Burke and Wills Conference
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ISSN 1836-5477

Approved Print Post No. PP 424022/00019
Printed by The Printing Office, Eagle Farm
The Victorian Exploring Expedition was organised by the Royal Society of Victoria who wanted to contribute to the advance of geographical knowledge. The desire for the colony of Victoria to become involved in exploration was unusual and the Expedition eventuated as the result of a remarkable set of circumstances that occurred in Melbourne in the 1850s. It took three years to organise and outfit the Expedition and during that time the objectives changed frequently and the aims were never clearly defined. The way the Society established the Expedition was unlike any previous Australian expedition.

The Expedition was renamed the *Burke and Wills Expedition* after the deaths of the two leaders. Although it is easy to imagine the drama on the Expedition centered solely on Burke and Wills, the story is a complicated one which involved many people in various groups scattered across the continent. Fifty people sat on the Exploration Committee in Melbourne and at one stage there were more than 120 people employed on the Expedition and the relief expeditions – it was a large undertaking.

**Establishing the Expedition**

The Expedition was established in quite an unusual fashion and was the product of a unique set of circumstances that occurred in Victoria as a result of the gold rush. The discovery of gold, just after Victoria’s separation from New South Wales in 1851, led to one of the most dramatic transformations of any colony. During the 1850s, one-third of the world’s gold was passing through Melbourne with two tons of gold being delivered to the Old Treasury building each week. Some 2500 migrant ships were arriving in Port Phillip Bay yearly, with their human cargoes racing off to try to make their fortunes on the
Melbourne was on its way from being a small, rather insignificant town at the bottom of the world, to becoming the second largest city in the British Empire and with that growth came the grand buildings and public institutions: Parliament House, The Treasury, Lands Department, Hospital, University, Museum and Library. These institutions attracted educated and intelligent people to the colony and in 1854 they formalised scientific study by establishing the Philosophical Institute of Victoria. In 1860 the Institute became the Royal Society of Victoria.\(^2\)

Scientific societies had not flourished in Australia until that point. It is said that pioneering does not lend itself to culture and scientific study was not a priority in a young colony. Agricultural and horticultural societies had done well, as had Mechanic’s Institutes, but scientific societies had struggled. However, the combination of wealth, the recently established institutions in Melbourne and the influx of educated migrants, allowed Victoria the luxury of being able to devote some of its energies to science.\(^3\)

From the outset, the Institute set its sights on exploration. At its first meeting in 1854, members discussed organising an expedition to explore the colony and by 1857 the Vice-President, Dr David Elliott Wilkie MLC (1815-1885), had set his sights on a much grander venture. He proposed the Institute should organise an expedition to cross the country from east to west, departing from Moreton Bay and finishing at the Swan River. The Institute established an Exploration Committee ‘to consider and report on the practicality of fitting

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Robert O’Hara Burke, 1821-1861 and William John Wills, 1834-1861.
(nla.pic-an8960212, National Library of Australia)
A comparison of the way the Institute arranged the Burke and Wills Expedition with the methods used in other colonies to establish expeditions reveal some major differences. Generally expeditions were financed either by the state or privately. The vast majority of expeditions were privately funded, but these were usually small-scale ventures sent out to find new pastoral land. The more well-known examples of this type of expedition were those led by John McDouall Stuart, sponsored by James Chambers, South Australia’s richest man at the time, and Ludwig Leichhardt, who became tired of waiting for a position as botanist on Thomas Mitchell’s expedition and organised his own, privately-sponsored expedition, paid for mainly by the settlers of Moreton Bay. The other category of expedition was funded by the state and organised by colonial governments. These were larger scale expeditions such as Charles Sturt’s three expeditions, Augustus Charles Gregory (exploring from Western Australia), Edward John Eyre and the irascible Thomas Mitchell, whose four expeditions became increasingly larger and more cumbersome. The usual procedure for establishing this type of expedition was for the surveyor-general to propose a geographical hypothesis and suggest an area that he felt should be explored. Mitchell’s motivation was tracing rivers, Sturt’s motivation increasingly became the search for the elusive inland sea. The proposals were forwarded to the Colonial Office in London, and, if approved, funds were placed on the estimates for the following year and the leader would eventually form a party and head out to explore.

While the Burke and Wills Expedition could definitely be considered a large-scale expedition (certainly when it departed Melbourne it was a large outfit), Burke’s Expedition was organised very differently to Sturt’s, Mitchell’s or Gregory’s. When the Institute made the proposal to establish an expedition it was not in a financial position to fund such a grand affair and because the economy had slowed, the government was not interested in paying for an expedition that would be conducted in another colony. The Institute was undaunted and formed a Fund Raising Committee whose task was to raise £2000 from public subscription. However, the Committee found the public equally uninterested and it took over two years to raise the money. Also, during that time members of the Exploration Committee promoted the Expedition as having widely different aims and objectives. There was never consensus on what the aims were and so each member formed his own opinion as to the benefits the Expedition would have for Victoria.

At the end of 1859 the Philosophical Institute, now called the Royal Society of Victoria, found itself in a position where it had the funds to mount an expedition, but with no leader and no idea of where to send him. Robert O’Hara Burke (1821-1861) was chosen as leader just two months prior to
the Expedition departing and the route was only decided one month prior to departure. Although Wilkie had abandoned his idea of an east-west traverse, the Committee still considered sending the Expedition to the Kimberley on the northwest coast, and then a week later overturned this decision and decided the Expedition should go to Cooper Creek and then the Gulf of Carpentaria. Thus it is apparent that Burke’s Expedition was the result of a unique set of circumstances that happened at a unique point in Australia’s history. The Expedition came about because of the formation, with the growth of Melbourne, of a scientific society in Victoria, which resulted from an influx of educated men into the colony as a result of the discovery of gold. From the outset, the Philosophical Institute had an ambition to mount an expedition, but the method of establishing the expedition was distinctly different to the way it had been done previously. Instead of proposing a hypothesis, nominating a leader, determining where he should go and then raising the funds, the Exploration Committee raised the money first, then two months out they selected a leader, and finally one month out they decided where he should go. At no time did they clearly lay out the aims of the Expedition or state what it would achieve.

**Expedition personnel**

The Exploration Committee considered a number of people as suitable leaders, including Peter Edgerton Warburton, the South Australian Commissioner of Police, and Augustus Charles Gregory, who had just been appointed Surveyor-General of the new colony of Queensland. However, when it came to the crucial vote to select a leader, most of the Committee wanted a Victorian to lead their expedition, and so, after a series of meetings, debates and adjournments, they finally chose Robert O’Hara Burke. 

Although it is often stated that Burke had never ventured out of the settled districts, he had travelled widely, although of course he had no experience as an explorer. He was born in 1821 in County Galway to a wealthy Protestant family, educated at Woolwich Military Academy, and became a Lieutenant in the Hungarian Hussars. While enrolled in the Austrian army he travelled extensively around Europe and then returned to Ireland where

Robert O’Hara Burke (1821-1861), photograph ca. 1860. (Picture Queensland Collection, State Library of Queensland)
he spent some time as a policeman in Dublin. He migrated to Australia in 1853 where he spent seven years in Victoria, first as a Police Inspector at Beechworth and then as a Police Superintendent in Castlemaine. So he was well travelled, an excellent horseman, spoke several languages and was by all accounts charming and quite dashing, if a little eccentric. His motivation for leading the Expedition was the fame it would bring. In 1860 Burke was approaching 40-years-of-age and his career as a policeman in a provincial town did not offer great prospects. Burke admitted he was looking for a challenge, ‘something to take the sting out of him,’ and the Expedition offered him the opportunity to make a name for himself.\(^\text{12}\)

As well as Burke, there were four other officers appointed by the Exploration Committee: Landells, Wills, Beckler and Becker.

George Landells (1825-1871) was chosen as second-in-command. He was an Englishman who had spent 14 years in India. He had only spent a couple of years in Australia, and two months before the Expedition departed he arrived from India with a shipment of camels. Burke was impressed with Landells’ knowledge of camels and initially felt he needed Landells along to manage the camels.

William John Wills (1834-1861) was the third-in-command, and the surveyor and astronomical observer. He was quite a brilliant and gifted scientist, with a very promising career ahead of him.

There were two other scientific officers. German, Ludwig Becker (1808-1861) was the Expedition’s artist and naturalist, the only member of the Royal Society of Victoria on the Expedition and also the oldest man in the party; and Hermann Beckler (1828-1914), the Expedition’s surgeon and botanist.

In addition to these five officers was an American selected as the foreman, four Indian sepoys selected as camel handlers, and nine ‘Expedition Assistants’, comprising men from England, Ireland, Scotland, France and Germany.\(^\text{13}\)

The Victorian Exploring Expedition

The Expedition departed Royal Park in Melbourne on Monday 20 August 1860 and as many as 15 000 Melburnians turned out to farewell the explorers. Burke and Landells were now well known to the Melbourne public, but Wills kept out of the spotlight and was virtually unknown. He did not leave
Royal Park with the main Expedition, but stayed behind to pack the scientific instruments. The Expedition was originally named the Victorian Exploring Expedition and was only renamed after the two leaders posthumously at the insistence of the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly.14

The Expedition got off to a slow start due to the large amount of equipment. It has been suggested that there were 20 tons, but no one has been able to accurately assess exactly how much. Stories of Burke taking top hats and iron bedsteads were made up by Joseph Furphy in his 1903 novel, *Such is Life.*15 Other stories of Burke having taken six tons of firewood were also wrong, and come from more recent literary works on the expedition such as Sarah Murgatroyd’s *Dig Tree.*16 Nevertheless, there was a lot of equipment, much of it superfluous.

Burke chose to take wagons as a means of transport and he was provided with three large American wagons, which slowed the Expedition’s progress through Victoria where the heavy winter rain had turned the roads to mud. In addition, Landells objected to the camels being loaded as he wanted to keep them fresh for the desert stages. Burke was forced to hire three more wagons at a cost almost double the wages bill for all 19 men on the Expedition.17

Burke left some of the equipment along the way in towns including Swan Hill and Balranald. Accounts of him jumping up on the back of a wagon and staging impromptu auctions are incorrect, as he left the equipment in storage with local merchants. Crossing the mallee country, Burke realised the wagons could not continue through the soft sand and so he decided he would split the party and leave a depot at Menindee. As they travelled up the Darling towards Menindee the camels became increasingly difficult to handle and on one occasion they disappeared and were not found for five days. The delay caused friction between Burke and Landells and a dispute over taking rum as a medication for the camels strained their relationship further. However it was a disagreement over the best method to get the camels across the Darling River that caused Landells to resign. Landells’ departure meant Burke promoted Wills to be second-in-command, as the two men had formed a good working relationship and Burke thought Wills ‘a capital officer’.18

Burke left five men at Menindee with the majority of the stores and a handful of the weakest animals. A local man, William Wright, volunteered to show Burke the waterholes along the way for the first 200 miles and after two weeks on the road together, Burke was so impressed by Wright’s abilities as a bushman that he made him third-in-command, placed him in charge of the supply party and instructed him to return to Menindee and bring the remaining men, stores and animals to Cooper Creek. Burke continued on to the Cooper with his slimmed down party of eight men, 16 camels and 12 horses. Without the wagons they made good progress.19
Burke’s first depot camp at Cooper Creek was abandoned after two weeks because of a plague of rats, and the Expedition moved downstream to find a more suitable site. Near the border between Queensland and South Australia, Burke made Camp 65, where the Dig Tree stands today. Wills made several reconnaissance trips to the north of this depot camp, but couldn’t find any water, so Burke decided they would head north-west across Sturt Stony Desert towards Eyre’s Creek, which had been mapped by Charles Sturt in 1845 and was the only known water beyond the Cooper.20

On Sunday 16 December 1860 Burke split the party again leaving four men behind. He placed 25-year-old German, William Brahe (1835-1912) in charge of the depot party. Burke told Brahe he expected Wright to arrive from Menindee with the supply party, but if they did not arrive, Brahe was to wait at the depot for three months before returning to Menindee. Wills allegedly asked Brahe to wait four months.21

Wright and the supply party never reached Cooper Creek. Wright had been placed in an unenviable position because Burke was expecting him to bring up the majority of the stores, but he had only left five men and a handful of the weakest animals in Menindee. Wright did not have the authority to purchase more pack-animals and it took him more than two months to get
organised. When he did leave it was January, the waterholes had dried up and the journey was described as ‘a very hell’. The supply party suffered terrible privations and three men died at the Bulloo River in south west Queensland, including the artist, Ludwig Becker.22

At the depot, Brahe and the other men were beginning to suffer from the effects of scurvy. They had waited four months and one week, Burke was five weeks overdue, and there was no sign of William Wright and the supply party. Because Burke had only taken three months worth of provisions, Brahe reasoned Burke must have met a ship on the north coast or have headed across to the settlements on the Queensland coast, and so he decided to return to Menindee. He left a note buried in a camel trunk under a tree which he marked ‘Dig,’ and at 10 o’clock in the morning on Sunday, 21 April 1861, he set off for Menindee.23

Burke meanwhile had been making good progress north toward the Gulf. He had taken three men with him: Wills, Charley Gray and John King, and they had six camels and one horse. After crossing Sturt Stony Desert they found the Diamantina River, which was unknown to Europeans at the time, although surprisingly they did not name the river. They crossed the Selwyn Ranges and followed Corella Creek into the Cloncurry River, then the Flinders River, and after two months travel, they reached the Gulf of Carpentaria.24

On 11 February 1861 Burke reached his most northerly point. It is well known that Burke was unable to see the open ocean and it is generally believed to be due to the impenetrable mangroves. He did not get to the beach, however, because the last 20 kilometres are salt flats which are covered by the wet season floods and king tides – both of which Burke had to contend with.

The northbound trip had taken much longer than planned, but fortunately for Burke it was a late wet season that year and the rain had not been much of a problem. However on the return trip the monsoon broke and the flooded rivers and muddy conditions slowed them down considerably. As the provisions began to run out the men were placed on half-rations and then quarter-rations. The oldest of the four, Gray, died when they were just four days from the depot camp on the Cooper and the others took a day to bury him. John McKinlay (1819-1872) later found human remains which he believed were Gray’s at a place he called Lake Massacre. However the exact location of Gray’s grave is uncertain.25

Burke, Wills and King arrived at the depot camp on Cooper Creek at about 7.30 in the evening of 21 April – the same day that Brahe had left. Burke arrived just nine hours too late. The men had walked 3500 kilometres in four months through the desert in the middle of summer with no tents or swags to protect them from the monsoon rains and were in a pitiful condition.

There is a perception that after arriving back at the depot camp, Burke,
Wills and King became delirious and wandered aimlessly around the desert, before dying at the end of June. In fact the three men made several determined attempts to rescue themselves. Instead of following their outbound track to Menindee, with its long waterless stretches, Burke decided to head to Mount Hopeless, which was the closest station to Cooper Creek. However, Burke failed to locate Strzelecki Creek, so after several attempts to get to Mount Hopeless and with all the camels dead and no means of carrying sufficient water to cross the desert, they found themselves trapped at the Cooper.26

Despite occasional gifts of food from the Yandruwandha, Burke, Wills and King ended up on a diet that consisted exclusively of nardoo, which contains little other than starch, and also has a high content of thiaminase, which destroys Vitamin B1 in the body. They were already in a pitiful condition, emaciated, exhausted and suffering from scurvy, and the lack of Vitamin B1 would have accelerated their deaths. Burke and Wills died either at the end of June or early July 1861.27
Relief expeditions

Burke’s last despatch arrived in Melbourne in early December 1860. By April 1861, when there had been no further news from the Expedition, the public and press called on the Exploration Committee to send a boat to the north coast and find out what was happening. Wills’ father, Dr William Wills, was particularly active in requesting action.28

However it was mid-June 1861 before the Exploration Committee met to discuss Burke’s plight. At the end of June they sent Alfred Howitt (1830-1908) to the Cooper with a small party to see if Burke needed assistance, but just two days out of Melbourne Howitt found Brahe who was on his way to Melbourne to inform the Exploration Committee that Burke had left for the north coast six months ago and had not been seen since. Howitt returned to Melbourne immediately.29

The news of Burke’s disappearance shocked Melbourne and stirred the Exploration Committee into action. Howitt organised a larger party and set off again for Cooper Creek. In September 1861 he discovered the sole survivor, John King, living with the Yandruwandha, and he buried the remains of Burke and Wills. A friend of Dr Wills, James Orkney MLA (1821-1896), sent his own miniature steam yacht, the SS Sir Charles Hotham, to the Gulf. The Hotham was a 16 ton scale replica of the SS Great Eastern and under Captain Ebenezer Wyse it sailed from Melbourne to Maroochydore before running onto its anchor and becoming holed. After being repaired in Brisbane it was sold and became the Brisbane River mail steamer.30

The Victorian Government sent the colony’s first warship, the HMCSS Victoria, to the Gulf under the command of Captain William Henry Norman (1812-1869) to see if Burke was trapped at the Albert River.31 The Exploration Committee itself arranged for the SS Firefly under Captain Thomas Kirby (1829-1888) to sail to Brisbane to pick up William Landsborough (1825-1886) and the Queensland Relief Expedition, before sailing to the Gulf. Landsborough explored the Barkly Tableland before travelling overland to Melbourne.32

The brig SS Gratia and the schooner SS Native Lass were contracted to take coal to Sweers Island to refuel the Victoria and Frederick Walker (1820-1866) was appointed by the Victorian Government, under the instructions of the Auditor-General of New South Wales, William Colburn Mayne (1808-1902), to travel overland from Rockhampton to the Gulf to search for Burke.33

In the flurry of activity, the South Australian government also sent John McKinlay as leader of the South Australian Burke Relief Expedition to Cooper Creek. McKinlay’s party crossed the continent from Adelaide to the Gulf, arriving at the Albert River two months before John McDouall Stuart reached the north coast on his first crossing of the continent.
By the end of 1861, there were more than 120 men employed on five vessels and four overland expeditions, searching the country for news of Burke and Wills. These relief expeditions were significant in themselves as successful parties of exploration and they covered more terrain than the original expedition could ever have hoped to. Although the Burke and Wills Expedition did not bring any financial benefit to the colony of Victoria, the endeavours of the Royal Society of Victoria significantly added to the understanding of the geography of central Australia.

Endnotes


7 Philosophical Institute of Victoria, *Exploration Fund Raising Committee Minutes, 1858-1860*, Box 2088B/1, MS13071, State Library of Victoria.


9 Although the creek was named Cooper’s Creek by Sturt, current naming practices by GeoScience Australia mean today the creek is Cooper Creek.

11 Royal Society of Victoria, *Exploration Committee minute book, 1858-1873* Box 2088B/1, MS13071, State Library of Victoria, p. 48. Minutes of the EC meeting, 20 June 1860.


14 *The Argus*, Melbourne, 21 August 1860, p. 5; *The Age*, Melbourne, 7 November 1861, p. 5.


21 William Brahe, Report, dated Melbourne, 30 June 1861 Box 2082/4h, MS13071, State Library of Victoria; John King, Narrative, (recorded in Alfred Howitt’s diary), Item #255110, Box FB33, MS13071, State Library of Victoria.


26 William John Wills, *Journal of trip from Cooper Creek towards Adelaide*, MS30/7, National Library of Australia.

28 Burke, Dispatch dated Cooper’s Creek, 13 December 1860, Box 2082/1a, MS13071, State Library of Victoria; Wills, Successful exploration; Jackson, Australian exploring expedition; The Argus, Melbourne, 17 April 1861, pp. 4-5.
29 Alfred William Howitt, Diary 13 August-17 November 1861, #255110, Box FB33, MS13071, State Library of Victoria; Dispatches, 30 June 1861, Box 2085/5a, MS13071, State Library of Victoria; Instructions issued to Howitt by the Exploration Committee, Box 2087/7e, MS13071, State Library of Victoria.
30 Wills, Successful exploration; The Argus, Melbourne, 19 July 1861, p. 5; The Brisbane Courier, Brisbane, 2 August 1861, p. 2; 15 August 1861, p. 2; 31 August 1861, p. 2.
31 William Henry Norman, Exploration Expedition: Report of Commander Norman of the HMCS Victoria, together with copy of his journal of the late expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria, Melbourne, John Ferres Government Printer, 1862; Exploration Expedition: Letter from Commander Norman reporting the return of the Victoria from the Gulf of Carpentaria, together with reports and correspondence, Melbourne, John Ferres, Government Printer, 1862.
33 Frederick Walker, ‘Journal of Mr Walker from the day he left Macintosh’s Station on the Nogoa to that of his arrival at the Albert River, Gulf of Carpentaria’, Royal Geographical Society Journal, vol. 33, 1863. William Mayne, Despatches, 1861-2, Box 2088A/4b, MS13071, State Library of Victoria.
John King: an Ulster explorer who became the first person to cross Australia.

Dave Phoenix*

John King was a young man from Ulster whose life changed forever after a chance meeting in India. He arrived in Australia with no aspirations of being an explorer. Nevertheless he became the first person to cross Australia from north to south and became a reluctant hero as a result. His loyalty to Robert O’Hara Burke (1821-1861) secured him a trusted position in charge of the Expedition’s camels, and camels allowed Burke to explore in a style that no one had been able to attempt previously. At the age of 21, after being in Australia for only 10 weeks, John King set off with Burke to walk from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria and back. His story is intertwined with that of the camels, the first to be used on a major Australian exploring expedition.

John King

John King (1838-1872) was born in Moy, County Tyrone in 1838. He was the youngest of four children, his father dying shortly after he was born while his mother died when he was nine. As the orphaned son of a British serviceman he was eligible for entry into the Royal Hibernian Military School in Dublin, which was a preparatory school for the British Army. King started his education there in 1847 at the age of nine, during Ireland’s great potato famine.¹

When King was 14 he joined the 70th Regiment of Foot, and was sent to the Chatham Dockyard before being posted to India. Initially he was stationed in Kanpur on the Ganges River, where he worked as a teacher’s assistant. During the Indian Rebellion of 1857 he was sent to Peshawar in the Punjab, and the following year at the age of 17 he suffered from a severe fever and spent 16 months recuperating in the Murree Hills near Rawalpindi. At some stage, probably late in 1859, he met George Landells who was in India buying camels for the Victorian Government.

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Contrary to popular belief, the camels were not intended specifically for the Burke and Wills Expedition. Landells was actually purchasing the camels for a breeding stud as part of the acclimatisation movement, which was becoming increasingly popular in Victoria at the time.\textsuperscript{2}

The use of camels in Australia had been proposed as early as 1822. In 1836 Thomas Maslen suggested Australian explorers could cross the deserts seated comfortably in Persian chairs mounted on camels. Although Maslen had experience handling camels from his time stationed in India with the British army, he had never visited Australia and his outlandish idea was never put into practice. However, as inland exploration entered increasingly arid terrain, people began to recognise the potential of using camels to cross deserts. After seeing his horses suffer terrible hardship in the Simpson Desert in 1845, experienced explorer Charles Sturt realised camels could be of immense benefit to desert exploration. However at the time there were very few camels in Australia and even fewer people with camel handling experience.\textsuperscript{3}

The first camel to set foot in Australia was a large bull-camel called \textit{Harry} who landed in Adelaide in 1840. \textit{Harry} was the sole survivor of half-a-dozen camels that were bought in Tenerife. After a few years of idle grazing in sheep paddocks in the Clare Valley, \textit{Harry} was acquired by John Horrocks, who thought the camel was worth the equivalent of six cows. In 1846 Horrocks took \textit{Harry} on an expedition north of Spencer Gulf, where an unfortunate incident occurred and Horrocks was fatally shot by the camel.\textsuperscript{4}

In going round this lake - which I named Lake Gill - Kilroy who was walking ahead of the party stopped, saying he saw a beautiful bird, which he recommended me to shoot to add to the collection. My gun being loaded with slugs in one barrel and ball in the other, I stopped the camel to get at the shot belt which I could not get without his laying down.

Whilst Mr Gill was unfastening it I was screwing the ramrod into the wad over the slugs, standing close alongside of the camel. At this moment the camel gave a lurch to one side and caught his pack on the lock of my gun, which discharged the barrel I was unloading; the contents of which first took off the middle finger of my right hand between the second and third joints, and entered my left cheek by my lower jaw, knocking out a row of teeth from my upper jaw.\textsuperscript{5}

Horrocks died of septicemia, and at his request \textit{Harry} was destroyed – not because he wanted revenge, but because Horrocks believed in the value of camels for exploration, and he thought \textit{Harry} was not the best example of his breed.\textsuperscript{6}

Shortly after \textit{Harry} landed in Australia, two shipments of camels arrived. Two camels from Tenerife were landed in Tasmania, and three camels from Oman landed in Sydney. These three were purchased by Governor Gipps,
who let them graze on the lawn at Government House in Sydney. Ludwig Leichhardt heard about these camels after returning from his first expedition to Port Essington, and he went to Sydney to see if he could use these camels on his next expedition. Unfortunately, Gipps had just sent the camels to Eden on the NSW south coast and Leichhardt never got a chance to be a camel wrangler. The camels, however, did very well on Benjamin Boyd’s property at Eden and sailors reported seeing herds of feral camels near Twofold Bay at least 15 years before Burke and Wills’ camels arrived.

Although there were an increasing number of people advocating the use of camels for Australian desert exploration, other than these six camels that arrived in the 1840s, no more camels were brought into Australia until 1859.

It was the acclimatisation movement in Victoria that brought the first large shipment of camels into the country. The motto of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria was ‘If it lives, we want it’, which indicates their desire to populate Australia with all manner of introduced flora and fauna. Although the Society was not established until 1861, there were plenty of attempts to introduce animals into the colony before then.

One of the greatest advocates for acclimatisation was Thomas Embling MLA (1814-1873). In 1856 he petitioned the Victorian Parliament to introduce alpacas and camels into the colony. His ideas, however, were not taken too seriously and his speeches were often met with derisive laughter from the back benches. Undeterred, Embling and Ludwig Becker proposed that the Philosophical Institute of Victoria consider the feasibility of importing camels. The Institute received this proposal 18 months before their president, Dr David Wilkie, suggested they should organize an exploring expedition. Discussions about the introduction of camels ran concurrently but initially separate, to the plans to organise a Victorian expedition. In fact the original plans for the expedition did not consider using camels at all, which is not surprising as the Institute was considering Augustus Charles Gregory or Peter Egerton Warburton as leaders, both of whom were committed to using horses.

In 1858 George Landells was taking a load of heavy military horses to India and he was looking for a shipment for the return journey. Landells approached Embling with a proposal to bring back a load of camels. Embling, by now a member of the government’s Zoological Gardens Committee, joined forces with the government botanist, Ferdinand von Mueller, to petition the Chief Secretary for funds to purchase camels for a breeding stud that would provide animals for exploration purposes as well as providing pack-animals for pastoralists. Mueller was so enthused by the breeding program project that he immediately began erecting stables alongside the Yarra River in the Botanical Gardens.

Landells sailed for India at the end of 1858 with a commission to buy two
dozen camels. Members of the Exploration Committee were interested in the animals, but they were so confident of their fund raising abilities that they believed their expedition would have departed for the interior by the time Landells returned.11

Landells arrived in India to find the country greatly changed due to the rebellion and travelling around was much more difficult. He had planned to purchase a mix of dromedary and Bactrian camels but the Emir of Afghanistan refused to allow him to travel to Kabul, so he was unable to purchase Bactrians. Landells concentrated instead on finding the best dromedaries, and after a year in India he purchased 15 of the finest riding camels in the Bikaner market in Rajasthan. Landells then travelled to the Bolan Pass in Baluchistan where he bought 10 sturdy Khorosan hill camels for use as pack animals. Along the way he stopped in Rawalpindi, and this is most likely when he met John King.12

Landells employed nine sepoys to care for the animals and he planned to take them with him to Australia. However as the sepoys did not have maritime experience, Landells was worried about the camels’ welfare on the long sea voyage, so he employed three Europeans to supervise the sepoys. Landells may have disclosed this plan to John King when they first met, because in January 1860 King purchased his army discharge in Rawalpindi, joined Landells at the port of Karachi, and sailed to Australia. King had already been considering leaving the army, possibly because of his illness, or possibly because of the trauma of what he had witnessed during the rebellion. He originally planned to go to South Africa, but his sister Elizabeth had migrated to Australia in 1858 and so King accepted Landells’ offer. Landells did not offer King a position on the Expedition, as Landells was not a member of the Exploration Committee and he was not aware that he would have any association with the Victorian Expedition upon his return to Melbourne.

Landells had trouble chartering a vessel to take them from Karachi to Australia, as most boats were being used to transport soldiers returning to Britain after the rebellion or were shipping stores to China for the Second Opium War. When he finally found a boat he was running behind schedule and the camels did not arrive in Melbourne until June 1860.13

The camels’ arrival caused great interest, and once they had been unloaded, Landells dressed in his finest Indian clothes and paraded the exotic animals along St Kilda beach. They had to have a police escort to clear the crowds so the camels could get to their temporary home at the stables at Parliament House. The novelty did not last for long, as the Honourable Members soon tired of their horses being frightened by the smell of the camels, and the camels, along with King and the sepoys, were moved out of town to Royal Park.14

The arrival of the camels rekindled the public’s interest in the proposed
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Victorian Expedition, and this put pressure on the Exploration Committee to stop their deliberations and finally select a leader. Six days after the camels were unloaded, Burke was selected as leader. The Committee considered they were in a position to take as many camels as they required, so they selected all of them except for two pregnant females and two small males, which didn’t give Embling and Mueller’s breeding stud much chance of success. Burke also felt that Landells’ expertise should be utilised and he was offered the position of second-in-command.15

Of the nine sepoys who Landells originally employed and King supervised, eight came to Australia. Although there had been a number of Indian migrants to Australia prior to 1860, these men were the first of several thousand Muslim cameleers to arrive in this country. Four of the men were employed on the Expedition and Landells also engaged two of the three Europeans who had supervised the sepoys on the ocean voyage. John King was offered a position because he spoke the ‘Indostani’ language of the sepoys. This reference is ambiguous at best, as the sepoys came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Most came from Afghanistan or Baluchistan, but were described as sepoys, laskars, Malays, Indians, Scindians, Hindoos, Indostanis, Pathans and Asiatics.16

Dost Mahomet was the oldest of the sepoys. He was about 45-years-old, a Muslim from Ghazni in Afghanistan, and his native language was most probably Pashto. Of all the sepoys, he spent the most time with Burke and travelled with the Expedition as far as Cooper 17 Creek, where he was one of the four men in Brahe’s depot party. When he returned to Menindee, Mahomet was savaged by a large bull camel called Nero, and lost the use of his left arm. He found employment in Menindee where he died in 1888. He is buried just outside the town, on the hill where he used to go to pray.18

Belooch (Baluch) Khan was employed in Mahadpoor in the Punjab, but it is likely that he was from Baluchistan and spoke Parsi. He went with Burke as far as Menindee, and to the Bulloo River as a member of Wright’s supply party. After the Expedition he returned to India, but returned to Australia shortly afterwards with his wife. He stayed in Australia for at least another 25 years.19

Esau (Hassan) Khan was a Muslim from Baluchistan and probably spoke Balochi. He travelled with the Expedition as far as Swan Hill, but was discharged when he became ill. He stayed in Victoria and was employed by the Victorian Acclimatisation Society to care for the handful of camels that had been left behind in Melbourne.20 The fourth sepoy employed on the Expedition was called Samla. He was a Hindu, and, unable to eat the Expedition’s rations, stayed with the Expedition for only two days.21

As one of the ordinary men employed on the Expedition, King is not
mentioned very much in the diaries or reports for the early part of the Expedition. Burke left the management of the camels to Landells, and King would have spent more time under Landells’ supervision than Burke’s. When Landells resigned, one might have expected King to have shown some loyalty towards him and left the Expedition. In addition, Burke might have been disinclined to take on a man who had originally been selected by Landells. However King had obviously distinguished himself, as Burke selected him to go on from Menindee to the Cooper and then to the Gulf.22

Even though Dost Mahomet had more experience with camels and was considerably older than King, Burke placed King in charge of the camels. King immediately started hobbling the camels when they were feeding and he tied them to the pack-saddles at night to stop them from straying, which is something that Landells had refused to do. Hobbled camels meant less time was spent searching for the animals each morning, so the Expedition could get away much earlier. This definitely pleased Burke, but it also meant the camels had less time to feed each day.

When Burke left the Cooper Creek depot to head to the Gulf he took six camels with him and just one horse. He chose the six largest male camels that had been bought in Bikaner, and though they were expensive and well bred riding camels, Burke chose to walk to the Gulf and use the camels as pack animals. The camels were primarily loaded with water, 360 litres in total, which was sufficient supply for 10 days. This meant the four men did not have to waste time looking for water every day, and as they were no longer restricted to following watercourses, they could take a much more direct route to the Gulf. Once Burke left the Diamantina River, he instructed Wills to set a course for the Gulf, then loaded the camels with water and headed due north. Without camels Burke would not have been able to explore in this manner. If he had used only horses (and Burke was an excellent horseman) he could not have carried so much water and would have had to take a more circuitous route that followed watercourses. Slower progress would have prevented Burke reaching the north coast in time. Camels allowed Burke to travel fast and direct, and it was this method of exploration which tempted Burke to make the dash to the Gulf.23

On the return journey from the Gulf to Cooper Creek, it was King who fared the best despite having only recently recovered from a serious illness in India. When Burke, Wills and King were trapped at the Cooper in the winter of 1861, it was King who collected the greater proportion of the ngardu that fed the three men. At the end of June 1861 when Wills realised he was close to death and could not continue, he insisted Burke and King leave him behind and go on ahead to get food from the Yandruwandha. Burke only managed to walk for two more days, before he too lay down to die. He asked King to
place his loaded revolver in his hand, stay with him until he was completely dead, and then leave him unburied. Just before he died, Burke wrote a letter to his sister and a final note to the Exploration Committee. The note read, ‘King has behaved nobly and I hope he will be properly cared for.’

King then spent a few days alone on the Cooper before returning downstream to the gunyah where he had left Wills. When he got there he found Wills was already dead. At this point King described feeling very lonely – and those feelings were all the more intense because King had spent so little time in Australia prior to leaving Melbourne. Now he was the only European in the middle of the Strzelecki Desert. It must have been a completely foreign environment to him.

After a few weeks alone at the Cooper, King found the Yandruwandha and he stayed in their camp. Although they were hospitable to him, they saw him as an inconvenience and every few days when they moved camp they expected King to go away. Eventually King explained that when the Yandruwandha moved camp, he would go with them. One day the Yandruwandha asked after Burke, and when King showed them his body, they wept and placed branches over Burke’s remains. From that point they accepted King as one of their own

_Burke’s burial tree, Innamincka district._

(Picture Queensland Collection, State Library of Queensland)
and were far kinder to him.\textsuperscript{26}

Alfred Howitt’s relief expedition discovered King at Cooper Creek on 15 September 1861, two-and-a-half months after Burke and Wills had died. King was in a terrible state and close to death, and it took 10 days of medical care and attention before Howitt considered him fit enough to travel. During this time, Howitt buried Burke and Wills and wrote down King’s recollections of the Expedition. This is known as King’s Narrative and is the most comprehensive account of the last days of Burke and Wills’ lives. King still had Wills’ last letter and pocket-watch and Burke’s last letter and pocket-watch in his possession, and King showed Howitt where Wills’ field books and maps were buried.

King suffered terribly on the return trip to Melbourne. He became very introverted and would often lapse into long periods of silence or burst into tears. When he refused to swim across creeks, Howitt tied his hands to the tail of a quiet horse and the horse dragged him through the water. Once across the creek they rubber him down with brandy inside and out, and as the Murray River was in flood during their return, they had to carry out this process quite frequently. As King passed through the gold mining towns of Victoria, the diggers would rush the Cobb and Co coach, cheering and throwing gold nuggets at him. Matrons clustered around him, fanning him and cutting off locks of his hair. Howitt’s surveyor, Edwin Welch, escorted King to Melbourne. He recalled banquets at Swan Hill and Bendigo in King’s honour, but when it came to the after dinner toasts and speeches, King became lost in his own thoughts and refused to speak. Sometimes when travelling through towns King cowered on the floor of the stagecoach to avoid the crowds. Welch was embarrassed by this and felt obliged to wave at the well-wishers as they passed. Although none of the diggers knew King’s appearance, Welch admitted feeling like an imposter and charlatan when he pretended to be King.\textsuperscript{27}

Because King was only able to travel slowly, Howitt sent Brahe on ahead to Melbourne with the news of the deaths of Burke and Wills. Brahe telegraphed the news to Melbourne on the evening of Saturday 2 November 1861. King did not arrive in Melbourne until the end of November, and by the time he arrived the Commission of Enquiry was taking evidence and the whole city was gripped with excitement. King was the object of
‘great and curious interest’ and as his train pulled in to Spencer Street Station he was met by an enormous cheering crowd. Wills’ father, Dr William Wills, boarded the train with the intention of preventing King from attending the reception organised by the Royal Society of Victoria. Welch pushed the traumatised young man through the crowd to the Government offices, where he was met by the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly, and reunited with his sister Elizabeth.28

King recuperated at his sister’s house in St Kilda and despite requests to attend speaking engagements and appear in theatre productions and moving dioramas relating the story of the Expedition, he refused and was rarely seen in public. However he did attend the Commission of Enquiry to give evidence, and he was one of Burke’s pall bearers at Burke and Wills’ state funeral in 1863. He also attended the unveiling of Charles Summer’s statue in 1865, where one of the bass reliefs commemorates the day that Howitt found him at the Cooper. In August 1862 he went to the Royal Society of Victoria where the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly, presented him with a gold watch from the Royal Geographical Society of London. The inscription on the watch commended King for his ‘highly meritorious conduct on the expedition under the lamented Burke and Wills.’ President of the Royal Geographical Society, Sir Roderick Murchison, included a note which referred to the Society’s gold medal which had just been presented posthumously to Burke.29 Murchison wrote, ‘The watch sent to King cost much more than Burke’s gold medal, and I hope the good soldier will like it.’30 The watch is still in the possession of the King family.

King eventually bought a house in St Kilda and married his cousin Mary. He never regained his health, however, and died of pulmonary tuberculosis in 1872, aged 33. Although King was uncomfortable as a public figure, and traumatised by his experience on the Expedition, he was acutely aware of the role he played in preserving the maps, diaries and journals which showed Burke had reached the north coast and had therefore succeeded in his task. When King did appear in public he made every effort to uphold Burke’s reputation. At a presentation in 1861 he said:

To have been the instrument, of preserving from destruction, the invaluable notes and other memoranda of the Expedition, is an honor of which I feel myself utterly unworthy, but which, nevertheless, I much value, because they afford evidence of the self sacrificing conduct of Messrs Burke, Wills and Gray, all of whom perished in the service of their Queen and country.31

King’s hard work and loyalty to Burke during the Expedition meant he was selected to be one of only four men who would cross the continent. His responsibility was the camels, and it was the camels that allowed Burke the opportunity to explore in a way no other Australian explorer had been able
to attempt. Camels allowed Burke to make his daring dash to the Gulf – the
dash that would ultimately lead to the deaths of three of the four men who
attempted it. If King had not survived, we would know very little of what
happened to the Expedition once Burke left the Dig Tree in December 1861 to
head to the Gulf. It is thanks to John King, the unwitting young explorer, that
we know as much as we do about the first crossing of Australia.

John King’s grave in Melbourne General Cemetery, 2008.
(Photograph courtesy of Dave Phoenix)

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‘Surgeon’ Wills of the Burke and Wills Expedition 1860-1861: new research and a medical perspective of William John Wills (1834-1861)

John Pearn*

Each year in the deserts of Central Australia blooms *Eremophila willsii*, a living memorial to William John Wills (1834-1861), one of Australia’s most celebrated explorers. Born at Totnes as one of six children to an old Devon family, his life was to have a prophetic parallelism with that of his explorer ancestors. The lessons of his life, successful in cartography but ultimately ending in personal tragedy, remain as relevant today as they did in the planning and execution of the Victorian Exploring Expedition of 1860 and 1861.

The success of expeditions so often depends on medical support. The contribution of medicine, particularly preventive medicine, ensured the success of eighteenth and nineteenth century land and naval explorations in Australia. In the era of the early European history of Queensland, those with medical knowledge contributed to the health of their fellows and the goals of their outreach. Such included Dr Walter Scott at the Moreton Bay Settlement (1824-26), Leichhardt on his expedition of 1844-46 from Brisbane to Port Essington; and Elsey during his trek from Victoria River to Brisbane in 1855-56.

Ferdinand von Mueller (1825-1896), the pharmacist and botanist who held an honorary Doctorate of Medicine from Rostock, was a leading proponent for an expedition to traverse the continent from south to north. Such, it was proposed, would determine the speculative existence of an inland sea; and generate the first traverse map of Australia which might form a reference for subsequent exploration. Von Mueller had first-hand experience of the importance of preventive medicine during AC Gregory’s North West Australian Expedition of 1855 and 1856. Von Mueller himself had spent 16 months as a member of that expedition which finally arrived at Moreton Bay after 8000 kilometres of overland travel. His experience was a factor in the Royal Society of Victoria’s decision to sponsor the Victorian Exploring Expedition, known universally today as the Burke and Wills Expedition.

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William John Wills (1834-1861), former medical student, unlicensed surgeon, meteorologist and surveyor on the Victorian Exploring Expedition of 1860-61.

(Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales)
The planning of the Expedition was amateurish and incompetent. As one of Burke’s biographers has written:

its route [of the Expedition], from Cooper’s Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria, was decided less than a month before it set out. Burke’s instructions, which were sent after him because they were not ready in time, were incoherent … Burke was a death or glory man and he achieved both.\(^5\)

The responsibility for this ineptitude lay particularly with the three leading members of the Expedition Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria, all of whom were ‘medical’ men.\(^6\) Although leaders in their own fields of botany and biology, clinical medicine and medical politics, their strategic planning or lack of it, turned out to be inappropriate in the face of the logistic challenges which lay ahead. Besides von Mueller himself, they were Dr David Wilkie and Dr John Macadam. Dr David Elliot Wilkie (1815-1885) was a Melbourne surgeon who was President (from 1859) of the Medical Society of Victoria and Editor (from 1858) of the *Australian Medical Journal*.\(^7\) Dr John Macadam (1827-1865), Fellow of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, was a skilled chemist and the founder of forensic medicine in Australia.\(^8\) Macadam, after whom in 1858 von Mueller named the macadamia (or Queensland) nut, *Macadamia integrifolia*, was Secretary of the Exploration Committee for the proposed Expedition.\(^9\) The initial Progress Report of the Expedition, published in the *Transactions* of the Royal Society of Victoria in 1860, was written by these three medical men.\(^10\)

There was a huge rush of applications for the 15 places (not including the camel-drivers)\(^11\) on the proposed Expedition to traverse the continent from south to north. Two of these were filled by medical men. Dr Hermann Beckler (1828-1914) was initially chosen as the third-in-charge to the leader, Robert O’Hara Burke. Beckler had failed in an attempt to establish a practice in the Moreton Bay Settlement in Brisbane in 1856; but had later practised as a general medical practitioner at Ipswich and at Warwick between 1857 and 1859.\(^12\) William John Wills (1834-1861), former medical student from Devon and unlicensed surgeon at the Ballarat gold fields and at Wannon, was appointed as meteorologist, surveyor and cartographer.\(^13\)

Although the overall planning has been condemned by historians, some aspects of the medical preparations were appropriate. The provision of lime-juice was important. In addition, the ‘45 yards of green gossamer for veils’\(^14\) reflected von Mueller’s own experience with Elsey’s success in preventing scurvy at Victoria River in 1855; and ensuring some relief from the torment of bush flies with the consequences of the threat of ‘blight’ (trachoma) in the summer heat of central Australia. Burke, contemptuous of these ‘cursed impedimenta’, was to jettison both citrus juice and head veils at Balranald on the Murrumbidgee River, 380 kilometres north of Melbourne.\(^15\)
The Expedition was the most expensive in the history of Australian exploration. It cost £60 000 and was to cost seven lives. Soon after leaving Melbourne, Beckler became disillusioned with the Expedition. After Burke’s fracas with his second-in-command, George James Landells, Beckler resigned when the team reached Menindee, on the Darling River. This proved to be personally prudent. However, for a doctor to abandon an expedition is an infamous thing. Half-a-century later, when Dr Whetter refused to work on the 1911 Australasian Antarctic Expedition (the *Aurora* expedition), the leader Sir Douglas Mawson described his actions as “a criminal matter”.

By contrast with Burke’s inexperience and inappropriateness as a leader, and Landell’s abandonment and Beckler’s dereliction of duty, every account of William Wills’ role attests to the latter’s integrity and skill. What was Wills’ medical role on the Burke and Wills Expedition? This paper describes some personal research concerning Wills’ early life; and reviews his medical training and experience in the perspective of the Expedition’s fatal outcome of 1861.

**Wills’ Early Life**

William John Wills was born on 5 January 1834 at Totnes, an ancient and prosperous cloth town on the River Dart. Wills’ father, William Wills, was a surgeon (MRCS 1827) practising at The Plains in Totnes. A first cousin twice-removed was Henry Thomas Dundas Le Vesconte, first lieutenant of HMS *Erebus* which later foundered as part of the Franklin Expedition (1848) in search for the Northwest Passage. Details of young William John Wills’ life are known from the posthumous publications (in 1863) of his father, who recorded details of his son’s early life. The young Wills was precocious and was schooled from the age of three. He enjoyed visits to a nautical instrument maker’s workshop at nearby Devonport. At the age of 11, he shot rooks for food (rook pie) in the grounds of the family residence but otherwise had a particular love and care for the welfare of animals. His surgeon father taught him astronomy; and together father and son measured the nightly movements of a comet in 1845.

William John Wills was known as John, but often by one of four nicknames, Gentleman John, Well Boy, Old Jack and Gentleman Jack. He was enrolled at Ashburton Grammar School when he was 11-years-of-age, and remained at that school for the ensuing six years. Together with my research colleague, Dr Christopher Gardner-Thorpe, we have identified Wills’ initials carved on a bench in his old schoolroom, extant in Totnes in the twenty-first century. As a boy, Wills was of a quiet and retiring personality. It was recorded by his Headmaster, Mr Paige at Ashburton Grammar School, that:

> It vexes me that John [William John Wills] does not take a top prize, for I see by his countenance that he understands as much, if not more, than anybody in my school; yet from want of readiness in answering he allows very inferior lads to win the tickets from him.
Socially, Wills was a favourite and good at games. He left school at 16 and was articled (30 May 1850) as an apprentice surgeon to his father. He learnt how to extract teeth and to bleed patients, sometimes five or six times day.21 Father and son made several visits to London – in 1851 to see the instruments and mechanical inventions on display at the Great Exhibition; and in 1852 to visit Guy’s Hospital with his father. As a medical student he stayed in London during the summer of 1852 and attended a course of practical chemistry conducted by Dr John Stenhouse at St Bartholomew’s Hospital.

**Emigration to Australia**

The first major gold rush to Australia followed the announcement on 12 February 1851 of Edward H Hargraves’ discovery of gold at Summer Hill, near Orange. In June 1851, Jimmy Irving, the Aboriginal child servant of the local doctor, Dr Kerr, found a gold nugget weighing 106 pound (‘Kerr’s Hundredweight’), then the largest nugget ever found in the world, between the Macquarie River and Meroo Creek. Rich fields were proclaimed at Ballarat and Bendigo also in 1851. In Europe, news of these finds fired the imagination of speculators and intending prospectors. William Wills, the surgeon in Totnes, immediately bought shares in the Melbourne Gold Mining Company and planned a journey to Australia in the Devon summer of 1852. He enlisted as the ship’s surgeon on the Ballarat, intending to take his eldest child, William John Wills and another younger son, Thomas Wills, with him. It was the women folk left at home who bore the brunt of such adventuring and it is recorded that William John Wills proposed to his father:

> My dear father, I have a favour to ask of you. I see my mother is grieving, although she says nothing, at our all leaving her together. Let Tom and me go [to Australia] alone. I will pledge myself to take care of him.22

This solicitude was expressed in the context of the recent death (23 May 1852) of the Wills’ nine-month-old daughter, Elizabeth Rose. Wills’ surgeon father decided to postpone his own trip but allowed his sons to emigrate.

The two boys emigrated to Australia on the Janet Mitchell, on the ship’s maiden voyage. The ship left Dartmouth on 1 October 1852. Wills typically kept a diary on the voyage. His diaries, edited posthumously by his father, describe how the 18-year-old medical student learnt the complicated names of the ship’s rigging, acquired the art of splicing, went aloft with the sailors during reefing in storms and studied books on navigation and trigonometry.23 The two Wills’ brothers arrived at Williamstown, Port Phillip on 3 January 1853. They spent the next months initially boarding at a small four-roomed cottage in Melbourne at a cost of £200 per year. Subsequently, they worked as bank clerks (The Royal Bank Company) and then as shepherds on a sheep station at Deniliquin in New South Wales, 50 kilometres from the Victorian border.
The father, Surgeon William Wills, followed his sons, arriving in Melbourne in August 1853. After eight weeks of searching he found them in October. The trio then moved to Ballarat where Surgeon William Wills (father) established a medical and surgical practice. William John Wills attended to patients in his father’s absence and also opened a gold office near the surgeon’s tent. There he weighed quartz and gold in air and in water, using the physical principles of relative density to determine the quantity of gold nuggets in quartz. Wills soon left his father’s practice and moved to the Wannon District of Victoria, commencing a solo practice in surgery. He was 19-years-of-age but as he was unregistered and unlicensed he found he could not openly charge patients.

Wills bought some surveying instruments, noted in a letter to his father dated 20 March 1857. Subsequently he was appointed as an assistant to the Astronomical and Magnetical Observatory at Flagstaff Hill in Melbourne. There he served under Professor George Neumeyer, the Government Meteorologist and Director of the Magnetic Survey of Victoria. Professor Neumeyer was an active member of The Royal Society of Victoria, and it was this connection, with Neumeyer as the pivot, which led to the young ‘surgeon’s’ application and acceptance as a member of the proposed Victorian Exploring Expedition, under the auspices of the Royal Society of Victoria, to cross the continent from south to north.

Why was William John Wills chosen as an expedition member, competing against the more than 700 applicants who applied to be expeditioners on the proposed transect journey across the continent? He possessed a number of personal and professional qualifications which, one conjectures, offered much to the Selection Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria. He had a considerable knowledge of biology, was a partly-trained doctor, had practised as an unlicensed surgeon, was skilled in astronomy and meteorological measurement and, at the age of 26 years, was fit and well. However, the most important criterion in the selection of expeditioners is their personalities. His father, admittedly not an unbiased observer, wrote that his son had:

An expressive eye that always outstripped his tongue, golden hair, a thick tawny beard, a smile at once intellectual and sympathising, a light, clean, agile frame.

In a letter to one of his younger brothers at Totnes, Wills had written of his view of the importance of an inquiring mind, and of personal humility:

As the great object of science is the correction of error and the investigation of truth, it necessarily leads all those that feel an interest in it to a higher appreciation and desire for truth…never try to show off your knowledge, especially in scientific matters. It is a sin that certain persons we know have been guilty of; the first step is to learn your own ignorance, and if ever you feel inclined to make a display, you may be sure you have as yet learned nothing.
The surgeon chosen for the Expedition was Dr Hermann Beckler who, like the President of the Society, was also from Germany. The superbly equipped Expedition (21 tons of stores including 6 tons of firewood)! left Royal Park in Melbourne on the 20 August 1860, followed by a huge retinue of well-wishers.31

**Wills on the Expedition**

In spite of its auspicious start, trouble soon broke out. Accounts of the ill-fated Expedition have been recounted and analysed numerous times.32 By the time the party had reached Menindee on the Darling River in central western New South Wales, irresolvable personal difficulties had arisen. Landells, the second-in-command, was dismissed by Burke. Following Landells’ dismissal, Beckler resigned because he did not like the way Burke had spoken to and interacted with Landells. Wills was promoted as Burke’s second-in-command.

As the team pressed northwards, the unwieldiness of the baggage train became obvious and Burke constantly had to dump stores. The team travelled, under Burke’s insistence, but against other advice, in the hottest part of the year in some of the driest parts of Australia. The party (a residual of 8 men, 16 camels and 15 horses) reached Cooper Creek on 11 November 1860.33 They remained there for five weeks consolidating their position and establishing a base. Wills undertook daily astronomical and meteorological observations. On December 15, the expeditioners had killed a horse for food. Wills wrote to his sister (15 December, 1860):

[I am] getting into that robust state of health, always enjoyed when in the bush with a tremendous appetite and [where I] could eat anything. One of the articles of consumption was horseflesh which was very nice and you would scarcely know it from beef. 34

On 16 December 1860, leaving William Brahe in charge of the depot at Cooper Creek, Burke with Wills, Charles Gray and John King, set out northwards for the Gulf of Carpentaria. The explorers traversed lands of the Yandruwandha, the Mitakoodi and the Kalkadoon Tribes, Traditional Owners who lived in excellent health but in what to European eyes were inhospitable and relatively barren regions.

It was ultimately to be a lack of local knowledge about medicine, nutrition and botany which was to be the death of Burke, Wills and Gray. Local bush food was available with a high vitamin content; but it was invisible to expeditioners’ eyes, particularly those of Burke from Ireland and Wills from the seafaring county of Devon. By April 1861, one conjectures that the first signs of avitaminosis were setting in. On 8 April, Gray was thought to be pretending not to be able to walk. One conjectures that this was almost certainly due to acute arthritis from scurvy.35 Burke and Wills reached
the impenetrable mangrove swamps of the southern tip of the Gulf and set out southwards on the return journey – it is now known with symptoms of malnutrition. Gray died on 17 April possibly from avitaminosis.

At the ‘Dig Tree’ depot, Camp LXV, by 15 April 1861, Brahe and McDonough had also developed joint pains and swellings which the expeditioners regarded as sprains. It was undoubtedly scurvy. On the morning of 21 April 1861, the base party at the ‘Dig Tree’ depot left to return to Melbourne, already having waited an extra month after their planned vigil for the return of the northern party. Later that day, 21 April 1861, the exhausted and sick threesome from the Gulf reached Camp LXV at Cooper Creek. They found the ‘Dig Tree’ and the provisions left by Brahe – flour, oatmeal, rice, sugar and dried meat. The three expeditioners ate oatmeal porridge with sugar.

On 28 April 1861 a surviving camel sank in a waterhole and the next day they shot it, ate some meat and dried some more. They still had bread, sugar, dried ginger, tea and cocoa. It is now appreciated that there was insufficient vitamin B and vitamin C in this diet. They chewed ‘bedgery’, the pituri of many Queensland Aboriginal groups. Pituri is a mood-altering plant, chewed as dried-leaf preparations picked from the Australian native corkwood, *Duboisia hopwoodi*, now known to contain atropine, hyoscine and hyoscyamine. If ingested, this plant produces a syndrome with features of widely dilated pupils, hot dry skin, loss of appetite and a depersonalised dream-like state which may progress to delusions. With the knowledge of hindsight, it was the worst thing the dying expeditioners could have eaten.

The expeditioners also apparently knew that the Aboriginal People used nardoo as a food in various parts of inland Australia. What was apparently unknown was that it had to be ground, mixed with water and baked before it was safe to eat. By late April and early May 1861, the three survivors began eating nardoo – probably the quatrefoil leaves as well as the sporocarps which grow on stems near the base of the plant. On 10 May 1861, Wills recorded that they searched, unsuccessfully, for more nardoo. However, the local people, the Yandruwandha, were sympathetic to their plight and gave them fresh fish, seeds and nardoo. Nardoo is the aquatic perennial rhizomatous fern, *Marsilea drummondii*, whose botanical identification was confirmed in 1918 by the anthropologist Baldwin Spencer.

Besides the nardoo, the solicitous Yandruwandha gave some seeds to the surviving trio. The expeditioners boiled them. Wills described them as ‘large beans called by the blacks padlu, which were sweet and resembled a French chestnut and there were plenty of them.’ These were also referred to by the Yandruwandha People as ‘mudlu’. A German missionary of the early twentieth century, Johann Reuther, suggested that this species was also described by the Diyari cognate word, ‘paldru’ which he listed in a lexicon as ‘shrub,
pods burst open, pop-saltbush’. The Pop Saltbush, *Atriplex holocarpa*, is relatively common in western Queensland and central Australia. Its fruits are initially globular and succulent but are poor in nutrition and are eaten by herbivores only under starvation conditions. If this was the species which Wills described in his diary, the seeds were hard and any vitamin C would have been destroyed by boiling.

On 10 June 1861 the explorers, weak and sick, shot a crow. On 13 June 1861 after eating more nardoo, Wills became progressively weaker and was scarcely able to move. Wills probably became suspicious about the medical side-effects of eating unprepared nardoo and ‘determined on beginning to chew tobacco and eat less nardoo in the hopes that it might induce some change in the system’. He developed painful constipation, a severe and intractable side-effect of chewing *Duboisia* leaves.

By the 20 June 1861 Wills had become prostrated. He wrote in his diary:

I can not understand this nardoo at all – it certainly will not agree with me in any form; we are reduced to it alone, we manage to consume four to five pounds per day between us; it appears to be quite indigestible, and can not possibly be sufficiently nutritious to sustain life by itself.

In Wills’ diaries, published posthumously by his father, one notes many references to clinical observations made by the dying erstwhile medical student. At an unknown period before his death, Wills recorded his own pulse rate. This was 48 beats per minute. A pathologically slow pulse is a sign of cardiac weakness, itself a feature of beri-beri, or vitamin B deficiency. Wills died on or about the 30 June 1861. King survived.

Several search parties were assembled to search for the lost Expedition. As it transpired all the search parties set out after the explorers had died. William Landsborough’s rescue party left Brisbane on 24 August 1861, to rendezvous with Frederick Walker’s rescue party which left Rockhampton. On 21 September 1861, Howitt’s rescue party from Melbourne found the bodies of the dead explorers and King.

*Plaque on the Wills’ Monument, at 3 The Plains, Totnes, Devon, United Kingdom, 1984. (Photograph, courtesy of Dr Christopher Gardner-Thorpe of Exeter, United Kingdom)*
Numerous memorials have been erected to both Burke and Wills. They stand in Elizabeth Street in Melbourne, at Ballarat and in several other Australian country towns. In the Marldon churchyard, in Devon, a stone reads:

In Loving Memory of Sarah Mary Elizabeth
Wife of William Wills Surgeon of Torquay and Mother of
William J Wills the Australian Explorer

A granite obelisk was erected in Totnes in 1864 to the memory of William John Wills. It complements the annual bloom of *Eremophila willsi* in the dry central regions of central Australia.

**A Medical Perspective**

Dietary deficiency diseases were known from the time, in 1752, of James Lind’s clinical experiments for the cure of scurvy.\(^4^8\) It was established that there was something in fresh fruit and vegetables – something which survived in the preparation of marmalade of carrot, lime juice, rob of orange or pickled sauerkraut – which prevented scurvy. It was not until 1911 that the essential substances, vitamins, were discovered and named. Vitamins cannot be synthesised by humans and must be obtained from the diet. Vitamin C deficiency as the cause of scurvy was not discovered until 1928, although its clinical ravages had determined the outcome of expeditions over the preceding three centuries.\(^4^9\) Scurvy causes weakness, bleeding, arthritis and anaemia. Lack of one of the B vitamins, B\(^1\) or thiamine, causes beri-beri. Its features are heart failure, muscle-weakeness, paralysis and anaemia. Both deficiency diseases are potentially fatal.

The ‘retrospectascope’
reveals that the expeditioners’ diet contained little vitamin C. The first symptoms described during the Expedition were undoubtedly those of early scurvy. If a diet is deficient in vitamin C, the first symptoms of scurvy appear after four weeks of inadequate intake. Some vitamin C is obtained from fresh meat. The fresh horsemeat, camel meat and bird flesh, consumed on several occasions during the journey, undoubtedly prolonged the ultimate fatal contribution of scurvy to the expeditioners’ deaths. Perhaps of greater significance was the onset and ultimately fatal effects of avitaminosis B. The body stores of thiamine are now known to last for a maximum of 20 days. There was probably minimally sufficient thiamine in the expeditioner’s diets. However, research in 1977 revealed that an enzyme that is present in certain foods contains thiaminase, an enzyme which destroys thiamine in the intestine even before the vitamin can be absorbed.

Following reports of thiamine deficiency in sheep, McCleary and Chick showed that under certain seasonal conditions, the sporocarps and rhizones of nardoo, *Marsilea drummondii*, contain extremely high levels of the enzyme, thiaminase I; and that this was the cause of clinical effects in sheep, similar to those of human beri-beri.50 Two types of nardoo poisoning occur in sheep when the animals are forced, because of starvation, to eat *Marsilea* fern. In one type of poisoning, animals separate from the flock, become unaware of their surroundings and behave as if blind. They collapse and die within one to two days. A second syndrome of nardoo poisoning which affects sheep causes difficulty in breathing, collapse and death within six to 12 hours.51

Both fresh water mussels and the flour of unprepared nardoo are rich in thiaminase.52 The Yandruwandha had, for millennia, subjected the nardoo seeds to prolonged washing; and then subsequent grinding and roasting. This destroys the thiaminase and thus prevents destruction of thiamine in other ingested foods in the stomach. The Aboriginal People also roasted their fresh water mussels, a process which also destroys thiaminase.

Much of the food that is available in the dry outback of Australia, ‘bush tucker’, is hidden from Western eyes. Many grass seeds are little more than fine powder, but are highly nutritious in essential aminoacids, proteins and vitamins. Aboriginal Peoples have exploited these since the Dreamtime. Perhaps by trial and error and by serendipity, our Aboriginal forebears have, over their long sojourn in the Australian outback, learned to exploit these important food resources.53

One conjectures that the expeditioners died as a combination of four coalescing deleterious factors. The first of these was beri beri due to lack of vitamin B, caused by a sub-optimal diet deficient in thiamine; and the presence of novel foods (at least to the expeditioners) containing thiaminase. Lacking the cultural background to correctly prepare these before ingestion,
what little vitamin B was ingested was destroyed by the nardoo enzymes. Secondly, the potentially fatal effects of scurvy (hypovitaminosis C) were added to the pathogenic effects of hypovitaminosis B. Thirdly, starvation itself was undoubtedly a factor. Fourthly, the toxic effects of ingesting the Australian native corkwood, Duboisia – altering gastrointestinal function, suppressing appetite, reducing food absorption and producing intractable constipation – inescapably aggravated the underlying potentially fatal mixed avitaminosis.

The three major lessons from the Expedition were firstly that successful exploration needs to acknowledge the importance of psychology, particularly in the selection of personnel; and, in matters of leadership, collegiate interaction and co-operation. Secondly, the threat of unknown toxins in novel foods is always present. It is unlikely that there was sufficient knowledge known in that era to save the explorers. The effects of corkwood and pituri on the human body were not described by Joseph Bancroft from his home in Brisbane until 1872. However, if Beckler had not abandoned the Expedition, his knowledge of scurvy prevention may have helped ameliorate the combined avitaminosis syndromes which were to prove fatal.

The third major lesson was the importance of nutrition, and its primary importance in both naval and land exploration. Both the President of the Royal Society of Victoria, Ferdinand von Mueller, and the other medical members of the Committee (e.g. Wilkie and Macadam) knew of the history of fresh greens in the maintenance of health. However, Burke was ignorant of such facts, and among other stores which were abandoned by the overburdened Expedition, had jettisoned the citrus juice before Menindee had been reached.

The lessons from the Victorian Exploring Expedition apply no less today to all who adventure, albeit in a contracting world. They apply also to daily life. The physical memorials to Burke and Wills endure as a legacy and serve as a lesson to those who understand the details of their story. That legacy is the message of the importance of managing interpersonal relations and of maintaining a healthy diet; in particular, avoidance of harmful substances which, through ignorance, can damage an otherwise healthy, enjoyable and adventurous life.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr Christopher Gardner-Thorpe of Exeter and Dr Damien Gardner-Thorpe of Bath; and Mrs Lynne Packer of the Royal Children’s Hospital, Brisbane for much encouragement.
Endnotes


NOTE:


19 W Wills, [ed father of William John Wills (1834-1861)], *A Successful Exploration through the Interior of Australia, from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria, from the journals and letters of William John Wills*, London, Bentley, 1863.


Wills, A Successful Exploration…


W Wills. [ed father of William John Wills (1834-1861)], A Successful Exploration through the Interior of Australia, from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria, from the journals and letters of William John Wills, London, Bentley, 1863.

W Wills, A Successful Exploration…

For comments on firewood, refer to D Phoenix, ‘Burke and Wills – an overview of the Expedition, its preparation, planning and outcomes’, *Queensland History Journal*, vol. 21, no. 8, February 2012, p. 502.


Named Cooper's Creek at the time of the Burke and Wills Expedition.

Wills, A Successful Exploration…


Pearn, ‘Corked up, Clinical hyoscine poisoning alkaloids of the native corkwood’, pp. 422-3.


Clarke, Aboriginal Plant Collectors, Ref. 22, pp. 124-5.


Wills. A Successful Exploration…

Pearn, ‘Corked up, Clinical hyoscine poisoning alkaloids of the native corkwood’, pp. 422-3.

Wills. A Successful Exploration…

J Lind, A treatise of the scurvy. In three parts. Containing an inquiry into the nature, causes and cure, of that disease. Together with a critical and chronological view of what has been published on the subject, Edinburgh, Kincaid and Donaldson, 1753.


The Literature of Burke and Wills

Ian Hadwen*

A tragedy.¹

A cruel and inevitable defeat.²

This disastrous and foolhardy expedition... The largest, the most expensive and worst led expedition yet seen in Australia.³

Burke was a pathfinder, and although he made disastrous mistakes and hasty decisions, as a man in the field faced with the physical task of conquering a barren wilderness, his display of courage and dogged endurance grips the imagination.⁴

An unbelievable adventure story of hubris and heroism – the attempted mapping of the mysterious Australian interior in 1860 and the explorers who foolishly caused their demise.⁵

In 1861, the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the demise of its principals aroused national sympathy. However, from the beginning it was controversial, had stimulated enormous public interest and triggered debate. And this continues unabated. Along with Ned Kelly and Gallipoli, Robert O’Hara Burke and William John Wills have fired the imagination of Australians – historians, writers and artists as well as members of the general public.

Whether it be the human cost of the Expedition, the controversy over leadership, the extensive search expeditions it triggered, or just the Australian people’s love of the underdog, no other feat of Australian land exploration has stimulated so much writing. This is even more amazing when you consider that Burke’s diaries, although recovered, were scanty. In fact, the only substantial first hand account of the expedition in its entirety was that of second-in-command, William Wills.

The literature of Burke and Wills begins with the Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria for 1859 (Volume IV). The volume includes a Report of a Public Meeting held at the Mechanics Institute, Collins Street, Melbourne on January 23rd 1860 for the purpose of receiving the report of the Exploration Fund Committee. A total of £3199 5s 10d had been raised, plus the recently announced £6000 voted by the Victorian Parliament. The 1859 Transactions... also contain an article (with five lithographic plates by the author) entitled Observations on Donati’s Comet ... by Ludwig Becker Esq. – artist and scientist to the Victorian Exploring Expedition. Becker’s death was one of the most tragic events of the whole ordeal.

In 1860, the Philosophical Institute of Victoria underwent a name change to the Royal Society of Victoria. The Society’s inaugural President’s Address

*Dr Ian Hadwen is a Medical Practitioner and a former President of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland.
delivered by the Governor of Victoria Sir Henry Barkly was printed, and contains numerous references to preparations for the upcoming Expedition into the interior.

Over the next three years, a number of progress reports of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria were issued, culminating in 1862 of a report announcing the disappearance of Burke and Wills. This was followed by a final report in response to the damning Government report into the Society’s mismanagement of the expedition. This final report, published in 1863, consists of 104 pages of single spaced small print foolscap, containing the diary of Wright, a report by William Brahe, Will’s journal from Cooper Creek to Carpentaria and John King’s narrative.

The three major Melbourne newspapers of the day had been full of the Victorian Exploring Expedition, each with a different approach. The Argus was strongly supportive of Burke as leader of the Expedition. The Age was critical. Its editorial approach was that Burke’s appointment as leader was ‘an affair of cliquery’ which had seen him selected without regard to his suitability.7

The Herald was enthusiastic initially about Burke’s appointment, declaring the Committee’s selection process ‘exhaustive’ and ‘conducted with strict impartiality’. However, it was the Herald that later published ‘rumours of a very grave character’ about disharmony in the Expedition group, and later suggested that Burke had fallen out with his more independent men, and that he would be able to retain only those ‘simple minded and easily wrought upon’.8 After the Expedition’s demise was known, the Herald referred to the Exploration Committee in such terms as ‘scandalous negligence’ and ‘foolish blundering and bragging throughout’.9

On 15 September 1861, AW Howitt’s party found King. It was not until 3 November 1861 that news of the fate of the Expedition reached Melbourne. On that day the Argus published a one page press sheet – The Victorian Exploration Expedition / The Continent Crossed / Death of Burke and Wills / Their remains found. By 14 November 1861 five different pamphlets had been published in Melbourne, containing extracts from the diaries of Burke and of Wills, King’s account of their experiences after returning to Cooper Creek and even part of Howitt’s journal.

All three major newspapers were involved. In terms of print runs, the Argus was the most successful. The first issue was entitled, The Burke and Wills Exploring Expedition: an account of the crossing the continent of Australia, from Cooper’s Creek to Carpentaria, Reprinted from the Argus, Melbourne, Wilson and MacKinnon. 1861. This consisted of 32 pages of text in double column.

A second issue soon followed, with the reference to the Argus omitted from the title page, and two leaves added – one titled Biographical Sketches and
the other *Heroes of the Victorian Expedition*. By the end of 1861, the *Argus* pamphlet had gone through five separate printings, including those copies embellished by Burke’s last dispatch, Wills’ last letter to his father, a map of the explorer’s route and illustrations, namely portraits of Burke, Wills, King and Gray.  

After release of the report of the Victorian Government’s Burke and Wills Commission of Enquiry, Wilson and MacKinnon published *Supplementary Pamphlet to the Burke and Wills Exploring Expedition: containing The Evidence taken before the Commission of Enquiry*. The first edition was illustrated with the portraits of John King and Charles Gray, and not the expedition leaders.

A pamphlet based on reports from the *Age* was also published. It was titled, *The Victorian Exploring Expedition. Diary of Burke and Wills, Journal of Howitt and Narrative of King*. Although published at the *Age* office, it had a number of imprints on the title page, representing the various booksellers of Melbourne. It was originally a 32 page pamphlet but was followed by a 40 page edition with added portraits of Burke and Wills together with biographical sketches of their lives. Both editions of the *Age* pamphlet are rare, the 40 page edition especially so.

However, neither are as rare as the small publication that emanated from the *Herald* office. Its full title was *Burke and his Companions. The Victorian Expedition; from its Origin to the return from Carpentaria, and the death of Burke, Wills and Gray, from starvation; with Burke’s and Wills’ Journals, King’s Narrative, Howitt’s Diary*. It is a publication of 176 pages. Only four copies are known to have survived; two in the National library of Australia, one in the State Library of Victoria and one copy that occasionally re-emerges on antiquarian book catalogues, most recently at the Australian Book Auctions April 2011 sale.

Another rarity is a publication by De Gruchy and Leigh titled, *Illustrations to the Diaries of Burke and Wills Expedition to Carpentaria*. It consists of eight tinted lithographs by artist Cuthbert Clarke, who was staff artist for the *Illustrated Melbourne Post* at the time. The magazine *Yoeman and Australian Acclimatiser* in its 14 December 1861 edition issued, as a supplement, a folding map by DeGruchy and Leigh showing the tracks of the explorers from Cooper Creek to Carpentaria, as well as the course of Howitt’s party. This is also a rarity.

There is one other rare pamphlet from this era, namely *Review of the Labours of Several Explorers of Australia by Thomas Foster; ten years resident in Victoria: also the Narrative of Mr John King, sole survivor of the Burke and Wills Expedition*. This item is illustrated by a wood engraving of Burke’s grave at Cooper Creek, based on a sketch done by Howitt.
Most major feats of nineteenth century Australian land exploration were followed by a significant publication (most commonly from prominent English publishers) and based on the edited journal of the expedition leader and/or, occasionally, a senior member of the party. In this case, both the leader and his deputy had died. Although their diaries were retrieved, Burke’s diary was hardly of publishable quality.

However, in 1862 Smith Elder & Co of London published Robert O’Hara Burke and the Australian Exploring Expedition of 1860 by Andrew Jackson. Jackson was an officer in Burke’s father’s regiment. The book was based on Burke’s diary, his dispatches and other official documents. It is a small octavo publication of approximately 230 pages and contains an engraved map outlining not only Burke and Wills’ trek, but also that of their South Australian rival, John McDouall Stuart. The book arrived in Melbourne in the first half of 1863.

In mid-1862 Wills’ father, Dr William Wills, returned to England where he edited and arranged publication of his son’s journals and letters. In 1863 Richard Bentley of London published A Successful Exploration through the Interior of Australia. From Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria. This was the most extensive of the contemporary publications and also came with a folding map showing the route taken by Burke and Wills as well as that of the McKinlay relief expedition. Apart from the controversial use of the word ‘Successful’ in the title, the book is also noteworthy for the use of garish, highly decorative and inappropriate end papers in some copies. Most copies were issued with the standard chocolate grey endpapers.

The success, if any, of the Victorian Expedition lay not in the journals or the geographic or scientific recordings of Burke and Wills, but in those of the four relief expeditions. Howitt led the Victorian Contingent Party, reformulated as the Victorian Exploring Party, which was established by the Exploration Committee with only slightly less dithering and conflict than characterised the formation of the original Victorian Exploring Expedition.

After his party’s success in finding King and the bodies of Burke and Wills, Howitt was commissioned by the Exploration Committee to undertake further exploration out from Cooper Creek, as well as to retrieve the explorers’ remains. Despite the success of both his missions, Howitt’s journals and dispatches were never published in a single volume. Apart from what is contained in his father’s two-volume History of Discovery in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand (published in 1865 and to be dealt with later), Howitt’s story was only published in the form of printed texts of lectures he delivered.

The first was titled Reminiscences of the rescuer, a lecture given at Queen’s College University of Melbourne on 15 April 1890 and published in the Argus
the following day. The second was titled *An episode in the history of Australian exploration*, published in the *Journal of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science*. The third is Howitt’s address as President of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, published in the *Journal* of that organisation in 1907. In addition, there exist a few copies of a bound typescript entitled *Search for Burke and Wills. AW Howitt’s Despatch*, illustrated with a hand-drawn map on oilcloth.

The South Australian Government voted £1200 for a relief expedition led by John McKinlay, a Scotsman and experienced bushman. McKinlay’s party departed *Blanchwater Station* in far north South Australia on 24 September 1861, travelled to Cooper Creek and from there headed to the swamps of the Gulf of Carpentaria. They had hoped to meet the *Victoria* at the mouth of the Albert River. Commander Norman and the *Victoria* had already left for Melbourne. McKinlay and his party set out for Port Denison, reaching there in August 1862. McKinlay and some of his party returned by sea to Adelaide. Before the end of that year, McKinlay’s journal had been printed in the South Australian *Parliamentary Papers*. Early the following year, McKinlay’s journal was published by FF Bailliere of Melbourne, complete with three large folding maps loose in an end pocket. The paper used was of very poor quality and it is difficult to find a reasonable copy these days.

The most substantial publication to come out of McKinlay’s relief expedition was from London publisher Sampson Low, Son & Co entitled *Tracks of McKinlay and Party across Australia* by John Davis who was a member of the expedition. His book relied on McKinlay’s journal as well as his own. The book was edited by William Westgrath, a prominent Victorian businessman and politician, and himself an author of several books. Westgrath also wrote a 70 page essay, *Introductory View, Recent Australian Exploratory Expeditions and their Results* for the book. Davis’ book is illustrated with numerous lithographic plates and a large folding map. Historian Valmai Hankel comments:

‘Tracks of McKinlay and party across Australia’ is one of the most readable and entertaining of all the explorer’s accounts. Davis writes with wit and humour, often providing picturesque details, anecdotes and ironical comments.17

Another early publication relating to the South Australian Relief Expedition was a 38 page pamphlet, closely printed in double column and with a portrait of McKinlay. It was largely a reprint of McKinlay’s journal as printed in the South Australian Parliamentary Papers and emanated from the offices of E & D Syme of Melbourne. It is now exceedingly rare with Jonathan Wantrup knowing of only four surviving copies. One of those recently resurfaced in a bookseller’s catalogue with an asking price of $12 000.

After some 20 years, two more rare publications pertaining to McKinlay’s
expedition appeared. The first is entitled, *Sketch of Explorations by the late John McKinlay in the Interior of Australia, 1861-2. Being a paper read before the Cowal Society, October 28, 1878*. The paper was delivered by Duncan Whyte. It is a 48 page booklet published in Glasgow in 1881. The second is George Loyau’s *The Gawler Handbook: A record of the Rise and Progress of the Important Town; to which are added Memoirs of McKinlay the Explorer and Dr Nott*. It was published in Adelaide by Goodfellow and Hele in 1880. In its better format, it is illustrated with six lithographs and 17 mounted photographs.

The Queensland government contributed the princely sum of £500 to a relief expedition. The advice of AC Gregory was sought and he appointed William Landsborough, another Scottish bushman and pastoralist, to lead it. The Victorian Government chartered the brig *Firefly* under Captain Kirby to pick up Landsborough’s party, including 30 horses from Brisbane. The *Firefly* left Brisbane on 24 August 1861 in company with HMCSS *Victoria* captained by Commander Norman. Another relief expedition led by Frederick Walker had left from Rockhampton and was to rendezvous with Landsborough and Norman at the Albert River.

The *Firefly* struck heavy weather and lost contact with the *Victoria*. According to Landsborough, Kirby and his crew were drunk and discipline aboard the *Firefly* was non-existent. The *Firefly* grounded near Sir Charles Hardy’s Islands about 40 km east of Cape Grenville off the Cape York Peninsula. Norman supervised repairs and managed to tow the *Firefly* as a hulk to the mouth of the Albert River. There the hulk remained. After a nine month absence from Melbourne and with much criticism of his captaincy, Kirby published through the *Herald* office, a small pamphlet attempting to justify his conduct. The pamphlet was titled, *Narrative of a Voyage from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria (1862)*, another now very rare item.19

It was intended that Walker’s party and Landsborough would meet up at the Albert River. By mid-November, however, Walker was nowhere to be seen. Commander Norman instructed Landsborough to proceed towards Central Mount Stuart and to return within 90 days. During this time, Walker arrived, lasted two weeks at the Albert River and headed off again, taking a different inland route. When Landsborough returned to the Albert River, Norman refused to show him the journals that Walker had entrusted to him. Landsborough left the depot, this time, on 10 February 1862, heading south. His party camped on the Warrego somewhere between present day Charleville and Cunnamulla when they were informed of the demise of Burke and Wills. Landsborough trekked down the Darling to Menindee and then to Melbourne.

Landsborough’s journal was first published in 1862 by Wilson and MacKinnon of Melbourne; it is titled, *Journal of Loughborough’s Expedition*
from Carpentaria, in search of Burke and Wills. With a map showing his route. It also had a lithographed frontis of the expedition members. In later issues, the imprint of FF Bailliere, Publisher, appeared on the title page initially and then on the upper board as well. A rare variant of the Bailliere issue contains Ferdinand Von Mueller’s 16 page supplement, Systematic Arrangement of the Plants noticed around the Gulf of Carpentaria. Mueller had sent Diedrich Henne, a botanical collector from the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, to accompany Landsborough.

An English edition was not published until 1866. It was edited by James Stuart Laurie and, although Landsborough’s journal was abridged, it did contain Mueller’s appendix. [Short title: Landsborough’s Exploration of Australia from Carpentaria to Melbourne. Publisher – Thomas Murby / Simpkin, Marshall & Co.] It appeared in cloth gilt and paperback versions.

Landsborough’s second-in-command, George Bourne, also went to print in a pamphlet of little over 50 pages, titled – Bourne’s Journal of Landsborough’s Expedition from Carpentaria in Search of Burke and Wills. It appeared in 1862 and the Melbourne publisher was HT Dwight. Bourne is at times critical of Landsborough. It is a very readable account of the expedition and, although copies are rare, it is an important addition to the literature of Burke and Wills. Allan McInnes drew heavily on it for his article mentioned previously. There was an English edition of Bourne’s account, with a different title, namely Australian Exploration. Journal of Landsborough’s Expedition in search of Burke and Wills, by G. Bourne, Second in Command.

The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society is a wonderful reference source on Australian exploration, even for the minor expeditions. Both the Burke and Wills Expedition and the relief expeditions were extensively covered. Volume XXXII, (32), 1862 reproduces not only Wills’ journal, but Burke’s journal and despatches, Brahe’s and Wright’s reports, King’s narrative and Howitt’s despatch on his party discovering John King. The relief expeditions and the diary of John McDouall Stuart make up the greater part of Volume XXXIII, 1863.

Walker’s journals were never commercially published. Apart from the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society and some snippets in the Argus, Walker’s journal is contained in the Papers of the Victorian Government, specifically within the reports and correspondence of Commander Norman titled: Exploration Expedition. Letter from Commander Norman, reporting the return of the “Victoria” from the Gulf of Carpentaria; together with Reports and Correspondence and, Report of Commander Norman of HMCS “Victoria”, together with Copy of his Journal on the Late Expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria. These are important sources in any study of the relief expeditions and seem to have been issued in two formats, one without maps.
and one with folding maps. It is thought that the latter format was exclusively for distribution to Members of Parliament. In the matter of Parliamentary Papers, mention should be made of another important primary source, the *Report of the Burke and Wills Commission*, published in the same year.

In 1864-65, there appeared an interesting trio of publications, all general histories of the discovery and exploration of Australia with significant sections devoted to the Burke and Wills and associated expeditions. The first to appear (1864) was a French publication by Charles Grad – *L’Australie Intérieure Explorations et Voyages à travers le Continent Australien*. Paris, Libraire de la Société de Géographie, 1864.

The first publication in English was by the South Australian, Rev. Julian E Tenison Woods, titled *A History of the Discovery and Exploration of Australia: or an account of the progress of geological discovery in that continent*, published by Sampson Low, Son and Marston of London in conjunction with HT Dwight in Melbourne. A few months later, Longman, Green of London published the *History of Discovery in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand from the earliest date to the present day*, by William Howitt, father of AW Howitt.

Each English publication comprised two volumes. Both contained extensive coverage of the Victorian Expedition (by now its title officially changed to the Burke and Wills Exploring Expedition) and of the relief expeditions. Tenison Woods’ work received critical acclaim, particularly in England. Howitt’s work largely went unnoticed. When, in 1867, his son sent copies to the leading newspapers in Melbourne, the result was one scathing review in the *Argus*, repeated in its weekly companion, the *Australasian*. It may have been mere coincidence, but Tenison Woods was a regular contributor to the *Australasian*. ²²

The literature aroused by Burke and Wills was not restricted to non-fiction. Several poets composed pieces, most were laudatory, including Henry Kendall (two poems) and later, Adam Lindsay Gordon. Catherine Martin’s poem on the subject, published in 1874 by George Robertson of Melbourne and titled *The Explorers and Other Poems by M.C.*, ran to 130 pages. ²³ Of Queensland interest is Elizabeth Berry’s *Australian Explorers in Rhyme*, which contains several pieces relating to Burke and Wills. Published in Brisbane in 1892, it is now extraordinarily rare. ²⁴ Overall, however, publication interest in Burke and Wills waned for 20 years from the late 1860s.

In 1889, William Pyke wrote *Australian Heroes and Adventurers*. The first part was devoted to Burke and Wills. Pyke’s book went through many editions and by the 1907 edition had sold 15 000 copies, more than any other account of the expedition. There had been earlier publications of a similar vein, such as Charles Eden’s *Australian Heroes*, first published in 1875, and George

Whereas Lockhart Morton had been the most vociferous critic of Burke and the expedition in the 1860s, the severest critic in the 1880s and 1890s was Ernest Favenc, himself an explorer and an author. Favenc’s *The History of Australian Exploration from 1788 to 1888* published simultaneously in England and Australia in 1888, and his later work, *The Explorers of Australia and their Life-work* (1908) are both useful references.

It was during this period that AW Howitt’s assessment of the Burke and Wills Expedition finally reached the printed page. His published lectures have been listed earlier in this paper. Howitt’s opinion was that Burke had committed several fatal errors of judgment through a combination of ignorance and impetuosity.²⁵ Both Favenc and Howitt mention Burke’s treatment (or maltreatment) of Charles Gray prior to his death. However, other authors of that period conveniently omit the matter from their accounts. In particular this is so of Rev. Michael Watson in his small volume *The Story of Burke and Wills: Sketches and Essays* (1911), and of a number of publications by the Victorian educationalists Charles Long and Rev. WH Fitchett.²⁶ Even Long and Fitchett could be critical. Although emphasising the bravery of Burke and Wills, they did refer to the Expedition in terms such as ‘remarkable blunder’, ‘sad disasters’, having ‘cost so much’ but ‘achieved so little’.

Between the World Wars, interest in Burke and Wills waned once again. After all, Australians had heroes from that other disaster, the Gallipoli Campaign, to occupy their minds. In this period, however, there appeared three scholarly publications on exploration by land that gave significant attention to the Burke and Wills and subsequent search expeditions: *South Australian Land Exploration* by Bessie Threadgill published in 1922, Robert Logan Jack’s *Northmost Australia* published in London in 1921 and in Australia the following year, and Ernest Scott’s *Australian Discovery by Land* 1929.

The first edition of *The Australian Encyclopaedia* appeared in 1925. Edited by Arthur Jose and Herbert Carter, its relevant entries are dismissive of Burke but complimentary of Wills. King and Gray barely get a mention, although the comment is made:

> on 21 April three emaciated figures staggered into the depot at Cooper’s Creek - the fourth, Gray, had died on the way (according to some reports, had been killed) and was buried in the bush.²⁷

Between the wars, there was only one monograph published that specifically dealt with the Burke and Wills Expedition, namely WT Hill’s *Burke and Wills. The Story of Their Ill-fated Expedition* 1935, and this was aimed at a juvenile audience. It was the only specific publication until 1937. In that year, the first
of three major best sellers in the popular market to appear over the next 70 years was published.

Frank Clune was a Gallipoli veteran who had tried his hand at labouring jobs and as a commercial traveller, at one time being a mousetrap salesman. He studied accountancy at night and, after graduation in 1928, spent the winter months travelling western New South Wales, preparing tax returns for country storekeepers, graziers and others. It was during these travels that he became interested in Burke and Wills. In 1936, Clune engaged a new collaborator, bankrupt publisher, Rhodes Scholar, Nationalist, Writer and ‘Wild Man of Letters’ PR ‘Inky’ Stephensen. Stephensen and Clune set about researching the Burke and Wills story. Unfortunately, their research did not include the Victorian State Library, which had, and still has, the largest repository of material related to the expedition.

When *Dig: A Drama of Central Australia*, complete with the striking Adrian Feint dust wrapper, first appeared in 1937, its reception by reviewers was critical. The lack of research, the ‘graphic narrative style of novel writing’ employed by Clune and Stephensen, and the invented conversations were all cited by the critics. Clune elevated Burke to the status of a great explorer, and romanticised beyond reality Burke’s relationship with the singer Julia Mathews.

Wright and particularly Brahe were the villains:

Brahe did not notice the broken bottle left by King on the stockade post. He did not notice the tattered clothes flapping in the breeze. He did not notice the hole cut by King in the horse-hide door of the stockade. He did not notice a packet of horseshoe nails discarded by King. He did not notice that the stools he had left behind had been converted to firewood. He glanced at everything, and saw – nothing.

Despite the critics, *Dig* became a best seller. By 1948 it had sold more than 60 000 copies. At the launch of a new edition in 1951, Clune inscribed, ‘I think this my best book.’

The next best seller related to Burke and Wills was critically acclaimed. Alan Moorhead was a journalist, distinguished war correspondent and established writer of non-fiction books in Europe, when, as an expat Australian living in Italy, he was encouraged by fellow expats Robert Hughes and Sidney Nolan to write, ‘on a subject from their own history’. It was then 100 years since the disastrous Burke and Wills Expedition. Written in 1962, the book was published by Hamish Hamilton of London in 1963, with its dust wrapper decorated by a Sidney Nolan painting from his Burke and Wills series. Simply titled *Cooper’s Creek*, it had an initial print run of 45 000 copies.

Moorhead does not dwell on the bungling delays during preparations for the expedition. He provides an accurate, non-judgmental narrative of the
trek itself. One of its strengths is the coverage of the enquiry held in the Expedition’s aftermath. *Cooper’s Creek* was published in multiple editions. There were successful French and Italian editions, although Moorhead himself was very unhappy with the response to the American edition of which only 15,000 copies were sold. In 1965, the first paperback edition appeared and in 1978 the first larger format illustrated edition.

If a scholarly, comprehensive coverage of all aspects of the Burke and Wills Expedition is what you require, then Tim Bonyhady’s *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth* fills the bill. A lawyer, cultural historian and academic, Bonyhady’s book was published by a small publisher David Ell Press Ltd in 1991. It is a large production of 375 pages. The extensive research is evident. It is analytical in tone and, in parts, not an easy read, but rewards persistence. Relatively expensive at publication, it ended up being remaindered. Copies in antiquarian bookshops or at auction now achieve three figure prices. It is in my view the outstanding work of scholarship so far on Burke and Wills.

The third bestseller was published in 2002. Sarah Murgatroyd was a British-

*First editions of Dig, A Drama of Central Australia by Frank Clune - dust wrapper by Adrian Feint and Cooper’s Creek by Alan Moorehead - dust wrapper decorated with a Sidney Nolan painting. (Photograph courtesy of Ian Hadwen)*
born news correspondent and radio journalist who retraced Burke and Wills footsteps in preparing her book. *The Dig Tree* was published in Australia by Text Publishing in a paperback format and there have been several re-issues in paperback format since 2002. It has been published in the United Kingdom and the United States, and at least in the US, it appeared in a hardcover format. Her thesis is to show how close Burke and Wills came to a successful conclusion to their Expedition, and that events at the ‘Dig Tree’ determined their fate.

Over the years, an enthusiastic few have travelled the route taken by Burke and Wills. In 1977, a band of four led by zoologist and veterinary surgeon Tom Bergin replicated the dash from Cooper Creek to the Gulf and back, using camels, but travelling in the dry winter months instead of the hot humid northern monsoon season. The aim was to complete the trek in three months as Burke had planned. Despite the more favourable climatic conditions, Bergin and his party were unsuccessful in their principal objective. The end product, however, was a publication authored by Bergin and titled, *In the Steps of Burke and Wills*. It appeared in 1981; the publisher was the ABC.

In the last 30 years, two members of the Victorian Exploring Expedition, both members of the German contingent, have had their day in print. Dr Hermann Beckler was botanical collector and doctor to the Expedition. He was yet another in conflict with Burke and resigned. Yet, after doing so, he was part of Wright’s supply party to Cooper Creek. Beckler kept a journal and it is alleged that he tried to have his account, supplemented with sections of Wills’ writings, published in Germany.\(^35\) He was unsuccessful and the manuscript remained in his family’s safe custody. In 1993, Miegynyah Press published Beckler’s account.\(^36\)

Dr Ludwig Becker, scientist, naturalist and artist, was the oldest member of the party. It is alleged that Burke bullied Becker, insisting that Becker perform all the physical tasks required of others, and relegating scientific observations and artistic documentations to a minor status. Consequently, Becker would stay up late at night to complete his drawings and scientific recordings. Considering the circumstances under which he worked, his output was prolific. Becker died at the Bulloo Swamps on 29 April 1861. Charles Stone and William Purcell predeceased him at the same site. In 1874 the Royal Society of Victoria deposited the art work and correspondence of Ludwig Becker in the La Trobe Library. Historian Marjorie Tipping edited Becker’s letters and reports. These combined with a scholarly introduction and a selection of Becker’s exquisite drawings resulted in a large format publication from Melbourne University Press, released in 1979.\(^37\) In 2009, Martin Edmond’s work on Ludwig Becker was published: *The Supply Party. Ludwig Becker on the Burke and Wills Expedition*. In preparation for writing
the book, Edmond travelled Becker’s path. He shares with the reader his enthusiasm for this tragic German.

But it is around the Expedition’s leader and his deputy that most literary interest has been centred and it is likely to remain that way. Even the hapless Captain Kirby predicted it so. In the conclusion to his narrative of the Firefly voyage, Kirby wrote:

The names of Burke and Wills will live in the grateful memories of the colonists, while those engaged in subordinate capacities in connection with the Exploration Expedition, however, great their labours or endurance, will be forgotten and disregarded.  

**Endnotes**

Note: Documents and maps associated with the Burke and Wills Expedition can be found on the online digital archive [http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/index.php](http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/index.php)

2 Tom Bergin, *In the Steps of Burke and Wills*, Sydney, ABC, 1981. Quoted from Prologue.
6 Named Cooper’s Creek at the time of the Burke and Wills Expedition.
10 Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books 1788-1900*, p. 235.
12 Lockhart Morton was founding co-editor of ‘Yoeman and Australian Acclimatiser’. Morton was a staunch critic of the Exploration Committee and the expedition. In 1859 he led a private expedition exploring areas north of Rockhampton, publishing ‘Notes of a Recent Personal Visit to the Unoccupied Northern District of Queensland.’ Royal Institute, Melbourne, 1860.
16 *Journal of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science*, vol. 8, 1901 (pp. 291–6).
17 Valmai Henkel, Introduction to *Tracks of McKinlay and Party Across Australia*, Adelaide, Friends of the State Library of South Australia, Adelaide 1996. (Facsimile)
18 Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books 1788-1900*, p. 242.
19 Recommended is an article by Allan McInnes published in the *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, volume XII, No 2, September 1985 entitled, ‘The Last Voyage of Firefly and Captain Kirby’. It details, among other things, the nature of Kirby’s unusual demise some years later, in a Thursday Island pub.
20 Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books 1788-1900*, p. 241.
Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books 1788-1900*, p. 242.


Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books 1788-1900*, and *The Bibliography of Australian Literature*. Online version for the complete text.


Frank Clune, *Dig. A Drama of Central Australia*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1937, p. 126.

An inscription by Frank Clune on a signed copy of the 1951 Edition.


Pocock, *Alan Moorehead*, p. 272


Hermann Beckler (translated by Stephen Jeffries and Michael Kertesz), *A Journey to Cooper’s Creek*, Melbourne, MUP in conjunction with State Library of Victoria, 1993.


As quoted in McInnes, ‘The Last Voyage of Firefly and Captain Kirby’, p. 281.
‘It is during my stay in this city that I learned of the tragic outcome of the expedition of O’Hara Burke’: Jean-Baptiste Desparmet’s account of the Burke and Wills Expedition

Colin Sheehan*

Australian history is largely written in English; and researchers access and rely on sources that are, in the vast majority, written in English. Sources in languages other than English, but not yet translated, can at worst remain unknown or at least, underutilized.¹ This paper addresses one of these non-English sources. French merchant captain, Jean-Baptiste Desparmet (1817-1873), born in Saint-Jean-de-Luz² into a Basque sea-faring family,³ visited Melbourne in 1863 and has left a record of his visit to the Colony of Victoria which includes an account of the Burke and Wills Expedition.

In 1983 his descendants in France published his memoirs entitled Journal d’un vieux marin (Journal of an old sailor). These contain accounts of the voyages he made to Australia in 1857, 1858 and 1863-64 which show Desparmet to be an informed and sympathetic observer and commentator on Australia.⁴

Desparmet’s account of the Burke and Wills Expedition does not add anything new or substantively different to what is known of this tragic Expedition, yet his eight-page summary is interesting.⁵ Desparmet was a visitor who chose to include a record of the Expedition, reflecting the importance that he considered it had attained in the Melbourne of 1863.

Desparmet’s Journal d’un vieux marin

Journal d’un vieux marin is not a logbook, but a personal account of his life as a professional seaman. The Journal contains 12 chapters arranged chronologically. Desparmet’s account of the Burke and Wills Expedition appears in Chapter 9. There is no introductory essay.

Colin Sheehan is a Senior Historian, Indigenous Services, in the Department of Environment and Resource Management. An article on Desparmet’s life story is scheduled for publication in the May 2012 Queensland History Journal. The presentation in its entirety is available at the RHSQ.
Desparmet’s account of the Burke and Wills Expedition

Desparmet’s account presents a quite concise overview of the Expedition (reproduced in French and English below), without omitting any critical event, a précis but sufficient to inform his family (and then upon publication, to a wider French-speaking public) of who was involved and what happened where. It is a narrative and not an analysis. Events in Australia did not receive wide coverage in the contemporary French press and his account provides sufficient for a reader to understand what had happened and something of the extent of the tragedy that unfolded in the interior of Australia – au bout du monde (at the end of the world).

Ernest Favenc in his History of Australian Exploration commented on the impact the Burke and Wills Expedition had made on Victorian society. This impact was sufficient for a visiting French merchant captain, arriving in Melbourne nearly two years after the reporting of the tragic events, to record a not insubstantial summary of it in his memoirs.

Jean-Baptiste Desparmet visited Australia during an important period of history and on each occasion he chose to record matters of importance. With the publication of his memoirs in 1983, the family fulfilled a wish that the captain left to his son, Henri Desparmet in 1873, for it to be available to a wider audience. Ian Nicholson concluded his brief review of Desparmet’s voyages by observing ‘Captain J-B Desparmet thus departs the scene, leaving us very grateful for the memoirs of his encounters’ with Australia.

À Melbourne je m’occupai d’une cargaison de chevaux que m’avait procurée Lemprière et c’est pendant mon séjour dans cette ville que j’appris le dénouement tragique de l’expédition dont il était déjà question lors de mon précédent séjour en 1858. L’État de Victoria projetait alors une exploration de l’intérieur du continent et le Parlement avait choisi pour chef cet ancien officier, dont l’énergie et le courage ne pouvaient être mis en doute. Il était secondé par M. Wills, jeune astronome de 26 ans, d’une énergie égale à la sienne et dont un parent, faisant partie de l’expédition de sir John Franklin au Pôle-Nord, avait déjà payé de sa vie son dévouement à la science.

Le but de l’expédition était de traverser l’Australie, du Sud au Nord, en étudiant les terrains qui composaient ce monde inconnu.

Reportons-nous donc au 20 août 1860. Tout Melbourne est sur pied, les rues de la ville ne sont pas assez larges pour laisser écouler le flot de population qui se presse sur les pas des 17 membres de l’exploration ; 27 chameaux et autant de chevaux portent des vivres pour 15 mois et ces voyageurs intrépides, bien armés et plein d’ardeur, défilent dans les rues, se dirigeant vers le nord.

Burke avait tracé sa route et l’avait divisée en trois étapes :

- D’abord Murrimbridge à 210 milles de Melbourne au nord 11° ouest.
- Puis Coopers’ Creek à 410 milles toujours au nord 11° ouest, presque au centre supposé du continent.
- Et enfin le golfe de Carpentarie à plus de 630 milles de Coopers’ Creek.

In Melbourne I was occupied with a cargo of horses which Lemprière had procured for me and it is during my stay in this city that I learned of the tragic outcome of the expedition about which there was already a question during my previous stay in 1858. The State of Victoria then planned exploration of the interior of the continent and the Parliament had chosen as leader this former officer, whose energy and courage could not be in doubt. His second in command Mr Wills, a young astronomer of 26, with energy equal to his and a relation of whom, taking part in the expedition of Sir John Franklin to the North Pole, had already paid with his life for his devotion to science.

The aim of the expedition was to cross Australia, from south to north, studying the lands that made up this unknown world.

We report then on 20 August 1860. All Melbourne was afoot, the streets of the town were not sufficiently wide to let pass the flood of people who pressed in on the steps of the 17 members of the exploring party, 27 camels and as many horses carrying the provisions for 15 months and these intrepid travellers, well armed and full of zeal, pass through the streets, heading towards the north.

Burke had marked out his route and had divided it into three stages.

Firstly, the Murrumbidgee, at 210 miles from Melbourne, to the north 11° west.8

Then Coopers Creek at 400 miles always to the north 11° west, almost at the supposed centre of the continent.9

And finally the Gulf of Carpentaria at more than 630 miles from Coopers Creek.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Le 19 octobre, après s’être vu abandonné sur le Murray par trois de ses compagnons, Burke arrive à Murrumbridge. Là il laisse la moitié de ses gens et de ses vivres sous le commandement du lieutenant Wright. Il lui laisse l’ordre exprès de le rejoindre à Coopers Creek le plus vite possible. Malheureusement Wright ne se remit en route que vers la fin janvier 1861, cent treize jours après le départ de Burke: beaucoup trop tard pour le seconder.</th>
<th>On 19 October, after seeing himself abandoned at the Murray by three of his companions, Burke arrives at the Murrumbidgee. There he leaves half of his men and his supplies under the command of Lieutenant Wright.(^\text{10}) He leaves the express order for him to rejoin him at Coopers Creek as quickly as possible. Unfortunately Wright does not set out until about the end of January 1861, 113 days after Burke’s departure: much too late to assist him.</th>
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<td>Dès lors et jusqu’en juin 1861 plus aucune nouvelle des explorateurs ne parvint à Melbourne alors qu’il avait été convenu que Burke donnerait le plus souvent possible de ses nouvelles pour qu’on puisse en cas de nécessité, venir à son secours. Melbourne forme une contre-expédition, pour se porter à son secours ; elle confie le commandement au jeune Howitt ; les autres colonies ne restent pas indifférentes ; mus par un sentiment généreux, Mac-Kinlay part d’Adelaide, Walker de Sydney et Landsborough, armant un navire, fait voile pour Torres et le golfe de Carpentaria.</td>
<td>From then and until June 1861 no further news of the explorers reached Melbourne even though it had been agreed that Burke would provide news as often as possible so that people could in case of necessity, come to his assistance. Melbourne forms a relief expedition, so as to bring help, command is entrusted to the young Howitt;(^\text{11}) the other colonies did not remain indifferent; moved by a generous feeling, McKinlay leaves from Adelaide, Walker from Sydney and Landsborough, furnishing a vessel, sets sail for Torres [Strait] and the Gulf of Carpentaria.(^\text{12})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howitt fut le plus heureux, si l’on peut dire: c’est lui qui devait apprendre au monde la fatale nouvelle de la mort d’O’Hara Burke. Durant quarante-cinq jours il avança dans un pays totalement différent de celui que venaient de traverser les explorateurs. Là où Burke avait souffert de la soif dans des sables arides, il ne rencontre que des prairies sans fin et un pays inondé. Il lutte contre des pluies torrentielles là où ses prédécesseurs ne trouvaient même pas de quoi se désaltérer.</td>
<td>Howitt was the most fortunate, if you can say that: it is he who had to tell the world the fatal news of the death of O’Hara Burke. In 45 days he advanced into a region totally different from that which the explorers had just crossed. There where Burke had suffered from thirst in the arid sands, he encountered only plains without end and a flooded country. He battles against the torrential rains there where his predecessors did not even find enough to quench their thirst.</td>
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Il arrive enfin à Coopers’ Creek où il étudie chaque pouce de terrain pour trouver un indice du passage de Burke. Il remarque soudain un arbre creusé au couteau de se seul mot /182/ [map] /183/ « Dig », ce qui signifie creuse ». On fouille aussitôt et à un demi-pied sous le sol on trouve la caisse de fer dans laquelle Brahe avait laissé par écrit l’explication des raisons qui l’avaient forcé à partir, et aussi les journaux de Burke annonçant qu’il avait réussi à traverser le continent jusqu’au golfe de Carpentarie, puis qu’il était revenu à Coopers’ Creek pour se trouver abandonné de son lieutenant, sa dernière espérance. Détail affreux, la dernière note de Brahe datait du matin même de l’arrivée de Burke.

Le récit de Brahe retrouvé le 29 juin 1861.

C’est Brahe, 4e lieutenant de l’expédition, que Howitt retrouva le premier. Il avait perdu quatre hommes touchés par le scorbut; il était suivi de près par Wright qui en avait perdu trois et s’était inconsiderément attardé à Murrumbidgee. Voici ce que lui apprirent ces hommes harassés de fatigue et méconnaissables sous leurs haillons déchirés:

En moins de deux mois Burke avait traversé le continent jusqu’à Coopers’ Creek : un peu moins de la moitié du trajet de Melbourne au golfe de Carpentarie. Au mois de décembre, à bout de ressources et manquant d’eau pour lutter contre les ardeurs de l’été austral, il attendait toujours Wright et déplorait un retard qui mettait en danger le succès de l’expédition.

Le jeune Wills, son second, partit avec trois chameaux, et se dirigea vers le nord à la recherche d’une source ou d’un cours d’eau. Il poussa jusqu’à 100 miles de Coopers’ Creek sans trouver de quoi s’abreuver et là, pour comble de malheur, il laissa échapper ses chameaux. Le voilà avec deux compagnons, seuls, à pieds, abandonnés au milieu du désert.

He arrives finally at Coopers Creek where he studies every inch of ground to find a trace of Burke’s passage. He suddenly notices a tree cut with a knife with the only word “Dig”, which means “dig”. He excavates immediately and 6 inches under the ground he finds an iron box in which Brahe had left a written explanation of the reasons which had forced him to leave, and also Burke’s journals announcing that he had succeeded in crossing the continent as far as the Gulf of Carpentaria, then that he returned to Coopers Creek to find himself abandoned by his lieutenant, his last hope. A ghastly detail, Brahe’s last note was dated the very morning of Burke’s arrival.

Brahe’s account found on 29 June 1861.

It is Brahe, 4th lieutenant of the expedition, whom Howitt found first. He had lost four men affected by scurvy; he was followed closely by Wright who had lost three and had been thoughtlessly delayed at Murrumbidgee. Here is what these men harassed by fatigue and hardly recognizable in their tattered rags, told him.

In less than two months Burke had crossed the continent to Coopers Creek: a little less than half of the distance from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria. In the month of December, at the end of his resources and lacking water to combat the heat of the southern summer, he always expected Wright and deplored a delay which placed in danger the success of the expedition.

The young Wills, his second in command, left with three camels, and headed towards the north in search of a spring or a water course. He went on for about a 100 miles from Coopers Creek without finding enough to drink and there, to top misfortune, he let his camels escape. There he was with two companions, alone, on foot, abandoned in the middle of the desert.
Il ne désespère cependant pas et encourageant ses hommes il refait à pieds, sous l’ardeur d’un soleil brûlant (50° centigrades environ), sans une seule goutte d’eau, les 110 milles qui le séparent à ce moment-là de son chef.

Burke, voyant que Wright n’arrive toujours pas, trouve prudent de ne s’avancer vers le nord qu’avec peu de monde pour ménager ses vivres et les forces de ses bêtes. Laissant donc Brahe, un de ses lieutenants, à la garde de ses provisions, il lui ordonne de l’attendre au moins trois mois et plus si ses vivres le lui permettent. Puis le 16 décembre 1860, emmenant avec lui Wills, Gray et King sur six chameaux et un cheval, il part à la découverte vers le nord.

Brahe attendit quatre mois, luttant son seul contre la chaleur accablante et la privation d’eau, mais encore contre les aborigènes qui ne leur laissaient aucun répit. Enfin, le 21 avril, ne voyant revenir aucun de ses compagnons, ayant déjà perdu quatre de ses hommes, Brahe, le cœur serré, quitta Coopers’ Creek en y laissant quelques provisions. Il les enferma, avec une lettre indiquant la date de son départ et les raisons qui l’avaient motivé, dans une caisse de fer qu’il enterra au pied d’un arbre sur lequel il grava au couteau le mot « DIG ».

Après trois jours de marche il rencontra Wright et sa troupe, en retard de quatre mois sur le rendez-vous fixé. Une fois réunis il reprirent la route de Coopers’ Creek mais ne voyant dans l’oasis rien qui put indiquer la présence de leur malheureux chef ils se décidèrent à repartir.

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<th>Il ne désespère cependant pas et encourageant ses hommes il refait à pieds, sous l’ardeur d’un soleil brûlant (50° centigrades environ), sans une seule goutte d’eau, les 110 milles qui le séparent à ce moment-là de son chef.</th>
<th>He does not despair however and encouraging his men he retraced his steps, under the heat of a burning sun (about 50° centigrade), without a single drop of water, the 110 miles which separate him at that moment from his chief.</th>
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<td>Burke, seeing that Wright still does not arrive, finds it prudent to advance towards the north only with a small group to manage his supplies and his animals. Then leaving Brahe, one of his lieutenants, to care for his provisions, he orders him to wait at least three months and longer if his provisions permit him. Then on 16 December 1860, taking with him Wills, Gray and King on six camels and a horse, he sets out on the discovery towards the north.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahe attendit quatre mois, luttant son seul contre la chaleur accablante et la privation d’eau, mais encore contre les aborigènes qui ne leur laissaient aucun répit. Enfin, le 21 avril, ne voyant revenir aucun de ses compagnons, ayant déjà perdu quatre de ses hommes, Brahe, le cœur serré, quitta Coopers’ Creek en y laissant quelques provisions. Il les enferma, avec une lettre indiquant la date de son départ et les raisons qui l’avaient motivé, dans une caisse de fer qu’il enterra au pied d’un arbre sur lequel il grava au couteau le mot « DIG ».</td>
<td>Brahe waited four months, battling on his own against the exhausting heat and the lack of water, but more against the Aborigines who were leaving them no respite. Finally, on 21 April, not seeing any of his companions return, having already lost four of his men, Brahe, his heart broken, departed Coopers Creek, leaving some provisions there. He enclosed them, with a letter setting out the date of his departure and the reasons which had motivated him, in an iron box which he buried at the food of a tree on which he engraved with a knife, “Dig”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Après trois jours de marche il rencontra Wright et sa troupe, en retard de quatre mois sur le rendez-vous fixé. Une fois réunis il reprirent la route de Coopers’ Creek mais ne voyant dans l’oasis rien qui put indiquer la présence de leur malheureux chef ils se décidèrent à repartir.</td>
<td>After three days march he met Wright and his party, four months late for his fixed appointment. Once reunited he set off again for Coopers Creek but not seeing anything in the oasis which could indicate the presence of their unfortunate chief they decided to leave.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Journal de Burke.
«Le 16 décembre 1860 j’ai quitté Coopers’ Creek avec mes trois compagnons et pendant deux mois, en butte à une chaleur accablante nous avons marché vers le nord, tantôt à travers des prairies fertiles, tantôt dans des déserts pierreux. Quant aux natifs ils fuyaient devant nous. Chaque fois que nous parvinmes à les rejoindre ils nous donnèrent du poisson séché.

Nous avons trouvé sur notre passage plusieurs lagunes d’eau salée et, à certains endroits, des sables rouges amoncelés et des terres bouleversées comme sous l’effet de quelque cataclysme. Nous avons aperçu vers le nord une haute chaîne de montagnes à laquelle j’ai donné le nom de Monts Standish. Au pied de cette chaîne s’étendait une plaine magnifique que j’ai nommée « Le terre promise » à cause de sa belle végétation. Nous avons eu à nous défendre tout autant des indigènes que des serpents et des rats qui pullulent à cet endroit. Nous avons ensuite traversé une forêt si dense que nous avions beaucoup de peine à nous frayer un passage. Souvent nous avons dû employer nos haches aussi nous n’avons avancé que très lentement. Harassés de fatigue, épouvassés par les privations, seul le désir d’arriver au but nous soutenait. Mais nos deux compagnons étaient à bout. Les laissant dans un endroit facilement repérable, Wills et moi continuâmes seuls à nous diriger vers le nord, confiant à nos camarades le soin des animaux, également à bout de force. C’est avec un peine infinie que nous avons progressé, souvent à travers des forêts vierges, parfois dans des marécages où nous enfoncions jusqu’à la ceinture. Nous rencontrâmes enfin un bras de mer et ce moment que nous désirions si ardemment faillit être le dernier de notre vie. Le flot en effet montait et nous, épouvassés de fatigue, nous n’avions plus la force de sortir de ce marécage. Enfin nous étant traînés sur un hauteur nous découvrîmes l’Océan !

«On 16 December 1860 I had left Coopers Creek with my three companions and for two months, exposed to exhausting heat we journeyed to the north, sometimes across fertile plains, sometimes in stony deserts. As for the natives, they fled before us. Each time that we managed to meet up with them, they gave us dried fish.

We have found on our route several salt water lagoons and, in certain places, built-up red sands and lands disturbed as from the effect of some cataclysm. We have seen towards the north a high range of mountains to which I have given the name Standish Mountains. At the foot of this range there extended a magnificent plain which I have named “the Promised land” because of its lush vegetation. We have had to defend ourselves equally from the natives as from the snakes and rats which abound in this place. We have then gone through a forest so dense that we exerted much effort to clear a path for ourselves. Often we have had to use our axes so we have advanced but very slowly. Harassed by fatigue, exhausted by privations, only the desire to arrive at our goal sustained us. But our two companions were at their end. Leaving them in a place easily identified, Wills and I continued alone heading to the north, leaving to our comrades the care of the animals, equally at the end of their strength. It is with an infinite pain that we have advanced, often through virgin forests, at times in swamps where we sank right up to our belt. We finally found an arm of the sea and this moment which we desired so arduously was nearly to be the last of our life. The tide in effect rose and we, exhausted from fatigue had no longer the strength to get out of this swamp. Finally dragging ourselves up a rise we discovered the Ocean.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notre but était atteint, notre tâche accomplie: c’était le 11 février 1861.</td>
<td>Our goal was reached, our task accomplished, it was on 11 February 1861.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Après nous être un peu reposés, Wills et moi revinmes sur nos pas. Quand nous avons enfin rejoinnt nos compagnons il ne nous restait que pour cinq semaines de vivres. Il fallait retourner à Coopers’ Creek sans attendre. Nous sommes donc repartis à marche forcée vers nos amis et l’aide dont nous avions tant besoin. Malheureusement la fatigue accumulée, accrue par des pluies abondantes, menaçait de nous faire périr avant d’être de retour.</td>
<td>After being a little rested, Wills and I retraced our steps. When we finally rejoined our companions, there remained for us but five weeks of provisions. It was necessary to return to Coopers Creek without waiting. We then left by forced march to our friends and the assistance in which we were in such need. Unfortunately built-up fatigue, increased by the abundant rains, threatened to cause us to perish before our return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le 6 mars, ayant mangé un gros morceau d’un serpent que j’avais tué, j’ai failli mourir.</td>
<td>On 6 March, having eating [sic] a large piece of a snake I had killed, I nearly died.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le 20, nos chameaux éreints ne pouvaient plus avancer. Force fut d’alléger leur charge en jetant 60 livres de provisions par bête de somme.</td>
<td>On the 20th, our exhausted camels could not go further. Forced to lighten their loads by getting rid of 30 pounds of provisions per animal in total.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/186/ Le 30 nous avons tué un chameau.</td>
<td>On the 30th we killed a camel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le 10 avril ce fut le tour de mon cheval Billy, que je montais depuis Melbourne.</td>
<td>On 10 April, it was the turn of my horse Billy, which I had ridden since Melbourne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le 11 avril nous avons été forcés de faire halte un quart d’heure pour attendre Gray qui s’était arrêté. La faim nous indisposait contre ce malheureux : nous avions conservé comme ultime ressource un peu de farine…et nous l’avons surpris à en manger en cachette !</td>
<td>On 11 April we had been forced to halt for a quarter of an hour to wait for Gray who had stopped. Hunger indisposed us against this unfortunate man: we had kept as our last resource a little flour...and we had surprised him secretly eating some of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le 21 avril nous avons enfin atteint Coopers’ Creek : l’oasis était déserte. Nos compagnons n’y étaient plus !</td>
<td>On 21 April we have finally reached Coopers Creek: the oasis was deserted. Our companions were no longer there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En cherchant leurs traces nous avons découvert, inscrit sur un arbre, le mot « DIG ». Nous avons fouillé et bientôt nous trouvions une cassette en fer que Brahe avait laissée. Elle contenait un mot de lui m’expliquant les raisons de son départ..., et dire que cette note est datée d’aujourd’hui ! 21 avril ! C’est ce matin qu’ils sont partis, mais ils ont au moins sept heures d’avance sur nous et ils sont bien montés : nous n’avons aucun espoir de les rattraper.</td>
<td>In looking for their tracks we discovered, inscribed on a tree, the word “DIG”. We dug and soon found an iron box which Brahe had left. It contained a word from him explaining to me the reasons for his departure..., and to say that this note is dated today! 21 April! It is this morning that they left, but they have had at least seven hours start on us and they were well mounted: we have no hope of catching up with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Text</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je me souviens qu’il y a un troupeau de moutons au pied du Mont Désespoir, à 113 milles d’ici.</td>
<td>I remember that there is a flock of sheep at the foot of Mount Despair, 113 km from here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le 23 avril, après deux jours de repos, j’ai engagé Wills et King à me suivre : ils n’ont pas hésité. J’ai remis sous l’arbre la caisse de fer avec ce journal en précisant l’idée qui me fait me diriger vers le Mont Désespoir. »</td>
<td>On 23 April, after two days rest, I urged Wills and King to follow me: they did not hesitate. I put the iron box with this journal detailing the idea which made me head towards Mount Despair back under the tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La fin de ce journal que King conserva précieusement fut rapportée après la mort de Burke par Howitt.</td>
<td>The end of this journal which King kept very carefully was reported after Burke’s death by Howitt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suite du journal de Burke.</td>
<td>Continuation of Burke’s journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>«23 avril 1861. Quelques heures après avoir quitté l’oasis de Coopers’ Creek un des nos chameaux est tombé de fatigue. Nous l’avons tué et nous avons fait sécher sa viande.</td>
<td>«23 April 1861. Some hours after having left the oasis of Coopers Creek one of our camels fell from fatigue. We killed it and we dried its meat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« Le 24 : notre dernier chameau, notre seule ressource se meurt ; n’ayant plus de moyen de transport nous nous traînons de notre mieux ; mourant de faim et de soif nous chercherons à rejoindre les naturels. Ils se montrent hospitaliers, ils ont pitié de nous. Nous avons ainsi vécu jusqu’au 15 mai, jour où eux aussi nous ont abandonnés. N’ayant plus d’autre moyen d’existence nous reprenons notre route vers le Mont Désespoir.</td>
<td>On the 24th: our last camel, our only resource dies; not having any more a means of transport we drag ourselves along as best we could; dying from hunger and thirst we seek to catch up with the natives. They show themselves to be hospitable, they took pity on us. We lived in like this up to 15 May, the day when even they also abandoned us. Not having any longer any other means of existence we prepared our way towards Mount Despair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le 24 mai, neuf jours plus tard, nous tombons de faiblesse sur le sable brûlant. Rien ne paraît encore à l’horizon toujours le sable et l’immensité du désert.</td>
<td>On 24 May, nine days later, we fall from weakness on the burning sand. Nothing appears on the horizon, always the sand and the immensity of the desert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« Le 27 mai nous renonçons à aller au Mont Désespoir, nous retournons à Coopers’ Creek. Nous vivons de graines du désert, le « nardou », dont le suc ne suffit pas à nous soutenir. Nous voulons revoir l’oasis où nous resterons encore cette dernière et douloureuse relation.</td>
<td>On 27 May we gave up the idea of going to Mount Despair, we return to Coopers Creek. We live on seeds from the desert, the “nardo” the sap of which does not suffice to sustain us. We want to see the oasis again where we once more restart this last and sad report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« 20 juin (de l’écriture de Wills) : le nardou que nous broyons est inefficace ; il est trop douloureux de se sentir abandonné, je ne peux plus vivre…</td>
<td>20 June (from Wills’ writing) The nardoo which we boil is ineffective; it is too painful to feel ourselves abandoned, I can live no longer…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 juin (écriture de Wills : adressé a son père) : Ma mort… ma mort est certaine dans quelques heures… mon esprit est calme.</td>
<td>22 June (Wills’ writing: addressed to his father): My death… my death is certain in a few hours, my spirit is calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 juin (de l’écriture de Burke). Quelque faible et mourant je veux chercher la tribu aborigène, notre dernier espoir. King survivra j’espère, il a montré une grande force d’âme. Notre tâche est remplie ; nous avons, les premier, gagnés les rivages de l’Océan, mais nous avons été aban… »</td>
<td>28 June (from Burke’s writing). Though weak and dying I wish to look for the Aboriginal tribe, our last hope. King will survive I hope, he has shown a great strength of spirit. Our task is complete; we, the first ones, have reached the ocean shores, but we have been aban…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avant d’avoir retrouvé King et lu ce dernier journal, Howitt, qui n’avait aucune idée de la direction qu’avait pu prendre les trois malheureux explorateurs, avait dispersé son monde. Il chercha dans la sable parmi les marques laissées sur le sol mais sans arriver à démêler quelles étaient les bonnes. Enfin le 10 septembre il découvrit parmi les traces d’une tribu sauvage la marque d’un soulier. Il avance en suivant ces empreintes que se perdent dans une forêt où les feuilles et les branches effacent toutes les pistes. Après mille recherches inutiles une légère fumée prouve aux sauveteurs que la forêt est habitée. Il se dirige vers cet endroit et ne tarde pas à trouver une tribu aborigène au milieu de laquelle il découvre le malheureux couvert de guenilles. Son épuisement est tel qu’il se soutient à peine, sa figure décharnée est défigurée par la souffrance. C’est King, le seul survivant.</td>
<td>Before having found King and read this last journal, Howitt who had no idea of the direction which the three unfortunate explorers could have taken, had dispersed his party. He looked around in the sand for the tracks left on the ground but without managing to sort out which were the good tracks. Finally on 10 September he discovered among the tracks of a savage tribe the mark of a shoe. He goes forward following these prints which are lost in a forest where the leaves and the branches erase all the tracks. After a thousand useless searches a light wisp of smoke proves to the rescuers that the forest is inhabited. They head towards that place and do not delay in finding an Aboriginal tribe in the middle of which they discover the unfortunate man covered in rags, His exhaustion is such that he can hardly support himself, his emaciated face is disfigured by suffering. It is King, the sole survivor.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>À la vue de Howitt il reprend courage et veut parler mais ce n’est qu’après avoir reçu quelques soins qu’il put raconter son calvaire.</td>
<td>At the sight of Howitt he recovered courage and wants to speak but it is only after having received some care that he could recount his calvary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Récit de King.</td>
<td>Kings’ account.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
«Le 28 juin, Wills était à l’agonie. Burke décida de se remettre à la recherche des sauvages. Avant de nous laisser partir le jeune homme voulut confier à son chef sa montre et un mot d’adieu pour son père. Nous le laissâmes couché sur le sable espérant lui faire porter secours par quelques naturels. Nous avons marché toute la journée sans rencontrer personne. Le lendemain 29, le courage nous soutenait encore lorsque tout à coup Burke se sentit faiblir et tomba pour ne plus se relever. Il me recommanda de ne pas l’abandonner avant qu’il ne soit bien mort et de laisser son cadavre exposé au soleil. Puis il regarda la croix du sud, car la nuit venait de tomber, ferma les yeux et mourut.

«On 28 June, Wills was in agony. Burke decided to leave him in his search for the savages. Before allowing us to depart the young man wanted to entrust to his chief his watch and a word of farewell for his father. We left him lying on the sand hoping to bring him help from the natives. We travelled all day without meeting anyone. On the day after, 29th, courage sustained us again when all of a sudden Burke felt weak and fell not to get up again. He sought me not to abandon him before he was indeed dead and to leave his body exposed to the sun. Then he looked at the southern cross, because the night had just fallen, closed his eyes and died.

«Je ne savais que devenir. Je me traînai vers l’oasis où nous avions laissé l’infortuné Wills : je ne retrouvai qu’un corps privé de vie.

«I did not know what to do. I headed to the oasis where we had left the unfortunate Wills: I found again a lifeless body.

«Résolu à trouver à tout prix la tribu d’aborigènes qui seule pouvait me sauver, je m’enfonçai dans la forêt en me nourrissant de nardou et quelques jours après je fus recueilli par ces sauvages avec lesquels j’ai vécu».

Resolved to find at all costs the Aboriginal tribe which alone could save me, I plunged into the forest nourishing myself on nardoo and some days after I was taken in by these savages with whom I lived.

Howitt, guidé par King, réussit à retrouver les squelettes des deux héros que les sauvages avaient, par respect, recouverts de branchages. Burke avait encore son revolver à sa droite. Howitt, n’ayant pas des suaires, les ensevelit dans les plis du pavillon national.

Howitt, guided by King, succeeds in recovering the skeletons of the two heroes whom the savages had, in respect, covered with branches. Burke still had his revolver in his right hand. Howitt, not having any shrouds, buried them in the folds of the national flag.

Après avoir récompensé les indigènes, Howitt rentra à Melbourne avec le précieux journal et le seul survivant des quatre explorateurs.

After having rewarded the natives, Howitt returned to Melbourne with the precious journal and the only survivor of the four explorers.

Le 9 décembre suivant il repartait, et ramenait les restes des deux amis à Melbourne où toute la ville était en deuil.

On 9 December following he left again and brought back the remains of the two friends to Melbourne where the whole city was in mourning.

La ville érigea un moment superbe représentant Burke, Wills et Gray.

The city erected a superb monument representing Burke, Wills and Gray.
On 11 December 1863, after having loaded the horses provided by Lemprière, I was able to put to sea.
Endnotes


2 St Jean-de-Luz is located on the southern Atlantic coast of France, in the Département des Pyrénées-Atlantiques and in the region of Aquitaine, very close to the Spanish frontier.


7 Victoria did not become a State until Federation in 1901.


9 Cooper Creek had been visited by Charles Sturt in 1845 and Augustus Charles Gregory in 1858. Burke and Wills arrived there on 11 November 1860.


11 Sir Henry Barkly informed the Duke of Newcastle that Howitt was the son of the well known author, William Howitt and that he had bush experience, Despatch from Governor Sir H Barkly to His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, 21 August 1860, in *Australian Exploring Expedition*, p. 4. For Alfred William Howitt see WEH Stanner, ‘Howitt, Alfred William (1830-1908)’, *ADB*, vol. 4, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1972, pp. 432-5 and for William Howitt see Mary Howitt Walker, ‘Howitt, William (1792-1879)’, *ADB*, vol. 4, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1972, pp. 435-6. His appointment to the relief expedition can be found in the Burke and Wills Commission report, 1861, pp. 22-4.

12 This statement is not strictly correct. Landsborough left Brisbane in the *Firefly*, escorted by the *Victoria*, under the command of Captain Norman. After a hazardous journey, Landsborough and the two vessels arrived at Sweers Island. From there he established a camp on the Albert River.


14 The account of the expedition in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 December 1861, p. 3 states that the expedition remained three days on the Albert River.

15 Gray killed a large python (probably *Aspidites melanocephalus*, a black-headed python) which he and Burke ate. They both immediately came down with dysentery.

16 Favenc, in his *History of Australian exploration from 1788 to 1888* states: ‘Gray fell sick and stole some flour to make some gruel with; for this Burke beat him severely.'
Wills writes on one occasion that they had to wait, and send back for Gray, who was “gammoning” that he could not walk. Nine day’s afterwards the unfortunate man dies – an act which at any rate is not often successfully gammoned’. Gray died at a place thought to be near Lake Massacre in South Australia.

Although the name Mount Hopeless is used throughout the English sources, I have retained the name Despair as this translates more accurately the French désespoir. Burke named Blanchewater station Mount Hopeless. It is located at 29° 33’S and 139° 26 E.

At Cooper Creek the explorers had entered the country of the Yabdruwandha people, who gave the explorers fish, beans which they called ‘padlu’ and a kind of damper made from nardoo seeds.

Nardoo (Marcilea) is a genus of nearly 65 species of fern. Also known as desert fern, water clover and four-leaf clover. The seeds of species Marcilea drummondi are collected from the plant growing in marshy swamps are edible and were among foodstuffs used by Aboriginal people. Nardoo seeds contain an enzyme which destroys thiamine. The seeds are ‘pounded and broken up with a special stone, the “nardoo” stone, previous to grinding’. See Walter Roth, Ethnological studies among the north-west-central Queensland Aborigines, Brisbane, Government printer, 1897, paras 85-6 (pp. 79-80), 110-11 (p. 92) and 155 (p. 104). The seeds contain an enzyme which destroys thiamine.

Howitt found King on 15 September 1861.

The different accounts by King can be found on the Burke and Wills web online archive, Sir Henry Barkly informed the Duke of Newcastle that King ‘was formerly a soldier, who it is stated came to this colony on obtaining his discharge from some regiment in India’, Despatch from Governor Sir Henry Barkly to His Grace the Duke of Newcastle, 20 November 1861, in Australian Exploration Expedition, 1861, p. 30.

William Strutt’s 1911 painting of the burial of Burke in the Union Jack is held by the State Library of Victoria.

Howitt presented breast plates to some of the Yandruwandha people.

The State funeral took place in Melbourne on 21 January 1861.

The gazetting of the site for the Melbourne reserve can be found in the Victoria Government Gazette, 1 September 1863, p. 1924.
William Landsborough and the Burke and Wills search expedition

James McCourt*

On 14 August 1862, William Landsborough arrived in Melbourne after crossing the continent from north to south. He was greeted as a hero and his journey was turned into a heroic feat of exploration both at an official level as well as in the popular press. In the intervening 150 years his reputation as an explorer has faded. After being hailed an ‘an explorer facile princeps’, or the best of the best at a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in London,1 he is now remembered merely as the leader of one of the four search parties sent to find or rescue Burke and Wills. This paper assesses Landsborough’s contribution to Australian exploration by re-examining his journey, and in the light of contemporary evidence and documentation to suggest that the entire Burke and Wills enterprise was about much more than geographical discovery.

William Landsborough was born in 1825 in Ayrshire, son of a clergyman. He inherited a hardy constitution and a practical intelligence for which lowland Scots are renowned. He arrived in New South Wales in 1841 to join two of his brothers who had already established stations in the New England region. He became an expert bushman and by 1850 had leased his own station. In 1854 he followed his brothers north to the Kolan River in the Burnett region of Queensland where he applied for leases. For the next six years Landsborough explored and selected new country for pastoral purposes, in particular in the Nebo area of central Queensland, Broadsound and the Comet and Nogoa Rivers. In 1859–60 he travelled as far west as Torrens Creek east of present-day Hughenden, followed by a journey with Nat Buchanan further west to the...
area around present-day Aramac. This led him to the upper reaches of the Thompson River, the creeks flowing into it north east of Muttaburra and the discovery of some of the best grazing country in Queensland. He named these Mitchell grass downs *Bowen Downs* and applied for 13 runs of 100 square miles each.

In mid-1861 when the Victorian Government decided to organize search parties to look for and even rescue Burke and Wills, Landsborough was chosen by the new Queensland Government on the recommendation of AC Gregory, the Surveyor General, to lead a search party from the Gulf of Carpentaria. The Victorian Government dispatched HMCSS *Victoria* from Melbourne on 4 August 1861 together with a smaller chartered vessel, the *Firefly*. On 24 August Landsborough and his party left Brisbane on the *Firefly* with the *Victoria* as escort. On 4 September after passing Raine Island into the inner passage of the Great Barrier Reef, the *Firefly* struck a reef and after much difficulty, all but two of the expedition’s horses were landed on one of the Sir Charles Hardy group of islands. The *Victoria* steamed into view and towed the *Firefly* off the reef. The stores and horses were reloaded onto the *Firefly* which was towed through Torres Strait to reach the Albert River on the southern shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria on 1 October. A depot was established some miles from the mouth of the Albert River.

Landsborough had been instructed to search for Burke and Wills south-west from the Albert River and accordingly on 17 November 1861, he departed from the depot on the Albert and followed the river across the Plains of Promise which had been named by Captain Stokes when he surveyed the area in the *Beagle* in 1841. Landsborough followed the Gregory River south and west until he came to an elevated tableland which he named the Barkly Tableland. He traversed this open country until he reached the Herbert River tributary of the Georgina River, south of present-day Camooweal. Realising that the country could easily flood within a few months, thus cutting off his party, he returned to the depot on the Albert on 19 January 1862 without finding any trace of Burke and Wills.

In the meantime, Frederick Walker arrived at the depot after overlanding from Rockhampton. He had found traces of Burke and Wills on the Flinders River to the east of the Albert and after being re-supplied by Commander Norman of the *Victoria*, followed the Flinders south in search of the Victorian explorers. However, he lost their track and headed east to Port Denison.

Landsborough had the choice of returning south on the *Victoria* but against Norman’s advice, decided to travel overland with his party to search for traces of Burke and Wills. With only meagre supplies from Norman, he departed the Albert River depot on 8 February 1862 in the company of Bourne, Glover and two Aboriginal guides. He reached the Flinders River on 21 February,
following it south and east for 280 miles (440 km) until he reached the elevated open downs country near Hughenden. Landsborough followed the south-flowing Towerhill Creek to present-day Muttaburra. He was on the Bowen Downs country which he had discovered two years earlier. He saw evidence of tracks and stock from the first party sent out to occupy the Bowen Downs runs, three-quarters of which he had sold and mortgaged to raise capital to enable his remaining runs to be stocked. He followed the Thompson River to Stonehenge, from where he crossed to the Barcoo and further south to the Warrego where on 21 May he reached Williams’ Station north of present-day Cunnamulla, where he learned of the fate of Burke and Wills.

Landsborough traveled overland to Melbourne, arriving in August 1862 and was hailed as the first to cross the continent from north to south. This honour, however, probably belongs to John King, the sole survivor of the Burke and Wills party which traveled to the Gulf from Cooper Creek although King had to be carried most of the way, arriving in Melbourne in November 1861.

On the face of it, Landsborough’s explorations were fairly minimal. The journey from the Albert River to the south-west covered 250 miles (400 km) and took 62 days to complete the round trip. Most of the journey was through country which Leichhardt and Gregory had crossed although not penetrating as far inland as Landsborough did. His second journey south commencing on 8 February 1862 comprised only two stages during which he traversed country not previously seen by Europeans. After some 50 days until late March he followed the Flinders River south and crossed the range to Tower Hill and the headquarters of Landsborough Creek, a distance of about 350 miles (560 km). He then traversed country he had discovered some 20 months previously, and made application to select as Bowen Downs, from north of Muttaburra to Jundah in the south. His journey from the Thompson River to the Barcoo River and south to the Warrego River between 17 April and 30 May 1862 over 200 miles (320 km) was probably the first attempt by Europeans to link the discoveries of Kennedy with the pastoral occupation on the Warrego River. Thereafter, on his journey south to Melbourne, Landsborough traversed country which was either occupied or known to Europeans.

Why then in the light of relatively modest discoveries, was Landsborough feted when he reached Melbourne? By any comparison, McKinlay’s journey from Gawler to the Gulf of Carpentaria through Queensland to Bowen, was a greater achievement both in terms of unknown country crossed and distance covered. Yet Landsborough was presented with a service of plate worth £500 by the Governor of Victoria although, to be fair, the South Australian Government did pay McKinlay £1000 for his services.

It could be argued that the entire Victoria Exploring Expedition [VEE] of Burke and Wills and the subsequent search expeditions were about more than
mere geographical discovery. Although sponsored by a learned society, the Philosophical Institute of Victoria which in January 1860 became the Royal Society of Victoria, the Expedition could in no way be described as a scientific expedition. Apart from a botanical collection put together by Dr Hermann Beckler during his enforced stays at Menindee and the Bulloo, nothing was collected by Burke who did not even keep a journal or diary.³

What, then was the purpose of the Burke and Wills Expedition?

The VEE was, above all, a manifestation of the collective pride, even hubris, with which residents of the Colony of Victoria viewed the progress of their Colony in the 1850s. This period included separation from New South Wales, the discovery of gold in 1851 and self-government in 1855. In less than 10 years Melbourne was transformed by gold and a huge influx of people, into one of the most prosperous cities in the world. The initial funds for the VEE were subscribed by the public. In response to a public meeting of the Exploration Committee of the Philosophical Institute under the chairmanship of Chief Justice Sir William Stawell, a letter was issued on 15 September 1858:

To open up a communication with the northern shores of this continent is an enterprise which should engage the sympathies and command the support of the merchant, the squatter and the miner, no less than those of the man of science; for such an enterprise promises to abridge the distance which separates us from the Old World; to bring us at an early date in telegraphic communication with India and Europe; to open new avenues of commerce; to indicate how we may obtain access to vast areas of pastoral land from which we are at present cut off; owing to our ignorance of the intervening country; and to solve a geographical problem, which is as important as it is interesting.⁴

The original scheme of exploration in 1857 and 1858 was to cross the continent from east to west along the Tropic of Capricorn. By 1860, after the Legislature had given £6000 to the Exploration Committee, and spent £3000 to import camels from India, the plan was:

Across the country by the most direct route to Cooper’s Creek, in lat. 27°37’8”, long. 141°5’, where the party would be on the verge of the unexplored country, and on a spot where permanent water could be had, and a depot formed, whence excursions could be made to the north or north-west as might be deemed desirable, and upon which the party could at any time fall back for supplies in case of necessity.⁵

In their Instructions to Burke dated 18 August 1860 the Committee stated:

The object of the Committee in directing you to Cooper’s Creek is, that you should explore the country intervening between it and Leichhardt’s track south of the Gulf of Carpentaria, avoiding as far as possible Sturt’s route on the west, and Gregory’s down the Victoria on the east.⁶

The most telling paragraph in the Instructions was:
The Committee considers you will find a better and a safer guide in the natural features of the country through which you will have to pass. For all useful and practical purposes, it will be better for you and the objects of future settlement, that you should follow the water courses and the country yielding herbage, than pursue any route which the Committee might be able to sketch out from an imperfect map of Australia.\(^7\)

Even after the debacle of Burke’s death and that of six other members of the Expedition, the Committee in its Progress Report dated 14 April 1862 stated:

The Explorers of the Victorian Expedition have been the means of opening a path from the southern settlements to the northern shores, which they hope will at no distant day, be made available for telegraphic communication, by way of Batavia and India, with the mother country’ and they rejoice that now, through a broad belt of fertile land, a connexion has been established between the discoveries of Leichhardt on the Burdekin, those of Burke towards Carpentaria, of Stuart towards Arnhem’s Land, of Augustus Gregory towards North Western Australia.\(^8\)

In its Final Report dated 17 August 1863, the Committee went further:

It is scarcely within the province of this Committee to pronounce an opinion upon the political appropriation of the territory thus discovered, but they conceive that they will not be exceeding their duty in dwelling with some emphasis upon the sacrifices of life and treasure which the colony of Victoria has incurred in promoting the exploration of the interior; and that they are justified in expressing a hope that those circumstances will be brought under the notice of the imperial Government, so that the colony which has “borne the heat and burden of the day” may not be overlooked when the apportionment of Burke’s Land comes under the consideration of Her Majesty’s advisers in England.\(^9\)

In 2002, Sarah Murgatroyd published a controversial book entitled *The Dig Tree*.\(^{10}\) She argued that the true purpose of the Burke and Wills Expedition was to explore and annex to the Colony of Victoria the territory between 138° and 141° East of Greenwich. When the Colony of Queensland was proclaimed in 1859, its western boundary was at 141° E.

It is probably no coincidence that Burke’s route to the Gulf was west of 141° E Longitude. The fact that Burke’s dash to the Gulf and back did not constitute what at the time was properly considered to be exploration has been completely overlooked with the passing of time. In 1888 Ernest Favenc in *The History of Australian Exploration*, called Burke’s dash from Cooper Creek to the Gulf ‘a tramp’:

The first duty of a man entrusted with such a large party, was to have carried out its chief aim and mission of reporting on the geographical features and formation of the country he was sent to explore, and bringing back the fullest and most minute account of it, and it productions. Burke, during the most important part of his journey, left behind him his botanist, naturalist, and geologist, and started without even the means at his disposal of following up any discoveries he might make. His sole thought evidently was to cross to Carpentaria and
back, and be able to state that he had done so – a most unworthy ambition on the part of a leader of such a party, containing within itself all the elements of geographical research, and one that could certainly not have been anticipated by the promoters. After all the pains and cost expended in the organization of this expedition, we have now the spectacle of the main body, including two of the scientific members, loitering on the outskirts of the settled districts; four men killing time on the banks of Cooper’s Creek, and the leader and three others racing headlong across the country ahead, all four of them being utterly inexperienced. As might be expected, the results of the journey are most barren. Burke scarcely troubled to keep any journal at all.11

What has this to do with the claim that the covert purpose of the Expedition was to enable the Colony of Victoria to annex additional territory in the north of the continent?

It needs to be appreciated that in the nineteenth century there were certain protocols connected with the claiming of unexplored country. The first was priority of discovery: the first person in the field was entitled to claim for his Sovereign or his Government the territory he traversed. Great Britain did not recognize prior discovery alone as the basis of territorial claims; there had to be, in addition, a settlement of the territory claimed.

In order to prove discovery, an explorer was required to leave proof of his journey in the form of marks on trees and the erection of permanent structures such as stone cairns or poles with inscriptions. Burke had been given clear instructions to this effect:

The Committee entrusts you with the largest discretion as regards the forming of depots and your movements generally, but requests that you will mark your route as permanently as possible, by leaving records, sowing seeds, building cairns, and marking trees, at as many points as possible consistently with your various other duties.12

This explains the questions directed to John King, the only survivor of the party which reached the Gulf, when he appeared before the Royal Commission on the Burke and Wills Expedition on 5 December 1861:

Q861. You say he came back and desired you to prepare for the start back? - Yes.
Q862. What marks did you leave? - There were some small box trees; we cut the bark eighteen inches by four and cut the letter B in the trees, some fifteen trees were marked.
Q863. No date? - No.
Q864. Was that at the camp where you and Gray were? - Yes.
Q865. Did Mr Burke say he had marked any trees where they were? - I believe not: he took no knives or implements to do so.
Q866. Were there any stones there to make any cairns? - There were some rocks.
Q867. You did not build any cairns? - No.
Q868. You did not hear him say he built any? - No; they made a small plant there at their Camp 119, and left a note and left a few articles there.
Q869. What were the articles they left there? - A few camel pads and the camp oven, and a few other small articles, and a lot of books—a considerable quantity of books.13
Although he did not keep a proper diary or journal, Burke did mark trees where he camped, and at his furthest point north and closest to the shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria, he marked 15 trees. In 1977 these trees were found and identified by Tom Bergin during his trip with camels from Cooper Creek to Burke’s Camp 119.14

It might appear inappropriate for a colony such as Victoria to claim additional territory which was not contiguous to it. However, before the unification of Italy in 1861 and the unification of Germany in 1870, many European states claimed sovereignty over non-contiguous territory. This practice also occurred in Australia on two occasions prior to 1860. When the Colony of South Australia was created in 1836, a slice of territory between its western boundary and the boundary of the Colony of Western Australia remained part of New South Wales; and when the Colony of North Australia was created in 1848, this area was cut off from direct land access with New South Wales. Similarly the Colony of Queensland in 1859 left New South Wales with the territory between 141° and 129°E Longitude to the north of the Colony of South Australia with no land corridor connecting the two territories. Thus, it would appear that the establishment in 1860-62 of a settlement on the southern shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria to the west of the Colony of Queensland under the administrative control of and even as part of the territory of the Colony of Victoria was not beyond the bounds of possibility.

When the newly formed colony of Queensland realized that its western boundary did not give it proper access to the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, Sir George Bowen requested the Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to move the western boundary of the new colony westward by 3° of longitude. The Duke of Newcastle replied that ‘the government of South Australia has proposed the annexation to that Colony of part of the territory… also a group of gentlemen in Victoria wanted to form a settlement on the north coast of Australia.’15

The colony of Queensland succeeded in having its territory enlarged by moving its western boundary to 138°E. On 23 June 1862, an Extraordinary Government Gazette notified the annexation ‘to this Colony [of] so much of the Colony of New South Wales as lies to the northward of latitude 26 and between the 138th and 141st meridians of longitude.’16 The new western boundary ran north from Poeppel’s Corner instead from Surveyor’s Corner.

The manner in which Landsborough was greeted at the time, both in Melbourne and London, would lend support to the theory that there was a plan for either the colony of Victoria or influential interests in Victoria to claim territory in the north of the continent. Speaking at a special meeting of the Royal Society of Victoria on 18 August 1862 to honour both King and
Landsborough, the Governor of Victoria Sir Henry Barkly stated:

among the most brilliant exploits which grace the history of Australian exploration, there is not one more brilliant to be found than the passage made by the party, of our dear friend, Mr. Landsborough, from the shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Darling River. I hope Mr. Landsborough will be kind enough to-night to give us some information as to this route on the occasion. We all know, without waiting for that explanation, that his journey has conferred a most substantial benefit on all these colonies. It has, there can be no doubt, very much accelerated the formation of a great settlement in North Australia, which may be expected to become some day a separate and independent colony. In fact, it has formed a fitting addition to the noble efforts which have been made by this colony in the cause of Australian exploration.17

Allowing for some measure of Vice Regal exaggeration, this statement is confirmation that at the time, Landsborough’s journey was considered to be a ground-breaking achievement. The emphasis in all contemporary press accounts is the fact that large areas of country suitable for grazing had been discovered, with the consequent expectation that settlement would follow in the north of the continent. It would be no exaggeration to say that Landsborough was not only caught up in the moves by Victorian interests to occupy the far northern areas of the continent, but that he also saw himself as an active promoter of such an enterprise.

On 12 November 1862, a testimonial presentation of a ‘handsome service of plate’ to Landsborough took place at the Exhibition Building in Melbourne, ‘the gift of your private friends and admirers in this colony’ stated Sir Henry Barkly, who presided. He further stated: ‘by opening up of an easy route for stock from the southern colonies to the very shores of Carpentaria, it has accelerated by many years the colonization of Northern Australia.’18

The inscription stated:

To William Landsborough, Esq.,
Commander of the Expedition from Carpentaria in search of Burke and Wills,
This salver and the accompanying pieces of Plate are presented by Numerous friends and admirers in Victoria To express their appreciation of the Courage and skill With which he successfully crossed the Continent, and Opened up a vast territory, won from the Desert, for Australian enterprise, And for civilisation.
Melbourne, November 12, 1862.19
In his reply Landsborough made the remarkable statement:

Although this city is commercially the metropolis of the Australian world, the territory of this colony is small…. It therefore became me when employed by the Royal Society on the mission I was engaged upon on the other side of the continent, to tell on my return of the fine country I had seen…. Already much of the frontier of Queensland is occupied by Victorians…. They are, I presume, supported by the capitalists here, who, I hope, will get a good return from the money they have invested.\textsuperscript{20}

When he returned to Brisbane, a ‘very numerous party of ladies and gentlemen assembled at the School of Arts’ on 8 December 1862 to witness the presentation by Sir George Bowen of a Congratulatory Address to Landsborough. The Governor stated:

To this colony you have rendered transcendent service inasmuch as you have considerably added to our information with regard to that large and valuable tract of country annexed to our territory by her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen.\textsuperscript{21}

In his reply, Landsborough made the telling statement: ‘Apart from the mission in search of Burke and Wills, there has been another object in view – the discovery of new pasture land.’\textsuperscript{22}

The ultimate accolade for an explorer was to be presented at the Royal Geographical Society in London, and Landsborough had the honour to achieve this on 25 May 1863. At the Society’s Anniversary Meeting he was presented with a gold watch and heard the President, Sir Roderick Murchison state:

Mr Landsborough has practically accelerated in a remarkable degree the formation of a northern settlement. Geographically he has taught us that Sturt’s desert extends but little to the east, and that between it and the foot of the Eastern Cordilleras there is a vast, rich, and well-watered pastoral country.\textsuperscript{23}

This was the highpoint of Landsborough’s career. On his return to Queensland he found he had lost most of his property through the incompetence or dishonesty of those to whom he entrusted it. After being appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands and Magistrate at the new settlement of Burketown, he presided over the collapse of the first attempts to establish a settlement on the Gulf and was dismissed in ignominious circumstances in 1870. He spent the next decade struggling financially to support a young family after the death of his wife. His constitution was undermined by the privations which he had endured on his explorations. In 1881 the Queensland Parliament voted him the sum of £2000 in recognition of his services to the Colony. He used the money to select 2000 acres on Pumicestone Passage south of Caloundra, where he died in 1886 at the age of 61.
Endnotes

2 Named Cooper’s Creek at the time of the Burke and Wills Expedition. The main accounts of Landsborough’s journey are contained in: Journal of Landsborough’s Expedition from Carpentaria in search of Burke and Wills, Melbourne, Wilson & Mackinnon, 1862; Captain [Thomas] Kirby, Narrative of a Voyage from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria, Melbourne, Herald Office, 1862; James Stuart Laurie (editor), Landsborough’s Exploration of Australia from Carpentaria to Melbourne, London, Marshall & Laurie, 1865; George Bourne, Bourne’s Journal of Landsborough’s Expedition from Carpentaria in search of Burke and Wills, Melbourne, Dwight, 1862; [William Henry Norman], Exploration Expedition Letter from Commander Norman, reporting the return of the “Victoria” from the Gulf of Carpentaria, together with reports and correspondence, Melbourne, John Ferres, Government Printer, 1862; ‘Reports of the Various Expeditions fitted out to relieve, or ascertain the fate of Messrs Burke & Wills, comprising...’3. Journal of Landsborough’s Expedition from Carpentaria...’ The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, vol. 33, 1863, pp. 79-132.
4 Third Report of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1858, p. 2.
6 Seventh and Final report of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1863, Appendix 1, p. 1.
7 Seventh and Final report of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1863, Appendix 1, p. 1.
9 Seventh and Final report of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1863, Appendix 1, p. 1.
12 Seventh and Final report of the Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria, 1863, Appendix 1, p. 1.
13 Report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into and report upon the circumstances connected with the sufferings and death of Robert O’Hara Burke and William John Wills, Melbourne, John Ferres, Government Printer, p. 33.
14 Tom Bergin, In the steps of Burke and Wills, Sydney, ABC Books, 1981, p. 120.
15 Murgatroyd, The Dig Tree, p. 121.
16 Courier, (Brisbane), 17 July 1862, p. 3.
18 The Argus, (Melbourne), Thursday 13 November 1862, p. 5.
19 The Argus, (Melbourne), Thursday 13 November 1862, p. 5.
20 The Argus, (Melbourne), Thursday 13 November 1862, p. 5.
21 Courier, (Brisbane), Thursday 18th December 1962, p. 3.
22 Courier, (Brisbane), Thursday 18th December 1962, p. 3.
John McKinlay – ‘Knight Errant of explorers’: an explorer’s explorer?

David Gibson*

What defines ‘an explorer’s explorer’? A Knight Errant is defined as a rover, especially in search of adventure and the Arthurian Sir Lancelot and Cervantes’ Don Quixote are invariably offered up as examples. As to what makes for a successful explorer; it is somewhat more complex. Peter Macinnis in his Australia’s pioneers, heroes & fools makes the observation that the drawback to being an explorer was that ‘you might end up dead, wounded or terribly sick’.¹ That said, the big advantages were the chances of fame and adulation and the explorer’s hope of being given a large grant of prime land in any area found and reported. There was also the prospect of cash rewards, positions of importance and influence, assorted honours, governorships and even, in the case of John Forrest, a life peerage. Major Mitchell became Sir Thomas, Lieutenant George Grey became Governor Sir George Grey, Ludwig Leichhardt was ‘forgiven’ a technical desertion from the Prussian army; and so it continued … for a select few.

John McKinlay does not feature at all in Macinnis’ book and Sarah Murgatroyd, in her vibrant tome The Dig Tree² offers but two references to a man who some knew by the name ‘Big John’. No explorer wishes a lonely death in an unforgiving environment. John McKinlay lived, as did the men who comprised the relief expedition which departed Adelaide in August 1861. That expedition included assorted animals²⁶ horses (10 were for riding), 12 bullocks, 100 sheep and four camels; many of which – like Wallace, the expedition’s dog – had been given names. By the time McKinlay’s party stumbled upon a herd of bullocks and ‘two white men tailing them’ on Saturday, 2 August 1862 around 70 miles from Port Denison in Queensland, many of the animals had been sacrificed, though no humankind had been lost in the process.

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Marble bust of John McKinlay. Purchased for £10 in 1910 by the Town of Gawler Council. (Gawler Heritage Collection)
Having lived through an expedition, every explorer wants to justify what he or she did and to ensure said reputation is intact. A number of contemporary journals of that expedition survive; that of McKinlay (economic, to the point and often more pre-occupied with his stock), Hodgkinson (‘a ready pen and a ready tongue’ befitting the former sub-editor on the Melbourne Age) and Davis (generous, and with compassion). All contribute to the creation of a surreal society dictated by an unforgiving and always-in-control environment.

To be an explorer’s explorer, do goals need to have been realised? In the case of the South Australian Relief Expedition, it is unclear – as indeed it was to McKinlay – that the objectives of the expedition were achieved. South Australia’s Commissioner for Crown Lands, HBT Strangways had been most precise in commissioning McKinlay:

Firstly – The relief of the Expedition under the command of Mr. Burke, or the acquiring of knowledge of its fate – this is the great objective of the Expedition under your command. When you may have accomplished the foregoing, or may have deemed it necessary to abandon the search for Mr. Burke, then – secondly the acquiring a knowledge of the country between Eyre’s Creek and Central Mount Stuart. Thirdly – The acquiring of knowledge of the western shores of Lake Eyre. A separate letter of instructions is given to you, and the particular matters to which you will direct your attention in this locality.

That separate letter, dated August 16 1861, the date McKinlay departed Adelaide, amounts to a secret directive:

I request that, when you may succeed in reaching the country to the west of Lake Eyre, you will carefully search that locality for indications of gold, minerals, or precious stones, as there is reason to believe that some of these exist, and have been found, in that locality; and you will especially search the country between longitude 136 and 137, and latitude 27 and 28, having regard to those objects. It will be desirable that you should keep this information from the remainder of your party until it becomes necessary that you should make use of their services in digging or washing the soil. I need hardly mention that any discovery of this nature will prove of great value to this Colony.

Did McKinlay’s party find Burke and Wills and their party alive – THEY DID NOT! Did McKinlay and his men return to what passed for antipodean civilisation in 1862 with a swag of precious stones and details of a reef of gold – THEY DID NOT!
And lastly, there is the matter of leadership: the ability to maintain discipline, especially in adversity and to encourage *esprit de corps* to promote harmony within the team when all is well and to ensure survival when things go awry. McKinlay brought his men to safety, he invoked courage and led from the front at times of desperation and yet, the *dynamic* that was the men under his command and the touring party in his name, at times resembled a dysfunctional television soap opera and his relationship with second in command William Oswald Hodgkinson still begs the question, even after 150 years, of…WHY?

John McKinlay was born on 26 August 1819 at Sandbank, Holy Loch, Argyllshire in Scotland; a third son for Dugald and his second wife Catharine. John was a brother to Alexander (born 27 October 1815), Ellar (born 19 May 1817), Duncan (born 14 July 1821) and Mary (born 11 September 1824).

Between 1832 and 1850, it has been estimated that 16 000 Scots were assisted in migrating to the Australian continent. These migrants were ‘mostly Protestant and mostly literate’ and were augmented by a number of agricultural tradesmen, labourers and shepherds brought out by the Australian Agricultural Company. Sponsored by their uncle Duncan McKellar who had taken up land on the Shoalhaven River, east of Goulburn, New South Wales, John joined his oldest brother Alexander aboard the *Elizabeth*, arriving in Hobart in December 1836. Perhaps because their sponsor decided to return to Scotland, the two brothers found themselves working around Tuggeranong, not far from present-day Canberra. Alexander, suffering from rheumatism and desperately unhappy and homesick offered to ‘transport the Dunoon Inn to the Centre of Melbourne’.8 In time other members of the family – brother Duncan – followed, or at least that was the plan although John urged caution. Writing in June 1839 to his brother Ellar he lamented that ‘I am sorry to say that without money very little is to [be] made in this country’.9 Still not 20-years-old, John McKinlay was constantly haunted by the prospect of penury.

Writing to his mother just three months later, McKinlay reported that:

> I am at the present day nearly as short of cash as the day I arrived in the Colony and you will know I had but very little then, but ‘God’ be thanked I have both youth, strength and health and when a person has that he never ought to grumble. My day may come round yet as well as others.10

This optimism was in contrast to his brother Alexander who, by May 1841 was dead; drowned in Van Dieman’s Land. John McKinlay’s day did come; he had a taste for bush life and acquired lands with Darling and Murray river frontages; a partner describing him as a ‘most athletic man, all sinew and muscle with a kindly disposition and would not quarrel’.11 By 1853, joined by his brother Ellar, McKinlay further attracted the attention of the South Australian ‘establishment’ in pressing to establish runs in the northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia.
By March 1861, five months had elapsed since any news of the Burke and Wills Expedition. Relief expeditions began to be assembled. Indeed, it has been estimated that the total cost of the various relief expeditions would cost more than the actual Burke and Wills Expedition; and that did not include the cost of sending the ship *Victoria* to the Gulf and the £5000 spent on camels.  

In 26 July 1861, the South Australian House of Assembly debated its own version of a relief expedition. John McKinlay recognised his moment in history, offering to work with Howitt’s land expedition or lead the venture ultimately offered to Walker. On 28 July 1861, the South Australian Government appointed John McKinlay to lead its relief expedition. McKinlay was 41-years-old. Advertisements appeared for fit young men and McKinlay interviewed all applicants, his observations sprinkled with any number of what might be deemed today as politically incorrect terms such as ‘too heavy’, or ‘too young’.

The South Australian Government also imposed on McKinlay a man whom, Queenslanders especially, were to hear a lot more of; William Oswald Hodgkinson, born 1835. By the time Hodgkinson joined the relief party, he had been a midshipman, a worker on the Victorian goldfields, a clerk in The War Office and reporter on Melbourne’s *Age* newspaper. Indeed he had been part of the Burke and Wills party and, more recently one of Alfred Howitt’s search team. McKinlay, impressed, appointed Hodgkinson second-in-command. On the same date that Landsborough left Brisbane to start his search south of the Gulf, so too did the South Australian Relief Expedition commence with its odd assortment of male temperaments and egos, bullocks, sheep, dog and the camels named *Naroo, Coppin, Siva* and *Krishna*.

August became September, Aborigines Frank and Jack joined the party, as did bullock driver Ned Palmer who the inveterate story teller John Davis described as ‘the beau ideal of a bullock driver: hardy, devil-may-care, good tempered, could swear as none but bullock drivers can, and a very pleasant little fellow he was during the rest of the journey, and could spin his yarn with the best, and it lost nothing by his telling it’.  

The party was now complete; McKinlay in charge, with Hodgkinson, his second-in-command. John Davis, Thomas Middleton in charge of the camels, William Bell, Paul Wylde and Robert Poole in charge of horses, Edward Palmer the bullock driver, John Kirby, cook and the two aforementioned Aboriginals employed as shepherds.

Spring had come and Summer was to follow. Ahead was 10 months and one week of hardship, starvation and pain in a landscape that, at first, was punctuated by a ‘fearful jumble of broken sandhills’, where ‘mouths [were] kept moist with a type of pigface’ and ‘low, salt tolerating scrubland called samphire’ made for miserable country.
Places with lyrically-sounding Indigenous names found themselves renamed in the European manner as McKinlay and his party blazed their way across a capricious landscape that offered sustenance yet despair, and then hope with news, in October 1861, of a sighting of five white men who alas, were not found. And then there was the discovery of a white man’s grave in the vicinity of what had been called Lake Massacre (Kadhibaerri) and the speculation that here were the remains of Charles Gray of the Burke and Wills Expedition. McKinlay may have believed it to be Gray; historians writing in more recent times are not so sure.

Guy Fawkes Day came and went, the party rested, awaiting the return of Hodgkinson with supplies. Damaged tents were repaired and seeds were scattered in expectation of gardens of melons, pumpkins and stone fruit. The overlanders weighed themselves and whilst the cook had put on 4 pounds (1.8 kg). McKinlay had lost 28 pounds (12.7 kg), Davis 20 pounds (9 kg) and Kirby 16 pounds (7.3 kg). By now, Summer was upon the party with day temperatures averaging 110°F (43°C).

On Friday 29 November 1861, Hodgkinson rejoined the party bringing with him a new cook, William Maitland, and the searing news that Howitt had found the remains of Burke and Wills at Cooper Creek and that King had been found living further down the creek with an Aboriginal community.
Plan B was now to be put into operation; a mission of mercy now became a journey of forensic discovery in the course of which, poignantly, the path of McKinlay’s expedition crossed the path and campsite of Burke.

McKinlay’s party still had problems, especially with a cart that had been the bane of their enterprise and yet there was time for a camp newspaper edited by Hodgkinson, ever a newspaperman. Horses and camels became bogged and for the first time, the quartet of camels struggled in the terrain. New lakes made an appearance and were accorded European names; one even being named for a Miss Pile of Gawler, who 13 months later, would become Mrs John McKinlay.

Christmas Day 1861 was celebrated by the 10 Caucasians with 200/300 Aborigines, horses, camels, bullocks and sheep at a spot almost halfway between today’s settlements of Innamincka and Birdsville on the south-east side of the Simpson Desert. In his Journal, McKinlay noted ‘[H]ad an excellent dinner of roast mutton and plum pudding and did not envy anyone in the City of Adelaide’.

The next day, Hodgkinson buried his first memo with the tried and true intonation ‘Read, attach memo, and re-deposit.’ Davis, ever the optimist, refused to let the outback get to him:

who can tell what will occur, or what sort of country they shall see next, or whether they will find water at the camping place, even if they tried till 12 o’clock at night? Yes, such is the lot of an explorer, and a hard life and a jolly one, no care for the morrow, no [debt collectors] to fear and no debts incurred. It is a primitive life…but there is one thing wanting, it is the smile and solace of a gentle woman.

In time the desert gave way to flooding waters and mosquitoes but not before correspondence between two of the relief party senior members. On Monday 24 February 1862 – and for reasons never satisfactorily explained – Hodgkinson handed McKinlay a letter in pencil on a white card resigning as second-in-command and seeking permission to return to the ‘settled districts’. Hodgkinson made the approach; and yet in the official entry and it would appear that the initiative belonged with McKinlay.

From this point onwards, we see a different McKinlay – vengeful, aloof and hurt as evidenced by his formal reply to Hodgkinson, in pencil and on blue paper:

It has just saved me the disagreeable necessity of intimating to you that such was my desire, and determination. AS IT DOES NOT SUIT MY SUCCESS [emphasis added] I will not sanction your return at present from the party under my charge. And for the future you will be as one of the others of the party and will be treated as such. Further communication will not be attended to.

In the first week of March 1862, the party noticed the country changing
colour, water everywhere, with the ever-present mosquitoes by the thousands. Bullocks were slaughtered yielding 116 pounds (53 kg) of dried meat and each man was given his last ration of sugar.\(^1\) One could be forgiven for thinking that the worst was behind McKinlay’s party and yet, mindful that there were insufficient supplies to enable their return to Adelaide, he determined that he would make for the southern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria, head east towards Port Denison and there await instructions from South Australia.

He reached the Gulf at a point four or five miles from the coast, 276 days after leaving Adelaide. By this time, however, all the sheep had been consumed, just two bullocks remained and the camels were lame. On 16 June 1862, McKinlay observed, ‘I wish I had a little more food. If I had I would give the animals a week here, but I have barely sufficient for 6 days’.\(^2\) As Kim Lockwood in his seminal biography *Big John* noted, ‘it was six weeks before they ate properly again’.\(^3\)

It is in that intervening period that the legend of ‘Big John’ McKinlay was born; the camels were killed, *Nardoo* being the first and then the horse *Rowdy* was found dead and horses with names *Jamie, Bawley, Camel* and *Fidget* had to be left behind. The pack-horse *Mr Buckeye* was killed and made into a stew and then it was *Goliah*’s turn. Middleton was now McKinlay’s second-in-command and he had a mountain named after him, recognising the ‘good

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(www.burkeandwills.net.au/Memorials/mckinlay.htm)
example to the rest of the party’.

The discipline of history has an uncanny knack of repeating itself and being serendipitous so should anyone be surprised that, when relief came to the South Australian Relief Expedition on Saturday 2 August 1863, amongst those on hand to greet them was one William Brahe who had been with Howitt in the relief expedition that resulted in the rescue of King?

McKinlay’s party had not found Burke and Wills and members of their party alive and the treasure uncovered was, apart from some copper, not the kind Commissioner Strangways had imagined, the explorer Landsborough noting that ‘By Burke, Walker, McKinlay and myself, six of the Carpentaria rivers have been traced. These rivers chiefly water country of a character which, although dry, is the kind that I like best for pastoral purposes’.

And so a ‘royal progress’ of sorts was played out – one year and one day after leaving Gawler. The party now began to break up and McKinlay and his remaining party made their way down the eastern seaboard, the Ben Bolt taking them from Bowen to Rockhampton where the poorly-done-by Hodgkinson elected to remain along with Poole. The sub-editor from Melbourne’s Age would go on to become editor of the Rockhampton Morning Bulletin and later Mackay’s Mercury and, later still, a member of the Queensland Parliament,

Memorial to John McKinlay  Town of Gawler, South Australia.

(Gawler Heritage Collection)
and a Mining Warden on the Etheridge and Palmer Goldfields.\textsuperscript{25}

Sydney was the next port of call and more of the party departed. Just five left for Melbourne, arriving for a handsome reception honouring McKinlay, Landsborough and their respective parties at the then Exhibition Building. It would seem that \textit{bonhomme} was in abundance but was McKinlay prepared to share in that applause?

In the light of research undertaken by Kim Lockwood in \textit{Big John The Extraordinary Adventures of John McKinlay 1819-1872}\textsuperscript{26} the author speaks of reports of that Melbourne \textit{Soirée} in the \textit{Glasgow Herald} as well as an extract of a letter from an unidentified member of McKinlay’s party writing about the efforts of the South Australian Burke Relief Expedition. The detail is astonishing, right down to how many sheep were eaten and the cart left in the desert. There were perhaps only three in the party so erudite; and given the rancour in the relationship between McKinlay and Hodgkinson, now directed at the South Australian Commissioner for Crown Lands, was it the \textit{Pollyannansque} Davis or McKinlay seeking some kind of absolution for a less than successful venture?

McKinlay and the remaining four members from his party reached Adelaide on 14 October 1862 with McKinlay rewarded with a payment of £1000 and three month’s pay to each man who had accompanied him. At least that was the plan amid constant bickering at any number of levels. A series of gala receptions followed, the first at the Pier Hotel, Glenelg followed by a congratulatory dinner in Gawler after which there was an official reception in Adelaide and the presentation of a silver tea service paid for by public subscription.

On Monday 8 December 1862, the city of churches again paid tribute to McKinlay and Alfred Howitt who had returned from Cooper Creek, having arranged for the remains of Burke and Wills to be transported to Melbourne via Kapunda and Adelaide. On Thursday 11 December 1862 in Adelaide, John McKinlay found himself in company with Dr James Murray and Howitt walking behind Mr Rounsevell’s best hearse bearing the remains of Robert O’Hara Burke and William John Wills.

John McKinlay was destined to play the role again of exploring ‘Knight Errant’ in 1865; chosen to lead a further exploration of the Northern Territory and to report on the best sites for settlement. Time was not something that McKinlay had in abundance, dying on the last day of 1872. He left a widow, Jane, married for just 10 years and who was 34-years-old. A monument to the memory of John McKinlay was erected at Gawler, the foundation stone laid by the explorer John Forrest on 14 November 1874, in the presence of John Davis.
The inscription on McKinlay’s Memorial reads:

Brave yet gentle, resolute yet unassuming
Formed to command, yet stern to none
Who knows to obey;
He was admired and loved:
To his country he bequeathed a name
Which she may proudly add to the head roll
Of her distinguished men.27

Endnotes

8 Alexander McKinlay to his Father, September, 1840, in Lockwood, *Big John*, p. xix.
12 Lockwood, *Big John*, p. 5.
14 Davis, *Tracks of McKinlay*, p. 10.
15 Named Cooper’s Creek at the time of the Burke and Wills Expedition.
16 The expedition’s dog, Wallace, had taken a bait. Davis’ Journal, 31 October 1861.
17 Wednesday December 25, 1861, in McKinlay, *Journal of Exploration into the Interior of Australia*.
19 Davis, 18 January 1862, in Lockwood, *Big John*, p. 49.
21 Lockwood, *Big John*, p. 81.
22 Lockwood, *Big John*, p. 81.
27 Inscription, McKinlay Memorial, Gawler, South Australia.
Editorial Board

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Conversions

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\begin{align*}
1 \text{ foot} &= 30.48 \text{ centimetres} \\
1 \text{ mile} &= 1.61 \text{ kilometres} \\
1 \text{ chain} &= 20.12 \text{ metres} \\
1 \text{ acre} &= 0.4 \text{ hectares} \\
1 \text{ acre} &= 0.004 \text{ square kilometres} \\
1 \text{ pound} &= 0.45 \text{ kilograms} \\
1 \text{ ton} &= 1.02 \text{ tonnes} \\
1 \text{ fathom} &= 1.82 \text{ metres} \\
20 \text{ shillings} &= 1 \text{ pound (£)} \\
12 \text{ pence (d)} &= 1 \text{ shilling (s)}
\end{align*}
\]

At metric conversion 14 February 1966
(refer to exchange rates after this date)

\[
\begin{align*}
1 \text{ pound (£)} &= $2 \text{ Australian dollars} \\
10 \text{ shillings (s)} &= $1 \text{ Australian dollar} \\
1 \text{ shilling (d)} &= 10 \text{ cents}
\end{align*}
\]

Cover: The design by Society member Dr Michael Tracey incorporates the Queensland Flag with the Union Jack in the upper left corner and the Maltese Cross with a superimposed Royal Crown.

Images left to right: Burke's burial tree; John King; Burke and Wills; McKinlay montage; Arrival at the Dig Tree
Burke and Wills - an overview of the Expedition, its preparation, planning and outcomes
Dave Phoenix

John King: an Ulster explorer who became the first person to cross Australia.
Dave Phoenix

‘Surgeon’ Wills of the Burke and Wills Expedition 1860-1861: new research and a medical perspective of William John Wills (1834-1861)
John Pearn

The Literature of Burke and Wills
Ian Hadwen

‘It is during my stay in this city that I learned of the tragic outcome of the expedition of O’Hara Burke’: Jean-Baptiste Desparmet’s account of the Burke and Wills expedition
Colin Sheehan

William Landsborough and the Burke and Wills search expedition
James McCourt

John McKinlay – ‘Knight Errant of explorers’: an explorer’s explorer?
David Gibson

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