers and clothes singed by the heat of the fire. It was an amazing feat not to have coughed from the smoke and given himself away, but then again, his life had depended on it

Having been told this story many times as a child, I always wondered why the tribesmen didn't return the next day to finish the job. It's not as if the Major hadn't thoroughly earned such a fate anyway. It was only decades later when I learned about Murrangurk's Law, that it all finally all made sense to me.

BARAK'S ACCOUNT OF MEETING BATMAN

William Barak is the most famous of all Wurundjeri leaders and we can claim him as a local. He was born in September 1823 at Brushy Creek near the Yarra River in Wonga Park. This suburb was named after Barak's cousin Simon Wonga, whom he succeeded as Wurundjeri leader in 1874.

Barak and Wonga were both present at the historic meeting with Batman on June 6th 1835. Barak was almost 12 and Wonga almost 14. Batman claims to have negotiated the purchase of land occupying present day Melbourne at this meeting. Ever since then, there has been controversy about where the 'treaty' meeting was really held. The Merri Creek near Rushall Station has long been the political front runner, but it should be noted that Merri means 'rocky'.

About five years ago I was shown a document dictated by William Barak in 1888. He was almost sixty-five, feeling unwell and fearing he would die. The document focussed on the meeting with Batman and the influence of William Buckley on tribal thinking, which I spoke about in last month's edition. I read the document and could hardly believe my eyes. I asked the librarian if she understood its implications, which she did not. I then explained some of them to her. The problem was that unless you had some understanding of the traditional Aboriginal mindset, it would all just go over your head. I therefore took a copy of Barak's document and began to tease out these hidden meanings.

After this I carefully studied Batman's journal, which purported to be a daily account of his six days in Melbourne. I also studied his report to Governor Arthur. Apart from some stark discrepancies between the two documents, it was again helpful to have some knowledge of Aboriginal culture to identify some of the spurious claims made by Batman.

Finally I had to reconcile the differing accounts by Barak and Batman, and of course I preferred to believe Barak's account. He was after all a man of impeccable character and integrity, whereas Batman was a proven liar, braggart, swindler, womaniser and murderer. But apart from that he was a good bloke.

Take for example Batman's claim that in each of the first four days, he walked thirty miles before meeting the Wurundjeri. That is 120 miles in four days and not even a fully fit army commando would be capable of such a feat. Batman at that stage had tertiary syphilis and was dead four years later. He actually spent the last year of his life being trundled around in a wheelbarrow. So let's throw his diary to one side and look at what Barak said.

Batman had brought seven Sydney Blacks with him as guides and interpreters, but strangely never mentions them when at Melbourne. Barak on the other hand tells us that Batman gave his Sydney men a couple of bags of potatoes and told them to make contact with the locals and arrange a meeting. In Barak's own words: *'Batman sent some potatoes to the camp of the Yarra blacks. Then the Blacks travel to Idelberg.'* Barak then explains that the Sydney men were told at Heidelberg that the Elders were meeting further up the Plenty River and they would be there the next day if they wanted to meet with Batman.

Barak of course did not refer to the Plenty River by that name. He referred to it by the translated Woiwurung name, saying: *'All the blacks camp at Muddy Creek;*' Kurrum was the original name of the Plenty River and this word means 'muddy'. So the meeting was on Muddy Creek not Rocky Creek. It is instructive that Gellibrand, the lawyer in Batman's syndicate, is the person who named it the Plenty River. He also confirmed that it was indeed where Batman's meeting was held.

You will recall in the first of these articles I talked about Songlines. This knowledge of Aboriginal geography was instrumental in being able to reconstruct Batman's real itinerary, not the phony one in his diary. To Batman's Sydney guides the landmarks and features along the Songlines would have stood out like neon lights. When the ship docked at the William Street falls, they simply followed the Songline up William Street, past the law courts and Victoria Market to the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

There the Songline split into three, Flemington Road, Sydney Road and across Melbourne University to Heidelberg Road. Once they made contact at Heidelberg the Sydney men returned to get Batman and guide him to Greensborough. After the meeting they returned by a more direct route. One of the few accurate journal notes Batman made was that to get back to their ship they walked *'twelve miles in a south-west direction'*. Have a look at the Melways. This was the Plenty Road Songline.

A Contextual Understanding of ‘My Words’ by William Barak

On 26th May 1888 famed Wurundjeri Elder William Barak began dictating some of his recollections to a teenage student at Coranderrk School. Barak was in his 65th year, feeling unwell and fearing he might die. Because of Barak’s stream of consciousness and the Aboriginal concepts embedded in his narrative, its profound implications have not previously been understood. Elements of both Aboriginal oral history and colonial documentation have been utilised to help draw out these implications. The following interpretation therefore shows the implication of Barak’s narrative in *italics* and his original words **bolded**. This interpretation was produced by Jim Poulter, in consultation with Wurundjeri Elders and is subject to ongoing revision, the latest being in April 2020

I was born in the year 1823 at Brushy Creek in Wonga Park which was named after my cousin Simon Wonga and I was about eleven years old when Batman visited Port Phillip Bay. *As a child we all heard the convict William Buckley talk about his previous life in Europe. Buckley, whom we knew as Murrangurk, was escorted all over Kulin Country to speak at every Black’s camp. He told us about how he had fought in the Napoleonic Wars and about the guns and cannons Europeans possessed, and the killing these weapons caused. He warned us that white men would soon come to our Country with these weapons because they wanted land. I have never forgotten it and I remember Buckley’s words every time I think of that first meeting with Batman in 1835.*

It was thirty-two years prior to this meeting with Batman that Buckley had come to live among us when he escaped from the failed colony at Sorrento in December 1803. We had not seen a white man until five years before Buckley came to live with us. This was when George Bass, not Captain Cook as I had wrongly thought, landed at Westernport in 1798.

Then in June 1835 Batman came looking for Country just as Buckley had warned us. Batman sailed into Port Phillip Bay looking around the sea and landed where he found a lot of blacks on the other side of Geelong. After Batman had left to go back to Tasmania on the 9th June 1835, he left his team at Geelong. Then on 6th July 1835 Buckley came in the camp. He had no trousers and was all raggedy and only wore a possum skin rug. After Buckley proved who he was by showing them his tattoo, they took him back to live with white people again and we were all sorry. But a month before Buckley came out of the bush, Batman had come to Melbourne and moored his boat ‘Rebecca’ at the William Street falls. Batman wanted to meet with the Woiwurrung Elders and he had seven Sydney Blacks with him as guides and interpreters. Their names were Pigeon, Joe the Marine, Old Bull, Bungett, Bullett, Stewart and Jacky. Their job was to go ahead of Batman and make contact with the local Blacks.

Batman sent the Sydney men with some potatoes from Melbourne to find the camp of Yarra Blacks. Then the Sydney Blacks travelled to Heidelberg. *Being ‘Out of Country’ the Sydney Blacks followed proper protocol and were ‘Singing Country’ as they went along the Heidelberg Road Songline that follows the Yarra on the north side. When they got to Warringal they were told by the few people there that the Elders knew white men had finally come, so they were having a special meeting. All the blacks were therefore in a camp at Kurrum, which means Muddy Creek. But then not much later, Batman’s lawyer, Gellibrand, gave it the whitefella name of the Plenty River. Batman’s Sydney men were told that his request for a meeting would be taken to the Elders at Kurrum near Greensborough and Batman should go there the next day and wait. Batman’s message was then taken to the Woiwurrung Elders who decided they would meet him the next day on the Plenty River at Greensborough.*

Next morning they all went down to see Batman arrive, not just the Elders but also every old man and woman and all the children. *This included me and my three cousins Wonga, Keelbundoora and Jika-Jika. We were all the sons of the three Headmen, who were regarded as brothers, so we regarded ourselves as cousins. I was the son of the Headman, Bebejern; Wonga was the son of the Songman, Billibelleri; and Keelbundoora and Jika-Jika were the sons of Jagga-Jagga who was the Kidney-fat Man or law enforcer. We all went to Batman’s camp near the ford on the Plenty at Greensborough for rations.*

The Elders welcomed Batman onto Country with a Tanderrum Ceremony, after which he held a whitefella ceremony. In asking the names of the three headmen so he could write it down, Bebejern and Billibellari deferred to their leadership ‘brother’ Jagga-Jagga as they were on his land. That is why the name Jagga-Jagga is written three times on Batman’s ‘Treaty’. The men with Batman had brought a couple of sheep and so they then killed some sheep by Batman’s order and we all feasted. Later, the parishes of Bundoora and Jika-Jika were named after Jagga-Jagga’s two sons, because this was in acknowledgement that Batman had met with the Woiwurrung on his land on the Plenty River. It was not at Merri Creek because Merri means ‘rocky’ not ‘muddy’. It was not Darebin Creek either because Darebin means the bird ‘Welcome Swallow’.

Seeing Batman at Greensborough on the 6th June 1835, three months before I turned twelve, I could not help but remember again the things that Buckley had told us in the years before. Buckley told the Blacks to look at his face and see how he looks very white. He said that any man you see out in the bush with a white face not to touch him. Also when you see an empty hut belonging to a white man, you are not to touch the bread in it. Instead, act as if you are Out of Country and you are approaching the camp of another tribe. Follow the ‘Out of Country Rule’ and make a camp outside and wait till the man comes home. When the man comes home and finds everything safe in the house he will be friendly and share his food with you. Murrangurk told us that they are good people when you respect their property, but if you kill one white man they will hunt down all your mob and shoot you down like a kangaroo. He said a lot of white fellow will come here by-and-by and clear all the scrub all over the country, so just remember what I have said when you see a white man in your Country.

BATMAN'S SECOND BOGUS TREATY

Jimmy Dawson was an early settler in Warrandyte who arrived in 1840 and moved to Port Fairy in 1844. Jimmy became fluent in at least four Aboriginal languages and in 1880 wrote a book 'Australian Aborigines' which set out many of his understandings of Aboriginal culture.

In 1980 a facsimile edition was produced to celebrate the centenary of its publication and although I was able to photocopy some chapters, I was never able to get my own copy. However last month I had a stroke of luck. A friend was moving into a retirement village and gave me her collection of books on Aboriginal heritage. I couldn't believe my eyes when it included a copy of Jimmy Dawson's epic book.

As I flipped through the pages I came across a fold-out replica of Batman's 'Treaty', but when I read it I was completely gobsmacked. It was not the treaty for the purported purchase of land in Melbourne. It was a **second** treaty for the purchase of land in the Geelong area.

I had never seen or heard of such a document, so I checked it carefully and compared it to the copy I had of the first treaty. Sure enough there were key differences in the description of the two tracts of land. The description of the Melbourne area was much more elaborate, but crowded into the same space occupied by fewer words on the second document.

The second treaty described the land being purchased as '*All that tract of country situate and being in the Bay of Port Phillip known by the name Indented Head, but called by us as Geelong extending across from Geelong Harbour about due south for ten miles more or less to the Heads of Port Phillip.*

What was immediately apparent was that both documents had been prepared before Batman came to Port Phillip in mid-1835. Appropriate legal jargon had been used, but spaces had been left to fill in later with descriptions of each particular area of land.

This confirmed what historians such as Rex Harcourt had previously known. The Port Phillip Syndicate lawyer, Joseph Gellibrand, had in fact prepared the documents before Batman left Tasmania in May 1835, leaving Batman to fill in the blank spaces.

There has since been much controversy over whether the Aboriginal people involved had any concept of selling the land. After all, their cultural belief was that the land owned **them**, not the other way around. Land was simply not a utility that could be bought and sold by individuals.

Universal Aboriginal cultural practice would also have required any visitor to bring gifts. Batman was therefore seen as simply bringing gifts of scissors, axes, shirts, blankets and suchlike. Batman had a lifetime of relationship with Aboriginal people and had seven Sydney Blacks with him, acting as guides and interpreters, so he knew aboriginal protocols well and used his knowledge cynically.

The real point is that in the second treaty document, Batman purported to have purchased land from the **Woiwurung** people in Melbourne that actually belonged to the **Wathurong** people in Geelong. It is an impossible proposition that even Batman recognised by withholding knowledge of the second 'treaty'.

The treaty signing ceremony that Batman described was therefore a masquerade. The idea of holding such a ceremony had been conceived because Britain had abolished the slave trade and was giving more consideration to the rights of native people facing colonisation. Batman's Syndicate therefore tried to emulate the process employed in 1681, when William Penn had established Pennsylvania by purchasing land from the native people.

Penn had used the medieval ceremony of Feoffment, which involving receiving a sod of earth followed by the ritual of 'beating the bounds'. The British government subsequently approved Penn's purchase, so Batman pretended to conduct a similar ceremony in Melbourne.

The emergence of the second treaty document therefore clearly shows that the claimed land purchases in both Melbourne and Geelong were fraudulent. In fact Batman could not have taken the documents to the meeting. They were instead left on his boat moored at Melbourne, to be filled in when he returned. After doing this he dropped his three men off at Geelong, along with five of his seven Sydney men, before returning to Tasmania with the deeds.

We know this because the same parts of the two documents are written in different handwriting. Also, the purported signatures of the eight Aboriginal leaders were practised by Batman on his diary cover on the trip over, so had seemingly been given to him by his Sydney men.

However a third point is the most telling. Neither of the documents had a single smudge, ink spot, fingerprint or raindrop on them. They were in pristine condition and so had not been carried by Batman on any jaunt through the Australian bush.

THE NAMING OF THE YARRA IN SEPTEMBER 1835

When beginning this column two years ago, the Diary Editors suggested the very apt name of 'Birrarrung Stories'. Birrarung is of course the original Woiwurung name for the Yarra, meaning 'river of mists and shadows'.

A previous article briefly recounted how our river got the name 'Yarra', but it is worth giving a little more detail. The full story actually illustrates how by constant repetition, myths can become regarded as historical facts.

The story begins in May 1835, when John Batman made his historic journey to Port Phillip. He brought with him seven Sydney Blacks, who were to act as guides and interpreters. Although Batman scarcely mentions them in his diary, the Sydney men did their required job. They made contact with the Woiwurung people and organised the historic meeting with Batman on the Plenty River at Greensborough.

Straight after this meeting on 8th June 1835 Batman went back to Tasmania. He left five of the seven Sydney Blacks at Geelong, together with the other three colonists in his party. The surveyor in the Port Phillip Syndicate John Wedge then came over from Tasmania and was dropped off at Geelong on 7th August 1835.

Wedge surveyed there for four weeks and was accompanied by William Buckley the escaped convict, who had come into the camp on 6th July 1835. After this the five Sydney men rowed Wedge to Melbourne in a whaleboat, arriving there on 2nd September 1835. Three of the Sydney men then returned to Geelong with the boat, whilst the other two accompanied Wedge on his survey work.

Back on 2nd September though, as the boat came up the river and approached the Queen Street falls, the two Sydney men who were to remain with Wedge exclaimed Yarra! Yarra! This meant 'waterfall' in their Sydney tongue, but Wedge misunderstood. He thought they were telling him it was the name of the river.

Wedge was at that time probably a bit distracted, because John Pascoe Fawkner's ship the Enterprise, with a party led by Captain Lancey, was already moored at the falls. Wedge subsequently got into an argument with Lancey and said they had no right to be there on the land claimed by Batman. He then gave Lancey a written order to leave.

Lancey handed the paper back to Wedge and informed him that he '*...might want it for some necessary occasion, which would be the full worth of such a notice*'. In the flowery language of the day Lancey was of course telling Wedge to wipe his bum with it.

This clearly demonstrated the rivalry and ill-will between Batman and Fawkner which continued unabated for the rest of their lives. Batman died in 1839, but for the following twenty years Fawkner continued to give public lectures on what a liar and degenerate Batman was.

However back in 1835 Wedge told everyone the name of the river was Yarra, and it stuck. Myths have now become entrenched around the history and meaning of the name, making it difficult to correct. This started when it was wrongly assumed that the natives with Wedge were locals. Building on this, it was then assumed that 'Yarra' was a Woiwurung word. It is, but Yarra in Woiwurung means 'hair' and Yarra-Yarra means 'fur'.

The many Woiwurung words with 'yarra' in them have since been conveniently ignored. All these words refer to specific types of hair such as eyebrows, eyelashes, beards, moustaches, pubic hair and even baldness.

The situation was further confused fifty years later by Hugh McCrae, the grandson of Georgina McCrae, an early settler on the Mornington Peninsula. In his grandmother's Boonwurrung language notes, one word containing 'yarra' referred to tidal flows. Hugh noted he thought it meant 'ever flowing' and once more the idea stuck. One Boonwurrung word about tidal flow has now been misapplied to claim that Yarra-Yarra means 'ever-flowing'.

Many people therefore now believe that Yarra was the original name of the river and that the local people were therefore the 'Yarra-Yarra Tribe'. This is in a sense true, because tribes in the first instance refer to themselves as belonging to a river catchment. However that name of the river was Birrarung not Yarra.

This error on how the Yarra was named continues to this day, despite Wedge having later publicly corrected his mistake. In correspondence to Batman's biographer, John Bonwick on 23rd February 1856, Wedge wrote that after finishing his survey work in Melbourne in late September 1835, he and the Sydney men began walking back to Geelong. On reaching the ford at the Werribee River, the Sydney men again pointed to the rapids and said 'Yarra'.

Wedge wrote it was then he realised he had been mistaken in the name of the river. But it was already too late and the myth is still today firmly entrenched as fact.

MELBOURNE'S FEUDING FOUNDING FATHERS

John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner are the co-founders of Melbourne, but both in physique and temperament you could not have found two more diametrically different people. Batman had always been a physically imposing figure. He was tall, broad shouldered, strong, and handsome, whereas Fawkner was short, scrawny and scruffy.

However by the time Melbourne was founded in mid-1835 when Batman was 34 and Fawkner 43, the ledger had been squared somewhat. Fawkner was still diminutive and scruffy, but Batman was now facially disfigured and physically compromised by tertiary stage syphilis. Batman died four years later in 1839 and spent the last year of his life being trundled around in a pram.

Batman had always been an enthusiastic, energetic and ebullient character to whom many people were drawn. However, many others were repelled and regarded him as a bombastic, self aggrandizing liar, who lacked any moral compass.

Like Batman, Fawkner was energetic, ambitious and courageous, but he also had an acid tongue. Even his friends regarded him as argumentative, opinionated, patronising and downright aggravating.

Whilst Fawkner often skirted the edges of the law in many shady financial dealings, Batman plunged deeply over. It is well established that Batman was both a swindler and murderer. It is probably fair to say that whilst Batman's moral failings were far greater than those of Fawkner, history remembers Batman much more kindly.

At the time they got to know each other, Fawkner was the Licensee of a hotel in Launceston, at which Batman frequently drank to excess. Having heard that Batman belonged to the newly formed Port Phillip Syndicate, Fawkner wanted in. Batman derisively rebuffed him and so earned Fawkner's undying enmity.

Inspired by the Henty's unauthorised landing at Portland in November 1834, Fawkner decided to assess Westernport Bay as a settlement site and hired a ship 'The Enterprise'. When his party set sail in April 1835, Batman and the Syndicate were caught by surprise. Batman was immediately told to grab the fake treaties Gellibrand had drafted, take his seven Sydney Blacks, and get over to Port Phillip before Fawkner.

Batman finally left Tasmania in the Rebecca on May 27 1835 and returned with his purportedly signed treaties on June 11. He boasted: *'I am the greatest land owner in the world'* and claimed to have walked about 120 miles in four days (although suffering tertiary stage syphilis). This was promptly ridiculed by Fawkner and others.

The surveyor in the Syndicate, John Helder Wedge, immediately resigned his government post and set off for Port Phillip, arriving at Geelong on 7th August 1835. Whilst Wedge was surveying there, Fawkner's ship docked at Melbourne on 20th August 1835. This site had already been identified by Batman as *'The place for a Village'*.

Both Batman and Fawkner now laid claim to being Melbourne's founder, with neither willing to share the honour with the other. Despite Batman's braggadocio and significant moral failings, more people warmed to him than they did to the vitriolic Fawkner, so Batman became more widely accepted as the founder.

This was helped by a later sycophantic biography that didn't just gloss over Batman's failings it virtually airbrushed them from history. True to his acerbic nature, Fawkner did not let the matter rest. He lived until 1869, thirty years after Batman, and devoted himself tirelessly to exposing him as a fraud. Fawkner gave public lectures about how the morally corrupt and mortally ill Batman, claimed to have walked impossible distances in securing his bogus treaties with forged signatures.

Fawkner had limited success within his own lifetime, but gradually people forgot how argumentative, arrogant and aggravating he was, whilst at the same time rediscovering Batman's flawed character. So 181 years after Batman's death his name has justifiably been removed from a federal electorate and Fawkner has been elevated to the status of co-founder of Melbourne.

Fawkner has however had one more victory. He successfully convinced the public that Batman's famed meeting with the Woiwurrung had occurred on the Merri Creek at Rushall, only a couple of miles out of Melbourne. Fawkner had no proof whatsoever for this claim, but it stuck and is nowadays still regarded as fact.

There were however only two eyewitness accounts to this event, those of John Batman and William Barak, with both accounts being in fundamental agreement. Barak said that the meeting took place near 'Idleburg' on 'Muddy Creek', with this being the translated Aboriginal name of the Plenty River. Batman said that after the meeting he returned to Melbourne by walking 12 miles in a southwest direction and crossing two creeks.

Both accounts therefore place the famed meeting site at present day Greensborough on the Plenty River. To get to Melbourne from there you have to travel southwest, twelve miles along the Plenty Road Songline and cross two creeks, the Darebin and the Merri.