Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Hilary Clare Jankelson
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8121-4283

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy - Arts (by thesis)

September 2019

Department of Culture and Communication
Faculty of Arts
University of Melbourne
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Abstract

Andrew Sayer’s landmark book *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century* was published in 1996. It revealed for the first time the extent of the art produced by Tommy McRae during the second half of the Nineteenth century and discusses in detail the context of the artist’s works. With most of his drawings now held by public institutions, they are available for his audience to view and study.

This thesis advances the understanding of McRae and introduces a novel iconographic and chronological analysis of his works. It interprets the minutiae of posture, placement and engagement that the artist brought to his drawings in order to expand his narratives. Through careful evaluation they will be recognized for their pictorial appeal with their simplicity and fluidity of line, their complexity of detail, their humour and their honesty. The sensitivity and discerning qualities of his depictions are emphasized in his figures both human and animal, whereby he communicated speed, agility, vigour and momentum, emotion and intent. The works of McRae should be seen as documents of historical significance by a highly perceptive man and a committed and accomplished artist, who was countering the myriad of words that were being written at the time, by those outside his culture.

McRae was born in Victoria’s north-east in the 1830’s, growing up through the turbulent years of Colonial expansion, the rush for gold and the resulting population explosions of invading settlers. He maintained his independence outside formal government reserves and set up his base at Lake Moodemere, near Wahgunyah.

The artist was heir to a heritage of images etched and drawn on rock faces, trees, bark and skins. He was first observed drawing in the mud and then encouraged to transfer his ideas using ink and paper. There are upward of 245 images on single sheets and in notebooks and sketchbooks from which to study the iconography that established his narratives of hunting, fishing, fighting, ceremony and celebration. His definition of attribute and decoration detail the elements that make up the different occasions. Through close examination of the spacing and the relationship that the artist created between his participants, the mechanics and sequences of the performances and
activities can now be understood. McRae’s skill conveys the physicality in man, bird and animal, as well as the attitudes that drew his audience into his depictions and enlightens them to their demands and requirements. On paging through the sketchbooks, the evolving social climate to which the Aboriginal people were exposed is revealed, including McRae’s response to the government’s ‘Half-caste Act’.

The thesis explores gender within this social climate. From his earliest books until his death in 1901, there is a paucity of depictions of women at their traditional activities, except accompanying family groups in hunting for fish and game and as ‘music-makers’ at some ceremonial and celebratory events. It recognizes that McRae was drawing for predominately male patrons. Also, the census figures support the decrease of female numbers in the communities along the Murray Valley with a corresponding increase in those taking up residence in government reserves. His drawings thus focus on the pursuits of the Aboriginal men and then their responses to the influences to which they became exposed by the new settlers; alcohol, social interaction and dress.

Chronological sequences can be identified both within each book and between the books. McRae introduced the William Buckley saga in 1885 to define that within the former. By illustrating the circumstances around the arrival of the Europeans on the shores of Port Phillip Bay which coincided with the artist’s supposed birth in the mid-1830s, he developed the handkerchief waving motif to delineate those events and activities prior to and those after this occurrence. The source of the images is aligned with published accounts, recognizing that he may have been able to access this information through his literate second wife.

The iconography is juxtaposed with the analysis of his human and animal figures and the examination of McRae’s depictions of the tree, the shrub and the ground as chronological markers. The dissection of the evolving images of these features provides a sequence between his books. Across the years, the architecture of the trees becomes more complex, the main trunks develop a definition of bark and there is further transformation in the canopies. Varieties in shape and size extend to the middle and lower story shrubs, with the artist detailing a more intricate herbage underfoot. The development in these images is aligned with their known commissioning dates,
establishing a chronology into which can be inserted single sheets, notebooks and sketchbooks about which we have less information.

This thesis, with its detailed and comprehensive analysis of each drawing, furnishes the audience of the twenty-first century, with the knowledge of an Aboriginal Australian of the Nineteenth century, detailing his Aboriginality and his Cultural Interaction with the Colonial world.
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Declaration

The thesis comprises only my original work towards Doctor of Philosophy – Arts.

Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

The thesis is 98,170 words, inclusive of table, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed:

Hilary C Jankelson
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Preface and Acknowledgements

As President of the International Committee of Art from 2008 to 2012, Professor Jaynie Anderson convened the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art, ‘Crossing Cultures – conflict, migration and convergence’, that was held at the University of Melbourne. The cover image that Professor Anderson chose, as editor of the Proceedings of the Congress, was a pen and ink drawing from the University’s own collection – a drawing by the nineteenth century Aboriginal artist Tommy McRae. This was my first introduction to the artist and initiated my exploration of his works from the 1860’s to the end of the century.

The late Andrew Sayers book, The Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century provided further stimulus to the complicated and involved study of the artist’s iconographic and chronological approach to events in the lives of the Aboriginal people of the Murray Valley. McRae drew on single sheets, in sketchbooks and in notebooks with pen and ink on paper. He documented, in the face of the words that were written by alien observers, the finely balanced lifestyles of the Aboriginal communities as they underwent incursions into their Country and their heritage.

With many of McRae’s extant works in Australia and housed in its public collections, access to the sketchbooks, notebooks and single sheets from the National Gallery of Victoria, State Library of Victoria, Koori Heritage Trust Inc collection, National Gallery of Australia, National Museum of Australia, National Library of Australia, Corowa Historical Society, Benalla Regional Art Gallery, Art Gallery of New South Wales and many individual contributions including the University of St Andrew’s library, Scotland, extended the compendium of works that I was able to examine.

My thanks go to Donald McRae for information on the Scottish McRae family who settled in Rutherglen, to Jeannie Mims for details on the McCrae family, to Deidre Izon for her insights into Dr William Lang, to Alan Handberg for opening the Corowa Historical Society collection, and to Philip Kilborn, descendant of McRae’s patron, Rod Kilborn.

I am indebted to Dr Anthony White, Mr Philip Morrissey and Professor Ian McLean for their ongoing support. It is to the late Andrew Sayers that I owe special thanks, having met with him to discuss some of my findings. His works in bringing the art of the nineteenth century Aboriginal artists to the notice of the twenty-first century audience was the impetus for my passionate journey in recognition of Tommy McRae as an emissary and ambassador.

However, my most profound thanks go to Emeritus Professor Jaynie Anderson for her continuing and patient support as I grappled with the enormity of analyzing, interpreting and assessing the implications of McRae’s drawings for his contemporary audiences and for the audiences of today.
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Table of Contents

Abstract
Declaration
Preface and Acknowledgements
List of Illustrations, maps and photographs.
List of tables
Chapters

1. Introduction
   Victoria’s colonial environment through the years of Tommy McRae’s passage to adulthood
   McRae and the exposure of his art to the public
   Andrew Sayers and his introduction of McRae to the late twentieth century audience
   The patrons of McRae’s drawings, sketchbooks and notebooks
   Methodology in the examination of McRae’s art
   Why McCrae? Why McRae?
   Evaluation

2. Rock to paper, ochre to ink
   Etchings on skins
   Rock art of South-east Australia
   Etching on bark
   Exhibition history of McRae’s drawings

3. The Art of ceremony and celebration
   Ceremony and celebration through the eyes of the European artists
   McRae’s ceremony and celebration on paper

4. Tommy McRae and the William Buckley legend
   The literature referencing the saga of William Buckley
   William Buckley in McRae’s narratives
   Buckley and related depiction in the Lang Sketchbook No 1
   Buckley in the Grey commission
   Buckley from a disbanded anthology now in private collections and the University of Melbourne Archive
   The Koori Heritage Trust Inc Collection of Buckley images
   The Buckley image from the Williams Sketchbook No 2
   The related images from the Lefaivre Sketchbook and the Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook.
   Evaluations
5. The *Lang Sketchbook No 1* (1885) and *No 2* (1886): Their narratives

   *Lang Sketchbook No 1*
   *Lang Sketchbook No 2*

   The sketchbooks unraveled

6. Gender and the Social Climate of McRae’s Murray Valley

   McRae’s figures of the hunter and the hunted
   The sensation of performance
   Observations of the peculiar and the unfamiliar
   The advancement of the ‘dandified figure’, the Chinaman, the firearm
   ‘Where have all the women gone?’

7. The Tree, the shrub, the ground: Mapping their course

   The tree and shrub in McRae’s drawings
   The ground in McRae’s drawings
   The Tabulation of ground treatment and the tree and shrub architecture across time
   Analysis of trees, shrubs and ground treatments in dating the *Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook*

   Deliberation of subject matter in McRae’s drawings

8. Conclusions – Spanning the divide between the nineteenth century and the twenty-first century

9. Appendices

   1. Introduction appendix
   2. John Mathew, *Eaglehawk and Crow*, p. 15
   3. Hinkins, J T, 1884: *Life amongst the native race, with extracts from a diary*, p. 34
   6. Peter Beveridge, *The Aborigines of Victoria and Riverina*, p. 131-3
   10. Anonymous
   12. Hinkins, J T, 1884: *Life amongst the native race, with extracts from a diary*, p. 35.

10. Bibliography
# Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

## Illustrations Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tommy McRae</th>
<th>Item No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Aboriginal Art</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremner Notebook</td>
<td>2 – 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatliff Sketchbook</td>
<td>13 – 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey Commission</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook</td>
<td>20 – 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Notebook</td>
<td>28- 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Sketchbook</td>
<td>35 – 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koori Heritage Trust Inc Collection</td>
<td>44 – 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang Sketchbook No 1</td>
<td>47 – 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang Sketchbook No 2</td>
<td>65 – 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lefaivre Sketchbook</td>
<td>83 – 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas Sketchbook</td>
<td>91 – 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMahon Sketchbook(disbanded)</td>
<td>101 – 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Victoria Collection</td>
<td>107 – 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Museum of Aust. Sketchbook</td>
<td>118 -122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Collections</td>
<td>123 – 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Melbourne Archives</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker Collection No 1</td>
<td>126 – 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker Collection No 2</td>
<td>128 – 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams Sketchbook No 1</td>
<td>131 – 134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams Sketchbook No 2</td>
<td>135 – 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>141 – 151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Art and Artefacts</td>
<td>152 – 153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Barak</td>
<td>154 – 157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilhelm Blandowski</td>
<td>158 – 161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abraham-Louis Buvelot 162 – 163
Erlikilyika 164 – 165
Frank Gilbert 166
S T Gill 167 – 170
Henry Godfrey 171
John Glover 172 – 178
Clement Hodgkinson 179 – 180
Charles-Alexandre Lesueur 181
Joseph Lycett 182 – 185
Mickey of Ulladull 186 – 188
Albert Namatjira 189
Walter Preston 190
Charles Rodin 191
J M Skipper 192
Peter Purvis Smith 193
Eugene Von Guerard 194
Maps 195
Photographs
Anonymous 196 – 197
J Barnes 198
John Hunter Kerr 199 – 202
Lang 203
E Milne 204 – 205
Charles P Mountford 206
Baldwin Spencer 207
Rock Art 208 – 223.
Illustrations

Tommy McRae, (Tommy Barnes), Kwat Kwat

Tommy McRae - Australian Aboriginal Art


Tommy McRae - Bremner Notebook (1880)

2. Image 1, Bremner Notebook, 1880, National Library of Australia, Canberra.


**Tommy McRae - Ellwood Commission (1900)**


**Tommy McRae - Gatliff Sketchbook (1898)**


**Tommy McRae - Grey Commission**


Tommy McRae – Kilborn Notebook (1875)

28. Image 1, Kilborn Notebook, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

29. Image 3, Kilborn Notebook, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

30. Image 4b, Kilborn Notebook, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

31. Image 5, Kilborn Notebook, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

32. Image 8, Kilborn Notebook, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.
33. Image 10, Kilborn Notebook, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

34. Image 11, Kilborn Notebook, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

**Tommy McRae – Kilborn Sketchbook (after 1891)**

35. Image 2, Kilborn Sketchbook, after 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

36. Image 4, Kilborn Sketchbook, after 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

37. Image 6, Kilborn Sketchbook, after 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

38. Image 7, Kilborn Sketchbook, after 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

39. Image 8, Kilborn Sketchbook, after 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.


43. Image 13, *Kilborn Sketchbook*, after 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

**Tommy McRae - Koori Heritage Trust Inc**


**Tommy McRae - Lang Sketchbook No 1**


63. Image 17, Lang Sketchbook No 1, 1885, Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

64. Image 18, Lang Sketchbook No 1, 1885, Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Tommy McRae – Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886

65. Image 1, Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886, University of St Andrews Library, St Andrews, Scotland.


67. Image 3, Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886, University of St Andrews Library, St Andrews, Scotland.


77. Image 13, Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886, University of St Andrews Library, St Andrews, Scotland.


**Tommy McRae - Lefaivre Sketchbook, c. 1886**


**Tommy McRae - Lucas Sketchbook, 1881**


Tommy McRae - McMahon Sketchbook (disbanded)


Tommy McRae - Museum Victoria

107. ‘Hunting emu and chasing Chinamen’, Museum Victoria, Melbourne

Tommy McRae - National Gallery of Australia Notebook, n.d.,


**Tommy McRae - National Museum of Australia Sketchbook, n.d.**


**Tommy McRae - Private Collections**


**Tommy McRae - University of Melbourne Archives**


**Tommy McRae - Walker Collection No 1**

126. *Corroboree*, pen and ink on paper, 1860, Given to P Chauncy by Mrs G H Poole, Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria
127. Corroboree, pen and ink on paper, ‘Drawing by “Tommy Barnes” an aboriginal of the upper Murray in 1862. Walker Collection No 1, Given to P. Chauncy by Mrs G H Poole.’ Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria

Tommy McRae - Walker Collection No 2


Tommy McRae - Williams Sketchbook No 1, n.d.


Tommy McRae - *Williams Sketchbook No 2*, n.d.


**Anonymous**

141. Bontherambo, the residence of the Messrs Docker, north of Wangaratta, 1875, print, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.


143. Anonymous, Possum Skin Cloak, Yorta Yorta, 1853, Maidens Punt, Echuca, Victoria.

---

1 R E Johns Collection, Museum Victoria.


150. Anonymous, Grave Marker, 1866, reproduced from Meerreng-an,


American Art and Artefacts

152. The Grand Robe, 224 x 148 cm, MH 86.17.1. Reproduced from Robes of Splendour; Native North American Painted Buffalo Hides, George P Horse Capture et al., p. 102.


William Barak

154. Figures in Possum Skin Cloaks, 1898, pencil, wash, charcoal solution and earth pigments on paper, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.²

² The Ian Potter Centre, 2003: p. 45.

156. *Samuel de Pury’s Vineyard*, Musée d’Ethnographie, Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

157. *Untitled*, c. 1890’s, water colour and gouache on paper, 44.7x47.3 irreg., Private Collection.

**Wilhelm Blandowski**

158. Redaway and Sons engraver, *Corroboree or Native Festival*, Reproduced from Harry Allen Ed., *Australia, Wilhelm Blandowski’s Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*.


**Abraham-Louis Buvelot**

162. *Cottage with figures*, pencil, 9.3x16.1 cm, 1860’s-1880’s, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

163. *Settler’s Cottage*, oil on board, 21x31.5 cm, location unknown, reproduced from Menzies Art Auctions results.

**Erlikyika**


**Frank Gilbert**

166. Frank Gilbert, *The bark hut at Bontherambo*, 1838, Bontherambo Collection.
**S T Gill**


**Henry Godfrey**


**John Glover**


175. **Corroboree by moonlight, c 1832-3**, ink and grey wash, sketchbook 97, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Reproduced from David Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*. p. 126


177. **Early morning in the Painter’s Plains – Ben Lomond from memory, c 1832**, ink and grey wash, sketchbook 97, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Reproduced from David Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*. p. 128

178. **A Corroboree of Natives near Mills’ Plains, 1832**, Oil on Canvas laid on Board, 56.5x71.4 cm., Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia. Reproduced from David Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*. p. 129.
Clement Hodgkinson

179. ‘Dance at the conclusion of the Cawarra Ceremonies’, 1843, reproduced from *Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay with descriptions of the natives, their manners and customs, the geology, natural productions, fertility and resources of that region, First explored and surveyed by order of the Colonial Government by Clement Hodgkinson*, p. 233.

Charles-Alexandre Lesueur

181. *Corroboree, Charcoal and Ink, 14.5 x 22.5 cm, Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle, Le Havre. Reproduced from Hunt and Carter, Terre Napoléon Australia through French Eyes 1800 – 1804*, p. 65

Joseph Lycett


**Mickey of Ulladalla**

186. Fishing; Scenes of Daily Life; Native Flora and Fauna, Private Collection

187. Detail of Fishing; Scenes of Daily Life; Native Flora and Fauna, Private Collection.

188. Detail of Fishing; Scenes of Daily Life; Native Flora and Fauna, Private Collection.
Albert Namatjira

189. *Ghost Gum*, Glen Helen, 1945-59, Melbourne: Private Collection

Walter Preston

190. *Corroboree*, 1820, University of Newcastle, Newcastle, New South Wales.

Charles Rodin Lithographer


J M Skipper

192. *Corroboree*, 1840, Oil on Canvas, 106x152 cm., South Australian Museum, Adelaide, South Australia.

Peter Purvis Smith

193. *Kangaroo Hunt*, 1938-9, oil on canvas, 64.8x92.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York, reproduced from Mary Eagle, *Peter Purvis Smith: a painter in peace and war*, n.d., p. 43.
Eugène Von Guérard

194. *The Tower Hill*, 1855, (68.6 x 122 cm), on loan to Warrnambool Art Gallery from Department of Environment and Primary Industry, Victoria.

Maps

195. Map of Port Phillip from the survey of Mr Wedge and others, reproduced from James Bonwick, *Discovery and Settlement of Port Phillip*, 1856.

Photographs

Anonymous


H Barnes


John Hunter Kerr

199. H 30158/18, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne


Lang


E Milne


Charles P Mountford,


Baldwin Spencer


Rock Art


212. Western New South Wales, 1943, p. 23.

213. Unknown Artist, Rock Painting, Kangaroo, Mootwingee, reproduced from Lindsay Black, Aboriginal Art Galleries of Western New South Wales, 1943, p. 23.


217. Unknown Artist, Rock painting, Emus, Wiltagoona, reproduced from Lindsay Black, Aboriginal Art Galleries of Western New South Wales, 1943, p. 57.
218. Artist, *Dancing men, painted red and white, Dog, also stencilled hands, Gundabooka*, reproduced from Lindsay Black, *Aboriginal Art Galleries of Western New South Wales*, 1943, p. 53.


Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Tables

Art of Ceremony and Celebration.

1. Incidence of dance events across McRae’s artistic output 1860 – 1898.

Tommy McRae and the William Buckley legend.


Gender and the Social climate of McRae’s Murray Valley.


The tree, the shrub, the ground: mapping their course.

4. Tabulation of ground treatment and tree and shrub architecture across McRae’s artistic output 1860 – 1898.
   a. Corroboree sheets 1860
       1864 (i) and (ii)
   b. Kilborn notebook 1875
   c. Bremner notebook 1880
   d. Lucas sketchbook 1881
   e. Lang sketchbook no 1 1885
   f. Lang sketchbook no 2 1886
   g. Kilborn sketchbook after 1891
   h. Gatiliff sketchbook after 1898

5. Incidence of ‘dance of defiance’ events with their level of body decoration across McRae’s artistic output 1860 – 1898.
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World*

Chapter 1: Introduction

Tommy McRae, or Yakaduna, as he is also known, was a Kwat Kwat man of the Yorta Yorta Nation in the north-east of Victoria, Australia. It is thought that he was born in the 1830s in the vicinity of Yackandandah, living until 1901 through the turbulent years of the expansion of Victoria, the gold rushes that brought even further upheaval and the fledgling colony’s response to its resulting wealth. He spent much of his life near the Murray River which separated New South Wales from the District of Victoria, documenting in image the environment of his Country and the lifestyles of his Aboriginal people as they negotiated the implications of the evolving events.

Victoria’s Colonial environment through the years of McRae’s passage to adulthood

After the exploration of the South-East of Australia by Hamilton Hume and William Hovell in 1824 and 1825, Thomas Mitchell in 1836 and the advance of the Port Phillip Association and other squatters from Van Diemen’s Land in 1835, Victoria underwent rapid growth and development during the latter three quarters of the Nineteenth Century. New settlers were coming from the south to take up opportunities in Gippsland and on the Western Plains as well as increasingly occupying country around the expanding metropolis of Melbourne. There was also migration overland by prospective landowners from the north, bringing with them extensive flocks of sheep and cattle. They were searching for the tracts of lush pastures bordering the many rivers that the explorers had found on their treks across the continent. Seeking to plumb its riches, it was not long before gold was discovered in the alluvial deposits of the plains, initiating a population explosion in search of this illusive mineral. From the 1850s miners from all walks of life arrived to seek their fortunes. Many of their exploits, a few victorious but most abject failures, have been documented in words, drawings, paintings and

---

*Throughout this paper I have used the term Aboriginal people, referencing https://www.monash.edu.au/about/editorialstyle/writing/inclusive-language.

4 McCombie, 1858: p. 7.
photography. To a degree the painters and writers were most comfortable depicting the towns and cities, and the European population travelling to, from and on the goldfields. However the artist Eugène von Guérard, having arrived in Melbourne from Austria in 1852, went out into the country. He chose to represent scenes of agricultural enterprises and the localities in which they were situated in Victoria – Western District, Grampians, Gippsland and the high country along the Great Dividing Range.

Eugène von Guérard, *The Tower Hill*, 1855, (68.6 x 122 cm), on loan to Warnambool Art Gallery from Department of Environment and Primary Industry, Victoria.

In some, he included Aboriginal people and indigenous animals thus locating his depictions in Australia, as he came to terms with the colors and light that were so different from that of Europe where he had trained. Most significant of these historical records was that commissioned by a Western District landowner, James Dawson who later wrote *Australian Aborigines*, (1881). In 1855 Dawson engaged Von Guerard to paint *Tower Hill*, oil on canvas, with the work recording the flora of this unique environment before the massive clearing by the encroaching settlers. They went on to destroy any habitat of the fauna that sustained the local Aboriginal populations and then removed all vestiges of ground cover to release the country for the growing of potatoes, pine plantations and gravel pits. Tower Hill was declared a national park in 1892 but the denuding of its plant life continued until 1961. In 1966 the painting, which had been retained by the Dawson Family, was donated to the Victorian Fisheries and Wildlife department as a “reminder of the former beauty of Tower Hill. It was then used as the

---

7 Thomas, 1989: p. 16.
9 Parks Victoria: p. 3.
reference for the extensive revegetation of the area, both by identifiable species and by siting.\textsuperscript{10}

It was not just the high-profile painters and writers that were recording the unique landscapes. The prospective landholders\textsuperscript{11} were also recording their new estates in both word and image - where the billabongs had been home to huge flocks of wild fowl and the expansive glades of trees had provided fodder and camouflage to all manner of native birds and animals. These havens for the Aboriginal people were cleared, removing the habitat that had supported the flora and fauna that were so important to them. The invasion by exotic European livestock and the weeds that they brought with them, disturbed the delicate equilibrium of the Australian environment.

The trees were felled and the land cleared for the cattle and sheep that were then competing with the kangaroos, wallabies, wombats and small macropods for food. To prevent plundering of the invading stock, more and more shepherds and outriders were being employed by the new settlers, thus denying Aboriginal people access to the grasslands and the riverbanks that had, for so long, provided them with the staples of their diet. This is exemplified in North-east Victoria by the progress of Reverend Joseph Docker and his extended family. They took up the controversial tract of land, Bontherambo Plains in the lower Ovens Valley, in 1838. This particular holding had earlier been the site of the ‘Faithfull Massacre’,\textsuperscript{12} was close by McRae’s childhood territory and adjacent to the ongoing battles that the earlier settlers had had with the Aboriginal people of the Ovens and Broken River Valleys.\textsuperscript{13} In contrast, it is documented that the Dockers treated the Aboriginal people with respect.\textsuperscript{14} The family was there to succeed and to create a prosperous life in the colony.\textsuperscript{15} Their records include a painting of the first simple home on the river flats.\textsuperscript{16} This may have been built by George Faithfull

\textsuperscript{10} Public Records Office of Victoria, 16644: p. 2.
\textsuperscript{11} Curr, 1883; Godfrey, 1926; Hinkins, 1884; Kerr, 1872.
\textsuperscript{12} Bride, 1898: p. 151; Andrews, 1920: p. 63; McMillan, 1994: p. 149. In 1838, the shepherds and stockmen of the Faithful party were attacked by about 300 Aboriginals armed with multiple spears. It was estimated that 7 or 8 of the party were killed, 1 badly lacerated and the stock dispersed.
\textsuperscript{13} Bride, 1898: p. 152. pp. 146-7; McMillan, 1994: pp 146-7
\textsuperscript{15} McMillan, 1994: pp. 139-153, pp. 171-186.
\textsuperscript{16} Docker Papers.
to stamp claim to the area for the Reverend, in the face of the many prospective settlers who were passing by.\textsuperscript{17}

Within thirty years an imposing multi-storied Italianate house dominated the site, surrounded by formal gardens. The building was designed by the architect Thomas Watts\textsuperscript{18} and while the style was considered “twenty years before its time”, its relevance to the Australian setting was questionable though the tower made for an excellent fire lookout.\textsuperscript{19}

This occupation of the country both north and south of the Murray River gathered momentum\textsuperscript{20} and the might of the invaders’ guns quickly overcame the flight of Aboriginal spears. Insights into the environments that were now being created come to light through the diaries of the new settlers – the Docker memoirs to name one and from those who supported them in their quest to subdue this alien land.

By the middle of the century there was also the stampede of immigrants, both European and Chinese, to the newly discovered goldfields in the north-east of Victoria; at

\textsuperscript{17} McMillan, 1994: p. 144.  
\textsuperscript{19} McMillan, 1994: p. 259.  
Beechworth, in the Buckland Valley near Bright and at Rutherglen in the Murray Valley, all coming to seek their fortunes. The migrant population of Victoria escalated across 1852 from 97,000 to 168,000 reaching 400,000 between 1856 and 1857 and by 1863 was 571,000. Of these, 80,000 were mining for gold across the State. The number of Chinese peaked at 40,000 during the initial rushes and by 1869 there were still nearly 16,000 in the colony. They had disembarked in South Australia because of the Chinese Capitation Tax levied at 10 pounds per Chinese immigrant landed in Victoria. They then walked across to Ballarat, Bendigo and up the Murray Valley to the goldfields at Beechworth and in the Buckland Valley. The tracks through the inhospitable country up the Ovens Valley would, by now, be well trodden by the prospectors, but nevertheless it had only been fifteen years previously that the Aboriginal tribes had held their own in the battles with the settlers, 817 of whom had been resident between the Goulburn and Murray Rivers.

When it became apparent to many of the prospectors that their ‘get rich quick’ efforts were futile, they turned instead to agriculture, some taking up land holdings while others were employed on these properties. The establishment and running of these enterprises is documented in Letters from Victorian Pioneers, (1898) compiled by Thomas Bride.

As the Europeans settled into their life in the new country, they turned some attention to examining and documenting the lives of the race whose land they had usurped. The earliest of these had been published by the mid 1800s and a steady stream of accounts continued from that time, illustrated by the European artists of the period. It was however with the publishing by Robert Brough Smyth of his two volumes of Aborigines.

---

22 Turner, 1973: vol 1, p.364
23 Turner, 1973: vol 2, p. 100
24 Turner, 1973: vol.2 p. 116
26 Brough Smyth, 1869: p. 396. Known as the Chinese Capitation Tax by Act 18 Victoria No 39 it was imposed on and after 1st November 1855 and was amended in 1859 and 1864 before being abolished in 1865.
29 Andrews, 1920: p. 100
30 Bride, 1898.
of Victoria, in 1878, that the first images of Aboriginal people and their way of life as depicted by one of their own, Tommy McRae, or as he had also been known, Tommy Barnes, appeared in print. For those viewers of his art, he was presenting a new and different perspective of the social and natural environment of the region.

**Tommy McRae and the exposure of his art to the public**

McRae had experience working as a stockman on various properties in the locality of his birth, he fished for his family’s needs and he made artefacts.\(^{31}\) It is not known when he started making drawings on paper, but the images in the *Aborigines of Victoria* are dated 1860 and 1862.\(^ {32}\) The family of Rod Kilborn, the artist’s early patron, made comment in an article by Charles Barrett, in the *Victorian Naturalist*, September 1935, that the first McRae drawings came from a notebook in 1865.\(^ {33}\) This volume may be the one in the National Gallery of Victoria collection with a date of 1875. It should be emphasized that at the time of the publication of this *Victorian Naturalist* journal, the earlier dated drawings were already in the public arena.

By the time of his death in 1901, at least three of Tommy McRae’s sketchbooks had been exported to the United Kingdom – one was commissioned in 1881 by Richard Lucas on a visit from England to the colony with his father, to see a sister dying of tuberculosis;\(^ {34}\) one was a gift by Rod Kilborn to the departing Governor of Victoria in 1896, Lord Hopetoun.\(^ {35}\) The third was sent by Dr William Lang to his brother Andrew, in London, who described the images as ‘designs...of an untaught Australian native...Nothing like this occurs in Australian scratches with a sharp stone on hard wood.’\(^ {36}\) This sketchbook was bequeathed by Roger Lancelyn Green\(^ {37}\) to the University of St Andrews Library, Fifeshire, Scotland, where it remains.

Andrew Lang was to the use the drawings from this sketchbook to illustrate two volumes of stories of Aboriginal Australians and Aboriginal life collected by K Langloh Parker –

---

31 Barrett, 1935: p. 88
34 Lucas Sketchbook, 1881: p. 1
36 Lang, 1896: p. xvi.
37 Green was a colleague of Andrew Lang, the brother of Dr William Lang who had commissioned the work and forwarded it to England in 1886.
Australian Legendary Tales, (1896) and More Australian Legendary Tales, (1898). Again there is no acknowledgement, as was the case with Aborigines of Victoria, (1878), by R. Brough Smyth, of the artist by name. The drawings did introduce to the contemporary European viewer and the current viewer, McRae’s Aboriginal interpretation of his interactions with his environment, with the usurpers of his country and the explanation of events and incidents within his experiences.

In the McRae sketches available, there is no reference to the direct hostility between the First Peoples of Australia and the new occupiers which must have had some impact on the communities of both in the vicinity. The erosion of the Aboriginal tribal lifestyle and the exposure to ailments against which they had no defenses encouraged the Aboriginal people into Protectorates where they would receive basic medical attention, education and assimilation into the ways of the European. The artist withstood these pressures and, in his art, commented instead on the indirect effects of the encroachment through his depictions of fewer huntsmen taking part in day-to-day activities and the compensatory reliance on smaller game. McRae did however produce images of both friendly and malicious interactions between neighboring tribes and those further afield. This former evidences a tradition of Aboriginal people coming together whether on a peaceful basis or otherwise and which had been noted in the Melbourne local press.38 W S Murdoch in a letter to the Director of the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia and published in Science of Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia, December 22, 190039, commented that there had been, as their numbers declined, an integration of the tribes from the Goulburn, Broken and Murray regions, with the subjugation of some of their traditional animosities.40

Drawings by McRae were included in the 1906 Exhibition of old, rare and curious books, manuscripts, autographs, etc., held in conjunction of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Public Library of Victoria.41 They appeared with sketchbooks, paintings and lithographs of and by personalities of Melbourne in the catagory – Manuscripts, Autographs, original Maps and Plans, Pictures and Miscellaneous exhibits of Australian

38 Port Phillip Gazette, No 23, March 21, 1840.
39 Murdoch, 1900: p. 136.
40 Murdoch, 1900: p. 136.
41 Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1906; p. 46.
Interest. It can be speculated that this was the first occasion that original drawings by McRae were on display in a public forum. They were the only works by an Aboriginal artist that were included. They had been donated to the library in 1903 by Roderick Kilborn with the inscription:

These sketches were made for me by Tommy/an aboriginal of one of the tribes on the Murray River. Tommy was the only aboriginal I ever/met who had any idea of Sketching. He was/also the only aboriginal I ever saw who never drank/either Wine Beer or Spirits. His peculiarity/as an artist was that in all his sketches/he commenced at the foot and worked upwards/These sketches were made in his gunyah/Presented to the Melbourne Public/Library/R Kilborn/Goojung/Wahgunyah/1903.

This was followed in 1909 by two McRae drawings illustrating an article, ‘Aboriginal Art’ by A W Greig in the Lone Hand, Volume 5, 1909. Apart from a private lecture given around 1916 by Edmund Milne, an amateur anthropologist and ethnologist, at which he used a McRae sketchbook owned by George L Williams and now in the National Gallery of Australia, the artist’s work was restricted to a limited audience. It was in 1927 that The Australasian published a number of drawings by McRae. The first three appeared in July of that year, attributed by Anonymous to Tommy (McCrae) McRae, with a further two appearing in August again attributed to Tommy (McCrae) McRae accompanying a letter by George L Williams. There was a further article in The Argus Supplement, 8th June, 1929 written by E M Cox, née Kilborn, illustrated with three McRae drawings. These appeared just before the opening of the Australian Aboriginal Art Exhibition mounted by the Trustees of the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria in July, 1929 - the second public occasion at which an original of the artist’s work was unveiled. In 1941 a small number of his drawings were exposed to an international audience.

---

42 State Library of Victoria, Loose leaf Sketchbook: verso of cover page.
43 Greig, 1909: p. 44.
44 Williams, 1927: p. 466.
46 Anonymous, 1927, p. 4.
47 Williams, 1927: p. 466.
48 Cox, 1929: p. 4.
49 Australian Aboriginal Art, 1929: p. 11.
audience at the exhibition, *Art of Australia*, mounted by the Carnegie Corporation at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, after which it toured The United States and Canada. Further drawings then appeared at the Melbourne *Primitive Art Exhibition*, organized by Leonard Adam, National Gallery and National Museum of Victoria. At this 1943 exhibition, the art of McRae was accompanied by two William Barak paintings.\(^{50}\)

William Barak was a contemporary of McRae’s and an Elder of the Wurunjeri clan.\(^{51}\) He settled in 1863 at Corranderk Aboriginal Station in the Yarra Valley near Healesville, east of Melbourne.\(^{52}\) It had been established by the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. They discouraged any display of Aboriginal cultural activity,\(^{53}\) thus Barak’s paintings of ceremonial and celebratory events were important documents for the preservation of these occasions.\(^{54}\)

**Andrew Sayers and his introduction of McRae to the late 20\(^{th}\) century audience**

It was then not until 1996 that the late Andrew Sayers, as the curator of Australian Drawings at the National Gallery of Australia, revealed the extent of the contribution that McRae made to the art of Australia through his catalogue of Aboriginal artists working during the nineteenth century. All were examined against the background of William Barak of Corranderk\(^{55}\) and other contemporary Aboriginal artists of the period. Sayers noted that Mickey of Ulladulla\(^{56}\) and Oscar\(^{57}\) were already producing depictions that were attracting attention. Through this much overlooked but extensive body of works, Sayers established that they demonstrated a different perspective from which to assess Australia. It showed the Aboriginal artists’ understanding of their own people, the effects of the invading cultures and the changes wrought across their lifetimes. These artists were grasping new concepts and new vistas and expanding these possibilities using new techniques.\(^{58}\) Sayers catalogue formed the basis of an exhibition and became his pioneering book, *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century*, which raised questions

---

\(^{50}\) Primitive Art Exhibition, 1943: p. 11.  
\(^{51}\) Murphy-Wandin, 2003: p. 5.  
\(^{54}\) Sayers, 1996: p. 15.  
\(^{55}\) Sayers, 1996: pp 13 - 25  
\(^{56}\) Sayers, 1996: pp 31 - 9  
\(^{57}\) Sayers, 1996: pp 59 - 63  
pertaining to the boundaries of that which had previously been defined as Colonial Art and the limitations that this had placed on the interpretations of Australian Art.\textsuperscript{59}

It was in the 1996 \textit{Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century Exhibition} at the Art Gallery of New South Wales that McRae’s art was displayed concurrently with \textit{Conrad Martens: British Watercolourist}. This integration of Indigenous Art into an art gallery created to collect Western art was a feature that had been introduced by Tony Tucson in his role as Deputy Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. In 1958 he had begun collecting Aboriginal Bark paintings for the gallery which he then assembled with other forms of Aboriginal art in an exhibition that toured all the State galleries in 1960.\textsuperscript{60}

Thus, across Australia the art of the Aboriginal artist began to take its place in the mainstream.

With the publication of \textit{Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century}, a reservoir of information was unveiled to the reading public. This book exposed details related to traditional Aboriginal culture and documentation of their responses to the changes occurring at the time across Victoria and southern New South Wales. The limited number of drawings by Aboriginal people contained in the book evidences their multiple abilities to describe their traditions and their ability to translate these onto paper, using techniques that were not necessarily intrinsic to their culture. Further research chronicled their engagement with the missionaries and other interested parties during the early and middle nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{61} Sayers argued that while the drawings may have been made specifically for sale to Europeans, they depicted aspects of Aboriginal life that were “less and less visible”.\textsuperscript{62} His book, thus provided the stepping stone for the exploration of an expanded history of the Australian social landscape across the entire population during the colonial period.\textsuperscript{63} For Aboriginal people, the artworks could be scrutinized for their subjects and their significance in the light of a contemporary understanding of what it meant to be an Aboriginal person and an Australian.\textsuperscript{64} In the

\textsuperscript{59} Bonyhady, 2015: p. 6.
\textsuperscript{60} adb.anu.edu.au/biography/tuckson-john-anthony-11888/text 21291.
\textsuperscript{61} Sayers, 1994: p. 70
\textsuperscript{62} Sayers 1994: p.5.
\textsuperscript{63} Bonyhady 2015: p. 8.
\textsuperscript{64} Sayers, 1994: p. 87.
words of Aunty Joy Murphy, she found “another window through which to explore exactly where I have come from.”

With his access to a wide range of McRae’s drawings, Sayers went on to categorise the subject matter. The expressive silhouettes of hunting, battles and ceremonies reflected the fibres of a society that had been the artist’s but were fast disappearing. Many of the drawings have been annotated with interpretations of the subject matter but with no indication of reference to the intention of the artist. They were perhaps added after the acquisition of the work.

Following the publication of Sayers book, a travelling exhibition was mounted by the National Gallery of Australia with showings in Canberra and at the Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. The viewing public were thus at last exposed to the extent and the variety of artistic works by this group of Aboriginal artists.

A further contribution by Andrew Sayers to the Australian Dictionary of Biography – online edition 2006, noted that besides a fascination with William Buckley’s exploits, McRae documented the traditions of hunting and celebrating. While both using and withstanding European authority, the artist could not however at times, escape the Government regulators who took his children, placing them in reserves across Victoria and causing him great distress. There is no reference to these upheavals in his sketchbooks. They perhaps coincided with the gaps in his records.

As a curator, Andrew Sayers ‘shape(d) the public art histories’ in the displays of institutions with which he was involved and from which Tommy McRae has leapt into our consciousness. However, Sayers concludes with the warning that McRae’s works, through their fragility and delicacy, have limited availability to the general public. The compromise of the digitizing of the images makes them accessible to a wide audience so that the emotion, vigor, substance and narratives expounded by the Aboriginal artists of the nineteenth century can enlighten.

---

66 Sayers, 1994: p31
67 Barrett, 1935: p.87
68 Sayers 2011: p. 3.
The patrons of McRae’s drawings, sketchbooks and notebooks

McRae’s abilities as an artist had come to the attention of supporters in the early 1860’s. In clinging to his traditions, it was post this time that he settled at a satellite reserve at Wahgunyah in the Murray Valley and within his natal Country south of the Murray River but upstream from the confluence with the Goulburn River.\(^{70}\) He attracted patrons; residents of the region, national and international visitors many of whom Sayers identified. The resulting commissions meant that the artist now had a stable source of income\(^{71}\) and by becoming more financially independent was able to supplement, for his extended family, those provisions supplied by the government.\(^{72}\) Each patron left the artist with paper often in the form of a drawing book, pens and ink, returning some time later to collect their sketches for a 10 shilling fee.\(^{73}\)

His earliest works on paper, 5 single sheets, are believed to have been commissioned between 1860 and 1864, by Theresa Walker, his only known female patron.

Theresa Chauncy/Walker had studied painting, drawing and modelling in London before she immigrated to South Australia in 1836.\(^{74}\) In Adelaide, she became known for her wax modelling as is attested by the portraits of Mocatta and Kertamaroo, two local Aboriginal people, which were exhibited at the 1841 Royal Academy Summer Show in London.\(^{75}\) She and her sister Martha Berkeley, a portraitist, were recognised for their sympathetic yet realistic approach in their depictions of the Aboriginal people.\(^{76}\)

Theresa was married twice, first to Captain John Walker and after his death to Mr George Herbert Poole. It is unknown in what capacity the Pooles sought their fortunes between 1856 and 1860 on the Victorian Goldfields.\(^{77}\) By 1860 Theresa was living at Williamstown and was working on plate 33, *Helicolenus percoides*, of Professor

\(^{70}\) Sayers, 1994: p. 113.
\(^{71}\) Barrett, 1935; p. 88.
\(^{72}\) Sayers, 1994: p 47
\(^{73}\) Barrett, 1935: p. 88.
\(^{74}\) Chauncy, 1976: p. 4
\(^{75}\) Kerr, 1995: p. 2
\(^{76}\) Hammond, 1993: p. 8
\(^{77}\) Kerr, 1995: p. 471.
Frederick McCoy’s *Prodromus*\textsuperscript{78}. At the end of 1860 she moved with her second husband to North Barnawartha in the Murray Valley of Northern Victoria. They had entered into a venture with her brother, William Chauncy, to develop ‘The Vineyard Company’\textsuperscript{79} on prime land that the surveyor had bought when he had subdivided the squatter runs on the southern side of the Murray Valley from Wodonga to Rutherglen.\textsuperscript{80}

The Vineyard Company folded in 1864 through lack of funds and the land was sold to the Gehrigg Brothers. The Pooles moved but after the death of her second husband, Theresa again visited Northern Victoria, staying for a short time in 1870, with her brother in Wodonga.

Rod Kilborn became McRae’s ongoing mentor and supporter over the next 35 years until the artist’s death in 1901.\textsuperscript{81} He had been appointed Postmaster at the newly opened Post Office at Wahgunyah and the first Justice of the Peace in the area. There is a notebook, 3 known sketchbooks and miscellaneous sketches on paper from this source – the *Kilborn Notebook*, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria; the *Kilborn Sketchbook*, c1890, National Gallery of Victoria; the *Kilborn Sketchbook*, after 1890, that was given to Lord Hopetoun at the completion of his term as Governor of Victoria in 1895,\textsuperscript{82} whereabouts unknown; the pages in the collections of private and public institutions and the Corowa Historical Society and the loose leafed *Kilborn Sketchbook*, 1865, in the State Library of Victoria.* Exclusive of the Lord Hopetoun sketches, there are 49 images in all from the Kilborn source. That McRae’s work became sought after is acknowledged by the number of people who went on to commission his drawings, many from far afield.

There is a notebook dated 1880 of 17 pages which is now in the National Library of Australia.

\textsuperscript{78} museumvictoria.com.au/caughtandcoloured/poole.aspx
\textsuperscript{80} en.wikipedia.org/William_Snell_Chauncy
\textsuperscript{81} Barrett, 1935: p. 86.
\textsuperscript{*} I dispute the dating of this loose leafed *Kilborn Sketchbook*. The grounds will become apparent through discussion of its contents in comparison with similar subjects from other sketchbooks.

\textsuperscript{82} The Australasian, 2\textsuperscript{nd} July 1927. The archives of Hopetoun House, Linlithgow, Scotland are being scoured for evidence of this sketchbook.
DRAWINGS/ by/ Tommy McCrae/ an aboriginal of the Wahgunyah Tribe/ on the River Murray/ 1880/ Presented by J.R. Bremner Beverley, W.A./ through H Gregory M.H.R. 27.11.3583

For whom or by whom it was commissioned is unknown as it came into the public domain indirectly from J R Bremner of Western Australia in 1935. John R Bremner had been the licensee of the Shamrock Hotel, Rutherglen84 and only resided in the area around 1895,85 thus postdating the creation of the work.

Not long after this book’s execution, McRae was visited by Richard MacDonald - Lucas, an 11-year-old Englishman, who not only commissioned a sketchbook to take back to England but also watched the artist work on the drawings.

The pen and ink sketches in this book were done about Xmas 1881 entirely by “Tommy McRae” an Australian Aboriginal, for my brother T.L., at Wahgunyah. I saw Tommy McRae at work upon them. R. M. Lucas.86

This sketchbook was to be a gift for his brother, Thomas, who died from tuberculosis shortly after Richard’s return.87 Richard held on to the drawings as he grew up, travelled around Europe and married. On his death in 1940, the sketchbook was left to his son, Duncan MacDonald – Lucas. Duncan immigrated to Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1951, taking household effects, family letters and papers and some of Richard’s memorabilia.88 He lived there until the death of his wife in 2000. Having become disillusioned with the life in that country, he packed a small number of possessions onto a trailer and drove to South Africa in search of a new home. His daughter was with him as he discarded everything that was superfluous to his needs and she believes that he must have specifically chosen to keep the sketchbook by Tommy McRae and other mementos of his father in the steamer trunk that went with him.89

83 Typed frontispiece bound into the Bremner Sketchbook.
84 McGivern, 1983; p. 164.
86 Lucas Sketchbook, 1881: p. verso front cover.
87 MacDonald-Lucas Family papers: held by the family.
88 MacDonald-Lucas Family papers: held by the family.
89 MacDonald-Lucas Family papers: held by the family.
Duncan died in 2013 and his daughters painstakingly went through the contents of his home. They discovered the sketchbook in the trunk, having never seen it before nor having heard their father refer to it. It had obviously been, through the years, well paged as reinforcing tape had been applied to the spine.

Knowing nothing of the artist but learning of the sketchbook’s significance through communication with the Rutherglen Library and the Corowa Historical Society, the family returned the sketchbook to Australia and where it was bought by the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Also coming from the United Kingdom, Dr William Lang arrived in 1884 and shortly afterwards commissioned two sketchbooks from McRae. The first was passed down to his descendants before being donated to the Ormond College Library at the University of Melbourne and thence to the State Library of Victoria.

This volume is one of a number of Books on Australasia collected by Mr John Lang Currie of Lawarra presented to the college by his daughter Mrs P.S. Lang and her family March 1901.  

These sketches are made by a Native Artist of Corowa, N.S.Wales, an Aboriginal, the last of his Tribe and a present from Dr W Lang to John S Currie 1895.

The second sketchbook was sent by Dr Lang to his brother, Andrew, in England and is now in the University of St Andrews Library, Fifeshire, Scotland.

Drawings made by a Black fellow at Corowa, New South Wales, 1886. His name I do not know. By the whites he goes by the name of Tommy Macrae. He is a man about 42 years of age. He is quite self-taught in his drawing and cannot read or write. He is about the only sober black I ever saw. He is king of the tribe which has now been reduced to only a few. Tommy and his wife live on a narrow strip of land between the River Murray and a lake called Lake Moodemere surrounded by an enormous pack of dogs of any variety. . There are three or four children. A few nights ago when I was in bed, I heard a great barking of dogs and squabbling.

90 Lang Sketchbook No 1, 1885: verso front cover.
91 Lang Sketchbook, No 1, 1885: title page.
of children. This was Tommy bringing his wife who had been bitten by a snake, accompanied by all the dogs and the children. The good lady was too drunk to leave the buggy. She got better.

W. H. L 92

There are a total of 35 images in these two books and while Dr Lang continued to live in the locality there is no further reference in his private papers to his involvement with the artist.93

McRae also created a 15-page sketchbook around 1886 for a travelling salesman, Mr Lefaivre.

Mr Lefaivre, 89, Womerah Av. Darlinghurst, got the attached book of abo... drawings from “King” Billy, about 39 years ago. Mr Lefaivre was travelling for the Universal Nursery Co. at the time, and was often down near Corowa, where several hundred abos were camped, “King” Billy among them. “King Billy” used often to do little drawings depicting abo life. These drawings he would sell to the people of the township. One day Mr Lefaivre asked “King Billy” if he would do a book of drawings and offered £1 as an incentive. “King Billy” agreed. A book, pen and ink were purchased at the local store, and he set to work. The work occupied a fortnight. Mr Lefaivre has kept the book all these years in his trunk. He has been a traveler nearly all his life, and has worked through Australia, New Zealand and the Islands. He is an American by birth and came to Australia about 40 years ago. He is now 74 years of age. 26.10.25.94

This volume was presented to the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, in 1925.95

Other drawings were created for John Guthrie Gray who came to Australia in 1863 as a 17-year-old. He stayed for 8 years before returning to the United Kingdom only to come back in 1873. He bought extensive land holdings north of the Murray River in New South

---

92 Lang Sketchbook, No 2, 1886: 1st leaf.
93 Deidre Izon- Personal interview, 3 March 2015.
94 Lefaivre Sketchbook, 1886: inserted letter.
95 Sayers, 1994: p. 127
Wales, ran merino sheep and was interested in light horse breeding. Through this latter he would have met Dr William Lang who was a horse racing fanatic. It may well be through this that he met Tommy McRae, who was an inveterate gambler on the races at Corowa.

Only recently have his descendants on-sold two drawings that Gray acquired.

McRae was commissioned to create short sequences of drawings and single pages by people with whom he came into contact – the local bank manager, Mr Bayliss, acquired a book of 5 pages* and the local policeman, Sargent Ellwood, a single sheet. There are numerous works that have come through the auction houses from unidentified sources as well as a single sheet found on the top of an old refrigerator, restored and now in the Sturt University Art collection.

As the Customs Officer, George MacMahon acquired a more extensive sketchbook. At some stage the book was subjected to a grease spillage which has permeated through the pages and by which 11 images can be identified. 5 of the images were passed down through the family.

Very old Aboriginal drawings received from Uncle Jack on 13.8.89-90 being one each from Grandads estate for the five boys of Walter George McMahon.

All have now been sold into private and public collections.

George L Williams purchased 2 sketchbooks from the artist, one of 13 drawings and the other of 10 drawings. Living at Orange in New South Wales, he furnished information about his books in response to the July 1927 article, by an anonymous journalist.

...I desire to point out the following facts regarding drawings by old Tommy McCrae. I knew Tommy very well and provided him with the pens used in the

---

97 Williams, 1927: p. 466.
98 Curator of Sturt University Art Collection.
99 A duty was levied on all persons and goods travelling the Wahgunyah-Corowa Bridge across the Murray River between Victoria and New South Wales. The Customs House sat at the Victorian end of the bridge with the border along the southern bank of the river.
100 Verso of Returning from the Chase, c1890.
production of the books referred to. ...I purchased 2 from him, containing 10 drawings each....Tommy McCrae’s son, now in a Mission station in Victoria, visited Orange about two years ago. He called upon me and the book of drawings was shown to him. I made him a present of one of the drawings, which he appreciated. Tommy McCrae never smoked or drank but he was a great gambler, attending shows and race meetings and spending all the silver he could get on the ‘sweat wheels’ of the day...101

Another sketchbook was acquired by H E Gatliiff after 1898. This is a book of 8 images. Sydney New South Wales 11th October 1913. The enclosed set of eight drawings is the work of a full-blooded Aborigine known as Tommy MacRae. At the time these were drawn he was an old man of about sixty years of age. He never had education of any kind, & with the exception of his sketching was little different from any others of his Tribe. Tommy MacRae was Head of a Tribe inhabiting the Murray Valley in the neighborhood of Lake Moodemere near Wahgunyah. This Tribe was reported to have been very numerous at one time but in 1898, when I first visited the Moodemere camp they had diminished to a score or so. Tommy was fond of his sketching although it was of a somewhat difficult matter to persuade him to sketch on steadily. He drew entirely from his imagination, sitting out in the open in the shade of a tree. Often he would glance up at a tree as if for inspiration but never have I seen any resemblance from his drawing and the object of his glances....H. Ernest Gatliiff.102

The sketchbook held by the National Museum of Australia containing 15 pages and the notebook held by the National Gallery of Australia with 29 pages of drawings, were commissioned from unknown sources.

Methodology in my examination of McRae’s art.

McRae’s art can be examined in the context of national and international non-indigenous artists. As early as 1818, these artists were documenting aspects of Aboriginal life that they had been able to access. Their compendium of works includes

102 Gatliiff Sketchbook, after 1898, inserted letter.
multiple depictions that illustrated events in the programme of the Aboriginal people. Joseph Lycett painted detailed images of Aboriginal activities which were reproduced by the engraver Walter Preston and then disseminated through the public arena by the early 1820s. Artists John Glover, John Michael Skipper, Wilhelm Blandowski and Samuel Tayler Gill had all visited or settled in Australia during the first half of the nineteenth century. Their expeditions into the landscapes and their illustrations thereof further expanded the imagery of the Aboriginal people. These are used as an initial reference point for the interpretation of works by McRae. Recognizing the constraints of these non-indigenous images, it is only when each individual drawing by McRae is meticulously examined that the minutiae of the detail that particularize his depictions is elucidated. This assessment heightens the appreciation of the artistic merit of the images. Importantly it then poses for the viewer a why and wherefore for every depiction whether as an isolated drawing or for those in the sequences of the sketchbooks and notebooks. The contemporary colonial diaries and descriptions, which may not have been available to the general reader at the time, are now able to provide, over a hundred years later, some insights that expand and support a broadened understanding of the drawings that were being created by this artist for his patrons.

As the physicality, personal adornment and decoration of vestments of the Aboriginal people of Australia were being recorded by paint and photograph, so were those of the Native American. Their art and their culture were also under the microscope of explorers, painters and ethnographers. While they were depicted in their traditional dress and in pursuit of traditional activities, their personal lives and customs were being plundered by collectors both nationally and internationally. With the erosion of their lands and lifestyles, the native populations of the Americas turned to visual imagery on the material that was readily available – ledger books of comparable dimensions to those sketchbooks used by McRae.103 They recorded their traditions of ceremony and celebration104 that they were no longer able or allowed to practice and which are “some of the most effective statements in the history of Indian Art.”105

103 Szabo, 1994: p. 93
104 Szabo, 1994: pp. 69, 72, 107, 119.
The ceremony and celebration scenes that McRae has illustrated make up over a quarter of the pages that appear in his sketchbooks and notebooks. To understand their complexities and innuendoes, these are examined through each element of the drawing, firstly by the physicality of the figures and then the attributes and decoration of the participants. In understanding these postures and poses and their relationship with those around and with the physical landscape, the sequence of events is detailed. The comprehensive analysis elicits the subtle innuendoes of display, dynamism, magnitude and ferocity of each event. Recognition of McRae’s use of spacing and of space is an important aspect in interpreting the sequences and therefore the narrative of the individual depictions and of the progression of the images. It becomes apparent that these pages serve a crucial role in the artist’s descriptions of his cycle of life from his very earliest 1860 single page illustrations through the multi celebration scenes of the National Museum of Australia Sketchbook.

Some of the drawings illustrate European dressed spectators and it could be inferred that their inclusion defined occasions mounted specifically for visitors and public viewing. In the absence of the spectators, McRae was referring not only in some cases to the more distant past but also accounting for aspects of his Aboriginal life and activities that must have existed outside the gaze and influence of the European settler.

It is only after my detailed analysis of the sequences of pages that a true picture of the artist’s complex narratives becomes apparent. This is fully appreciated when the pages of the two volumes of Lang Sketchbooks are viewed in their entirety with recognition of the timeframes in which they were created.

With his audience being recognized as predominantly male, the images throughout the sketchbooks and notebooks concentrate on activities of the male members of the tribes though analysis is directed to the scant presence of women. The Lang Sketchbooks No 1 (1885) and No 2 (1886), commissioned by Dr William Lang, who had emigrated to the Murray Valley in 1884, form the basis for the examination of the narratives that became apparent through Tommy McRae’s books of drawings. These two are identical forms of drawing books each with 18 pages available for images. Being read as a continuous chronicle, they introduce the artist’s comments on the changes – social and
environmental, that were occurring in the Murray Valley. He expands his depictions of flora. But most clearly, he launches his translation of the William Buckley legend.

William Buckley, the ‘wild white man’, was an escaped convict who spent thirty-two years living with the Aboriginal people on the western side of Port Phillip Bay, Victoria. The implications of his arrival are examined through all the artist’s reiterations with attention being paid to what and how events were illustrated. The felon’s re-entry into European society coincided with McRae’s speculated birthdate. McRae thus developed the motif of the handkerchief waving spear carrying figure to define this moment. The artist used it as a marker on the timeline of events and experiences of the Aboriginal people before the incursion of Europeans into the south-east corner of Australia and those that took place after and were relevant to his own lifetime.

James Bonwick provides evidence that the Buckley story was well disseminated through the indigenous community,¹⁰⁶ which raises the question as to whether this was by word of mouth through intertribal corroborees and meetings as documented by Robinson and the local press, or had the story become known by discussion with local landholders who were in possession of written accounts on Victoria and Aboriginal people that had become available through the second half of the century. Examination of these sources suggests the origin of McRae’s knowledge of the story.

McRae then goes on to make comment on the influences of non-indigenous customs in dress that were creeping into Aboriginal lifestyles. With their introduction into the narratives, close examination of the features of the subjects reveals the artist’s intent. Of significance in McRae’s expanding compendium was his exposure of behaviors that had not been illustrated in earlier drawings.

Across McRae’s oeuvre, from his early single page sketches, his narrative sketchbooks to his final single page sketches there are scenes in which the orchestra of women is depicted adding an aspect of sound and rhythm to the massed occasions. There are however, only a few other images featuring women in their specific roles. They are instead shown accompanying and supporting the family as they hunt, fish and fight. There is however one peculiar image on the final page of the Lang No 2 Sketchbook.

(1886). It depicts a woman wearing a possum skin cloak and leading a small child with, however, a white face. While it is recognized that a woman in mourning covered her features with clay\textsuperscript{107} and performed rituals peculiar to the occasion, this scene illustrates a family out hunting. Its timing coincides with the introduction of the ‘Half-Caste Act’ at the end of 1886 and which is discussed in the chapter ‘Gender and the Social Climate of the Murray Valley – Where have all the women gone?’

McRae expanded his techniques of imaging both the ground, the trees and the shrubs that located his images in his Country in the Murray Valley. Examination of each of these elements exposes their development across the artist’s creative lifetime. With the concurrent unfolding of the complex foliage underfoot that reflected the sentiment of the event being depicted, a chronology using the sketchbooks and notebooks with confirmed dates from across the artist’s creative lifetime, can be established and into which undated narratives can be inserted.

\textbf{Why McCrae, Why McRae?}

Tommy McRae could neither read nor write.\textsuperscript{108} The ink silhouettes became his signature though some of his drawings and his sketch and notebooks have been inscribed by others. These range from ‘Yakaduna’, to McCrae, Barnes and finally McRae.\textsuperscript{109} The first was his birth name, thought to be derived from an association with Yackandandah, the town and creek in north-east Victoria.\textsuperscript{110} At some stage he adopted the surname McCrae as did his brother Billy and his father, known as ‘Old McCrae’, the latter two being mentioned in the Protectorate Reports of the Aboriginal Reserves at Taggerty and then at Coranderrk, near Healesville. It has been suggested that the initial use of the McCrae name was from an association with the owner of the properties on the confluence of Yackandandah Creek and Kiewa River. The two properties in question, Baranduda, from April 1848 to August 1852, and Merimarenbung, from May, 1850 to June 1854, were in the names of Francis McCrae Cobham and Richard Cobham, nephews of Georgiana and Andrew MacRae of Mornington Peninsula fame and from whose family it was a tradition

\textsuperscript{107} Brough Smyth, 1878: vol 1, p. 296; vol 2, p. 297.
\textsuperscript{109} This theme is expanded in Appendix 1.
\textsuperscript{110} Sayers, 1994: p. 113.
for the local Aboriginal people to adopt their surname. With the artist’s marriage to Lily, who was literate, it can be speculated that the changed spelling of his surname arose from that which was in common use in the community. In 1847, a James McRae had arrived in the Murray Valley to manage two properties on its northern bank, Mulwala and Boroge. This man, had by 1853, taken up a publican’s license and had built and was running a punt service across the Murray River. He died in 1866. There was however, proliferation of the McRae name when a Duncan McRae moved, with his family, to the Wahgunyah/Rutherglen district between 1858 and 1862. From 1872 to 1900 this family acquired 6 tranches of land between Rutherglen and the Murray River not far from Lake Moodemere where Tommy lived. The six children all bought and developed properties in the area and their high profile through community involvement established the McRae name.

**Evaluation**

It is only through detailed scrutiny of each of the McRae drawings that it has been possible to analyze the artist’s mastery of the medium of pen and ink on paper. His transcription of the relationships between man and environment, limbs and torso, head and body, brings alive the physicality of the chase, the tangible endeavor of the fight, the artistry of the performances and his commentary of the changing attitudes of his fellow Aboriginal people in a world over which they were losing control. With the skills he developed to characterize his natural world, he exposed his viewer to the narratives that were so important to a heightened appreciation, if not understanding, of his complex culture. For those privileged to see his work under these conditions, the authority of his technique ascribes a new dimension to his art.

As has been noted, acknowledgement of McRae’s drawings, when published during his lifetime, was confined to the words “by a native artist” in both the Langloh Parker volumes, while Brough Smyth registers the inscription “Tommy Barnes, an aboriginal of the Upper Murray” on two of the illustrations that he included. These were probably

---

112 NSW Hotel License Register, no. 826; The Travellers Rest, 17th April 1860.
113 D McRae, 2012.
114 Parish of Carlyle, Schedule of Allotments.
115 Langloh Parker, 1896: title page; Langloh Parker, 1898: title page.
inscribed by Phillip Chancy to whom they had been donated by his sister Mrs G H Poole also known as Theresa Walker.\textsuperscript{116} The third illustration is ascribed to a native lad!\textsuperscript{117} The dismissal of McRae’s authorship negates the process by which the artist transformed his ideas into images. This could be due to societal attitude, the measure of perceived artistic skill or a combination of both. This is as damning as the statement made by T G H Strehlow in 1960, pertaining to the art and endeavors of the artist, Albert Namatjira.

Assimilation being the current official Australian term for the process of changing the ways of dark Australians into those of white Australians... Albert Namatjira...has been the most eminent of the dark Australians who [has] tried to become [a] full member of our white society, and, in the end has had to admit [his] failure.\textsuperscript{118}

It is only recently that reassessment of works of Namatjira by both Ian Burn and Ann Stephen,\textsuperscript{119} Philip Jones and others,\textsuperscript{120} has identified that, by insinuating his vocabulary of signs and symbols, he was overlaying another dimension and thus retrieving his landscapes from white artists that he believed had appropriated them.\textsuperscript{121}

Similarly, McRae insinuated indicators on his drawings that relate to his present, recent past and to a distant past. McRae was recording his history in a similar form to the Ledger Historians of North America.\textsuperscript{122} Like the Native Americans during the second half of the nineteenth century and like Namatjira was to do across the middle years of the twentieth century, he adapted only that which would convey his message. I believe that by employing materials, techniques and signs that were recognizable to his non-indigenous audience, Tommy McRae was firstly, reclaiming his culture and secondly, documenting in detail, a complex and traditional lifestyle that was undergoing transformation from within and through forces from outside. In the face of the words being written by alien observers that were appropriating his heritage and informing

\begin{thebibliography}{122}
\bibitem{116} Brough Smyth, 1878: pp. 256-7.
\bibitem{117} Brough Smyth, 1878: p. 258.
\bibitem{118} Strehlow, 1960: p. 4.
\bibitem{119} Burn and Stephen, 1992; p. 273.
\bibitem{120} Jones, 1992; p. 98.
\bibitem{121} French, 2002; p. 15.
\bibitem{122} Szabo, 1994; p. xiii
\end{thebibliography}
those around him, he was introducing a different way to observe Aboriginal people and the environment in which they functioned for the casual and biased European interloper. His success in this endeavor will be assessed in relation to his contemporary audience and his audience going forward.

McRae’s drawings will always be recognized for their pictorial appeal, through their simplicity and fluidity of line, complexity of detail, their humour and their honesty. If and when we learn more about the subjects of McRae’s depictions, his works will be seen as imminent historical documents from a man of great insight for an audience craving for the information contained therein. It is therefore of importance that his works, in their entirety, be held by public institutions where they are available for all to read and absorb.
Chapter 2: Rock to paper, ochre to ink

As an Aboriginal artist working from the 1860’s to the end of the nineteenth century, Tommy McRae was heir to a heritage of painted and incised images on stone, skin, pelt, wood and bark. These influences on his art can be traced through the examination of Rock Art galleries, possum skin rugs and bark drawings and their impact as evident in McRae’s notebooks and sketchbooks. During the lifetime of the artist, the physical and social environment of Australia was changing. It was not merely the transference of the traditional skills through the availability of pen and paper and the curiosity of the invading race, but also the decision to recount the lives of the first inhabitants and the changes that were being wrought by encroaching populations of man and beast, that give gravitas to the McRae creations.

The expansion of the colonies that clung to the seaboards of the Australian continent, was progressing apace on the back of the concept that it was *terra nullius*. For those who were unsure of this, there was the persuasive argument of the *Port Phillip Herald*:

> Although the Aborigines may be the legitimate proprietors of the soil they have, previous to colonization, possessed a greater quantity than they required, and it cannot be improper...to reclaim their grounds from a useless waste to a state of fertility, giving employment to the idle, food to the hungry, and a quick sure return to the adventurist capitalist.\(^{123}\)

In Northern Victoria the colonisers, in the footsteps of explorers, came south over the Murray and north from Melbourne. They recognised the potential of the great expanses of grasslands for the grazing of livestock, not those that were indigenous to the environment, but those that were familiar, cattle and sheep\(^{124}\) and whose products and by-products they believed would contribute to the wealth of their colony and to the individual.\(^{125}\) Orchards, vineyards and crops were planted to support and sustain their


\(^{124}\) MacDonal, nd (but pre 1895): p. 144.

\(^{125}\) While it is not possible to attribute exact livestock figures to the Murray Valley, the increase in animals in Victoria between 1843 and 1848 are reported at: cattle from 167,200 head to 386,700 head; sheep from 1,603,000 head to 5,130,000 head. McCombie, 1858: p. 190.
lifestyles. The countryside was tamed for this purpose by the grazing of every native wildflower and grass and the felling of the native trees for firewood, housing and fencing. Exotic flora was then planted in their stead and the terrain divided into manageable areas, so that the landscapes were encouraged to reflect the panoramas of England.\textsuperscript{126}

Having justified their possession of the land because it was untilled and they believed unimproved by the local indigenous populations, it was only a short step by the newcomers to the assumption that with no visible permanent housing and few durable commodities, the Aboriginal people carried no material culture forward. The designs that were woven into the weapons, the utensils and the ceremonies of everyday life employed techniques which were, in some instances transient, or used signs and symbols that were undecipherable to the Western eye.\textsuperscript{127} Those with any permanence of function were amassed and consigned to museums. Here they were seen as interesting insights into the lives of the Aboriginal people of Victoria and the Riverina; as information of a bygone age to be accumulated for science.

\textbf{Etchings on skins}

One such example is the possum skin cloak. Each was made from multiple pelts carefully sewn together with kangaroo sinew and then incised with intricate patterns.\textsuperscript{128}

126 MacDonald, pre 1895: pp. 133, 142.
127 Etheridge, 1918: plate XXXIII.
129 R E Johns Collection, Museum Victoria.
In this example, acquired from the Murray Valley, it is still possible to discern the lines incised and coloured down the 1853 cloak. The similarity to those that the Coranderrk Aboriginal artist, William Barak, depicted in his works painted at the end of the Nineteenth Century, can be easily discerned.

A W Howitt in his travels across the South-East of Australia, recorded other non-figurative designs that were used on these cloaks. These patterns were incised into the body of the leather making the skin suppler after the drying process. They were emblematic of the wearer’s relationship with his country and clan and his identity within his group.

---

130 The Ian Potter Centre, 2003: p. 45.
131 Howitt, 1904: p. 742.
An example of the intricacies of the incisions across the expanse of the possum skins is illustrated in this lithograph by Gould, a convict who arrived in Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) in 1827.


This lithograph evidences the fascination that the artist and his viewing public had for the artistry of the pelt.
This Skin Cloak was collected from the Hunter River region of New South Wales in 1839-40. It is now in the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington, United States of America.\textsuperscript{133} It was acquired by the United States Exploring Expedition in 1858, (Wilkes Exploring Expedition), and remains along with the Echuca cloak in Museum Victoria, (illustrated above), one of the few material examples from the early post-contact period. The photograph details some figurative images, but it is the complexity of the incisions that remains the overriding impression of the artistry involved.

There is knowledge of other examples from the series of photographs by John Hunter Kerr. Because of his relationship with the Aboriginal people of the Loddon Valley of which he wrote in his autobiography, \textit{Glimpses of a Life in Victoria by a Resident}, 1872,

\textsuperscript{133} australiandressregister.org/garment.274
he was able to document between 1853 and 1857, their interactions with him and his property, Fernyhurst. In a number of these, he illustrated the complexity and intricacy of the designs that could be incised into the leather of a possum skin cloak.

John Hunter Kerr, Detail from lower right of H 30158/18, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.
This garment is slung across the shoulders of a seated man, with the fur on the inner face, thus exposing the wide strips of regular and symmetrical patterns interspersed with geometric and elaborate cross hatching that are scored up the pelt side. These add a visual texture which vibrates from the surface. The photograph captures the uniformity and simplicity of each form belying the overall ornateness of the work, details that Barak was illustrating in his *Figures in Possum-skin Cloaks*, noted above.

Also, in the Loddon Valley and on the northwest boundary of Fernyhurst, was Boort Station. It was owned, at the time by Henry and Frederic Race Godfrey and they too had a good relationship with the Aboriginal people of the Kulin Nation for whom the area was their Country. In his diary, *Extracts taken from the Journal of Frederic Race Godfrey, 1846 – 1853*, the author refers to ‘Charlie’ 134 of whom there is a picture in Henry

Godfrey’s Sketchbook of Drawings with views of England, Tasmania and Victoria, n.d.¹³⁵

The portrait bears a striking resemblance to the figure in Kerr’s photograph, carries a similar shield but wears the possum skin cloak fur side out so that the intricate incising is no longer on show.

There are few specimens from nineteenth century Australia, rendering these photographs by Kerr of importance in the documentation of the techniques and of the symbolism that was inherent in the designs on possum skin cloaks. It is recorded that an example or examples were displayed with Aboriginal implements, objects and bark paintings at the 1854 Melbourne Exhibition, having been collected and contributed by John Hunter Kerr.¹³⁶ In his photograph above, he exposes with care the detailed work on the possum skins leading to the speculation that it may have been this garment that was included in the assemblage and therefore was one of the artefacts that then went to the Exposition Universelle de Paris, 1855.¹³⁷ It is known that the bark paintings were indirectly acquired by the British Museum.¹³⁸ The fate of the ‘Skins of Opossums worked by Aborigines’ is unknown and curious in the face of the active interest in the accumulation and preservation of the artwork on hide cloaks that had been prevalent in Europe and the Americas from the early 1800’s.

¹³⁵ Godfrey, 1864: Image 6, p. 113, file no sk0055-116-p113.tif,.  
¹³⁶ Melbourne Exhibition, 1854: p. 35.  
¹³⁷ Willis, 2007, 13.3.  
¹³⁸ Willis, 2007, 13.3.
Vivid paintings by George Catlin\(^\text{139}\) (*Letters and notes on manners, customs and condition of the North American Indians*, 1841).\(^\text{140}\) and Karl Bodmer\(^\text{141}\), both of whom had travelled into the unexplored west of the American continent, stimulated the acquisition of Native American material culture, including many painted buffalo hides such as the one illustrated above, that were acquired by and are still held by the British Museum and the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, France.\(^\text{142}\) While catalogued within the Ethnographic collections of these institutions, they formed part of the documentation about the ‘North American artist-historian’ of their history, culture, religion and aesthetics.\(^\text{143}\)

In Australia there were other artefacts of material culture that were collected from the post-invasion period and are still retained in museums. Amongst these are the skirts which were tied about the waist and made from emu feathers thickly bound to a fibre cord.\(^\text{144}\) These were similar to the emu feather ornaments that hung over the buttocks, an example of which was collected and illustrated by George Augustus Robinson in

---

\(^{139}\) George Catlin resolved to document the history of the Natives of North America and worked on his project from 1832 to 1840. His accounts and drawings were first published 1841.

\(^{140}\) Catlin, 1841: vol. 1, p. 148, plate 65.

\(^{141}\) Karl Bodmer accompanied the explorer, Prince Maximilian zu Wied – Neuwied on his Missouri River expedition, 1832 – 1834, chronicling the Native Americans, their lifestyles, exploits and traditions. His depictions were published in *Maximilian Prince of Wied’s Travels in the Interior of North America*.


\(^{143}\) Tillett, 1976: Lloyd Kiva New, p. ix.

\(^{144}\) Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 94; Robinson, 1841: Vol 2, Friday 4 June, 1841: p. 251, Fig. 6.1, p. 289.
He also documented round woven mats that were worn on the head and that were also used as carry baskets. They were made from plant fibre twisted horizontally and then stabilised with vertical patterns making them ideal for the transport of necessities. The broad shields and parrying shields, collected from as early as the 1840’s, were observed as being both painted and engraved with fine and detailed geometric patterns on their outer convex faces and in some instances decorated on their inner concave surfaces. One such example is seen in the John Hunter Kerr photograph (above) which illustrates cross hatching on the cloak and mirrored on the surface of the shield. Similarly, the spear throwers and clubs could be finely carved, decorated and embellished. In the early collections of the Port Phillip District, it appears to be only the barbed spears and the boomerangs from the mid-nineteenth century that were not enhanced by the modeller or the owner. It was at the end of the twentieth century that these, the rock and bark paintings, the Dendroglyphs of both ceremonial and burial grounds and the designs of the body decorations took their place in the art galleries of the world to be considered other than ethnographic artefacts.

During the same period, Tommy McRae, the Kwat Kwat artist of the Yorta Yorta Nation, was meeting the commissions of an increasing number of private patrons - businessmen both transient and permanent who were either residents of the locality in which he lived and moved or were visitors from afar. They provided the artist with pens, ink and paper, usually in the form of sketchbooks or notebooks, on which he illustrated the elegant, the humorous, the facile and the ridiculous to enlighten his audience to a climate of greater respect and acceptance of the Aboriginal people and their intimate relationship with and understanding of their environs. On completion, 10/- was handed over for the artistic narratives about which, for many, we have no further record of.

---

145 Robinson, 1841: Vol 2, Wednesday 12 May 1841, p. 203; Fig 5.13, p. 243.
148 Keeler and Couzens, 2010: pp. 156-64.
149 Keeler and Couzens, 2010: pp. 146-7, 149-51, 153-5.
150 Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 140-1, 152.
151 Carved trees.
explanation. There are, however, some with written descriptions from unconfirmed sources but whose authorship can only be speculated through their ownership and by handwriting identification.

Few other records of nineteenth century Aboriginal artists working on the frontier survive\(^{155}\) though there have been more come to light through the work of David Hansen. As an understanding of the facets of Aboriginal Art expanded through the focussing on the areas of rock art, bark and wood drawings and decoration of artefacts, it can be appreciated the role that the stories that McRae drew of hunting, fighting, interaction with environment, ceremonies and celebrations, played in enlightening those outside Aboriginality of his culture, tradition and relationship with his Country.

**Rock art of South-east Australia**

A feature of Aboriginal art that initially caught the attention of the European audience was that of the figurative decoration of rock faces. Governor Phillip,\(^{156}\) John White\(^{157}\) and Collins\(^{158}\) all noted the examples as they penetrated inland from Botany Bay and Sydney Cove in the first years of the colonisation of Australia.\(^{159}\) The documentation of these rock galleries along with those across central and western New South Wales gathered apace. A number of these were displayed in copy or photograph at the 1929 Exhibition of Australian Art in Melbourne, emphasising the dearth of examples from the far South-east of the continent. This was the first time that much of this rock art was available for viewing by the general public. Access to further images of the sites was greatly expanded with the publication in 1943 by Lindsay Black of *Aboriginal Art Galleries of Western New South Wales*.\(^{160}\) This was followed by the extensive cataloguing and illustration of rock engravings, cave paintings and dendroglyphs\(^{161}\) in the Sydney

\(^{156}\) Phillip, 1789: p. 106.
\(^{157}\) White, 1790: p. 141.
\(^{158}\) Collins, 1804: p. 381.
\(^{159}\) Kenyon, 1929: pp. 22-4.
\(^{161}\) Carving and painting on the bark and into the heartwood of standing trees.
By examining early photographs of these rock paintings and carvings, a selection has been made in relation to their orientation and style of depiction for use as reference points for the bark etchings and paintings and later works on paper by McRae that are discussed.

The cave at Winbar, 50 kilometres south west of Louth in Central - western NSW, near the Darling River (a major tributary of the Murray River), houses figures dancing across a rock panel beneath and beside a number of kangaroos depicted in profile. Some are shown hand in hand whilst others are waving weapons. In every example the anthropomorphic forms have adopted a frontal orientation with hips and knees bent and arms outstretched creating some dynamism to the depiction. The ceiling of the cavern is decorated with a red painted kangaroo, one hundred and twenty centimetres in length and accompanied by two white dingoes. Further depictions of birds, lizards, bird spoor and stencils under and over-lie these paintings.
It is the postures of the human forms and their relationships with each other that are of particular significance in this example and from which a comparison can be made with the works of McRae and other anonymous figurative artists under review.

The Mootwingee Gallery, 155 kilometres north-east of Broken Hill was considered by an American ethnologist who came to Australia to study Aboriginal Art,\textsuperscript{164} to be one of the most important sites because of its number of carvings, workmanship and variety.\textsuperscript{165} It was featured in the 1929 Australian Aboriginal Art Exhibition in Melbourne having been documented in the years immediately before the exhibition\textsuperscript{166}, with further images of the site appearing in Lindsay Black’s 1943 publication. It was only in 1962 that it was further catalogued in detail by Frederick McCarthy and N W G Macintosh with their article, \textit{The archaeology of Mootwingee, Western New South Wales}.\textsuperscript{167} There are large graphic images of kangaroos amongst their tracks, smaller marsupials and birds. Boomerangs and barbed spears are depicted alongside static anthropomorphic figures.\textsuperscript{168} These have been engraved into the rock surface which by now suffering the passage of time, weather and erosion. The engravings are juxtaposed with paintings of small and large marsupials, reptiles, implements and indeterminate figures some of which are humans. They are rendered using red, white yellow and orange ochres.\textsuperscript{169}

Research by the authors revealed that the site was a repository of images relating to the “big ceremonies” of the Eaglehawk and Crow Myth and which had been detailed at length by Norman Tindale, \textit{Eaglehawk and Crow Myths of the Maraura Tribe, Lower Darling River, New South Wales} in 1939. They included photographs of much of the art with some references to the myth, but it was Charles Barrett in his \textit{Art of the Australian Aboriginal}, (1943),\textsuperscript{170} who drew attention to the image of a wedge-tailed eagle.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Barrett and Croll, 1943: p. 43.}
\footnote{Barrett and Croll, 1942: p. 80.}
\footnote{Pulleine, 1926: p. 180-2; Riddell, 1928: p. 14-5.}
\footnote{McCarthy and Macintosh, 1962:}
\footnote{Black, 1943: p. 23.}
\footnote{McCarthy and Macintosh, 1962: p. 284-5.}
\footnote{Barrett and Croll, 1943: p. 64.}
\end{footnotes}
While there is illustration by McCarthy and Macintosh of many anthropomorphic postures and attributes, of interest is the frontal depiction in one of the caves, of a man, standing on his right leg with his left foot resting on his thigh. At the time the authors commented on its uniqueness in Australian Rock Art.

The 1929 exhibition catalogue includes photographs of the major rock shelter at the Mootwingee site along with two examples of extensive rock carvings and the engraving that are reproduced below. In their comments regarding this site, the authors consider that the work was done on the first before the rock fractured, as remnants of the tail can be discerned to the left of the main body\textsuperscript{171} while the painting of the second occurred after the splitting of the rock face.

\begin{quote}
Unknown Artist, Rock engraving, Kangaroo, animal tracks, Mootwingee.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{171} McCarthy and Macintosh, 1962: p. 257.
The first image of the kangaroo clearly depicts the animal at rest while the second illustrates a more dynamic pose. The artists were not merely defining the animal but was perhaps also recounting a story.

Amongst the multitude of animal spoor, crescent shapes and painted and stencilled hands and feet, the identifiable animals and snakes are depicted in profile, though some reptiles and the anthropomorphic figures are orientated frontally.

Some of the images were identified as emu spoor and emu eggs and McCarthy and Macintosh commented that most of the galleries included reference in some format to the emu but there are only 4 engravings of the birds.\(^{172}\) The authors provided no photographs only cartoons of these depictions.\(^{173}\)

At Wiltagoona, north-east of Mootwingee, there are detailed but static depictions of the emu with its small head and extended neck complimented by a deep body and long legs.

There are further depictions of the bird at Gundabooka also in Western NSW a few kilometres north of the aforementioned.\(^{174}\) This site also houses a unique single dancing human depicted in profile alongside that with the more usual frontal orientation. Painted in white these two stand out from the more conventional representations of

---

\(^{174}\) Black, 1943: p. 52.
the black macropod and anthropomorphic figures to the lower right of the panel. The rock face is further enhanced by two large hand stencils.

Unknown Artist, Dancing men, painted red and white, Dog, also stencilled hands, Gundabooka, reproduced from Lindsay Black, Aboriginal Art Galleries of Western New South Wales, 1943, p. 53.

All the above discussed rock galleries are adjacent to the Darling River valley, part of the river system of New South Wales, which flows south to the Murray River. Of particular note is firstly the figure resting on one leg from Mootwingee of which there is no example in McRae’s extant works. Secondly, the profile figure from Gundabooka which the artist perfected in his hunting, battle and ceremony and celebration scenes. This posture is, however, an anomaly to those figures painted across the gallery walls of the sites in North-east Victoria and so adjacent to the Country of McRae. These latter locations at Mount Pilot, the Garden Range and Mudgegonga were all identified in the twentieth century, while the Conic Range Gallery was first recognised at the end of the nineteenth century.175

The Mount Pilot site, north northwest of Beechworth, was visited in 1959 by Aldo Massola176 He then reported his findings in Native Painted Shelter at Beechworth177 and Journey to Aboriginal Victoria, 1969.178 In these he notes only one panel on which he identifies the profiles of a large kangaroo with an unorthodox tail and possibly a goanna of considerable length with a huge head.179 By 1983, R G Gunn interpreted nine images at the site all rendered in red ochre.180 The first is an anthropomorphic

175 Tugby, 1953: p. 446.
176 Aldo Massola came to Australia in 1923. He was educated at The University of Melbourne where he was influenced by Dr Leonhard Adam and studied anthropology. He specialized in South-East Australia and wrote extensively on the Aboriginal people and their influence on their Country.
178 Massola, 1969: p. 151
180 Gunn, 1983a: p. 16
figure in profile, with a long snakelike shape with a forked tongue which could be part of the first figure. To the right and a little below is a four-legged animal which may represent a thylacine but for its rudimentary tail.\textsuperscript{181}

If this is indeed a human form, then the body is presented frontally and the head and face in profile.

On a second panel 1300 metres distant can be discerned animal spoor, a bird in profile and adjacent to these, two full frontal hollow human figures, to one of which is attached, at the meeting of the thighs, a perpendicular appendage with forked head.\textsuperscript{182}

The panel at the Conic Range site, also referred to as Koetong Creek, near the Murray River, was documented in 1953 by D Tugby, an ethnologist at the National Museum of Victoria.\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{181} Gunn, 1983a: p. 17.
\textsuperscript{182} Gunn 1983a: p. 33.
\textsuperscript{183} Tugby, 1953: p. 446.
He noted its rediscovery in 1938 after the initial sighting around 1883. There were, at this time, 23 identifiable images as well as some that were indecipherable. The majority of the anthropomorphic forms are frontal stick figures, some with short forked appendages between their legs while one is drawn with breasts and splayed legs. The exception is the single profile image of an in filled four-legged animal with medium length tail. These rock paintings add to the compendium of depictions both anthropomorphic and animalistic with which the incised and drawn images on other media can be compared.

The Garden Range site on Seven Creeks, east of Euroa, presents massed depictions that can be likened to many of the celebratory scenes that have come to light on bark drawings from Victoria. Analysis by R G Gunn has identified the use of four pigments - brown, purple-brown, brown-red, and orange-red, in 172 images of the long panel, of which 111 can be classified as more than fragments. Those figures that are of a human form are all presented in a frontal orientation. Again there is, in profile, a single macropod animal with legs of equal length and a strong pointed tail.
Each of the sites being discussed, is within walking distance of water and that at Mudgegonga overlooks the Ovens River, northeast of Myrtleford and southeast of Beechworth. The panels at this location were first recorded in the 1930s. They illustrate game tracks, figures and miscellaneous lines that have become indecipherable through time and erosion. When Aldo Massola visited the gallery in 1965 he interpreted the scene as a corroboree.\(^{191}\) Since 1981, the five panels with over five hundred images in white, yellow, black and red, have been extensively documented by R G Gunn.\(^{192}\) There are a small number of stick figures, but the majority of the human forms are solidly in filled. All have a frontal orientation. However, within panel 2 and represented in profile, there is a 16cm macropod suggestive of a potoroo and a 64cm image of a kangaroo, tail outstretched between rear footprints as if to clearly identify the animal. The site also includes further images of anthropomorphic figures and reptiles.\(^{193}\)

The macropod can be compared with the 110 cm engraved kangaroo at Mootwingee, the extensive rock art site north-east of Broken Hill, illustrated previously. Thus, there appears to be some commonality in the illustration of these animals that can be found across the expanses of South-eastern Australia. Birds and fauna are represented on all these rock galleries, in profile and block coloured.

These latter four rock art sites are all in the north-east of Victoria, within or adjacent to McRae’s Country. On their walls are images of reptiles and macropods, human figures with a frontal orientation, animal spoors and fragments no longer decipherable. They

\(^{191}\) Massola, 1969: p. 152
\(^{192}\) Gunn, 2002: p. 120.
\(^{193}\) Gunn, 2002: p. 122
represent a vocabulary on which McRae was able to build. The evidence of the influence of those depictions from north of the Murray into western New South Wales is less compelling though the representations provoke a relationship.

**Etching on bark**

There was a further manifestation of Aboriginal imagery on which the orientation of both the anthropomorphic and animal figures became more complex - the development of figurative style on the traditional medium of bark. By an unknown artist and dated before 1854 when they were exhibited at Bendigo and Melbourne, are two etchings on the inner skin of bark. The blackened surface would suggest the wood had been treated with smoke to make it more malleable. They came from Fernyhurst, a sheep station owned and run by John Hunter Kerr from 1851 and were likely commissioned by him. As mentioned earlier he interacted with and extensively photographed Aboriginal people, their lives and ceremonies. They collected in this location as they moved between the Mission Stations at Franklinford on the Loddon River in Central Victoria and Lake Boga near the confluence of the Loddon and Murray Rivers in northern Victoria. These Aboriginal people, therefore, had had a prolonged contact with Europeans both on these Mission Stations and with the squatters that had taken up much of their Country along the Loddon River. It can only be conjectured as to the influences that had played out on the artwork.

---

195 Kerr, 1872: pp 185-207.
The first illustrates several figures depicted frontally, wearing scrotal fringes, in wide stance poses and waving implements, some of which are boomerangs.\textsuperscript{196} This early example mirrors the orientations and dispositions of the subjects from the rock panels in NSW. Spread out across the surface they seem to bear no relationship to each other.

The second bark etching depicts a kangaroo in profile whose furry texture has been scored into the wood. It is interesting to compare the posture and outline of this animal with those observed at the rock art sites. The artist has, in this instance, described the

\textsuperscript{196} Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 56.
forelegs with more clarity, definition he has extended to the arms and legs of his three human figures. Here he has used a semi-frontal orientation that gives him the scope to delineate the stepping motion and in using the curved face of the bark, has the consequence of imparting animation to his scene.\textsuperscript{197}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Unknown artist, \textit{Bark Etching}, before 1874, Museum Victoria, reproduced from \textit{Meerreeng-an}, 2010, p. 181.}
\end{figure}

This bark etching was attributed to a later date but before 1874 and had been collected by W. Stanbridge, a local guardian of Aboriginal people for The Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria. He was the leasee of the land east of Lake Tyrrell and those adjacent tracts on the western side of the Murray Valley near Swan Hill.\textsuperscript{198} Stanbridge had first made note of “drawings of men in corroboree, of kangaroo and emu hunts, or of men fighting” on the inner faces of the bark used by the local Aboriginal people to construct their “lodges” in his 1861 article \textit{Some Particulars of the General Characteristics, Astronomy and Mythology of the Tribes in the Central Part of Victoria, Southern Australia}.\textsuperscript{199} He commented that a film of black resulting from the

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{197} Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 108.  \\
\textsuperscript{198} Billis and Kenyon, 1932: p. 124.  \\
\textsuperscript{199} Stanbridge, 1861: p. 290.  \\
\end{flushright}
heat applied, made the slabs more pliable and it was against this that the images were scored. Unfortunately, it is now difficult to identify many of the features of this drawing, but an early cartoon of unknown origin, was reproduced in Brough Smyth’s *Aborigines of Victoria*, 1878, from which the following observations are made.200

![Bark Etching](image)


The unknown Aboriginal artist of the Lake Tyrell Bark has depicted some of the geography from the Lake, and it can be speculated, to the Murray River with native flora and fauna illustrated across the upper area. A surety of eye and detail suggest at least four varieties of bird all of which were prevalent across the northern plains to the west of the Loddon River; emu, brolga (native companion), bustard (native turkey) and pigeon.201 There is a somewhat humorous bent in the signalling of one kangaroo to its mate and there is a refinement of the trunks of the eucalypts and wild cherry-trees (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*)202 as they recede into their verdant canopies.203 On the far left, a human figure shimmies up a trunk using an axe to fashion toe holds while on the

---

201 Pizzey, 1997: pp. 18, 146, 158.
202 Victoria Surveyors report, 1869.
203 The trees illustrated demonstrate a European eye for detail. Recognizing that this cartoon was published in 1878, at an unknown interval after its original creation and was transcribed by an anonymous hand, it is impossible to ascribe further information regarding the flora.
far right two figures shelter beneath some trees with their spears, spear-throwers, axes, clubs, woven basket, coolamon\textsuperscript{204} and rifles. With scenes from Aboriginal life illustrated across the panel, references to the advancing changes by white man are noted with a fence, a double fronted cottage and a firearm in the hands of a naked figure. Through the centre of the vista various approaches to hunting are shown on both land and water, employing the axe, the spear and the rifle. It is however the potency of the scene being played out across the lower centre that attracts attention. At this ceremony, dancers are performing adjacent to a group of standing figures, flourishing sticks and boomerangs. At a little distance, figures lie and sit around the fires. There is a barrier behind which are seated musicians, while cloaked silhouettes stand still further away.

The flowing river at the top of the depiction defines the limitations of the scene which stretches down past small waterholes and creeks to Lake Tyrrell. As a landscape, the artist is creating a narrative that is incorporating contemporary issues. This work was sourced from the inner lining of a ‘lodge’ and therefore for a limited audience, it documents the game available and how it could be procured, the range of weapons obtainable or accessible and a ritual of importance to the group. Stanbridge suggested that the shelter would have been only used during the winter months due to the aridity of the location.\textsuperscript{205} With the rains, the Boorong people\textsuperscript{206} gathered to hunt the fauna that came to the lakes, pool, creeks and rivers and to recount their stories of the stars reflected in these watery expanses.\textsuperscript{207}

The Lake Tyrell figures of birds and animals are depicted in profile, however the humans on this bark drawing are presented as either frontal or in profile, in contrast to so many of those that are described on the rock faces further east in Victoria and those at Wiltagoona and Mootwingee north into New South Wales. In style, these galleries and the bark drawings were the genesis of figurative drawings and paintings that European

\textsuperscript{204} Bowl shaped vessel.
\textsuperscript{205} Stanbridge, 1861: p. 304.
\textsuperscript{206} Referred as Boorong by Stanbridge, 1861, p. 301; as Wathi-wathi by Howitt, 1904, p. 50; as Watty-watty by P Beveridge in Curr, 1887, vol. 111, p. 439; as Wotti-wotti by Curr, 1887, vol. 111, p. 439; as Watiwati by Tindale 1984, p. 209.
\textsuperscript{207} Stanbridge, 1861: p. 301; Kelly Koumalatsos: ‘When the rains came, Lake Tyrell reflected the stars from the sky on the surface of the water. Traditionally, Aboriginal people told stories about the stars here and passed them on to the next generation. Lake Tyrell is an inspirational place and very important culturally.’ Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 33.
artists and explorers, who in criss-crossing the country, invited the Aboriginal peoples to reproduce on paper.208

Translation of depictions to paper

The very presence of these intruders indicated a society in transition and was mirroring changes that were occurring concurrently across the Pacific Ocean in America.209 There, as new settlers penetrated into the Central Plains of the United States that had been the preserve of the Native American Indian, their territories became curtailed and confrontations eventuated.210 They had been persuaded into reserves and had ceded their land as early as 1784.211 By the 1860s their deplorable living conditions led them to yearn for the yesteryear212 “where the wind blew free and there...were no enclosures and everything drew a free breathe.”213 They had in the past documented their histories on buffalo skins and were encouraged to reproduce and create new vistas on paper and in ledger books.214 This necessitated a recalibration of scale and a compromising of content to conform to the smaller format.215

---

213 Josephy, 1995: p. 371. From an oratory by the Comanche chief Ten Bears at the Medicine Lodge Creek treaty meeting in 1867.
This depiction of *Warriors dance, War dance* has been dated between the late 1860s and the mid 1880s.\(^{216}\) It evidences the use of the visual image by Howling Wolf to keep alive the rituals and traditions that were no longer practiced and the interest that was shown by outside observers of ceremonies that were no longer prevalent in North American Indian societies. This Ledger Art, so named because of the use of the paper of ledger books, reached its zenith in the 1880s with the drawings recording their victories, customs and rituals, in particular, detailing the beliefs and traditions that were being discouraged by the prevailing culture.\(^{217}\) A direct comparison can be drawn with the Australian Aboriginal artists of the same period who were being exposed to the same pressures on their culture, creeds and practices. McRae’s response to these pressures is explored in the following chapters.

While the Aboriginal people had not been reproducing representations on the scale of the buffalo hides, they had been using a stick in the mud\(^{218}\) or their thumb nails to incise images, so the step to dipping nib and ink was not great. They had also been fashioning brushes from fibre and echidna quills with which to apply clay and ochre to themselves, their cloaks, bark sheets and rock faces.\(^{219}\) Baldwin Spencer described, in *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, a brush made from chewing and then splaying out the end of a short stick that was being used to decorate a piece of stringybark.\(^{220}\) It was with a European style equivalent that the Coranderrk artist, William Barak, (c.1825 – 1903) working on paper, in-filled his animals and Aboriginal figures with rhythmical straight and curved motifs in contrasting hues.\(^{221}\) His designs reflected the engraved and coloured faces of many of the shields now stored and displayed in the Melbourne Museum.\(^{222}\) In contrast Mickey of Ulladulla (c.1820–1891) was working with a predominantly monochrome pallet producing detailed reproductions of the wildlife around him and of his interface

\(^{216}\) Szabo, 1994: p. 166.
\(^{218}\) Robinson, 1841; Vol 2, Monday 19 July, p. 321.
\(^{219}\) Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 56.
\(^{220}\) Barrett and Croll, 1943: p. 31.
\(^{221}\) Sayers, 1994: Photograph opposite p. 18.
\(^{222}\) Keeler and Couzens, 2010: pp. 156-69.
with ‘modern’ and introduced constructions – the horse, the saw mill, the sailing ship, to name a few.\textsuperscript{223}

McRae presented his animal and human figures as silhouettes, fully in-filled, and adopted both a full frontal and profile orientation for the latter. His earliest recorded drawings were made with a stick working in mud\textsuperscript{224} and it was after their discovery by Roderick Kilborn that the artist was encouraged to use pen and coloured inks on paper. The earliest extant images are dated between 1860 and 1864 and were first collected by Theresa Walker during her time residing at Barnawartha, Northern Victoria. Walker had made her name as a miniature portraitist working in wax sculpture of local identities, her family\textsuperscript{225} and of an Aboriginal couple which she exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1841.\textsuperscript{226} She always depicted in profile, it is perhaps from this influence that McRae became so proficient in his action images in profile.

So, his artistic pursuits were launched and would continue until his death in 1901. His œuvre expanded to cover many aspects of the Aboriginal lifestyle both before and after the arrival of the ‘white man’. While McRae was using materials with which he was likely unfamiliar at first, he was manipulating an artistic vocabulary that had, as I have shown, its origins in rock galleries, on bark drawings and in the incisions on the pelts of cloaks, which he adjusted in ways to which his non-indigenous audience could relate.

There is no documentation of their aesthetic appeal, but Rod Kilborn, the Wahgunyah Post-master and local Justice of the Peace, recognised that a value would one day be placed on these Aboriginal drawings.\textsuperscript{227} Across the spectrum of his art, McRae was illustrating the elegant, the humorous, the facile and the ridiculous to enlighten his audience to a climate of greater respect and acceptance. There was an increased awareness of the artist’s work as is evidenced by the range of patrons commissioning his sketchbooks - local landowners, local businessmen, visiting salesmen and tourists.\textsuperscript{228} Three of his sketches under the name of Tommy Barnes, were first published in Brough

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{223} Sayers, 1994: pp. 53, 56, 58.
\item \textsuperscript{224} Cox, 1929: p. 4. ‘Found drawing with a broken stick in sun-baked mud surface of the Murray Flats.’
\item \textsuperscript{225} Freak, 2018: p. 148.
\item \textsuperscript{226} Ker, 1995: p. 471.
\item \textsuperscript{227} Barrett, 1935: p. 88. (Mrs G C Kilborn, Wife of Mr R Kilborn)
\item \textsuperscript{228} William Lang, John Guthie Grey, George McMahon, Mr Bayliff, Messrs. Lefaivre, Gatliff, Bremner, Richard Lucas.
\end{itemize}
Smyth’s *Aborigines of Victoria*, (1878). However, his images received far greater exposure as artistic illustrations with the publication in 1896 and 1898 of Kathleen Langloh Parker’s volumes, *Australian Legendary Tales* and *More Australian Legendary Tales*.

Despite their extensive use in these books, the creator was merely acknowledged as ‘a native artist’.

**Exhibition History**

McRae’s drawings were unveiled by the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria in 1906 with an Exhibition of old, rare, and Curious Books, Manuscripts, Autographs, etc., held in conjunction of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Public Library of Victoria, item 366: “Sketches drawn by an aboriginal named Tommy, known as Tommy McCrae, for many years with Andrew Hume of Brocklesby, and afterwards with Mr McCrae of Mulwala station. The writing under the sketches is in Tommy’s handwriting: as he was never at school, he must have learned to write and read from different persons on the station.”

Aboriginal art was further exhibited in 1929 when the National Museum of Victoria with the Public Library and the National Gallery of Victoria published *Australian Aboriginal Art*, to accompany an exhibition of Australian Aboriginal Art. With chapters by Charles Barrett and A S Kenyon, the monograph is confined to descriptions of the popular artistic

---

229 Catalogue, 1906: p. 46.

230 Artefacts and photographs collected by Walter Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen in their travels through Central and Northern Australia.
forms from across Australia. In the introductory essay, Charles Barrett, despite the title of the exhibition, still referred to the study as being the realm of the ethnologist and not the art historian, even though he went on to say that the ‘art of the rocks is precious.’

On display, were reproduced and traced examples of rock paintings and carvings. By juxtaposing panels from Mootwingee in Western New South Wales with those on the Northern Territory west coast and from Prince Regent River in North-western Kimberley, the differences in the techniques and subject matter were exemplified. As Charles Barrett wrote:

All that we know yet of Aboriginal Art in Australia is dominated by cave and rock shelter pictures. More elaborate is the art of their finest decorations, on weapons and sacred objects, of wood or of stone.

Along with the painted and carved shields, carved tree trunks and bark and slab drawings was the aforementioned drawing from Lake Tyrell, northern Victoria and an ornately carved wooden slab from Coranderrk in central Victoria. It was fashioned as a ‘Grave marker’, but it is unknown whether it was ever used for this purpose.

With a date of 1866, this etched and drawn work again demonstrates animals in profile while the human figures are all orientated frontally. It had been executed as a grave marker by a Yarra tribesman at Coranderrk and he would have been exposed to European influences at this Mission Station which may explain the absence of similar

231 Barrett, 1929: p. 5.
233 Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 58, 224.
examples. After all, the McRae images of William Buckley’s initial interaction with the Aboriginal peoples of southern Victoria, document grave sites defined by spears at either extremity. In contrast in NSW there is considerable evidence of carved burial trees as grave markers, using signs and symbols of an intricate nature but with few figurative insertions.

Also included in the exhibition and illustrated in the catalogue was a drawing attributed to Tommy Barnes/McRae. The postures and capers of the participants mirror those of the Lake Tyrell bark but with an animation and sophistication that the artist had now realised; the accentuated swaying of some of the participants as if in time with the beat of the ‘master of ceremony’. This cloaked figure with his jaunty head decoration is drawn in profile, an orientation that has been noted in only one rock painting of unknown date, at Gundabooka, and on the Lake Tyrell slab.

It is a ceremonial scene of two episodes. The lower illustrates an extensive group of figures with painted decoration on their legs and bodies, feathers affixed to their foreheads and who are dancing with their weapons of war. The upper shows another large group who have again decoration up their legs and across their torsos but sport thick brush about their ankles and, in contrast, perform with short sticks. This image is similar in its subject to the early corroboree depictions that McRae created for Theresa Walker. It does however belong to a later period, identified by the artist’s execution of the architecture of the tree as it gracefully spreads into its canopy.


The Lang Sketchbook, No 1, Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria; Tommy McRae Sketchbook, Koori Heritage Trust.

In the catalogue, this work is attributed to a Mission Aboriginal. It is apparent that the author knew little of Tommy McRae and his adherence to a life outside these Stations. ‘Showing European influence’ negated the artist’s references to the art of the rock galleries and wood and bark slabs. The statement was not unlike those levelled at some examples of Aboriginal art produced during the twentieth century and serving to diminish the status of the work as a legitimate art form. Its inclusion in the exhibition, however, stimulated the donation to the Library of a further McRae drawing, *Rutherglen Corroboree, (1899)*, by a Mrs Pattenden. Unfortunately, there is no documentation as to how or from where her image was originally acquired. Little attention was paid to this gift as it remained buried in the Museum papers until its discovery during the relocation of the institution in the year 2000 to Carlton Gardens. That this occurred suggests that even though McRae’s drawings had now been exposed to the public through the event and had generated some response, there was little recognition within the organisation of its ongoing value and interest.

Three Aboriginal pen drawings were included in the 1941 exhibition, *Art of Australia*, mounted by the Carnegie Corporation at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The pen images were preceded in the catalogue by eleven Aboriginal Bark Drawings from the Northern Territory. Then, acknowledged as owned by the National Art Gallery, Victoria, the first, *Hunting Emu and Chasing Chinamen*, is reproduced. While not attributed to Tommy McRae, it is the image that accompanied, in a truncated form, the 1935 Charles Barrett’s article on the artist in *The Victorian Naturalist.*

---

The lower episode shows a lone man stalking four emus from behind a mobile brush hide, his spear at the ready. He is accompanied by a woman and child. The eucalypt and acacias locate the scene in the Murray Valley. The depiction of the male figure in profile is a departure from the orientation of so many of the images on rock faces and bark slabs and contributes to the psychological anticipation of the hunt. The upper episode illustrates five figures armed with spears, clubs, shields and boomerangs in pursuit of two hapless Chinese, hats and pigtais flying as they drop or have dropped their pannikins. Again, the vitality of the chase is accentuated by the profile orientation of all the participants. Close examination details the contrast of the cunning and patience of the lower against the spiritedness and dynamism of the upper.

The other two images, *Warriors Dancing* and *Warriors*, are noted as from the same source, but again with no attribution. The former may be an image now in the Museum Victoria collection but in the absence of any description, identification is not possible. In this international arena, the appearance of these works by unacknowledged Aboriginal artists alongside the paintings of Arthur Streeton, Margaret Preston, Russell Drysdale and Peter Purves Smith must have contributed to their recognition as a legitimate art form and the first known occasion on which the two art traditions were so closely displayed. The exhibition was received with great interest though no comments were directed to the indigenous works of art.\footnote{Joseph Brown Gallery, 1976: no. 16.} It was to the Purves Smith *Kangaroo Hunt*, 1938-9, that attention was drawn by the critics describing it as having “a strength, mystery and passion of primitive drawing, plus a kind of surrealistic dream quality that places it all by itself.”\footnote{Turnbull, 1941: p. 14.} The juxtaposing of this work with its silhouette figures and naked trees and that of McRae’s hunting scene with its similarly disposed figures and statuesque flora, should have been of particular interest to the American audience, in the light of their own Native American Ledger Art. The Museum went on to purchase only *Kangaroo Hunt* for their permanent collection.\footnote{Eagle, n.d.: p. 45.}
In the introduction to the 1943 Primitive Art Exhibition in Melbourne, mention is made of the evolving interest in Primitive Art for its aesthetic appeal and for its insights into the study of the history of art and of ethnology. The exhibits were drawn from Oceania, Asia, America and Africa. In concentrating on the earlier examples of the arts of Aboriginal people, the Australian contributions included four bark paintings from Northern Australia, painted shields from the eastern seaboard, churingas and aquatic figures. By their inclusion, these had at last escaped from their classification as just ethnographic objects. They were joined by a final six catalogued items which were described as post-contact ‘Australian Graphic Art’ - the bark slab drawing from Lake Tyrell, two paintings by William Barak and three drawings by Tommy McRae. The first and second of the McRae works can be identified as the Theresa Walker commissions from 1860 and 1862 at Barnawartha, both of which had been reproduced in Brough Smyth’s *Aborigines of Victoria*, volume 2, and which had been donated to Victorian State Institutions by her brother Philip Chauncy.

---

242 Lindsay, 1943: p. iii
They were, by the 1940s, in the State Library of Victoria’s collection, as were two McRae sketchbooks, one of which may be the third catalogued item – ‘an unidentified sketchbook’.

The exhibition was mounted by Leonhard Adam, who having lectured in ethnological jurisprudence and primitive law, published the book, *Primitive Art* (1940), was interned in Britain and sent to Australia. In 1942 he was paroled and employed by the National Gallery of Victoria where he undertook research into the Aboriginal peoples’ use of stone.\(^{244}\) It was however in his article, ‘Has Australian Aboriginal Art a future?’ that he drew particular attention to the naturalistic quality of the images found on the south-east Australian rock gallery walls and which have been discussed earlier.\(^{245}\) It was these characteristics that were so strong on the bark slab drawing that had been included in his exhibition. He made particular note that the step from these Aboriginal drawing methods pre-contact, to the manipulation of the introduced materials and techniques that produced the dynamic human and animal figures by some Aboriginal artists, was not so great, making note of the McRae picture that had been on display in New York. In the same year as the Adam exhibition, it was this graphic image, again in its truncated form, that was reproduced in the publication, *Art of the Australian Aboriginal*, by Charles Barrett and Robert Henderson Croll. They described McRae as “Victoria’s most gifted Aboriginal artist”.\(^{246}\)
With the exposure of the Aboriginal artists of the nineteenth century by Andrew Sayers, David Hansen and the exhibitions that have followed, the art market is now interested in the collection of the art of Tommy McRae and his contemporaries. This is a confirmation of Roderick Kilborn’s prophesy that these works would one day have a value. What is unknown is whether this early patron meant their monetary significance, the aesthetic impact of the dignity, emotion and vigour of the depictions or for the wealth of information that McRae provided through his narrative images. As an heir to and in the context of rock and bark paintings, dendroglyphs, body art and artefact decoration, McRae’s art should be seen as the first of many steps which have been taken in revealing, and then recognising and appreciating Aboriginal Art and the unveiling of culture, traditions and relationship with Country for the world at large. For Tommy McRae, it is about his country where his spirit has rested and will rest for perpetuity and “to it he must finally return.”

---

247 Capell, 1950: p. 3.
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Chapter 3: The Art of Ceremony and Celebration.

Depictions of ceremony and celebration make up over 27% of Tommy McRae’s total artistic output with more than a third of images in some of his sketchbooks being devoted to their illustration. By their number, it can be speculated that these rituals are intrinsic to Aboriginal life in the Murray Valley. The artist isolated details of the ceremonies in a descriptive manner. There is much information that is interesting to his European patrons, but he does not reveal the stories that underpinned their importance within his culture nor what led to their enactment throughout the calendar.

McRae’s drawings are his answer to the well-established tradition of European art that depicts the corroborees of the Aboriginal people. They had had a fascination for the European viewers and artists since their arrival on the shores of Australia. This chapter begins by examining a selection of these early works from those alien and new to the country.

Ceremony and celebration through the eyes of the European artist.

Charles-Alexandre Lesueur was initially employed as an assistant gunner on the French exploratory expedition to Terre Napoléon (Australia) in 1800-1804. Led by Nicolas-Thomas Baudin to map and undertake a study of the continent, desertion from the voyage by the official painters and draughtsmen before their arrival in the South Seas led to Leseur’s appointment as a draughtsman as he was found to excel in artistic depictions. Beyond recording the schematic coastal vistas, he was also required to delve into the customs and habits of the Aboriginal people with his fellow artist, Nicholas-Martin Petit. They produced a gallery of portraits of the native inhabitants showing their statures, hairstyles, and cicatrices. As well as serving ethnographic purposes, the artists also indulged the emerging romanticism of the day - as evident in the charcoal and ink scene of a corroboree by Lesueur that catches the unique atmosphere of the bush setting illuminated by firelight.

249 A cicatrice is a wound filled with clay to exaggerate scar formation. Brough Smyth, 1878: p. 296. ‘When healed, (they) denote the class of the bearer, or his hardihood and prowess.’ Howitt, 1904, p. 313.
Around the periphery of the staging, standing and seated figures crowd with some waving music sticks while others lean on their spears. At their centre, the performers display the exaggerated contours of their bodies with arms raised as they gesticulate with their spears and clubs. At which location the artist was exposed to this event is unknown as the expedition sailed the west, south and south-east coasts of the Australian Continent during 1801, 1802 and 1803. They did however spend a prolonged period of recuperation around Port Jackson (Sydney) between June and November 1802 hosted by the English. The sketch probably dates from then.

Further is Corroboree at Newcastle, c.1818 by the convict Joseph Lycett250 (1774-1825).

---

250 Joseph Lycett was a convicted forger who was transported to Sydney, Australia in 1814. After further misdemeanours, he was sent to Newcastle, New South Wales in 1815, from where he was pardoned in 1821 and shortly after returned to England. http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lycett-joseph-2382/text3137
The billowing clouds and moonlight are signature motifs. These can now be recognised from many of Lycett’s images both in a recently discovered anthology, *Album of original drawings by James Wallis and Joseph Lycett*, compiled by Captain James Wallis, the Commandant of the penal settlement at Newcastle from 1816 to 1818\(^{251}\) and from the *Lycett Album*, incorrectly titled *Drawings of the Natives and Scenery of Van Diemen’s Land 1830*.\(^{252}\) Professor John Maynard analyses each of the 20 Lycett images from this latter album in his book, *True Light and Shade: an Aboriginal Perspective of Joseph Lycett’s Art*, 2014.

\[^{251}\text{Album of original drawings by James Wallis and Joseph Lycett, discovered in Ontario, Canada and purchased at auction by the State Library of New South Wales in 2011.}\]

\[^{252}\text{Drawings of the Natives and Scenery of Van Diemen’s Land 1830, purchased by auction at Sotheby and Co London, in 1972.}\]
Wales. A feature in many of the images of the album is the white loincloth and dress of the figures as they climb trees, rest by campfires, joust with clubs, spears and shields and perform. Maynard ascribes their garb as a redress to the sensibilities of Lycett’s viewers.\textsuperscript{253}

Examination of each of the plates in the album provides evidence that further informs the larger work illustrated above.

![Image of Aborigines resting by a campfire, near the mouth of the Hunter River, Newcastle, New South Wales](image1)

Plate 12, \textit{Aborigines resting by a campfire, near the mouth of the Hunter River, Newcastle, New South Wales}\textsuperscript{254} details a headland (centre right) and island (centre) at the entrance of the Hunter River. It is this landmark, clearly recognisable in Lycett’s work, \textit{Corroboree at Newcastle}, which firmly locates the painting in this location and by Lycett’s hand.

![Image of Corroboree around a campfire](image2)

From plate 13 the postures of the performers in the centre left foreground and in the centre left distance, can be exactly transcribed to Lycett’s larger work. This painting

\textsuperscript{253} Maynard, 2014: p. 8.

\textsuperscript{254} This title has been assigned as a cataloguing tool by the National Library of Australia.
introduces the concept of darkness, firelight and a treed location, with groups of figures displaying body decorations, individuals being prepared for traditional inductions while others are spectators and accompanists to the various performances. These all exhibit diverse attitudes in their staging. There is however, in the lower right, a figure threatening a kneeling woman, her arm grasped with his left hand as he raises a boomerang over his head with his right – an interesting and alien addition to this scene of ceremony and celebration.

As can be seen from Lycett’s works from the albums, this artist had gained an understanding of the interactions of the Aboriginal people of the Newcastle area with their Country, their fellow peoples and the invading Europeans.255 The painting of the corroboree embodies his perceptiveness that can only have been acquired through keen observation and exposure. His illustration and that of his ‘patron’, James Wallis, of the corroboree supports the intrigue that was exhibited by the new and foreign observers of Aboriginal culture and life.

*Album of original drawings by James Wallis and Joseph Lycett,* contains the drawings from which many of the views published in Wallis’ *Historical account of the Colony of New South Wales,* (London, 1821) were etched, in part, by another convict, Walter Preston (1771-1820). The publication of this volume in London in 1820 and 1821 with its corroboree scene based on the Lycett painting, further exposed the public to aspects of ceremony and celebration in a far-off land.

---

The colonial artist, John Glover (1767-1849) was also fascinated by the Aboriginal people who inhabited his landscape. In the early 1830s he settled in Tasmania at Mills Plains in the valley below Ben Lomond, about 40 kilometres east south-east of Launceston.\footnote{Hansen, 2003: p. 90.} Here he met George Augustus Robinson, the chief protector of Aboriginals in Tasmania\footnote{Hansen, 2003: p. 124.} and John Batman who was to play a pivotal role in the settlement of Victoria.\footnote{Hansen, 2003: p. 125.} Both these men had extensive contact with the Aboriginal people of the vicinity. Glover made many sketches of the latter and their celebrations, some peculiar to specific groups.\footnote{Hansen, 2003: p. 126.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{glover-corroboree-landscape.png}
\caption{John Glover, \textit{Corroboree in landscape}, c 1834, ink and grey wash, sketchbook 97, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.}
\end{figure}

This sketch and the following painting detail the highly animated performance around a fire during which a high jump is executed reflecting that used ‘in war to avoid spears’.\footnote{Plomley, 1966: p. 278-8.} It is recognised as a feature peculiar to dance performed by Aboriginal people around Hobart, Tasmania.\footnote{Hansen, 2003: p. 126.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{glover-aborigines-dancing.png}
\caption{John Glover, \textit{Aborigines dancing at Brighton, Tasmania}, 1835, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales Sydney.}
\end{figure}
John Glover, Aborigines dancing, c 1832-3, ink and grey wash, sketchbook 97, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

John Glover, Corroboree by moonlight, c 1832-3, ink and grey wash, sketchbook 97, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

John Glover, Danse d’indigènes de la Terre Van Diemen, [A corroboree of Natives in Van Diemen’s Land], 1840, Musée du Louvre, Paris France.

Taken from The illustrated sketches reproduced above were executed at least 5 years earlier than this painted corroboree scene which locates the performance by moonlight, in a secluded valley, surrounded by trees and around a fire which illuminates both the attending audience and the dancing figures wielding implements of aggression. The light, figuration, detail of attributes and animation are particularly noticeable in the drawings whilst it is suggested that the shadowy gloom of the painting signals the pending demise of the Aboriginal people in Tasmania.\textsuperscript{262} This painting was one of 6 that

\textsuperscript{262}\textsuperscript{262} Johns et al, 1998: p. 128.
were sent by Glover, to King Louis-Philippe of France who had shown a fascination in his works at the Paris Salon of 1814 and had a continuing interest in the artist.²⁶³

Visitors to Glover and Batman at their properties near Ben Lomond were intrigued by the Aboriginal performances, their decoration and their implements.²⁶⁴ A *Corroboree of Natives near Mills’ Plains*, 1832, Art Gallery of South Australia, documents that which they must have observed.²⁶⁵

The sky is infused by pink, setting the scene at sundown beneath a signatory tree which displays the features of scanty foliage and naked limbs that are so evocative of the Australian eucalypt. The depiction of a small group of Aboriginal people performing around a fire and their Aboriginal spectators, is as much about the event, as the landscape in which it was taking place. This Glover painting was included in an exhibition

---

²⁶⁴ Hansen, 2004: p. 204.
²⁶⁵ Hansen, 2004: p. 129.
of 65 works by the artist in London in 1835. It is considered that because of its ethnographic interest it was bought by Sir Thomas Phillips and became part of a large collection of the artist’s work that the patron continued to acquire through the middle of the nineteenth century.

John Michael Skipper (1815-1883) arrived in South Australia in 1836. As a young solicitor he cultivated his talent as an artist in watercolours recording events, cityscapes and his experiences on the Victorian Goldfields where he tried his luck in 1852. He occasionally worked on a larger scale in oils, of which Corroboree, South Australian Museum, Adelaide, South Australia painted in 1840 is an example.

The massed and ornamented figures perform before a seated Aboriginal audience illuminated by firelight and a rising moon. The scene is overshadowed by the massive tree trunks and background cliffs that encircle the event. In the foreground are non-indigenous spectators, both women and men, mounted on horseback which is indicative of the staging of this occasion. For the viewer, the setting of this painting reinforces the seclusion, timing at night and the involvement of both performers and audience in a tradition that had an attraction for the new settlers as they explored this land.

---

Another immigrant, Wilhelm van Blandowski (1822-1878), in recording his trips through Central Victoria and the Goulburn Valley in 1854 and around Western Port Bay from the end of 1854 to 1855, sketched *Corroboree or Native Festival*, *A native dance with hand weapons* and *Native women dance*.

![Corroboree or Native Festival](image1)

This first illustrates the complex decoration of the body, face and limbs that the group used as they perform before a fire. While the pose of each figure is similar, the illumination of their individual ornamentation insinuates excitement and vitality across the scene. An audience of adults and children is seen in the background and some of those seated in the foreground are accompanying the action with their music sticks.

![A native dance with hand weapons](image2)

---

270 Allen, 2010: p. 5.
It is the detailed and vigorous decoration of body, face and limbs that first draws the 
viewer into this next Blandowski image and imparts dynamism into the dance. The 
firelight emphasises the action as, with clubs and boomerangs, each performer 
gesticulates toward the elderly ‘master of ceremony’. He is defined by long white hair 
and beard and leads the action through the beating of his sticks. The audience is made 
up of seated and standing adults and children.

Sketch by Willhelm Blandowski, drawing by G Mützel, Redaway and Sons engraver, Native women dance.

This last image depicts two women dancing between fires. for an audience, the majority 
of which are men. The muscular physiques of the audience, the majority of which are 
men, are prominent in comparison to the gauntness of the ‘master of ceremony’ who 
orchestrates the performance. On this occasion he guides the timing with his club 
against a shield. At the lower left of the drawing a woman is seated breast feeding a 
baby. There appear to be no other children present. The action takes place in a wooded 
environment with a gloom enveloping the background. In contrast the central female 
figures exude a mischievous but restrained air that is very different from the mood of 
the previous two depictions.

The engravings of Blandowski’s sketches and of those of his accompanying party by 
Redaway and Sons include the elements of a treed location, firelight and the intricate 
decoration with the body paint of each of the performers. It is the interplay of these 
latter that has caught the artist’s attention. He has used them to insinuate movement 
across the whole scene giving it a vitality that infects the viewer. The detailing of the 
‘master of ceremony’ is an intrinsic element of the performance and the introduction of 
the women’s dance presents a different perspective. The audience, whether involving
only adults or a combination of adults and children, is an integral to the depiction. What is unknown is how Blandowski accessed these events and whether these performances were in fact staged for the European spectator!

Perhaps the most vibrant sets of images of the corroboree from this period were painted by Samuel Thomas Gill (1818-1880) between the 1850s and 1875. He had arrived in South Australia in 1839 not long after John Michael Skipper. He immediately set up his studio and began venturing inland to record the landscapes.²⁷⁴

![S T Gill, A Native Corroboree at Night, c1850, Water colour, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.](image)

It was during this period that he painted this early scene of a wild performance taking place in an amphitheatre and against a backdrop of sculptured hills that creates a similar environment to that of the Skipper painting. The event is also shaded by two statuesque white trunked eucalypts which act as a foil to the blackness of the figures cavorting below. The audience is seated some distance from the action. Those in the foreground include two non-indigenous spectators with a horse.

In 1851 Gill joined the throngs drawn to the goldfields of Victoria where he depicted his fellow travellers as they vacillated between jubilation and despair. The streets of towns and cities came under equal appraisal as they developed in response to the new-found wealth.

It was not until twenty years later that Gill again focussed his eye to the detailing of events relating to the Aboriginal people of his adopted home. He revisits with spiritedness, the corroboree as the central theme of this 1874 painting.

²⁷⁴ Campbell, 1989: p. 46.
Within an amphitheatre of trees and around a fire, the performers and the audience are all close to the action and all part of the event. Women sit to one side with music sticks aloft while the whole is orchestrated by a standing figure wielding his batons; both elements that were not apparent in Gill’s earlier work and in that of Skipper.

With minimal body decoration it is however the postures and attitudes of the dancers that capture the viewers’ attention and which convey the vigour and clamour of these events. The figures perform in unison with their shields to their chests and their spears held aloft. For the new arrivals and for those who would never visit the shores of Australia, images like these would be their only experience of this feature of Australian life.

Each of these examples whetted the appetite of both the artist and his audience. Each image expresses a visual experience for those not only exposed to the spectacle but for those viewing the depictions generated – the environment, the atmosphere, the dynamism of performance, the ancillary participants. This spectacle was, in each example, depicted in isolated and treed surroundings under a darkened sky and illuminated by the moon or firelight. With some mechanics of the actual performances, there was little else to inform the viewer of the complexities of the rituals of which the artists may not have been aware.
For the Aboriginal artist, the depiction of the events around ceremony and celebration were key to conveying the stories and traditions that underpinned the social cohesions of their culture.⁷⁷⁵

**McRae’s ceremony and celebration on paper**

There had been a history of presenting Aboriginal people with paper and pen to record impressions. In 1841, as George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, passed through the Grampians in Western Victoria, he noticed an outline of mountains drawn in mud.⁷⁷⁶ He requested that the image be reproduced on paper and it is now recorded for perpetuity in his diary.⁷⁷⁷ It is documented that for this reason, the Post-master at Wahgunyah in the Murray Valley, Roderick Kilborn, supplied Tommy McRae, in 1865, with a pocket book and materials to fill with drawings.⁷⁷⁸ McRae was, in these images, using an artistic vocabulary to which his audience could relate. He depicted the daily life of his people, their connection with the surrounding environments and their interactions with the changing circumstances of both this and his peoples. With the illustration of the many occasions celebrated across Aboriginal life emphasising different accoutrements, different decoration and different mechanics, he was also enlightening his viewers to their uniqueness while safeguarding the underlying significances and implications of the rites.

The earliest extant and dated pen and ink drawings on paper by McRae are five single pages dated between 1860 and 1864. These first works by McRae document events of and around the corroboree. They are the precursors to the illustrations of aspects of ceremonial and celebratory dances that the artist included in all his sketchbook and notebook narratives.

They were commissioned by Mrs G H Poole, better known as the artist and sculptor Theresa Chauncy or Theresa Walker. She had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of McRae while living near the Murray River, on prime land that her brother had bought

---

⁷⁷⁵ Cooper, 2003: p. 31  
⁷⁷⁷ Robinson, 1841: p. 353, figure 7.20.  
when he had subdivided the squatter runs on the southern side of the Murray Valley between Wodonga and Rutherglen. 279

The property that W. Chauncy had identified in the early 1860s was immediately to the west and at the foot of ‘The Hermitage’. 280 This family home had been built by David Reid as the centre of his previously held Barnawartha Run and was his pre-emptive right after the carve up of the squatter leases in the Murray Valley. 281 He repurchased much of that run when it again came onto the market. The valley was flat with the high point of the house looking over the surrounds to the east, south and west and to the meanders and courses of the Murray River to the north.

David Reid had arrived in Northern Victoria at the same time, in 1838, as Rev Joseph Docker. Like Docker who had acquired Bontherambo, he was impressed by the country in the Ovens Valley and settled near Wangaratta before taking up land near Yackandandah. 282 After marrying Mary Barber, the niece of Hamilton Hume who had explored and then extolled the area, Reid bought the lease of Barnawartha from his father-in-law, George Hume Barber, and built ‘The Hermitage’. 283

David Reid’s interest in and regard for the Aboriginal people is noted in the ‘First Report of the Central Board appointed to watch over the interests of the Aborigines of the Colony of Victoria,’ 1861. He continued as ‘Honorary Correspondent of the General Board appointed to watch over the interests of the Aborigines’ in the reports of 1862, 1864, 1869, 1872, 1873, 1874 and 1875.

When Theresa Walker arrived in North Barnawartha, there were Aboriginal people congregating in this area. Besides the distribution of their supplies, they were supported by a riverside environment which was ideal for much of the food upon which they relied. Like those pursuing an interest in Australian Aboriginal people, Walker gave McRae paper and ink to see what he would do with them. The images that he produced are, in style, an extension of the few extant examples of pigment on rock drawings in the

---

280 Parish map of North Barnawartha.
281 Pre-emptive right: The one square mile that squatters were able to select to protect their investment after the opening up for sale of previously held leaseholds.
283 Billis and Kenyon, 1832: Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip.
galleries of Northern Victoria and of the symbolic and figurative ornamentation with which the Aboriginal people decorated their bodies, their cloaks, their artefacts and the bark of their shelters.

These are the circumstances in which these freestanding images were drawn. The first is dated 1860 and the second 1862. They are both noted as being by ‘Tommy Barnes’ and given to Philip Chauncy by his sister Mrs G H Poole. The third is inscribed with McRae’s traditional name Yakaduna and dated 1864, while the fourth is notated on the verso “a native black of the Upper Murray Barnawartha? Victoria 1864”. On a photograph of this last and filed with it, is the notation “from a pen and ink drawing by an Australian Aboriginal of David Reid’s station on the Upper Murray”. The first two were reproduced in “Notes and Anecdotes of the Aborigines of Australia,” Philip Chauncy, J.P., District Surveyor at Ballarat, in R Brough Smyth, Aborigines of Australia. The latter two were donated to The Royal Geographical Society, London, date unknown. They were deaccessioned in 1974, when they were put up for auction at Christies and bought by the Dixson Galleries, State Library of NSW.

The 1860 image is presented as three separate scenes. Reading from the bottom up, the more formal proceedings are preceded by procurement of food for the celebration. A group of men go hunting emus, which were the large prey in the Murray Valley. They

---

284 The date on which they were put up for auction.
285 McRae began his image from the bottom of the page working to the top. Barrett, 1935: p. 87.
stalk behind an extensive hide made from brush, with spears at the ready. Each figure is a mirror image of the other. Though two of the birds are watching they have not taken fright and are drawn in static poses. At the lower right the inclusion of a lone huntsman taking aim at a fish from his canoe, locates the event near one of the backwaters of the river about which George Augustus Robinson had written so glowingly on his journey through the north-east of Victoria.286

The first performance is then illustrated in the middle scene. Thirteen frenetic figures in close proximity to each other, wave their sticks. Their torsos are decorated and they have attached brush around their ankles. To their right and seated under a eucalypt, eleven figures make music, probably by hitting their possum skin cloaks with their fists. That this ‘orchestra’ is made up of the women beating the time is documented in accounts of celebration and ceremony that were observed by the European settlers at other locations.287

A second group of fourteen men dance across the upper scene. They present only with painted chests and wave boomerangs, though the three central figures carry clubs and shields. There are no accompanying musicians. Because of their spacing, they do not have the same cohesion as the first group with less intimacy physically and psychologically.

The single tree rises as a thick trunk until it is abruptly cropped by five branches reaching skywards. A bird sits on its canopy. Descriptions of corroborees whether as image in the multiple examples quoted above or in words always makes note of a secluded location to which the tree alludes.

The viewer is very much an outsider looking in on this performance with no intimation of the exact meaning of the ritual, its postures and its decorations.288

---

286 Robinson, 1840: p. 255, Thursday 30 April 1840.
287 James, ed., 1949: p. 88; Curr, 1883: p. 137.
This second page introduces a variety of events and activities in the artist’s life. The location is defined by the presence of the single storied house at the centre right of the page. There are features which would suggest that it may be ‘The Hermitage’, where McRae was known to have worked. Built of stone about 1856, ‘The Hermitage’ property was subsequently purchased by Reverend Joseph Docker in the mid 1860’s and has remained in the family, with its original layout.\textsuperscript{289} It has a gabled roof with three chimneys. At the rear is a kitchen and dining building with a further stone chimney. Close examination of the image suggests that the roof line of the left-hand block extends forward of that on the right, thus conforming to the design of the property. However, ‘The Hermitage’ was located on a hillside with the land steeply falling away. It also now has dormer windows facing both east and west set into the pitch of the roof and making it multi-story. If present during its original construction and with McRae’s powers of observation these should have been a feature in his image. While the original access to the building may have been from the ends, entry is now via steps to a veranda that takes advantage of the elevation and overlooks the surrounding river flats.

\textsuperscript{289} \textit{Victorian Government Gazette,} No 100: p. 3649.
It can thus be speculated that it may instead have been the residence of Theresa Walker and her husband, Captain Poole, which was situated at the base of the rise to the west north west of ‘The Hermitage’. With a date of 1862 for the depiction by McRae, there would have been ample time for a single storey house to have been constructed on their holding and therefore for him to evidence it. There is no longer record of this building nor of its layout.

As the only extant depiction of any abode across McRae’s oeuvre, it was completed very early in his output. It was however not the only image of a European home created by an Aboriginal artist in Victoria.

The state of this bark etching makes interpretation of the image very difficult but the reproduction below, which was done for Brough Smyth’s publication only a short time after its acquisition, gives some insight into the perception of the European house in the lower right corner, by the Aboriginal artist. It is an interesting comparison with the drawing of the same by McRae.
It had been collected by W. Stanbridge from the vicinity of Lake Tyrell in northern Victoria and its subject is fully expanded in the chapter ‘From rock to paper, ochre to ink’.

Buildings in these styles were being recorded by European artists as part of the vernacular of the plains and valley landscapes of Victoria. Abraham-Louis Buvelot documented domiciles of ordinary men as they tamed the land to support themselves and their families. Having arrived in Australia in 1865 at the age of 50,290 Buvelot sketched and painted scenes of these unsophisticated buildings.

As the main subject of this drawing, Buvelot has concentrated on the simplicity of the cottage with its single chimney and one doorway. It has a steeply pitched shingle roof but with no protection from the weather over the windows and doors. The more substantial building is relegated to the distant background.

This single storey cottage of white-washed stone is slightly more sizeable than that in Buvelot’s previous drawing. It appears isolated in its setting. It is difficult to establish whether there is more than one door, but it has two brick chimneys which suggests that it comprises at least two rooms. McRae documents two doorways for his left-hand building that indicates that in its earliest form it had at least two rooms but there is no evidence of a portico.

![Detail of Tommy Barnes, Kwat Kwat, 1862. ‘Drawing by “Tommy Barnes” an aboriginal of the upper Murray in 1862. Walker Collection No 1, Given to P. Chauncy by Mrs G H Poole.’ Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria](image)

The Buvelot works include vestiges of the natural eucalypts that McRae has also highlighted in his 1862 drawing. Nothing remains of any natural vegetation on the Chauncy/Poole Vineyard Company site, but these may well have been lopped in the intervening years or their proximity was artistic licence by McRae as a necessary feature of the corroboree scene being played out.

The trees in McRae’s drawing are depicted with wide straight trunks from the apex of which sprout several thin branches. The canopies are neat, regular and inert, though one is modified by weeping boughs. Between the trees of the lower scene, nine figures dance. They have no ornamentation except for a fringed skirt. Each is waving instruments of war, a combination of boomerangs, clubs or shields. One performer even sucks on a pipe. Like some of the enactments illustrated by the European artists, the activities are being watched by a European couple formally dressed and hatted, he in breeches and boots and she in long full skirt and short cape. They are accompanied by an emu! It can thus be speculated that the performance was mounted for this couple, who may have been either the Reids or the Pooles.

The meanders and the Murray River bordering the northern limit of David Reid’s properties were a haven for waterfowl and wildlife. The upper scene illustrates hunting activities after these preys. There is spearing of fish from a canoe while another figure,
having positioned his canoe using a jendook,\textsuperscript{291} retrieves a turtle by hand. A pair of emus stands guard over their grass nest and eggs unaware of the hunter taking aim. Finally, a figure, holding axe aloft, is in pursuit of a goanna.

Most of the figures have been drawn as separate entities with little engagement between participants. They are disjointed and static with little of the elegance of line and dynamism that was to become an important feature of the artist’s work. The trees are depicted as separate elements cobbled together rather than the architectural focus of the Australian landscape.

This sheet is filled with activity. Reading from the bottom of the page McRae has set out a sequence of events relating to this corroboree. Each element – figure, flora, fauna – has been depicted in a form that the European viewer could recognise. The artist has spread the initial scene across the width of the page around a fire whose smoke drifts upwards serving to draw the events of the corroboree together. The performance takes place beneath a large tree, depicted in its basic visual form. To the right sits the audience in front of which stands a cloaked pipe smoking figure. This is the ‘conductor’ who controls the performance with rhythm and chant for “words, music and action cannot

\textsuperscript{291} A long pole for maneuvering his canoe.
be separated”. From the outset McRae has set the mechanics of the performance with the first dancer initiating his position while his fellow participants become more massed and intense in their actions. They are all wearing fringed skirts and waving boomerangs. Six musicians to their left accompany them. This display is answered by a second group, identified in their performance by their clubs and shields. These dancers are spread out, though they retain visual contact with each other by watching to the left or right. Both groups appear static in their presentation. The corroboree is being observed by a European dressed figure from behind the tree.

The page is then divided by a continuous ground line. In this second and middle scene are two groups of figures. To the left a cloaked and agitated mass wave their clubs, spears, boomerangs and shields in the air as a single cloaked figure gesticulates to them. To the right a further cloaked figure resting on a stick, directs a more dignified file of spear and shield waving figures who are accompanied by a group of smaller stature, which may be either the women or their children. While there seems to be much rattling of intentions, the narrative culminates in the uppermost scene with hunting for provisions.

Here McRae has illustrated a wide variety of prey. At the right are goanna, tortoise, kangaroo and wallaby. A file of emus wends their way through the trees, unaware of the figure taking aim from behind a brush hide. Above this hunter roost some birds in a leafless tree while a possum hides in the canopy of a eucalypt. On the water a huntsman takes aim at a swan while his fellow hunter readies his spear at a fish. It is however the most left-hand image of this scene that creates interest; this appears to be a depiction of a platypus shown with both its elongated ‘snout’ and tail.

The ‘Mallangong’ was considered by the Aboriginal people “to be very good eating” especially when young. The mammal was reported to be prevalent in the rivers of

---

293 This sequence of events is discussed by W.E.Stanbridge, 1861: p. 295-7.
294 As a food source these birds were particularly desirable due to their fat content. Curr, 1883: p. 259.
295 The platypus
296 Bennett, 1860: pp. 110, 132.
South-east New South Wales during the 1850s with many specimens being captured alive for export to Britain.

McRae has illustrated the procuring on water of fish, water birds, tortoise and this one platypus in the single page drawings discussed to this point but it is the only depiction of the last across his whole oeuvre.

McRae frequented the area between Barnawartha North and Wahgunyah, prior to his settling on the banks of Lake Moodemere. As well as a friendship with the Postmaster at Wahgunyah, Rod Kilborn, he worked for Andrew Hume, the owner of Brocklesby station, on the north side of the Murray River, where Corowa now stands, before this unmarried gentleman’s early death in 1857. While there is no way of identifying the squatter in the image, the fact that a single figure is pictured could point to his being Andrew Hume.

This is a comprehensive illustration of the corroboree and its context that McRae was prepared to divulge to his European audience. The artist has defined this through the inclusion of the spectator figure, a feature that can be recognised throughout his narratives and which is one of his few clues to the staging behind the celebrations. In his depiction he has used only those symbols that can be deciphered and are of interest to the European viewer. He has detailed the dances with a change in implements and their progress through the positioning of the participants. The central placement of the orchestrating figure in both the dance and the fight preparations signifies his importance to these events.

This final page presents another comprehensive view of a corroboree. The narrative is staged across three levels reading from the bottom of the page. In the initial scene it could be speculated that there are women performing to the left and children to the right of the accompanying musicians. It is however the following sequence that stimulates interest as the first two dancers calmly adopt their positions. The further participants, wearing fringed skirts and identified by the decorations attached to their foreheads, wave combinations of boomerangs, clubs and shields. The viewer then notes their massing closer and closer together with the interlacing of legs and boomerangs that insinuates more frenzied gyrations.

In the middle scene, a second group is waving music sticks and is differentiated from the previous group by the thick brush attached to their lower legs. The contact with their fellows is again created by the intertwining of their legs and by the turning to face those to their left or right. A momentum is established with the wavelike positioning of their music sticks. The small group of accompanists is led by a cloaked figure using two batons. The scene is completed with a man poling his way in a canoe, before taking aim at a fish a short distance away. Two emus are moving toward a stand of eucalypts. The trees are
depicted as strong straight trunks, with all the thin branches emanating from a single point. The awkwardness of this impression is countered by a figure scaling the furthermost example, axe poised above his head as he carves the next notch for his hand and feet and by the twisting of one tree before the other.

The third and uppermost scene illustrates a ritualised battle scene between the two groups, using spears and woomeras, shields and boomerangs. To emphasise the ferocity, warriors from each side of the encounter have not only taken up weapons as a group but are inflicting damage on their foes. The background for this ritual likely refers to the division of the Aboriginal people of the Murray Valley into two classes, the Mokwarra or Eaglehawk and the Kilparra or Crow.\textsuperscript{298} In observing one of the ceremonies complicit in this tradition, the occasion begins with a corroboree and is followed by the altercation.\textsuperscript{299} This ancestral cosmological story as described by John Mathew is reproduced in appendix 2.

All this action enlivens the scene. The common stance and posture of the participants proscribes the event which is being observed by two European spectators. The inclusion of these latter would suggest that the event is an exhibition rather than a specific ceremony or celebration in the Aboriginal calendar.

That this is an event involving two different clans defined by their accoutrements and attributes, is clearly suggested and McRae has set its location near water and in the seclusion of a glade of trees. With the figures in both frontal and profile orientations, their converging and parting communicates a physical and psychological vitality and energy.

These illustrations predate the written reports of ceremonial gatherings in the Murray Valley which were occurring at the Wahgunyah – Corowa River crossing and in which McRae may have been involved.\textsuperscript{300} Early settlers noted as many as 300 Aboriginal people bathing in the river near the bridge at its eastern end.\textsuperscript{301} Both men and women were

\begin{footnotes}
\item [298] Mathew, 1899: p. 15. See Appendix 2
\item [299] See Appendix 2.
\end{footnotes}
diving for fresh-water mussels while they speared fish from canoes.  

Large corroborees were then held on the western side of the bridge. The last corroboree was held in Corowa on its Reserve about 1880. To those Europeans who observed the festivities, it presented as a religious ceremony, dancing with bark cut-outs in the shapes of emus and kangaroos. The women accompanied the men with their war songs in a celebration that went on for a week.

While it was announced in the Free Corowa Press that McRae was organising a corroboree at Corowa near Oldfellows’ Hall on Friday June 9, 1893, there is no further mention of the event that would have post-dated that previously reported. By its very nature, this then was to be a spectacle for the visitor rather than a ceremony or celebration of significance for the Aboriginal people of the region.

The Kilborn Notebook, 1875, expands the images of ceremony and celebration. Image 10 from this volume enlightens the viewing audience with a performance staged before two European men. At a distance and with her back turned, appears a dressed figure in long skirt and bonnet. She has been turned away from observing the performance. This suggests that the event was being staged for men only and while there are many drawings in which no women are illustrated, it appears significantly, to be the only extant drawing by McRae, documenting such an exclusion. This exclusion of a European

---

woman was however described by John T Hinkins in *Life among the Victorian Blacks*, 1884.

With the arrival of a woman the Aborigines cried out “pull away white lubra; no dance till white lubra pull away.”

Aboriginal women were included in three of the early drawings by McRae as accompanying musicians. He went on to illustrate these participants in only five further performance scenes. The first appeared in the *Kilborn Notebook*, 1875 followed by one in the *Williams 2 Sketchbook* n.d.

![Image of Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Williams Sketchbook No 2, n.d. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.](image)

The dancers are all wearing brush decoration around their lower legs and waving music sticks, which are struck, one against the other in time and in increasing fervour. The scenes are further enlivened by the extensive and intricate body decoration on the torsos of the participants and the criss-crossing of the single lines up their legs.

Along with the art will be the old man who controls it, beating the music sticks ... together rhythmically and singing the chant that belongs to the action.\(^{308}\)

\(^{307}\) Hinkins, 1884: p. 35. See Appendix 12.

\(^{308}\) Capell, 1950: p. 7.
Further examples are two depictions from the *George McMahon Sketchbook*, n.d., of which only 8 pages have been identified. The pages of the book are now dispersed.


In each of these the performers sport brush around the lower legs and are waving music sticks. The first is distinguished by the spreading, then massing and finally spreading of the participants in a line across the page. For McRae, the illustration of the musicians and the leader was of significance, recognising that he began his depictions from the bottom of the page. The second exudes a different tone as the dancers are less formal in their spacing and the placement of the musicians and their leader less prescribed at the left centre of the page.
Image 11 from *Lang Sketchbook No 2* compares more closely with the earlier page from the *George MacMahon Sketchbook* in its increased fervour and ebullience conveyed by the spacing of the celebrants across the image. Reading from the left, the first and perhaps the second participants are positioned apart while the subsequent figures become bunched closer and closer together, inferring a heightened level of activity as the performance progresses. In this example the vibrancy is amplified by the complexity of the torso decorations and by the wavelike positioning of the music sticks - a motif that is employed by McRae in all but his earliest drawing. The notation at the centre bottom of the page relates to the image’s use as an illustration for Kathleen Langloh Parker’s *Australian Legendary Tales* and *More Australian Legendary Tales*.

There are six pages devoted to ceremony and celebration in the *Williams Sketchbook No 1*.
This later drawing depicts a group of performers that are again highly decorated on both their bodies and their legs. Their positioning of the sticks reads like notes across a music score. The more dignified start to the performance is again indicated, by the spacing of the first two dancers at the right of the page but the subsequent massing of the figures to the left suggest, as with the previous depiction, a build-up of emotion and ebullience. The animated interaction between the figures exaggerates the impact of the inferred sounds from both the collision of the sticks and the rustling of the brush about the legs.

The descriptions that appear on some of the pages have been inscribed by a hand other than McRae’s as he could neither read nor write.\textsuperscript{309} It is unknown whether these were done in consultation with the artist.

Where music stick dances are absent there are however examples in which the participants are wielding either extended emu feather\textsuperscript{310} or brush ornaments or short versions of the same. Image 5 in the \textit{Williams Sketchbook No 1}, illustrates 10 performers ranged across the page, at some distance from each other in contrast to a massing of

\textsuperscript{309} Barrett, 1935: p. 88.
\textsuperscript{310} Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 91.
the participants. Each figure has elaborate decoration on their torsos and up their thighs. They engage principally with each other and to a lesser degree with an audience outside the frame of the picture. In waving their thick brush ornaments of a short length at shoulder height, the viewer sees rather than hears the sounds, thus gaining more than a visual impression of this more sedate event, in comparison with that of the previous illustration.

This image bears some similarities through the short handheld ornaments, with two scenes which stand in contrast to all the other depictions of these social events. The first is the initial image 1 of the Bremner Notebook, 1880.

McRae has spread his dancers across the page facing forward with hips and knees bent to near right angle. Their bodies are flexed forward with a slight rotation to the page
right suggestive of an overextended elastic. This imparts to the viewer a vitality that is then exaggerated by each head thrown back in anticipation of the next move. They each brandish short lengths of brush above shoulder height. The participants in the *Bremner Notebook* image are unadorned except for a fringed skirt but then none of the figures in this notebook have any leg or body ornamentation.

The second example is image 11 in the *National Museum of Australia Sketchbook*, n.d.


They have thick blocks of white on their knees and thighs rather than continuous lines. They also have individualized designs across their torsos, this being the only example of painted trunk decoration in this sketchbook. An important element of the dance as performed by the tribes that McRae was describing, was obviously the thick brush that was held in each hand, with the suggestion of sound as they were waved in unison. It is the wild gyrations that draw the viewer into this scene of the *Cawarra Ceremony* but the similarities of attributes and decoration with that from the *Bremner Notebook* cannot go unnoticed. The notation, *Cawarra Ceremony*, is in an unknown hand and may have been made with reference to Clement Hodgkinson.

Clement Hodgkinson, 1818 – 1893, in his book *Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay with descriptions of the natives, their manners and customs, the geology,*
natural productions, fertility and resources of that region, illustrated and described in 1843, a dance that concluded the Cawarra ceremonies.

The Yarra-Hapinni tribe, which I saw execute this dance near the Clybucca creek, were so elaborately painted with white for the occasion, that even their very toes and fingers were carefully and regularly coloured with concentric rings, whilst their hair was drawn up in a close knot, and stuck all over with the snowy down of the white cockatoo, which gave them the appearance of being decorated with white wings. In this dance, the performers arranged themselves in the form of a semicircle, and grasping the ends of their boomerangs, which are also painted with great minuteness and regularity, they swayed their bodies rapidly from right to left, displaying a degree of flexibility in their limbs, which might have created the envy of many a pantomimic artist. Each movement of their bodies to and fro was accompanied by a loud hiss, whilst a number of other natives similarly painted, beat time with sticks, and kept up an incessant and obstreperous song. Every now and then the dancers would stop and rush, crowding together, into a circle, raising their weapons with outstretched arms, and joining with frantic energy in the song. They would then be more composed, and walk backwards and forwards in couples, holding each other by the hand, until again roused by an elderly native to resume the dance.  

---

311 Hodgkinson, 1845: p. 232.
The event was the initiation of boys into manhood to which neighbouring tribes were invited. It took place on cleared ground on a hilltop with the surrounding trees carved and painted.\textsuperscript{312} No women or outside spectators were allowed to view or hear the proceedings. It was only with the final performance that women and Hodgkinson were able to join the celebration.\textsuperscript{313}

These images illustrate performance scenes, in which the figures are drawn at some distance from each other. In the first example the participants look to each other within the performance in contrast to engaging with those outside the frame. It details none of the gyrations of the following two but draws its similarities from the thigh and knee ornamentation, the individualized torso decoration and the brandishing of the short brush.

Earlier in the \textit{National Museum of Australia Sketchbook}, reference may have also been made to the Clement Hodgkinson book. \textbf{Image 5} depicts figures arranged across the width of the page, diverging at the extremes on the left and the right and converging at the centre. The performers are visually engaging with each other and with those outside the picture frame. Their bodies are unadorned and unpainted, this latter a feature of all the depictions of ceremony and celebration in this book, of which there are six. The participants hold their weapons of aggression above their heads in a haphazard pattern.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image5.png}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{312} Hodgkinson, 1845: p. 231.  
\textsuperscript{313} Hodgkinson, 1845: p. 232.
The McRae image under discussion has been inscribed ‘Dance of Defiance’. One such episode was again illustrated by Clement Hodgkinson.\textsuperscript{314}

In this, the participants are undecorated except for head and waist bands, with a formality of stance. Each bears his weapons above his head and with this similarity, the notation would suggest that reference was made to Clement Hodgkinson in interpreting the McRae depiction.

Of greater similarity however, is an image from \textit{Lang Sketchbook No 1, c1885}. It is a scene of massed figures, conveying to the viewer individual vigour and group dynamism.

\textsuperscript{314} Hodgkinson, 1845: p. 233.
The participants are all similarly and simply decorated on only their chests and are actively engaged, not with each other, but with a force outside the picture frame. While their bodies are depicted frontally and they are grasping multiple shields at the ready, each head is turned to face the foe against which they hold their shields and clubs overhead, creating an impenetrable defence. The concentration of bodies and their preparedness for engagement presents a formidable spectacle for any opposing group but which might not necessarily result in physical confrontation. There is a detailed description of one such truncated interchange in South Australia written in the 1840’s by William Cawthorne.

I saw about a 100 or more blacks...when I came amongst most of them were standing together and speaking vehemently – after a little while an irregular line was formed by them and talking angrily as if an Enemy were before them and going through all the motions as if they were already fighting. But all at once they began running towards the place where the Adelaide tribe were sitting calm spectators – their spears elevated – their shields clattering – and their mouths yelling and neighing – jumping, crouching, in a word making the wildest antics they possibly could – and halted a few yards before the opposite tribe at the same forming themselves into a sort of phalanx. On a sudden their spears were elevated and as one man they clattered their shields for a space of a minute or so and immediately and all in the same movement they covered their heads with the same forming a sort of roof – accompanied with a noise very similar like a small explosion – this movement was performed twice and the effect exceedingly pretty – and at the last explosion (this noise is neither a shout nor a yell but the escaping of their breath) they all dispersed...315

This event was first illustrated in the *Lucas Sketchbook, 1881*, in an equally intimidating display. It has been suggested by Phillip Jones in his chapter ‘Broken Shields’ of *Ochre and Rust*, that this was an introduction to initiation ceremonies being partaken by two tribes at Mount Barker in South Australia.316 If this can be extrapolated to the tribes up the Murray Valley as far as the Goulburn, Ovens and Kiewa River confluences, then its

---

315 Jones, 2008: p. 79.
inclusion is the reference to important initiation events in the chronicle of Aboriginal life.

*Lang Sketchbook No 1* depicts a further massed scene, image 15, in which the artist has achieved a different visual and psychological tone.

![Image 15](image15.jpg)

Each of the figures clutches his long-barbed spears and other instruments of war to his chest, as if preparing to go on a raiding party. The hostility imparted to the viewer is reinforced by the inclusion of barbed spears and the visual engagement and aggressive posture displayed between the participants within their ranks rather than with anyone or thing outside of the frame. The commonality of pose, similarity of decoration to their upper trunk, the interlocking of their legs and their closeness of encounter, contributes to the impression of intense commitment, as if the action is about to commence. The image is enhanced by the variety of the physiognomies depicted with a minimum of detail – height, breadth of chest, fullness of face, length of beard. These illustrate McRae’s ability to translate that which he was observing in those around him, onto paper.

Comparison can be drawn with a welcoming dance by the Arrente, Central Australia observed and photographed by Baldwin Spencer in 1901. A massed group of men approached the stranger with long spears held aloft while clutching their other
implements of war, in a relaxed fashion. This disposition of figures and their relationship with one another, the perception of aggression with the arrangement of their weapons and stamping of the feet, is suggestive of the event illustrated by McRae. While from far dispersed geographic regions, the overall impressions between the two images thus insinuate a similarity of purpose, adding further to an understanding of the differing ceremonial and celebratory scenes that the artist included across his sketchbooks.

The *Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook* also includes a massed scene of figures each with simple adornment on the chest, who wave their weapons with abandon above their heads. This is in contrast to the stylised patterns reproduced on their upper thighs from which the interlacing of legs creates a formality of stance and a very different impression to that from the *National Museum Sketchbook, image 5.* (Illustrated above)

McRae defines the dynamism of his celebratory and celebration scenes by the positioning of the participants – the outside divergence and central convergence which imparts a sequentiality to the interlude.


In this example from the *Lang Sketchbook No 2*, extra vibrancy is enhanced by the complexity of the torso decorations and by the wavelike positioning of the music sticks - a motif that is employed by McRae in all but his earliest drawing.

Another defining motif that McRae has illustrated, is a single or double feather sprouting from the forehead of each of the dancers. In a page from the *Lang Sketchbook No 2*, this is paired with brush decoration. So illustrated, it mirrors a description by Edward Curr, of the meeting and celebration by two tribes on the exchange of betrothed girls that is quoted in appendix 6.317

317 Curr, 1883: p. 135-6
This same combination of brush to the lower leg, the music sticks and the single or double feathers sprouting from the foreheads appears in the sixth image from the Kilborn Loose leaf Sketchbook. Inscribed as Echuca Blacks in the old time, this is the locality of Edward Curr’s property in the Murray Valley. Again, the figures are decorated with differing patterns across their torsos but with the standard white lines up their thighs. Reading from the right, the performance has begun sedately with the dance becoming more frenetic with the massing of figures as the performance progresses.

The forehead decoration does appear in the presence and absence of body and leg painting. The majority of dancers so bedecked are performing with their weapons of war, the exception being that illustrated above from the Lang Sketchbook No 1, where music sticks are wielded.
With this example, McRae has incorporated a single tree, in which may be nestled a possum, a bird or both, depending on his depictions. These referenced the locations that were chosen for such occasions, for, in every sketchbook and notebook, there are a variety of examples of celebratory or ceremonial events. The most prolific are those in which the participants are wielding combinations of boomerangs, shields, clubs and spears either around their bodies or above their heads. In many but not all, the ferocity of the image has been enhanced by the complexity of body decoration, the leg painting and in later examples, the addition of red ink in the depiction.

The *Lang Sketchbook No 1, c1885*, is introduced with the arrival of William Buckley, the escaped convict, amongst the Aboriginal people of the western Port Phillip Bay, Victoria and before his return, in 1835, to his former life.³¹⁸ This is the first time that images of Buckley appear in McRae’s work.³¹⁹ It is immediately followed by the depiction of a dance scene where each performer waves a handkerchief on the head of his spear. This initiates a collection of ceremonial drawings for which McRae developed the specific motif – that of the flag bearing spears - a use for the handkerchiefs that were handed out as gifts with the arrival of John Batman and the Port Phillip Association at Indented Head on the shores of Corio Bay near Geelong, Victoria. This incursion was to change the whole dynamic of the lives of the Aboriginal people in South-east Australia. Its importance lay in its coincidence with McRae’s own birth.³²⁰

In the scenes, the massed participants, all with brush covered ankles and body and leg decoration, wave their either long or short weapons. Some include the tall white figure of William Buckley, further defined by his hat. The depictions appear in isolation or together with other drawings that describe events in the legend of William Buckley. Their insertion into the narratives by the artist established a timeframe - that before and that after the arrival of Europeans in the Aboriginal landscape.

Typical is the event illustrated on page 2 of the *Williams Sketchbook, No 1*. It takes place around a tree in which a possum is secreted. Holding their spears vertically from the

---

³¹⁸ The development of the concept is fully examined in the chapter *Tommy McRae and the legend of William Buckley*.

³¹⁹ This theme and its implications is explored at length in the chapter *Tommy McRae and the Legend of William Buckley*.

waist and to which are attached handkerchiefs, the participants sport thick brush on their lower legs, white lines up their thighs and a common pattern of decoration on their torsos.

This same motif is present in the scene of page 4 (pictured below) of the *Lefaivre Sketchbook*. With thick brush also bedecking their lower legs, any similarity between the two depictions ends. The latter image exudes animation with the scene infused with movement by the extensive and detailed body decoration. The patterning on each of the participants is individual. The viewer can thus anticipate that these are events of differing significance.

To this point the McRae images of ceremony and celebration have been examined in isolation. In contrast to the artist’s early depictions of the corroboree and his late drawings of the events with a number of scenes on a single sheet, he has however, within each of his sketchbooks and notebooks, included multiple pages documenting
occasions of importance. These are, in most instances, illustrative of only the performances. The *Lefaivre Sketchbook* is a book of 15 images, 8 pages being devoted to ceremony and celebration.

Images 2, 4, 11, 13 and 15 appear interspersed with ancillary activities whilst images 6, 7 and 8 are in a series. Each outlines differing attributes with a level of body decoration or lack thereof. For the viewer, uninitiated in their implications, it is only these along with the animation imbued in the participants that gives evidence to a deeper significance underpinning the event. The first two *images, 2 and 4*, while not juxtaposed, detail elaborate body decoration.


**Image 2** illustrates an occasion at which the figures wield a combination of boomerangs, axes and shields. They are decorated up their legs and across their torsos with individual designs. Their adornment is completed with a feather attached to their foreheads. The figures are massed to the left of the page presenting a scene of increasing momentum.

In **image 4**, discussed above, most figures hold aloft a spear finished with a handkerchief. The balance is however disturbed by the two participants flourishing their unembellished spears whilst brandishing their shields above their heads. Each is again elaborately painted on his torso and carries further decoration of thick brush about the lower legs. They are clustering about a man at their centre who brandishes two short handkerchief bearing sticks. Beyond its significance in timing events prior to and post the incursion of aliens into the artist’s environment there are no other clues to its importance.
McRae’s sixth image, the first in the series of three, illustrates a smaller group of figures in which each participant wields a club and a shield. They are physically discrete from each other in their performance and maintain eye contact with only those within the group. With the animation of the actions of the arms the viewer becomes aware of a ritual being performed.

The following image 7 depicts only four figures, each also performing at a distance from his fellows. Their visual engagement is not only within the cohort but with those outside the frame of the page. They are decorated with a simple crescent up their trunks and shake short lengths of brush in each hand. The difference in this image with those representing the ‘Cawarra Ceremony’ lies in the upright postures of the participants, their identical trunk decoration and the absence of any leg and thigh adornment.
The third page in this sequence, image 8, depicts a group of seven unadorned performers ranged across the breadth of the page. They engage visually only with each other as they grasp their spears to their chests with one hand, the barbs projecting above their shoulders while holding their clubs and shields in defence of their heads and upper bodies. Their postures appear prescribed in the formality of their positions. These latter three images have no intervening narrative.

Image 8

Image 11 illustrates a small group of four, gathered for a ceremony or celebration. With no body decoration, their bodies sway in response to the gesticulations of the long feathers or brush that they hold in each hand. With no visual engagement outside of the group, it impresses as a more measured performance.

Image 11

Image 13 presents as a staged presentation in which each participant mirrors his fellows. They hold three multi-barbed spears to their chests which, in extending above their heads, are held in place by the handpiece of their shields. Their clubs rest against their shoulder. They sport no body decoration though McRae had initially painted the chest of the right-hand figure. Their faces are turned inward as the only apparent movement from their frontal orientation and uncompromising position.

Image 13
Image 15 is the final page of the sketchbook. Andrew Sayers in *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century*, 1994, describes this as a ceremony. The viewer is immediately drawn to the smaller central figure who stands on a plinth waving an axe in each hand. He is presented frontally as he watches two further figures to his page right, who also carry axes. They in turn are moving toward and away from him though continuing to maintain eye contact. None of the figures has body adornment though the left-hand figure wears a cloak and carries a spear across the shoulder.

With over 50% of the *Lefaivre Sketchbook* devoted to ceremony and celebration, each of the images presents different combinations of attributes, body or no body decoration and performance spacing. In examining the McRae sketchbooks and notebooks, the viewer is thus presented with a series of events that occur with regularity through his life. The uncluttered expanse about each image is a feature that gives weight to its importance in the experience of the artist rather than a spectacle for his audience. McRae’s series of ceremonial images is thus the re-creation of the performances that ritualization has maintained the connection with the spirituality that underpins his quiddity. In creating the image of which the preparation and decoration is all part, the event is being recreated.

The ceremony is a re-enactment of the myth which lies behind the whole cycle of stories and each ceremony is part, and part only, of the larger whole.

---

323 Capell, 1950: p. 5.
324 Capell, 1950: p. 4.
In examining both the simple and more complex ceremony and celebration scenes by McRae and speculating on their narrative, they can be compared with accounts of corroborees written by non-indigenous spectators, but for which the artist has excluded outside audiences.

John T Hinkins lived at the Gunbower Station on the Murray River, between the confluences of the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers. He had arrived in Gippsland from Van Diemen’s Land in 1844\textsuperscript{325} and a short time later was appointed manager of Gunbower Station to which he moved with his fair and blonde young daughter.\textsuperscript{326} The area was home to a number of Aboriginal people who became intrigued with the young Hinkins, were very protective of her and were keen to include her in many of their celebrations. In a late 1840s diary entry Hinkins records one such event. The Black Police,\textsuperscript{327} who had come to investigate a collision between the Aboriginal people and the wife of an itinerant worker, initiated the idea of a gathering.\textsuperscript{328} It was the author himself who proposed that the Aboriginal people who had collected on his property, should reciprocate. The description of the event can be read in its entirety as appendix 3.\textsuperscript{329} It took place over several days during which the men, women and children all performed around a large fire. The selection of attributes, spears for the men and small boughs for the women is noted. Reference is made to the auditory input by the latter, a feature that is illustrated by Blandowski earlier in this chapter. The impression of sound is further enhanced by the vision of the clashing of sticks and the beating of rolled possum skins. With their naked bodies painted, the author made particular note that as they danced and moved from circles to rows, they were visually linked by the intertwining of their legs.\textsuperscript{330} Just as McRae’s spectators would have observed, the rhythm and timing of the gyrations stemmed from the efforts of the accompanying

\textsuperscript{325} Hinkins, 1884: p. 7.
\textsuperscript{326} Hinkins, 1884: pp. 11-25.
\textsuperscript{327} The Native Police Corps were formed in 1839 and disbanded in 1852. Its charter was to deal with clashes between the Aboriginal people and the white settlers and they were employed across the State. As trained horsemen and with their innate ability as bushmen and trackers, they were a successful addition to the policing of Victoria in the early years. The unit did not survive after the death of the Commanding Officer Henry Pulteney Dana, a squatter from the Western District in Victoria. Christie, 1979: p. 74-8.
\textsuperscript{328} The Native Police Corps were in the locality because of intimidation of a white woman, wife of a workman on the property, by a posse of young Aboriginal people. Hinkins, 1884: p. 34.
\textsuperscript{329} See Appendix 3.
\textsuperscript{330} Hinkins, 1884: p. 34
women. As is revealed in the early sketches and a very few of his latter depictions of the corroboree, this is McRae’s extent of women’s participation in the performance of ceremony and celebration.

This was also the observations of Albert Le Soeuf who, as an Assistant Protector of Aborigines for the Goulburn District, had observed corroborees performed by those Aboriginal people under his care. He had noted that while each tribe was confined to its own territory, they had assemblies at different times, at which several tribes assisted. On these occasions there were ‘great feastings and corroboree ... and the meeting generally ended in a fight’.\(^{331}\) In his description\(^{332}\) he notes the presence of the orchestrating figure for both the musicians and the dancers and notes the rising fervour that this figure generated in the performers and his orchestra. These latter are again the women who used their rolled cloaks as drums but whose music was amplified by the rustling of brush around the dancers’ ankles.

Edward Curr was on the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines from 1875 until 1883 having been Vice-Chairman from 1877-78. He went on to publish the three volumes of *The Australian Race*, a further contribution to the words that were being written by Europeans about the Australian Aboriginal people. His introduction to them had come about in 1841, when he took over a pastoral run at the confluence of the Murray and Goulburn Rivers, at what is now Echuca. It was on the traditional lands of the Bangerang Tribe that he noted their preparations for a corroboree with the neighbouring Ngooraialum Tribe.\(^{333}\) This former ranged up the Murray Valley to the Kiewa River. This was the tribe to which McRae belonged, thus the adornment of the head with emu or cockatoo feathers, the painted torso and lower legs, the scrotal fringes and the greenery bunched around the ankles are described\(^{334}\) as McRae has illustrated in the *Lang Sketchbook No 1, image 6.*
No mention was made by Curr of the contribution by women to the performance. Interesting in that the assemblage of the two groups about which he wrote, was for the exchange of girls whose betrothal had been arranged some time previously. As observers, his party by their presence, were as involved as were the spectating tribe.

This was the first time that my brother and I witnessed a corroboree and we sat on the ground in a somewhat prominent position on the left side of the dancers ... and a good deal in advance of the Ngooraialum spectators... Never on any succeeding occasion did I see the corroboree danced more successfully.

Hinkins, Le Soeuf and Curr were invited observers at the corroborees on which they were reporting. However, Peter Beveridge, who had journeyed in 1845 to Tyntyndyer on the Victorian side of the Murray River west of the Loddon River, wrote about a corroboree that he came upon one evening, when searching for missing stock. He suggests that the Aboriginal people were unaware of his presence. He was particularly impressed by the leader who besides orchestrating the accompaniment, goaded the dancers to greater exertions. The women were equally incited in their performance, both vocally and on their possum skins, to a crescendo after which all the participants crumbled as one. The account is littered with references to the magnitude of visual and auditory stimuli raining on the spectators. It is this physicality and dynamism that McRae began to impart in his early illustrations and at which he became so skilled through the

335 Curr, 1883: p. 141.
337 Beveridge, 1889: p. 3.
338 Beveridge, 1889: p. 131-3.
339 The account is quoted in full in Appendix 6
narrative development of his sketchbooks. With careful observation the viewer can now perceive the tone and stature of each of the different events of ceremony and celebration culminating in the contrasts of his late Ellwood drawing.

The lower scene details the massed and agitated participants wielding an array of small weapons. With simple white lines up their legs, their decoration becomes individualized and complex across their torsos, all contributing to the dynamism of the occasion. Each is visually engaged with those within the cohort. In contrast the upper scene is a more sedate affair in which the conductor of both the dance and three-piece accompaniment is illustrated. This image relates directly to image 8 from the George MacMahon Sketchbook discussed above. The figures perform discretely, while waving their music sticks. With brush around the lower leg and white lines leading up to the torso, their trunks are painted with simpler patterns that distinguish each from the other. The viewer is thus made aware of the sound as well as the sight.340 The Elwood Commission, 1900, is single page document which illustrates the diversity of presentation that McRae achieved in his sketchbooks and notebooks.

William Thomas, as the Assistant Protector of Aborigines for Australia Felix, wrote an extensive account of the corroboree in Robert Brough Smyth’s Aborigines of Victoria, volume 1, 1878, which is quoted in part in Appendix F. The description further enhances

340 Brough Smyth, 1878: Vol 1, p. xli.
the images that McRae was visually creating for his audience, encouraging the viewer to examine each feature with greater clarity.

In contrast with those images by European artists in which the trees and darkness are such a feature, McRae makes little reference to the former and none to the latter. He has in all his drawings established the importance of space around and between the participants, while defining their level of interaction both physical and visual.

He illustrates that body painting was an integral expression of the event as was the auditory accompaniment either through the brush attached to the legs or held in the hand, the striking of the music sticks, or the enthusiasm of the female accompanists. On occasions feathers about the head were an added adornment. The event was orchestrated by a ‘master of ceremonies’ who stirred the group to greater and greater intensity, visually communicated by the massing of his figures, his detailing of grotesque postures and the wavelike positioning of the music sticks and weapons of the hunt or aggression.

**Incidence of dance events across a selection of single sheets, sketchbooks and notebooks.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sketchbook</th>
<th>date</th>
<th>no of dance events</th>
<th>no of dance events depiction torso dec leg dec both dec brush legs</th>
<th>spears shelters boomerangs nullahs</th>
<th>avs feathers</th>
<th>skirts</th>
<th>music sticks</th>
<th>brush hands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 1</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 2</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 3</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 4</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Notebook</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenner Notebook</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas Sketchbook</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeFavin Sketchbook</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang 2 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Sketchbook</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat MA Sketchbook</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat G.A Notebook</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 1 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 2 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. MacMahon Sketch 1890’s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatlief Sketchbook</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersed Collection</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above details the accoutrements and adornment in McRae’s ceremony and celebration scenes that have been assessed. Their integration enlightens his audience to the complexity of these events in the face of all the written, painted and engraved
accounts that had appeared in print and on gallery walls. It is only when a complete understanding is achieved that the full impact of McRae’s drawings of ceremony and celebration will be realised. However, by that which is hidden in the symbolism of attribute and decoration, he has reinforced the chasm that must exist in an understanding of ceremony and celebration by the uninitiated and the non-indigenous and which sustains his very being and its importance in the everyday life of the Aboriginal people.

Written accounts are summarized by the contribution from William Buckley in Appendix 8.341 This escaped convict, in spending 32 years living with the Aboriginal people on the western side of Port Phillip Bay, Victoria was both a participant and an observer in the corroboree. He was able to furnish a close verbal record of those that he experienced. That McRae used these dance scenes with his defining motif of waving handkerchiefs342 to delineate the chronology of his narratives further emphasises the importance that McRae placed on such events and their role in the life of the Aboriginal people.

It has been established that ceremony and celebration were important and regular occasions in the calendar of the Australian Aboriginal people. Inherent in their meaning, these ceremonial and celebratory events saw the meeting of different groups for socialisation, the display of prowess and the exchange of stories. Their incidence, within McRae’s artistic output, is sandwiched between that of hunting at 30%, depicted by the artist as a more solitary pursuit and that of conflict and feud at 21%, which was illustrated at both a group and individual level. These events have been interwoven with the tapestry of life and activity of his environment and should be viewed as an historic narrative in the sequence in which they were drawn.

341 Brough Smyth, 1878: vol 1, p. 169.
342 This concept is expanded in the chapter Tommy McRae and the William Buckley Legend.
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Chapter 4: Tommy McRae and the William Buckley legend

Tommy McRae began his 1885 sketchbook, *Lang Sketchbook No 1*, with an image of a dressed and hatted, white faced man meeting with a group of Aboriginal people. He can immediately be identified as William Buckley, convict, whose story of escape, traipse around the northern margin of Port Phillip Bay, Victoria and his subsequent 32-year sojourn with the Aboriginal people of the western side of Port Phillip has entered into legend. McRae drew 15 scenes from the saga relating directly to the events of, or events pertaining to, Buckley’s interaction with these people. Two questions arise in relation to these images in McRae’s works. The first is the source of McRae’s inspiration for these depictions and the second is the reason for their inclusion in the narratives.

The literature referencing the saga of William Buckley pertinent to Tommy McRae

Throughout the middle of the nineteenth century descriptions of Buckley’s exploits were said to be circulating through the Aboriginal tribes of Victoria via the tribal telegraphic network.\(^{343}\) Published from the early 1850s to the early 1880s were also the first written chronicles describing Buckley’s experiences on the fringes of his Aboriginal group. In examining each of these literary accounts that had appeared in the public arena and following a detailed analysis of all the relevant McRae drawings, both the single and the sequences of images, it is possible to relate the two. However, McRae could neither read nor write in English,\(^{344}\) so it can only be speculated that his access to these sources came after his marriage in the early 1880’s to his literate second wife.\(^{345}\) She would, from her reading of these books, have been able to expand on and kindle the artist’s knowledge. McRae’s referencing of the exploits from the published commentaries is further supported by the evidence that no depictions of William Buckley are recorded in the artist’s works prior to and including the sketchbooks and notebooks dated 1881 and before.

\(^{343}\) Sayers, 1994: p. 41.
\(^{345}\) Sayers, 1994: p. 113.
The context for the William Buckley legend had been set at the end of the eighteenth century. Ships from Europe had, since the landing of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove, New South Wales, in 1788, been hugging the coast of what was known as Southern New Holland and passing through Bass Strait between the mainland and Van Diemen’s Land, now Tasmania. Two major bays penetrated inland, break the northern coastline of the waterway – to the east is Westernport with Phillip Island at its entrance. A little west, with a narrow and treacherous opening, is Port Phillip. This second was surveyed and recorded by Charles Grimes, Acting Surveyor-General of New South Wales and the crew of the *Cumberland* in 1802 and 1803. At this time, fresh potable water was found at the northern end of the bay validating its choice as the site for a new penal settlement. Logbooks from the initial evaluation noted numerous contacts with the Aboriginal people whose memories of these interactions may still have been alive when the escaped convict, William Buckley, made his appearance in the vicinity a year or so later. Buckley had absconded with two others from the ill-fated venture led by Lieutenant-Governor Collins to establish a convict colony on the Peninsula between Port Phillip and Western Port at the end of 1803. The experiment was failing through lack of fresh water, interesting when Grimes had established its ease of access at the northern end of the bay only a few months before. With the Governor’s decision made to withdraw to Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania), William Buckley deserted the camp on December 31, 1803. Having ‘mislaid’ his companions as he wandered around the bay to the Bellarine Peninsula on the western side, he was befriended by an Aboriginal group with whom he

---

347 Fleming, 1878: p. 16.
348 Knopwood, 1878: p. 59.
then lived. Thus, the William Buckley saga commenced. It was to be another 32 years before the story unfolded, approximately coinciding with McRae’s speculated birth.

It should be noted that in the interim, in 1826, settlement had again been attempted by the British, this time on Western Port to the east of Port Phillip. It had been explored during the first half of 1801 and at the time, a garden was planted with grains and potatoes on one of the islands. The reinvigoration of interest in the location was in response to intelligence that the French aspired to establishing a presence on the south coast of the continent following the positive observations by members of Nicolas Baudin’s expedition in 1802. Named Corinella, this English outpost was situated on the north-east margin of the bay where fresh water was available. Using information from the survey by Lieutenant J Murray conducted in 1801 and 1802 from the brig *Lady Nelson*, and that provided by the recently returned overland explorers, Hamilton Hume and William Hovell, an area was selected that would support troops, convicts and housing. Sealers were already active in the area, cohabiting with Aboriginal women and able to provide support to the new settlement. 22 convicts and 21 troops accompanied the initial foray to Western Port followed by a further injection of soldiers and convicts in 1827. The settlement was abandoned by the end of 1827 having thwarted the French and succumbed to a perceived lack of fresh water and a paucity of profitable agricultural country. There is little information regarding the interactions with the Aboriginal people by either the explorers or the colonizers nor whether their presence filtered through to William Buckley who had been living for over 20 years on the west side of Port Phillip.

Buckley’s acquaintance with his former countrymen occurred as the search for new grazing opportunities across southern Australia gathered pace. John Batman’s advance party of the Port Phillip Association, which had been formed in Van Diemen’s Land to

---

349 Lee, 1915: p. 100.  
352 Coutts, 1983: p. 13. From the account of the journey by Hume and Hovell it transpires that the information rather than describing Western Port, pertained in error, to Port Phillip. Hovell and Hume, 1831: p. 70.  
expand into these pastoral domains, had in 1835, landed near Indented Head on the Bellarine Peninsula. Buckley walked into their camp, left his nomadic lifestyle and re-entered Western society, firstly in Melbourne and then in Hobart. His responses to the initial meeting with fellow Englishmen were documented in detail by Andrew Todd, a member of Batman’s party in his *Indented Head Journal 1835*. This was not published in book form until the twentieth century. It had in part, however, been broadcast in the *Hobart Town Mercury* on 14th September 1885. As an employee of the Port Phillip Association, Todd was involved with setting up the camp that defended the Association’s claim to grazing land. He recorded the events that included interactions with the local Aboriginal populations. It is one of the few literary primary sources and some of its information would have been accessible through John Batman’s *Rebecca Journal* and John Helder Wedge’s journal and field book to authors writing about William Buckley during the middle years of the nineteenth century.

![The Todd Journal](image)


Further authors of the written accounts describing Buckley’s experiences on the fringes of his Aboriginal group claimed to have had either contact with Buckley himself or referenced those that had.

---

356 Todd, 1989: p. 31
357 Todd, 1989: p. 16.
359 Now held by the State Library of Victoria.
360 Now held by the State Library of Victoria.
The first chronicle of the saga of William Buckley was narrated by John Morgan and was published in 1852 before the death of the subject in 1856. It was written in the first person, as a supposed autobiographical account of the escaped convict’s years spent in the company of the Aboriginal people around Port Phillip Bay, the Bellarine Peninsula which encloses the west side of the Bay, the You Yangs hill range that overlooks the bay and up the Barwon River, a large watercourse which empties into the sea just west of the Bay’s entrance. It recounts Buckley’s travels and experiences of the interactions, conflicts and ceremonies of and between his own group and those with which they came into contact. In Morgan’s own words he expresses “the thoughts of a humble, unlearned man, in that language of simplicity and truth which ... is best suited to the subject.” Its complexity of detail belies the experiences that others had had in their communications with Buckley.

James Bonwick had accessed information from both the Batman and Wedge chronicles when he published in 1856, *Discovery and Settlement of Port Phillip*. In this, he

---

363 Morgan, 1980: p. 3.
documents the first attempts to establish a penal colony on the east side of Port Phillip Bay in 1803.\textsuperscript{364} There were a number of escapes from the settlement, some recaptures, whilst other fugitives were never heard of again.\textsuperscript{365} Quoting from the John Morgan account, Bonwick expands on the experiences of Buckley and while recognising the subject as a source of information, he described the ex-convict as having “torpidity of intellect, taciturnity of disposition, and indifference to action”\textsuperscript{366} It had been hoped that Buckley would facilitate dealings with the Aboriginal people through his employment by the Port Phillip Association,\textsuperscript{367} but this did not come to fruition.

James Bonwick published further on William Buckley with \textit{The Wild White Man and the Blacks of Victoria}, in 1857 followed by a second edition in 1863. The references to the experiences of Buckley acted as a preamble to the author’s descriptions of the Victorian Aboriginal people. Interestingly Bonwick quotes William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District from 1838, “Buckley was more ignorant than the blacks, and perfectly useless to them”\textsuperscript{368} It was a Captain Stokes, also in the 1857 edition by Bonwick, who said “His intellect if he ever possessed any such, had almost entirely deserted him, and nothing of any value could be procured from him respecting the history and manners of the tribe with whom he had so long dwelt.”\textsuperscript{369}

Joseph Tice Gellibrand had employed Buckley as a guide and had reported the affection with which the Aboriginal people still welcomed their friend on meeting.\textsuperscript{370} This proved

\textsuperscript{365} Bonwick, 1856: p. 13
\textsuperscript{366} Bonwick, 1856: p. 63.
\textsuperscript{367} Fyans, 1986: p. 209.
\textsuperscript{368} Bonwick, 1863: p. 1.
\textsuperscript{369} Bonwick, 1863: p. 2.
\textsuperscript{370} Gellibrand, 1836: p. 291.
of some value as his party traversed the country that the Port Phillip Association had ‘purchased’ from them.

It was however the impressions that Bonwick had documented that were further substantiated by others who had had contact with Buckley; George Russell described him as ‘a very ignorant, uneducated man’ while William Westgarth said of him – “poor, stupid old Buckley”.

William Westgarth, publishing in 1864, devoted a chapter to William Buckley’s escapade around Port Phillip, his welcome and his participation in the life of the Aboriginal people from 1803. It documents the events of 1835 that were to lead to the white man’s realisation of the presence of Europeans in his vicinity and discusses its implications for him as an end to his isolation.

John Helder Wedge recounts that he was able to forge workable associations with the Aboriginal people on which Buckley had for so long been reliant, because of the information with which he had been furnished about their characters and propensities. It is to this writer that is owed the two sketches of Buckley and a description as follows:

- Height, without shoes 6 feet 5 inches and 7/8, age 53, trade, bricklayer; complexion, brown; hair – dark-brown; whiskers – dark-brown; visage, round and marked with small-pox; forehead – low: eyebrows, bushy; eyes – hazel; nose

*371 Russell, 1935: pp. 78-9
372 Westgarth, 1864: pp. 43-53.
373 Westgarth, 1864: p. 50-1; Bonwick, 1856: p. 67.
374 Wedge, 1836: p. 65.*
– pointed and turned up;... Remarks: well-proportioned with an erect, military gait; mermaid on upper part of right arm; sun, half–moon, seven stars and a monkey; W>> on lower part of right arm.\(^{375}\)

It is nevertheless through the voice of the English language that each of the preceding descriptions recounts the life and times of William Buckley, being taken from the authors’ limited knowledge of both the man and the Aboriginal people. There are, however, two sources citing Aboriginal oral accounts of Buckley. The first is quoted in Bonwick, 1856, from a Yarra tribesman’s understanding of the finding of the ‘Wild White Man.’ The second, having perhaps greater veracity, was published in 1881 in *Australian Aborigines* by James Dawson and draws on an Aboriginal woman’s oral account of the discovery of this unknown giant and her people’s initial interactions.\(^{376}\)

...She belonged originally to the Buninyong Tribe, and was about fifteen years old when she became acquainted with Buckley. She says that one of the natives discovered immense footprints in the sand hummocks near the Barwon River, and concluded that they had been made by some unknown gigantic native— a stranger, and therefore an enemy. He set off at once on the track and soon discovered a strange looking being lying down on a small hillock, sunning himself after a bath in the sea, a brief survey, cautiously made was sufficient. The native hurried back to the camp and told the rest of the tribe what he had seen. They at once collected all the men in the neighbourhood, formed a cordon, and closed in on him. When they came near he took little or no notice of them and did not alter his position for some time. They were very much alarmed. At length one of the party finding courage addressed him as muurnong guurk (meaning that they supposed him to be one who had been killed and come to life again), and asked his name, “You Kondak Baarwon?” Buckley replied by a prolonged grunt and an inclination of the head, signifying yes. They asked him a number of other questions, all of which were suggested by the idea that he was one of themselves returned from

\(^{376}\) Dawson, 1881: p. 110.
the dead, and to all questions Buckley gave the same reply. They were highly gratified, and he and they soon became friends. They made a wuurn of leafy branches for him, and lit a fire in front of it, around which they all assembled. He was then recognised as one of the tribe. The news spread rapidly, and he was visited by large numbers of natives from different parts of the colony, who always showed great fear of him at first. The children especially would hide themselves from him at first, or call to their mothers to keep them from the Muuruup.

When ships visited the coast to get wood and water, Buckley never sought to make himself known to any of them. On several occasions ships were wrecked on the coast and all hands perished. From the wrecks Buckley and his tribe secured a large quantity of blankets, axes and other articles, which he taught them how to use.

When Batman arrived at Geelong, Buckley was fishing in the river Barwon – in which pursuit he excelled – and the news was conveyed to him by a number of natives who brought him several articles which they had received as presents from Batman and his friends, such as biscuits, sugar, bread, &c., which he at once recognised and partook of. He was asked by the tribe to take his fish (of which he had a large quantity) and all his war accoutrements and go down to the “big ships.” When he arrived he was met by Batman and “all the other big fellows,” who were well pleased to see a white man among the natives. Buckley could not at first understand what they said, having completely forgotten his own language. He looked so puzzled while he was endeavouring to recall his mother tongue. Several days passed before he could converse with any freedom. Batman and his companions were not long in getting Buckley thoroughly washed and shaved, and in cutting his hair, which had grown to a prodigious length. When he was taken away in the ship the natives were much distressed at losing him, and when some time after, they received a letter informing them of his marriage in Hobart Town, they lost all hope of his return to them, and grieved accordingly.
It provides an alternate perspective, even though through the transcription of the Superintendent of the Aboriginal Mission Station at Framlingham, to the literature from which the burgeoning population of the Port Phillip District was able to gain their familiarity of the story of William Buckley during the nineteenth century.

**William Buckley in McRae’s narratives.**

The story can now be taken up by the pen and ink drawings of Tommy McRae, all of which post-date the literature published during the nineteenth century about William Buckley and his saga. The details in the McRae images suggests the sources from which they may have been derived.
Incidence of depictions pertaining to William Buckley across McRae’s artistic output 1860 - 1898.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sketchbook</th>
<th>date</th>
<th>no of depiction</th>
<th>Buckley images</th>
<th>Buckley ceremony of Buckley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 1</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 2</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 3</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 4</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Notebook</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremner Notebook</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas Sketchbook</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang 1 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lefaivre Sketchbook</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang 2 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Sketchbook</td>
<td>&gt;1891</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat M A Sketchbook</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat G A Notebook</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 1 Sketchbook</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 2 Sketchbook</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G MacMahon Sketchbook</td>
<td>late 1890’s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatlief Sketchbook</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersed Collection</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Looseleaf</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray Sheet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koori Heritage Trust</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellwood sheet</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGV sheet 1</td>
<td>c1880</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGV sheet 2</td>
<td>c1880</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table registers that the first William Buckley images appear in the *Lang Sketchbook No 1, 1885*. Their position and sequence on the first two pages introduce and then establish, the relevance within the artist’s narratives of all the William Buckley images that subsequently appear throughout his artistic output.
Buckley and related depictions in the *Lang Sketchbook No 1*.


The initial page (above) depicts the white-faced Buckley entering from the right, having just passed an Aboriginal grave site defined by upright stakes at either end. He is dressed in trousers, coat and hat and carrying a tomahawk and has two short pronged spears over his shoulder. Immediately the incongruity of the image is apparent – the attire of a white man while he carries Aboriginal implements. At the centre of the image is a eucalypt tree, the significance of which is two-fold. Firstly, Buckley had discovered early in his wanderings around the Port Phillip that the exuded gum from the eucalypt, when heated, was palatable and a ready source of nourishment.

> We found about this place, a sort of gum, which, when passed over a fire, became soft and palatable... on this we subsisted.\(^{377}\)

It should be noted that at this early stage in Buckley’s account he was using the plural ‘we’, from which it can be surmised that he was still accompanied by at least one of his fellow escapees.

Secondly, when the tribal men first made contact with him, Buckley was resting beneath a large eucalypt but now used the singular ‘I’ to describe his experience.

\(^{377}\) Morgan, 1980: p. 17
While searching for gum already mentioned, I was seen by two native women who watched me unperceived. At length I threw myself down at the foot of a large tree to rest.\(^{378}\)

Buckley’s Aboriginal companion recounted the discovery of immense footprints in the sands near the Barwon River, which led to the prostrate figure beneath the tree. Fearful that this stranger was an enemy, the Aboriginal woman gathered together her tribal group and, on approaching Buckley, they demanded of him whether he was, because of the weapons in his possession, Murrangurk, a recently slain warrior come back to life.\(^{379}\)

For Buckley, it transpired that his filching from the grave site was the windfall for his reception into the tribe.

They called me Murrangurk, which I afterwards learnt, was the name of a man formerly belonging to their tribe, who had been buried at the spot where I had found the piece of spear I still carried with me. They have a belief, that when they die, they go to some place or other, and are there made white men, and that they then return to this world for another existence.\(^{380}\)

At the left of the depiction stand five blanketed Aboriginal people. Four of them are carrying spears and are gesturing in welcome, though one has turned away from the advancing figure, but watches over his shoulder. The fifth, identified by a small child on her back, is pointing toward Buckley.

This is the story that is recounted in detail by John Morgan, some of which is repeated in Bonwick’s *Port Phillip* and is verified by Buckley’s widow, quoted in Dawson. Her recollection of the events preceding his discovery by her people however differs slightly.\(^{381}\)
The following page (above) illustrates a ceremonial dance in which eleven men are pictured with chests decorated, sporting dance belts and thick brush at their ankles. Rudimentary flags wave above their heads attached to the tips of their spears. The event is orchestrated by one who waves short sticks bearing the same accoutrements. It is the fluttering of these which instills the sense of movement across the scene. Todd, in his *Indented Head Journal* noted that handkerchiefs were the first gifts to be distributed to the Aboriginal people by his landing party.

Jim Gum distributed the following to them, viz: 100 Handkerchiefs, 30 Knives, 6 Tomahawks, 54 Scissors, 14 Shirts, being all that we were possessed of...  

The drawing references directly the Morgan account in which the performance of a ‘corroboree’, led by a ‘master of ceremonies’, celebrates, amongst other events, Murrangurk’s ‘coming back to life’. Importantly it is this image which is the key to the identification of the depictions which can now be related to McRae’s narrative of William Buckley and to the recognition of the tribe of the south-west margins of Port Phillip as defined by Tindale as the Kurung and distinct from the Bunurong. It can be suggested that McRae adopted the motif of waving handkerchiefs to locate in time the

---

382 Todd, 1989: p. 27  
incursion of white man into the world of the Aboriginal people and to provide a chronology about which his narratives were created. The subsequent pages in all the sketchbooks where these depictions appear, relate to occasions and events after this episode and within the artist’s own experience.

**Buckley in the Gray Commission.**

This multi-scene single page (above), notated in an unknown hand, was recently acquired by the National Museum of Australia from a private collection in Corowa. Recognising that the artist worked up from the bottom of the paper, the lower episode within the narrative depicts the arrival of a three masted sailing ship in a bay. Aboriginal people returning from a hunt view the apparition from behind the screening vegetation. This row of trees represents one of the rare occasions that McRae instilled perspective in his landscapes. The upper stanza depicts the now familiar white-faced figure of Buckley with spears and hatchet over his shoulder, having just passed the native burial site. The inscription ‘Jump up white fellow’ refers to the oft repeated statement that the black fellow would after death, return as a white man.

---

“Neber mind, Mitter Looyd, tir, by-‘n’-by, all dem blackfella come back whitefella, like it you”

To the left of the centrally placed tree, McRae has illustrated Buckley’s discovery by three Aboriginal people. The scene represents Buckley’s first interaction with this group of three,

armed with spears and ... opossum skins thrown over their shoulders,\textsuperscript{387}
as described in Morgan’s account. Importantly it was they who introduced him to fruits of the bush that were to provide variety to his diet as he continued his trek.

Bringing... a rude kind of basket made of rushes. In it was some...berries.\textsuperscript{388}

To the far left awaits a welcoming group, with their weapons laid aside. It represents the sequel to the discovery of this curious intruder as described in the Westgarth, Morgan and Bonwick.

This drawing was one of two that are known to have been commissioned by John Guthrie Gray. They passed by descent until bought at auction by the National Museum in 2012.

There are two series in which McRae has more explicitly detailed important episodes of Buckley’s life amongst the Aboriginal people.

\textsuperscript{387} Morgan, 1980: p. 25
\textsuperscript{388} Morgan, 1980: p. 28.
Buckley from a disbanded anthology now in private collections and in the University of Melbourne archive.

The first images come from an anthology of which only six pages are extant and those are now dispersed across three collections. Three of the drawings pertain to the William Buckley story. They are again introduced by his entry into the world of the Aboriginal people. The depiction of this event deviates slightly from those previously discussed in that it is a naked figure who turns to enlist his fellow tribesmen to surround the intruder. No women can be identified.

The image that follows illustrates Buckley, still resplendent in hat and coat, accompanying a man, woman and child. The Family are ensconced on the bank of a waterway, their spears ready at hand and watching the approach of a heavily laden canoe in which are seated fighting men and a child. From John Wedge it is known that Buckley had lived with and had a very close relationship with one family.

---

The name of the chief or head of the family was Nullaboin, to whom he attached himself; and continued with him and accompanied him in all his wanderings... 

We came to the Barwin, which we crossed, and then could plainly see the black heads of a number of natives amongst the reeds: appearing to me like a large flock of crows. About a hundred man came to meet us... 

The third image (above) from this sketchbook illustrates Buckley’s inclusion in the corroboree, an important ritual of the group. He is distinguished by his pallor, height and hat and careful examination of the depiction of Buckley shows the method with which the spears were being held at waist height and up the chest. He accompanies eleven of his group, all with painted chest, brush embellished ankles and dance belt while the event is orchestrated by a twelfth who waves short sticks bearing handkerchiefs.

In the distance of this image lies a ship in full sail as if substantiating that Buckley had, for a period, turned his back on his previous culture and traditions. It is known from his widow that ships made landfall and put personnel ashore to search for wood and water.

---

390 Wedge, 1836: p. 72.
391 Morgan, 1979: p. 34
392 Sayers, 1994: p. 126. The first two images of this sequence have come down by descent to the present owner whilst the third entered the University of Melbourne Archives through a donation of family papers by another descendant.
She stated that Buckley had no interest in re-joining or even initiating contact with them. 393

I often looked towards the sea, thinking that I might observe some vessels passing:... Although so desolately placed, I, for a long time, fancied myself comparatively happy, and that I could gladly have ended my days there. 394

Westgarth contradicts this view quoting that Buckley had, on occasions, wished to communicate with his former countrymen.

Buckley says he longed to re-join his people and the civilised world, and would fain have communicated with these casual and unknown visitors, but on each occasion, he was disappointed. 395

This sketchbook covers the story of Buckley’s arrival into, reception by and integration into the world of the Aboriginal people. The work was acquired by Roderick Kilborn, an early landowner at Wahgunyah and a man who had supported McRae in his conflicts with the bureaucracy.

It is unknown how widely the artist’s drawings of the saga had been seen when the first two depictions described here appeared in *The Argus Supplement* in 1929, accompanying an article written by a descendent of the original owner. 396 There was no further comment on the significance of the drawings in the press.

*The Koori Heritage Trust Inc. Collection of Buckley images.*

In another five-page anthology now in the Koorie Heritage Trust Inc. Collection, there are three similarly arranged drawings. In each Buckley is clearly identifiable by the pallor of his face.

---

393 Dawson, 1881: p. 111.
394 Morgan, 1980: p. 87.
395 Westgarth, 1864: p. 49.
396 Cox, 1929: p. 4.
This depiction deviates from the introductory image of the previous sketchbook, in being read from the left. Buckley has just passed the burial site, having retrieved the two spears. On this occasion he is welcomed by an Aboriginal group who, with their weapons are secured a small distance away are not threatened by his presence. This integrated version of the drama is exactly as recounted by Westgarth.

...He appears to have been treated with some consideration. These, as well as other Australian natives, have a superstitious belief that white people are persons of their own race who have come to life again after death. If such resuscitated persons are deemed to be their own friends, the tribe will treat them well. Buckley came upon the scene opportunely in this respect. A chief of the tribe with which he afterwards lived had died about the time Buckley was spending his first summer of wild independence near the Port Phillip Heads, and been buried near Buckley’s rude domicile. A piece of a native spear had been left to mark the grave. Buckley had seen and appropriated this fragment, and he carried it in his hand, when first seen by the tribe, they joyfully hailed him as no other than their deceased chief himself come again to life.\(^{397}\)

\(^{397}\)Westgarth, 1864: p. 47.
The second page illustrates a ceremonial dance in which Buckley is actively partaking. Again, prominent by his colour and his hat, he wears the dance belt and brush decoration of his companions. Each participant carries a spear tipped by a handkerchief, a motif that can now be ascribed to McRae and which he employed to denote the tribes around the south-western areas of Port Phillip Bay and their early contact with the intruding race. Again in the distance is a manned sailing vessel, on which Buckley has turned his back thus exhibiting his allegiance to the race into which he has been welcomed.398 At the far left of the depiction is a symbol of two diamonds perhaps representing spirits of the land, a motif traditional to South-east Australia.399 The imagery would suggest reference to Morgan and perhaps Dawson for its source.

398 Dawson, 1881: p. 110.
399 Reference is here made to Kelly Koumalatsos, Wergaia/Wamba Wamba who gives this explanation for the diamond symbol, Keeler and Couzens, 2010: p. 33.
The third page (above) depicts Buckley seated within a family group, spears and axe in the ground. They observe two people waving flag-bearing sticks to an approaching horde, all of whom appear to be carrying small spears and boomerangs. It is the only depiction of this particular episode and it describes, and its place in the sequence would suggest, the event which led to Buckley’s re-engagement with John Batman’s advance party at Indented Head as documented by Todd but described in detail by Westgarth. He recounts that two young Aboriginal people appear with coloured handkerchiefs attached to the tips of their spears, having been given them by the recently landed white men.

Their use as flags is validated in the Morgan account.

> We discovered two young natives coming through the marshes, and in our direction: each having a coloured cotton handkerchief fastened to the end of his spear. These they held up as high as they could, waving them about to and fro, for me to see...  

For Buckley, this was the first indication of the presence of his countrymen. It also alerted him to the implications of their arrival with equipment and commodities of which his companions had become so desirous.

> They had plenty of provisions, blankets, tomahawks and such articles – that they had asked for...but were refused.

This scene conflates the incident with a following episode. The Aboriginal people, wishing to take advantage of the lack of numbers in the landed party, being only three white men and six natives from Sydney, enlisted the aid of groups in the vicinity to mount an attack in order to gain possession of the tomahawks, blankets and other chattels that would be of use.

> Buckley...found the natives arranging to kill three whites and six blacks that were left behind.

---

400 Westgarth, 1864: p. 50.
401 Morgan, 1980: p. 116
402 Morgan, 1980: p. 117.
403 Bonwick, 1856: p. 65.
This is the only sequence of drawings in which the opening, middle and closing events in Buckley’s life amongst the Aboriginal people is illustrated. Literary sources from James Bonwick, John Morgan and William Westgarth and Wedge to a lesser extent, all reference these depictions.

When and for whom this series was commissioned is unknown. The complexity of detail would suggest that McRae was concerned to include pivotal particulars of the William Buckley story. It is interesting in this, as in all of his illustrations of the saga, the artist has catalogued Buckley’s entrée into the world of the Aboriginal people in hat and coat, but nowhere seems to have illustrated his withdrawal from this world - as the man of ‘gigantic stature...enveloped in a kangaroo skin rug; his long beard and hair of thirty-three years growth, together with his shields, spears and clubs.’\footnote{Bonwick, 1863: p. 7.}

The Buckley image from \textit{Williams Sketchbook No 2}.

![Image of drawings](image)

\footnote{Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, ‘Gibsland tribe Viktoria/ First ship ashore in Australia/ War danz’, \textit{Williams Sketchbook No 2}, n.d., pen and ink on paper, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.}

This more problematic drawing, appearing as the third page of a sketchbook acquired by George L Williams of Corowa, is inscribed ‘Gibsland tribe Viktoria/ First ship ashore in Australia/ War Danz’, by an unknown hand. However, using McRae’s convention of creating his images upwards from the bottom of the page,\footnote{Barrett, 1935: p. 87.} the lower scene depicts fourteen men decorated in the style and with the motif now recognisable as belonging to the groups with whom Buckley was associated. The handkerchief motif not only defines the place but also the time, which is an acknowledgement of the initial landing.
of Europeans at Indented Head and their distribution of gifts. The upper scene depicts a group of five figures draped in blankets, who observe, from behind an extensive brush hide and with some animation, an approaching sailing vessel. Their mode of dress would suggest that the scene is being played out in the winter months at the time that Buckley introduced himself to Batman’s landing party.

He fell in with the family of natives, with whom he continued to live till the 12th of July 1835, the day on which he joined the party left by Mr Batman.  

Anticipation of the return of a ship and the resulting range of desirous items that she would carry, was the bait that Buckley used to persuade the Aboriginal people to reserve their planned massacre of the would-be settlers.  So interpreted, this is another chapter in McRae’s illustration of the William Buckley saga.

This sketchbook is now in the National Gallery of Australia collection along with another sketchbook from the same source, George L Williams. This patron wrote to The Australasian in 1927 in response to an anonymous article and reproduced drawings which had appeared in the newspaper a month previous, correcting some of the information. In his letter he comments that he knew McRae (spelt McCrae) well and had provided the artist with the pens that had been used to generate the sketchbooks from which the drawings had been reproduced. Further, he himself had also purchased 2 sketchbooks of 10 drawings each. In about 1925 a son of McRae visited Williams in Orange, NSW, was shown a book of Tommy’s drawings and was presented with one of them.

There are further images that utilize the motif that McRae has extrapolated from and expanded on the William Buckley story.

---

406 Bonwick, 1863: p. 4.
407 Bonwick, 1856: p. 65.
408 See Appendix 10.
409 See Appendix 11.
The related Buckley images from the *Lefaivre Sketchbook* and the *Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook*.


The above depiction on the early pages of this Mitchell Library sketchbook, its relationship through the kerchief motif with the story and the relevance of its placement to define the life and world of the Aboriginal people before and after the arrival of the European, has now been speculated. Devoid of the sailing vessel, it is an enlivened image in which the dancers are carrying handkerchief waving spears and interact with each other. It includes, however, two participants who, by wielding spears and shields, introduce an aggressive element into the scene. This illustrates the performances that occurred as different tribes came together to determine their quarrels and differences. Morgan, in his interpretation of Buckley’s life amongst the Aboriginal people makes numerous references to these occasions.

This particular sketchbook was commissioned by a visiting salesman, a Mr. Lefaivre, circa 1886.\(^{410}\) It thus post-dates all the literature published during the nineteenth century about the William Buckley saga.

Inscribed in an unknown hand, this depiction, *Too[k] two kings/ Melbourne tribe when blacks saw ship first*, illustrates eight decorated dancers waving the now recognisable handkerchiefs on their spear tips. They are accompanied by two further figures, each gesticulating with small flagsticks, sporting hats on their heads and pipes in their mouths. McRae seems to have been partial to hats and throughout his complete and disbanded sketchbooks he has illustrated varying styles on both his European and Aboriginal figures, whether in formal clothing or generic garb. The pipe is also an essential feature for his dandified figures. In this scene the hats and pipes introduce a comic element to an otherwise dignified occasion, but their inclusion is somewhat puzzling with no evidence for further interpretation except to ascribe the early adoption of accoutrements that had appeal.

From a now disbanded McRae sketchbook of twelve pages, but whose contents and sequence can be established by the library’s accession numbers, this drawing appears in the final third of a book which includes eight dance scenes, three of which immediately precede it and one follows. Its relative lateness in the book suggests that all the earlier events illustrated, predate Batman’s landing at Indented Head and the distribution of the kerchiefs. Its subject matter and content also advances the proposition that contrary to the ascribed date of 1865, the whole Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook belongs to a date post that of the Koori Heritage Trust Sketchbook (nd) and the Lang Sketchbook No 1 (1885).⁴¹¹

A common feature in each of the ceremonial scenes involving Buckley is the brush attached to the lower leg. A more incidental feature is the short spear waving leader or

⁴¹¹ This is explored at length in the chapter ‘The tree, shrub and ground: mapping their course.’
leaders. The explanation of this latter is illustrated in the third image from the *Koori Heritage Trust Sketchbook* which may suggest that this undated compilation predates the *Lang No 1 Sketchbook* of 1885 and the *Lefaivre Sketchbook*, 1886.

The question also arises as to the artist’s source for the detailed sketch of a three masted, fully rigged sailing ship that appears in the background of some of the depictions. There is no record of vessels of this kind navigating the Murray. It may be the reproduction from the masthead of the shipping news of a regional newspaper. However, Rod Kilborn’s wife notes that McRae, in his capacity as a stockman on Andrew Hume’s Brocklesby Station, had driven cattle down to Newmarket and had witnessed the opening of the Hobson’s Bay Railway line\(^\text{412}\) where many of these vessels would have been at anchor. There may yet be another explanation for the image.

Direct nor indirect reference to the William Buckley story does not appear in all of the extant sketchbooks as can be ascertained by the paucity of examples discussed. A recurring theme however, is Buckley’s immersion in a pivotal event of tribal life – the traditional ceremony and celebration. William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District from 1838, evidences Buckley’s involvement:

> The preservation of Buckley for thirty-two years, without in the whole period ever ill-using him, ought ever indelibly to mark them as a humane race.\(^\text{413}\)

This reinforces McRae’s commentary on integration and mutual respect that was engendered as Buckley straddled the worlds and cultures with which he was confronted and perhaps conversely inferring that these were courtesies that should be extended in the artist’s current social climate.

**Conclusion**

From the above it is shown that McRae has established the motif of spear waving handkerchiefs by which the tribes of the south-west fringe of Port Phillip could be identified. In creating the motif referencing the William Buckley saga, he was introducing a time frame into his narrative of drawings – events before the incursion of white man


\(^{413}\) Bonwick, 1863: p. 1
and those after Buckley’s arrival and then prolonged sojourn within the tribal life of the Aboriginal people of Victoria, anticipating the invasion of the alien race and culture that was to result in such dislocation of the Aboriginal people, disturbance of their physical environment and their social upheaval.

It is to George Thomas Lloyd that is owed a poignant description of this plight which he included in his chronicle *Thirty-three Years in Victoria and Tasmania*:

> When I first landed in Geelong, in 1837, the Barrabool Hill tribe numbered upwards of 300 sleek and healthy-looking blacks. A few months previous to my leaving that town, in May, 1853, on casually strolling up to a couple of maim-miams, or native huts, that were erected on the banks of the Burwan river, I observed seated therein nine loobra (women) and one sickly child...I was induced to ask after numbers of my old dark friends of early days... “The stranger white man came in his great swimming coorong [vessel] and landed at Corayio with his dedabul boulganas [large animals], and his anaki boulganas [little animals]. He came with his boom-booms [double guns], his white miam-miams [tents], blankets and tomahawks; and the dedaul ummageet [great white stranger] took away the long inherited hunting grounds of the poor Barrabool coolies and their children... Where are our coolies now? Where are our fathers – mothers – brothers – and sisters? Dead! All gone! Dead!”

This arrival of Batman and the Port Phillip Association was a defining moment in McRae’s history of Aboriginal life and was the climate into which the artist was born and raised in North-east Victoria. It is this perhaps that is the most important reason that the depictions and the motif that stemmed from them, became such a seminal feature across his drawings, in informing his audience of events of significance in the artist’s accounts of the Victorian Aboriginal people and their lifestyles.

Consideration was given to the oral transmission of the narratives through the tribal telegraph network. However, the examination of the images which revolve around the theme of William Buckley adhere to and suggest that McRae’s inspirations and

---

414 Sayers, 1994: p. 41
information came primarily from the literary works of Morgan, Bonwick and Westgarth, and to a lesser degree Dawson and Wedge. As noted, these volumes were all published prior to 1881 and were known to be circulating through the European population due to the interest in and popularity of the story.  

Accessing the books from this community and facilitated by the literacy of his second wife, the artist would have been able to detail the minutiae of the differing accounts through his conjuring up the images as he heard the scripts. To this time, it has not been possible to assign a date prior to 1884, to any of McRae’s Buckley narrative images. This was the year in which Dr William Lang arrived in Australia and he was the commissioning patron of the *Lang Sketchbook No 1*, the first dated sketchbook in which Buckley was illustrated.

In the same way that the tribal networks publicized the William Buckley saga, it can be assumed that other episodes relating to interactions between the Aboriginal people and the encroaching settlers were being disseminated. With the latter penetrating northwards from Port Phillip and from Portland on the west coast of Victoria where prime grazing land had also been identified, there was erosion of lifestyles and displacement from Country. Struggles on the Western Plains of Victoria were reported in the *Port Phillip Gazette* during which groups of Aboriginal people were slaughtered and about which the new settlers across Victoria could have read. Close to McRae’s tribal lands in the nearby Ovens Valley, were the skirmishes with the Faithful Brothers, in which both Aboriginal people and settlers lost their lives as the two groups fought for control of the land and the encroaching livestock.

It is the images relating to William Buckley that make a visual chronicle of events that are of continuing importance and fascination to the public at large. As a seminal feature of McRae’s narratives, they are yet another aspect of his sketchbooks that informed his audience of events of significance in his accounts of the Victorian Aboriginal people and their lifestyles.

---

416 *Sayers*
418 *Port Phillip Gazette*.
419 Bride, 1898: p. 150.
Chapter 5: The Lang Sketchbooks No 1 (1885) and No 2 (1886): Their narratives

The Lang Sketchbook No 1 and Lang Sketchbook No 2 were, until the recent discovery of the Lucas Sketchbook, 1881, in South Africa, the earliest extant sets of images in the ‘Drawing book’ format as distinct from those anthologies in notebooks. With definitive dates they chronicle the intricacies of the lives and evolving influences on the Aboriginal people of McRae’s Murray Valley and northern Victoria. The sketchbooks come from a detailed provenance having been commissioned by Dr William Henry Lang directly from Tommy McRae.

Dr William Lang had emigrated from Scotland in 1884 to join his brother, John, who owned a vineyard at Corowa, New South Wales. He initially lived at Tarramia Station in the Murray Valley, near Mulwala, before setting up his medical practice in Corowa. He was interested in and widely knowledgeable of horse racing and was instrumental in the formation of the Corowa Amateur Race Club in 1890, which became the Corowa Picnic Race Club and the Corowa Race Club in 1899.

It is not known how or where McRae first encountered Dr Lang. As an inveterate gambler the artist may have been present at many of the race meetings that were conducted around the area, however Dr Lang’s commissioning of two sketchbooks from the artist in the mid 1880’s predates the establishment of this formal horse racing. While McRae and Dr Lang may have met through their common interest in horse racing, there is evidence of medical services being provided by the doctor, documented at the front of the second book.

---

420 Izon, 2009: p. 79.
421 Izon, 2009: p. 79.
422 Williams, 1927: p. 466.
423 St Andrew’s Sketchbook, 1886: p. 1.

Drawings made by a Black fellow at Corowa, New South Wales, 1886. His name I don’t know. By the whites he goes by the name of Tommy Macrae. He is a man about 42 years of age. He is quite self taught in his drawing + cannot read or write. He is about the only sober black I ever saw. He is King of the tribe which has now become reduced to only a few. Tommy + his wife live on a narrow strip of land between the River Murray and a lake called Lake Moodemere surrounded by an enormous pack of dogs of any variety. There are three or four children. A few nights ago when I was in bed I heard a great barking of dogs + squalling(?) of children. This was Tommy bringing his wife, who had been bitten by a
By the time of the doctor’s arrival in Australia, some of McRae’s drawings that had been presented to Theresa Walker between 1860 and 1864, had been reproduced in the 1878 edition of Robert Brough Smyth’s *Aborigines of Victoria*. Notebooks of drawings had also been created for the local Postmaster, Rod Kilborn in 1875 and for J.R. Bremner in 1880. *The Lucas Sketchbook*, which has now been acquired by the National Library of Australia, Canberra, is dated 1881 and was recently discovered in the attic of a house in South Africa. It had been created for a visiting English boy and his father who took it with them on their return to the United Kingdom. How this family became aware of McRae’s depictions of Aboriginal life is unknown, but this commission marked the beginning of their appeal to a more eclectic audience, both local and international.

Dr Lang’s two sketchbooks measure 24.8cms by 31.5cms and 24.6cms by 30.4cms with covers in dark green and black. They are *Drawing Books* with the front illustrating a Grecian style woman seated to centre left before a circular window and holding a framed work. In the background is depicted a freeze of mounted horsemen while in the foreground are large branches of foliage. The back board has an image of three small masted vessels moored in a shallow waterway.

*Lang Sketchbook No 1* is in the State Library of Victoria collection. It is inscribed

> These sketches are made by a native artist of Corowa NSW, an aboriginal, the last of his tribe and are a present from Dr W Lang to John S Currie, 1895,’ and was ‘one of a number of Books on Australasia collected by Mr John Lang Currie of Lawarra, presented to the college (Ormond College) by his daughter, Mrs P S Lang and her family, March 1901.

It was presented to the La Trobe library from this source in 1937.\(^424\)

*Lang Sketchbook No 2* is in the collection of the Library of The University of Saint Andrews, Scotland. It was sent to Andrew Lang, the brother of William, in London after 1886. Andrew had been a reader of much that had been written about Australia and its people, though he had never visited the country.\(^425\) He considered that he came to the

---


\(^{425}\) Lang, 1896: p. xiii.
subject of the art of the Aboriginal people with some knowledge. Whether it was in response to the contents of the McRae sketchbook is not known, but Andrew wrote in a letter to George Gordon McCrae, son of Georgiana and Andrew McCrae, early settlers in Victoria, 426

It is very odd that some blacks and Bushmen drew better than the Athenians did about 200 B.C., yet the Athenians later improved a good deal! 427

From this sketchbook, he did however make use of those images that related directly to Aboriginal people and their way of life, in illustrating the Australian Legendary Tales and More Australian Legendary Tales, collected by Kathleen Langloh Parker and published in London in 1896 and 1898. In his introductions to these books he is dismissive of Australia in general but, in passing judgement of McRae’s drawings, gives some praise, without acknowledgement, to the artist’s emus, kangaroos and trees. 428

**Lang Sketchbook No 1**

The first sketchbook, dated to 1885, comprises eighteen depictions of ceremonial, hunting, fishing and fighting scenes. The paper is of standard sketchbook quality. The artist has used only one side of the page and while he was known to work with a pallet of iron gall ink and hues of blues, pinks and violet, here he has confined himself to black inks applied with a thin nibbed pen that created crisp defined lines. McRae drew his depictions up from the bottom of the page 429 and it is in this order that the images should be read. His silhouette figures are in-filled but exhibit a variety of emotion through both facial expression and physical posture. Where he has positioned these within a landscape, the scene loosely defines the environs, being identifiable by the architecture of the trees – the combination of eucalypt, acacia and Murray pine.

---

427 McCrae, 1966: p. 215. (McCrae manuscripts, 2517/6, Item 12, Andrew Lang to George Gordon McCrae.)
428 Lang, 1896: p. xvi.
McRae has commenced the narratives in this sketchbook with an image of the meeting that took place during the first years of the nineteenth century, between escaped convict William Buckley and an Aboriginal group on the west side of Port Phillip Bay. As previously discussed, this encounter, as depicted by McRae, was one of surprise rather than of aggression, with the welcoming troop dressed in cloaks and wielding hunting sticks. The group includes at least one woman who can be identified by the infant on her back. Buckley carries a pair of spears that he has retrieved from a new grave site. This act contributes to his acceptance as an incarnation of the recently deceased compatriot rather than an interloper. It was believed by Aboriginal people that their dead may return as white men.\footnote{Kerr, 1872: p. 26. “Jump up white fellow.”}

The tree, which divides the depiction, has a narrow slender trunk from which dead stumps protrude. The branches become thinner as they fork into the canopy of bunches of foliage. The impression is of a mature eucalypt from which boughs have broken as it has grown. In each of the impressions of this event that McRae reproduced across his corpus of work, the tree, as discussed in the chapter ‘Tommy McRae and the William Buckley legend’, sets the scene for the exposure of the ensuing saga.

The story of the escape and adventures of this convict had, by the middle of the century, been recorded and disseminated widely throughout the colony.\footnote{Sayers, 1994: p. 41.} As the initial image
in the sketchbook it can only be surmised as to the importance that the artist attached to it as an event early in his life, or immediately prior to his birth. It has been proposed that McRae, who had experienced, through the invasion of the European settlers, the disruption of his finely balanced environment which had led to the breakdown of the laws and traditions that had been the backbone of his Aboriginal life. He thus, identified with Buckley, a man separated from his culture and his heritage but accepted and integrated into the alien world in which he found himself.432

![Image 2](image2.jpg)

**Image 2**, which follows, is a ceremony performed by a group whose body painting, decoration and implements of celebration are those allied with the Buckley story. If viewed in isolation, the waving kerchiefs are the only intimation to their identity relating them to Buckley’s Port Phillip hosts. The two associated depictions of these events in other sketchbooks, define Buckley clearly as one of the participants.

The endeavours are orchestrated by an identifiable leader waving two flags, an important element at all ceremonial events has been discussed in the chapter *The Art of Ceremony and Celebration*. The performers’ personal adornment includes a thick brush covering to the lower legs with painted lines up their thighs finishing with and drawing

attention to the differing patterns decorating their torsos. They clasp spears to their chests at the tips of which are hung the kerchiefs. The image radiates a serious and contemplative occasion, in which the static posture held by the legs and body is counteracted by the insinuation of movement emanating from the rise and fall of the kerchiefs as the participants turn their faces each way.

While the Aboriginal peoples of the north-east of Victoria and along the reaches of the Upper Murray would have been aware of the initial incursion through their territories by the European explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell in 1824, it appears that the arrival of William Buckley, his embracing by and finally his retreat from the Aboriginal community on the west coast of Victoria, to the white ‘world’, was a defining moment in the eyes of the artist.

So, begins McRae’s narrative of the Aboriginal life of his experience.

It is interesting to note that the fine detail belies the simplicity of this image 3. The performance is taking place around a leafless tree which would suggest that it was dead. McRae had by this time been drawing on paper for over twenty years, and the finessing of his technique is apparent in this single feature – the deft lines and tapering branches of the naked skeletons of the dead trees that were so significant as a habitat for reptiles and small mammals in his environment. As a location for a ceremony or celebration it
may also inform the event, as Blandowski noted in his ‘Personal Observation in the Central Part of Victoria’. At initiation a tooth was avulsed to represent the severing of a mother’s influence over her son. Given to her safe keeping, it was secreted in a tree, which on the death of the man was stripped and set alight as a lasting monument to the deceased. This inclusion by McRae becomes another piece of evidence that he inserted to inform and define the many events through his life.

Each figure wears a fringed skirt of possum-skin thongs and wields two instruments of battle – boomerang and boomerang, boomerang and shield, shield and waddy or in one instance, shield and spear. As has been previously discussed the variety of attributes is an important feature of the depiction in distinguishing the occasion. While there is no physical contact between the dancers, McRae has established their engagement with each other by not only the postures of their arms and bodies but also the angles and defiance of their heads and faces. There is intimation of movement through the attitude of the legs and their relative positioning. Each participant is intricately decorated with identical painted lines up the legs, but their adornment becomes individualised across each of their chests. These markings were an important artistic tradition, significant to each Aboriginal person and to their Country. Ceremony and the visual transformation of symbols as body art have more than an aesthetic value to the Aboriginal people. The designs were passed down from generation to generation by the rituals that were entrenched in the culture and that were incorporated in the rights of passage for each individual in this society. They bound the local group through sacred and economic ties especially as the bonds to Country and landscape became more tenuous with the decimation of some tribal groups and their displacement to Protectorate Reserves.

The combinations of lines, blocks and circles are also found on the shields of the Aboriginal people of the Murray and on the Dendroglyphs of southern NSW.

433 Blandowski, 1855: p. 72.  
434 Blandowski, 1855: p. 72.  
435 Curr, 1883: p. 136. “The performers wore a belt around the loins, from which depended, both before and behind, a thick bunch of opossum-skin thongs, which hung half-way down to the knee.”  
439 Black, 1941: pp. 20, 21, 26, 29, 36.
The landscape of the artist’s Country is filled with native animals and birds, not cattle and sheep nor the introduced exotic flora that provided little sustenance for either the Aboriginal people or the indigenous fauna.

With Image 4, McRae has defined his environment of flat grasslands interspersed with eucalypts, Murray pines and acacias. Animal life abounds with birds and possums living in the trees while the ground hugging game frequent the native pastures. The stately emu is defined by his powerful legs while his rudimentary wings poke from beneath the breast feathers. His long curvaceous neck is finished by the small head that can reach into the sapling tops and peer across the surrounds. The kangaroo has a fluidity of line that emphasises the spring of its hind legs and the counterbalancing of its tail while the reduced profile of its forelegs with their detailed paws, points to their dexterity. At the right of the image is a pair of large fine birds, one illustrated with outspread wings to indicate its flighted ability. These may be bustards, also known as the native turkey, which were hunted by both the Aboriginal people and the new settlers until its disappearance from this part of Australia. Or, it may be the brolga, the native companion which suffered the same fate and which was clearly identified by William Lang in the pages of his second commission.440

440 Lang Sketchbook No 2: p. 10
One food source that sustained the Aboriginals was the birds of the trees. **Image 5**

Though there appears to be some success in using the spear on smaller flighted birds, the boomerang was also a weapon of choice. It is difficult to determine the bird species at which these figures are taking aim, whether they are currawongs, ducks, or ibis all of which were certainly plentiful in the area. George Augustus Robinson, when he visited the Murray Valley at the end of April 1840, noted the prevalence of this latter, a ‘large bird size of goose black and white and half web footed they perch in trees as well as on the ground.’ It is the ibis that Lang has noted, similarly roosting in a tree, in his second commissioned volume and in the image similar to that above.

Ceremonies were performed to encourage the abundance of food sources and to celebrate their migratory arrival, to welcome neighbours and the passing of life.

---

441 Robinson, 1840: p. 273.
milestones. Without further evidence it is impossible to specify whether this Image 6 was one of those occasions.

This is a complex scene in which many participants, all wearing profuse decoration, have come together. The feathers, which may be emu, cockatoo or ibis attached to their foreheads by twisted possum skin, emphasise the jaunty angles at which they hold their heads. Each performer has brush thickly adhered to their lower legs while their body art begins with simple lines painted up the thighs from below the knee and finishes at the intricate and varied decorations that cover their chests. The detail of the designs together with the bracing of the torsos toward and away from that of their neighbour, insinuates a movement of both the individual and of the mass. The dancing pattern created as the participants gesture to each other with their short music sticks, conveys to the viewer an impression of sound and of occasion.

The depiction incorporates the sets of signs whose interpretation was only available to those who had passed through the rites and for whom this image would thus have had a greater significance. While these were images executed for a specific European audience in which McRae was documenting the world of the Aboriginal people, he was furnishing enough information to reveal an essence of the intricacies of the rituals while not transgressing the sacred.

The possum was also an important source of food, warmth and provided a commodity that could be traded. As a significant economic resource their harvesting needed to be
respected and controlled. The Image 7 suggests that while the adult hunters would take aim with their spears, it was the smaller persons who did much of the pursuing.

The possum is a nocturnal animal and so the hunter would seek them out during the day when they were an easier prey. Their capture would nevertheless involve shimmying up the trunks using axes to cut notches into the bark that provided grip for both hand and foot. By tapping the branch the hunter could ascertain whether it was completely hollow or whether an animal was secreted therein. On securing the prey, the axe was then at hand to dispatch the small marsupial or it could be thrown to the ground. Its pelts were cleaned and dried and then either cut into thongs or sewn together with kangaroo sinew for the cloaks that McRae has shown slung across the torsos of some of his figures.

In illustrating that possums would sometimes make their homes in the cavities of dead trees, the artist was emphasising the importance of these ‘skeletons’ of the landscape.

Fighting usually occurred on a man-to-man basis even when it involved a dispute between groups rather than individuals.

---

442 Maynard 2014: p. 24. The first two images from the Lycett Album are devoted to the detail of tree climbing.

443 Kerr, 1872: p. 19. “With his tomahawk he cuts a small notch in the bark, just large enough to support the ball of his great toe; on this tiny ledge he rests while he cuts a second notch further up, then, dragging his body upwards, he makes another, clinging onto the stem with one arm while he wields the tomahawk with the other; in this manner he can climb straight stems and trees, sometimes to a height of sixty feet.”
The initial episode in reading the scene from the bottom of image 8, illustrates a skirmish between spear wielding warriors. One is at significant disadvantage as he runs from his opponent. He swivels to dispatch his weapon. The effort and propulsion of each figure is conveyed through the length of stride and angle of body while the effort needed to propel their weapons is counter-balanced by the weight and angle of the shields. With simplicity of line, McRae has implied in the uppermost episode on the left, aggression through both body language and the vigorous forward propulsion of the individuals. Using boomerangs and shields, there is no ritual to the engagement, rather the intent to inflict power of one over the other with the distance between the combatants integral to its success. Or, having prepared themselves with body paint, the right-hand depiction represents the more formal encounter using shields and clubs which necessitated close contact as the participants landed blows to the head and body.

With each figure, whether in profile or full body, McRae has caught the immediacy of the action and with no apparent outcome, it is left to the viewer to anticipate the sequel.

There were however, occasions when the extended group would come together in a show of strength and commitment

In image 9, the participants are similarly and simply decorated on their chests only and are actively engaged, not with each other, but with a force outside the picture frame.
While their bodies are depicted frontally and they are grasping multiple spears, each head is turned to face the foe against which they hold their shields and clubs overhead, creating an impenetrable defence. The concentration of bodies and their preparedness for engagement presents a formidable spectacle for any opposing group but which might not necessarily result in physical confrontation. There is a detailed description of one such truncated interchange in South Australia written in the 1840’s by William Cawthorne.  

This has been quoted in its entirety in the chapter *The Art of Ceremony and Celebration*. While there is no obvious explanation in the narrative of this sketchbook, the postures, implements and common decoration on each of the participants alerts the viewer to its significance as an occasion of importance at which large numbers have collected.

In the past the group had been numerous enough to collectively hunt for large game like the emu. In the uninterrupted landscape of Image 10, with a eucalypt and seedling at its centre, there is no camouflage for the hunters so the group of four figures stalk the large flightless birds from behind a mobile hide of full height and width made of brush. The

---

444Jones, 2008: p. 79.
spears are carried at the ready, but the birds seem little perturbed by the approaching apparition. It is also unnoticed by the bird roosting in the treetop.

The tribe to which McRae belonged took to the water in canoes to hunt for both fish and swans. Except during periods of extreme drought, which have been reported only rarely, the Murray River and its meanders were anything but deep and fast flowing therefore were ideal territories for the easy pursuit of such game.

In the lower scene of image 11 this Aboriginal fisherman has steered his laden but shallow canoe toward a pair of black swans, at which he is taking aim with spear and spear thrower. McRae has drawn this pair of birds, elegant and graceful with a corpulence of body that so defines them. The balance and position of the hunter is maintained by a long pole that he has also used to propel his craft to the desired location. He is accompanied by a woman and child suggesting that this is a family activity.

In the upper scene the single figure has adopted poise and control that puts him as one with his craft as he leans forward to take aim at the finely sculptured Murray Cod. It is indeed the fine features in this depiction of the fish that would suggest that McRae had spent some time with the artist Theresa Walker who, before her residence at

---

445 Blandowski, 1855: p. 60.
Barnawartha had worked on those plates of Victoria’s native fish, for McCoy’s *Prodromus* a compendium of the animals, fish and reptiles of Victoria.446

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, image 12, *Lang Sketchbook No 1*, 1885, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

The hand-to-hand combat disclosed in image 12 and its outcome is illustrative of two different confrontations. The participants in the lower episode wear possum thong skirts and should be read as the more formal observance with a choice of stance and carriage of head which conveys to the viewer the ritualized confrontation. Those of the second scene are naked, fighting with a hostility and aggression which culminates in one of the duellers losing his balance and his weapons. It is documented that these interchanges, while ending in sore heads and much blood, never resulted in serious injury but rather that honour had been re-established.

446 museumvictoria.com.au/caughtandcoloured/poole.aspx. The *Prodromus* project was initiated by Professor Frederick McCoy, to document the Zoology of Victoria.
Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, image 13, Lang Sketchbook No 1, 1885, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

At the centre of this image 13 scene, a figure is about to strike a goanna from a low tree branch. To his right a sprinter, hair standing on end, is being pursued at speed by a snake. The Murray valley has always been a haven for snakes and close to water the venomous tiger snake abounds, being particularly aggressive in the autumn. Nowhere has McRae illustrated the hunting of this particular reptile. Rather they are always depicted in pursuit of some hapless Aboriginal person. There is a reference to the consequences of snake bite by Lang, when introducing the second volume of these sketches.

Across the compendium of McRae’s extant works there are three versions of a snake pursuing an Aboriginal person. In none is the event or events pertaining to the circumstances known, as neither the pages before nor after give a clue to its more extended implications. Its persistent inclusion would however, suggest that it was of some significance, though it should be noted that these are the only occasions in which this reptile is depicted through the artist’s corpus.

---

447 Cogger, 2000: p. 660
The ceremonial dance of Image 14 is indicative of an extensive group again coming together for a common purpose. McRae has achieved a different visual and psychological tone with this image in comparison with those of images 6 and 9. There is an atmosphere of aggression as each of the figures clutches a pair of long multi-barbed spears and other instruments of war to his chest. These implements are not positioned ready for attack but rather as a prescribed formation indicative of a specific event. On this occasion, body decoration has been applied but is restricted to a standard pattern executed only on the upper trunk. This contributes to the impression of intense commitment between the individuals coupled with the interlocking of their legs, their closeness of encounter and their visual engagement to right or left but within the confines of the group. Dynamism in the image is enhanced by the variety of the physiognomies depicted with a minimum of detail – height, breadth of chest, fullness of face, length of beard. These illustrate McRae’s ability to translate onto paper that which he was observing in those around him.
With the demise of more sizeable tribal groups it fell to the unaccompanied hunter to procure large game birds. As with image 10, it is the stance and the angle of the central emu’s neck in comparison with the bird to the left who feeds unperturbed, that indicates to the viewer, the predictable flight.

In this instance the lone hunter slips from tree to tree in an effort to close the gap on his prey. This landscape, treed with eucalypts, pines and acacias, includes no saplings, perhaps indicative that this area was regularly set alight by the Aboriginal people to stimulate fresh and nourishing grass to attract their game. Of note in this image, is also the air of anticipation in the hunter. He has his knees slightly bent and extends his head while he grasps his barbed spear in one hand and holds the pine trunk with the other. The hunted peers suspiciously backwards waiting for the danger to reveal itself and ready to take flight with his companion.

The final three images should be read as a sequence of events.

It is the goanna that has significance in this drama depicted by McRae. Image 16 illustrates a family group of man, woman and child entering the scene from the right. The adults are wearing possum-skin cloaks and the woman, identified with child on her back, carries a hunting stick on which is skewered a number of small game, perhaps tortoises. She draws attention to the goannas scurrying up a naked tree, as a further one escapes along the ground. Her companion though, has threateningly raised his spear at a small figure, writhing reptile in hand and sprinting out of the left-hand frame of the depiction. In the absence of any explanation, the viewer can interpret the situation in two ways – the first would suggest that the location of the incident falls within the family group’s traditional hunting area and that the poacher, not being part of that group, has stepped outside his legal bounds. The second implies that the poacher is not yet of an age or belongs to a goanna totemic group which would exclude the goanna from his diet. In either case it would suggest that the young interloper has not yet been initiated into the traditions and laws of the tribe, a ritual that was becoming more difficult to perform as the family groups became smaller and more dislocated from each other.

Again, however McRae has established the psychological tone of each of the participants in the drama. The woman is concerned with the chase while the hunter has already

---

450 Brough Smyth, 1878: Vol 1, p. 144.
451 Brough Smyth, 1878: Vol 1, p. 234-5. “A man may not eat the flesh of the animal that is the totem of his tribe.’ ‘If any young person… should eat any of the flesh of the (iguana)... until he was given authority to eat it by the old men...After the age of thirty he could eat any...with impunity.’
adopted a stance of feet apart, head extended as he prepares to hurl his weapon. The wrongdoer has lengthened his stride but because he has had to turn to monitor the aggressor’s actions, the burden of his squirming load has had to be counter-balanced with his hunting stick.

There is thus an establishment of conflict. The scene of image 17, depicts the representatives of two groups who are in confrontation with each other. Wielding short but barbed spears, they stand in close proximity, with shields raised in defence of their heads, faces and upper bodies. With no distance to fling their weapons, this is the ritualized staging of the resolution.
Honour however has not been established. Finally, it is resolved in image 18 between the proxy for the perpetrator and the Aboriginal person against whom the incident was perpetrated. These two however mean business, threatening in this close and physical struggle, with no defence against the might of the axe except their agility. This final contest is witnessed by two observers who are both emotionally though not physically involved with the action. McRae has engaged the viewer through the energy and forcefulness with which the combatants clash with each other and through the gestures and postures of the observers as they urge their champion on. The reader of this sequence is thus attracted to the drama and into the progression of the narrative.

In this volume McRae has inserted into his landscapes, trees that can now be identified and located by their details and have a realism with which his audience could relate. In these forms they had not previously been documented as part of the Aboriginal artistic vocabulary. The artist has encompassed the quarry on which he and his group had traditionally relied for food and clothing with the means of their procurement. His single figures are drawn with an elegance of line and motion with attention to the musculature of leg and torso. In the staging of ceremonial and celebratory events at which hordes or tribes have congregated, the atmosphere of solemnity, aggression, or hilarity are all apparent to the viewer while in some, the further dimension of their clangour can be appreciated.

The narrative has been introduced by the William Buckley episodes with which the European reader was probably fully conversant, setting the timeframe within the artist’s own lifetime and during a period of Aboriginal disinheritance from their Country, traditions and culture. Of the 16 pages, 5 are devoted to ceremony and celebration, with the resolution of disputes, whether real or imagined, depicted on 4 intervening leaves. The rest of the sketchbook details the landscape of the Murray Valley and the hunting of game both small and large.

**Lang Sketchbook No 2**

The second sketchbook conforms to approximate dimensions and details of the previous sketchbook now in the State Library of Victoria, suggesting that the blank books were purchased around the same time and from the same source. While some of the subjects
in both volumes are variations on a theme, their sequence is relevant to the narrative that is being expressed.

Each of the pages is numbered in pencil in the upper right corner and those images that had been reproduced for publication by Andrew Lang have had their size reductions noted across the lower edges.

The first page is dominated by a stylised plant of four leaves distributed symmetrically between three large flowers. It has been worked in blue ink with continuous pressure along each line or curve displaying proficiency with the pen.

It has been suggested that the design and execution mirror the end papers of a printed book. Having examined relevant editions of books relating to the William Buckley saga and those pertaining to McRae’s art and the life of the Aboriginal people that were available at his time, none bore illustrated front and back papers.

Around the image on this first page, is the inscription in black long hand:

Drawings made by a black fellow at Corowa, New South Wales, 1886. His name I do not know. By the whites he goes by the name Tommy Macrae. He is a man about 42 years of age. He is quite self taught in his drawing and cannot read or write. He is about the only sober black I ever saw. He is king of the tribe which has now become reduced to only a few. Tommy and his wife live on a narrow strip of land between the River Murray & a lake called Lake Moodemere surrounded by an enormous pack of dogs of any variety. There are three or four children. A few nights ago, when I
was in bed I heard a great barking of dogs & squalling of children. This was Tommy bringing his wife who had been bitten by a snake, accompanied by all the dogs and the children. The good lady was too drunk to leave the buggy. She got better. W.H.L

Having been signed and dated by William Lang, the collection of drawings can now be inserted into a timeline of the works of the artist. From the hand, the notations across the bottom of the drawings can also be assigned to William Lang, though it is unknown as to whether they were done in consultation with McRae or at a later date.

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, image 2, Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1885, University of St Andrews Library, St Andrews, Scotland.

Image 2 is dedicated to a ceremonial scene though notated as ‘A Corroboree’ in the hand of William Henry Lang. The single scene occupies the lower half of the page and is drawn in black ink. A eucalypt, its branches becoming ever finer as they reach the canopy, is pictured to the left of the page. Seven men perform in front of it creating some perspective. Each wears a fringed skirt and has white lines painted up both legs. Their torsos are decorated with individual designs as is at least one of the faces. There is no hint of hair or head adornment. They each wield two boomerangs concave outwards. Only two could be considered to have physical contact while all the men seem to be looking above and beyond their fellow dancers. The artist has introduced a slight intimation towards a “v” shape at the centre of the image on an otherwise flat landscape. The small number of participants and the complexity of some of their body decoration suggest that this is an event of significance though there is nothing to locate it in time or place. There is little crowding of the participants and while the sentiment of
the composition can be compared with scene of Image 3 in the Lang Sketchbook No 1, the attributes differ.

This is followed by a very different scene with Image 3. On a rising field, broken at the page centre by a weeping acacia, a female figure wearing a long dress holds a sprig of herbage. Her face is in profile with no infill except for her features. In front of her stand two men, the closer with only a partially darkened face, is dressed in trews, jacket and hat and leans on a walking cane as he gestures toward the lady. His companion, also gesturing toward her, wears breeches and knee-high boots and like his three fellows to the left of the tree, has a completely in filled face. The four wear breeches or trews with waistcoats, coats and hats all of which are depicted in detail. They appear to be engaged in animated conversation.

Where the male figures are depicted square to the page plane, there is refinement of line down the body, thigh and the calf but this becomes a little clumsier when drawn in profile. The figure of the woman is complete with bust and cinched waist above the billowing skirt of the period. Black ink is the predominant medium, but it has been more lightly applied across the ground, the foliage and the woman’s dress.

Attention now needs to be drawn to the colouration or otherwise of the physiognomy of the personae in this scene and a comparison made with the first William Buckley depiction previously discussed at the start of Lang Sketchbook No 1. In this, Buckley is defined not only by his dress but also by his white face which is in contrast with those otherwise illustrated. In applying this technique to the scene in question, it would imply that the interaction takes place between a European man and woman to which the
dandified Aboriginal people are spectators. McRae is thus introducing evidence of the developing influences and pressures of the changing social landscape.

![Image 4](image_url)

**Image 4** is divided horizontally by two grounds. The lower scene is dynamic and aggressive, introducing a new subject. A single figure faces off, club and shield at the ready as four antagonists race towards him, also armed with clubs and shields, though the closest wields only a club. The intensity of the interchange is made especially apparent through the postures of the combatants at the centre of the depiction – one crouches low, ready to spring forward at the earliest opportunity while he is supported by those at his rear, upright and defiant. At a distance four unarmed figures flee from the scene through the long grass.

This is a rare example of McRae illustrating the flight of one group of Aboriginal people from another. The action takes place from the right to the left of the page, something which can be noted in many of the action and hunting depictions by McRae.

The upper scene depicts a duel between two antagonists. The viewer can easily decipher the dynamic as the one leans forward with intent, poised to thrust his spear while protecting himself with his shield. His foe has had to discard his now broken spear and wields a boomerang and a shield. It can be seen as a precursor to the events illustrated on **Image 5**.
The duels continue with two pairs of combatants, undecorated but wearing fringed skirts. They battle each other with club and shield. The left image depicts them fully engaged. They lean backwards to impart maximum force to their next strike and shield their vulnerable heads from the inevitable clash. The fight appears to conclude with the right image illustrating the vanquished, having lost his shield, falling to the ground while the conqueror raises not only his head but his weapons in triumph.

In comparison with similar subjects in the previously discussed sketchbook in which is depicted the methods but not the emotions, these lively encounters illustrate McRae’s evolving skill, both artistically and intellectually in representing the drama of an event. They may have come about through the artist recognising that his audience responded to the physicality of the confrontation not just its visual impression.

Using black ink for the outline and the infill, the page is inscribed in William Lang’s hand, *Two Duels*.

Then follows two hunting scenes. *Image 6* is without notation. A group of men, without camouflage or hide, chase down the desirable prey. The three figures are in full flight,
lunging down a featureless incline with spears and spear throwers at the ready. Their impetus is imparted to the viewer through the inclination of their torsos and the length of their strides, each with a differing posture. Their heads are thrown back in anticipation of the release of their weapons at four kangaroos, each delicately balanced on their hind legs with tails outstretched and forelegs tucked into their chests. Thus, the forward propulsion of both men and animals is felt across the page from right to left.

Image 7 is ‘Black fellow stalking kangaroos and emus’. In contrast to the previous page a solitary figure pursues the mixed large prey. The ground is depicted with rough cross hatching with some vertical strokes of grass against the horizon. In the treeless landscape and as a single hunter, he has resorted to a mobile hide of brush to camouflage his approach to the game. He prepares to take aim with his spear. The animals and birds are already spooked, being led off by two emus though the foremost of these looks back at the advancing apparition.

The artist is here illustrating two approaches to the procurement of large game. While the outcomes of these exercises are unknown it can be assumed that there would be a greater reliance on the second method as the Aboriginal population in the Murray Valley declined.
The striking feature of this next scene, **Image 8**, is the variety and density of the trees depicted. The eucalypts, acacias and Murray pines are all indigenous to the Murray Valley but with the inclusion of the skeleton of a tree long dead, the artist emphasises its importance as a habitat for much of the smaller game upon which the Aboriginal people rely. The compact body and shortened beak of the bird is suggestive of a cockatoo or raptor, but the former move in flocks, while eagles and hawks are lone predators. The artist observed and recorded the minutia of the environment about him, and this thus represents one of his few depictions of a bird of prey. It is certainly different from the bird sitting atop the tree on the far left which is more illustrative of an ibis, currawong or crow. If it is the last, then that the two should appear in the same image suggests a reference to creation stories that proliferate in Aboriginal oral history.\(^452\)

Birds were the original inhabitants of the world. Through their enmity, those that rose to eminence were the Eaglehawk and Crow as illustrated. With an end to their hostilities the classes of the Eaglehawk and Crow were initiated, and it is to these that the tribes of the Murray valley still conform.\(^453\)

A family enters the scene from the right; the man with a hunting stick at the ready while the woman with child on her back carries a digging stick. The landscape is alive with prey. Goannas climb the largest gum tree whilst there is a possum, bird and goanna on the bare branches. Two emus wander between the trees. This environment thus services many of the needs of a small Aboriginal group with food, pelts and decorative feathers.

---

\(^{452}\) Mathew, 1899: p. 15.

\(^{453}\) See Appendix 2.
The scene is notated by William Lang in black ink.\textsuperscript{454}

What follows on \textbf{Image 9} is an interesting confrontation between two cloaked figures. The one holds his short spear aloft while wielding his shield in front of his body. The second approaches aggressively, also with short spear held high but assisted by a walking stick! The inclusion of this last identifies an owner of esteem or of advanced years, though the absence of his shield would suggest the latter. This act of irreverence toward the venerable of the tribe must have been of sufficient significant for its inclusion, but there are no indicators to location or time. The image has been inscribed by William Lang, ‘I don’t know what this means.’

Black ink has been used for the figures, both in profile, but executed on this scale, they have less elegance both in their depiction and in their dynamism.

\textbf{Image 10} depicts a hunting scene in a flat landscape broken by a eucalypt in full leaf and by a naked tree skeleton, whose branches are alive with ibis. A lone Aboriginal hunter, camouflaged by a mobile brush hide, is stalking two brolgas engaged in a mating display. The one parades with neck extended and wings outstretched, his performance also

\textsuperscript{454} The writing compares favorably with the inscription on the first page.
being observed by a pair of emus. These latter with their differing demeanour and physiques are defined by their larger deeper bodies and elementary wings.

The two species were prevalent in the Murray Valley though the brolga migrated to the warmer north in the winter. Known as the native companion, it was hunted, like the native turkey, to near extinction in the area, by both the Aboriginal people and the settlers. William Lang has identified each of the bird species below their depictions.

![Image of Corroboree](image.png)

**Image 11** is inscribed *Corroboree*. Ten performers with white lines painted up their legs and decorated across their torsos wield music sticks. They each wear a fringed skirt and have thick brush attached to their ankles but display no hair or head ornamentation in contrast to those in **Image 6** from *Lang Sketchbook No 1*. The performance has commenced with the appearance of the first three dancers before a further clustering of the main group during which they dance before, behind and between each other while visually engaging with those next to them. This scene vibrates with movement imparted by the positioning of the music sticks and by the mesmerizing patterning of the participants. Anticipating the clamour that would be generated by the hitting of one stick against another and the rustling of the brush from the gyrating legs, a further dimension of the scene can be appreciated by the viewer. It is the combination of these elements by which McRae engages his audience and involves them in the event. In stark comparison with the austerity and solemnity of the previous performance (**image 2**), this depiction exudes the atmosphere of an occasion of a very different magnitude.
Image 12 illustrates scenes of importance in the life of the Aboriginal people of the Murray Valley. A cloaked figure bearing a pole, from which two large fish dangle, speeds away to the right. To his left two naked combatants are also proceeding in the same direction. The intention of the one is obvious as he pursues his antagonist with his short-barbed spear and shield. The other, while attempting to flee, also wields a short-barbed spear, though his shield plays no part in his defence. There is no way of knowing whether the events across the bottom of the page are related.

A laden canoe occupies the middle stanza of the page. Skimming across the water it carries four people, two small seated figures, a pipe smoking woman and a standing fisherman about to launch a very long spear at a distant fish. The whole vessel seems finely balanced for this family activity.

As with every fishing event examined, the action takes place from the right to left, and in this instance, emphasises the orientation of left to right, of the lower scene.

The upper scene pits two naked figures against each other. Each is armed with a short spear and shield and in this face to face combat neither has yet the upper hand. The absence of body art would suggest that it is a serious altercation.

None of these images bears an inscription.
Image 13 illustrates seven immaculately trousered and coated men, all with hats, four with pipes and two with walking canes. Their attire varies from check trousers to breeches and knee-high boots. On each is detailed the trouser fly, buttons of the waistcoat and on many, those of the jacket. Six of the figures are in animated conversation, gesturing with hands, pipes and canes. The seventh figure stands apart, not in position but in demeanour. Similarly attired he looks beyond the frame of the depiction, but McRae has in filled his face in contrast with those to his left. The depiction of this figure was not incidental to the scene but rather that the artist was making a point with his distinction; he is able to move seamlessly between the traditional activities of his Aboriginal life and culture and the outward symbols his European neighbours.

The artist was known to be particular with his attire and was proud of his hats. Photographs kept by the Corowa Historical Society document the array of outfits worn by the men and women living at Lake Moodemere. Interestingly, as with the previous depiction in which non-Aboriginal figures were included, this image was not reproduced in either of the Langloh Parker volumes of Australian Legendary Tales.
Image 14 is inscribed as ‘Discovering an ambush and fleeing from it’. This is another altercation between two groups. At the right, five figures crouch behind an extensive brush hide that they are carrying. Each appears to be bearing multiple spears. Their quarry has however been alerted and is depicted racing away to the left of the page carrying their weapons; shields, spears, boomerangs and clubs. The gravity of their flight has been conveyed through the lengths of their strides and the postures of their torsos, so the viewer is left in no doubt as to the urgency of the situation. This subject’s reappearance suggests that this or these events were of particular significance and that there had been some incident that had triggered its illustration.

Image 15 has been titled ‘Emu stalking’ by Lang. In a flat landscape dotted with eucalypts, Murray pines and a dead tree at its centre, a lone figure using a tree as a hide and some brush for camouflage is stalking two emus. The closer is already aware of some danger while the further continues to feed. Contrary to the multi-figured hunting scenes in which the Aboriginal people are depicted in full chase of their prey, the pursuit of
game by a single figure involves greater ingenuity, made a little easier by the emus’ propensity for the lightly treed habitat of McRae’s depictions.

With the exception of the first page, all the images are executed with black ink. Image 16, ‘A possum up a Gum Tree,’ is drawn in blue ink, with the inscription from Lang in his recognisable hand and black ink.

This portrait of a eucalypt depicts a lone tree with a full crown atop a straight trunk that is broken only by two stumps halfway up. As they divide, the branches become slimmer until, unable to support the weight of the leaves, they weep. On a central fork a possum has taken refuge.

This image shows that the artist is now ready to define the characteristics of these trees of his environment rather than just depicting a generic example. Through its execution the artist has instilled depth to the canopy bringing complexity to an image that had been alien to his artistic vocabulary.
The penultimate depiction, **Image 17**, is a reproduction of the stylised plant of three detailed flowers and four detailed leaves that illustrated the first page of this sketchbook, thus confirming it as an endpaper. Using on this occasion pink ink, the series of circles, curves and straight lines has again been executed with a firm hand. At the lower left is an elegant, cloaked figure standing with his barbed spear and club at rest. He looks and points upward and to right. He has no ornamentation and is fully in-filled with black ink though he stands on a ground of blue. At the lower right of the page is a second figure dressed in breeches, boots, waistcoat, jacket and hat. All but the last are drawn in detail in black, while his hat and the flag which he waves in his right hand, are in blue ink. The features of his face are discernible with no infill. He looks and gestures to the right and out of the frame of the picture. The Aboriginal person, in control of his Country with his traditions of dress and implements, is now having to share his environment with the alien European with his hat, coat, breeches and walking stick!

There is however a further depiction in this sketchbook, **image 18**. A family; a man, a woman and two children, is out foraging, an everyday task for the Aboriginal family, providing not only sustenance but also the materials for their warmth and for use as decoration. In a flat landscape broken only by a eucalypt and a dead tree, a cloaked figure leads the way, carrying two possums in one hand. He gestures with his implement to the small figure shimmying up the dead tree in pursuit of the possum, who has taken refuge at the end of the highest branch. A second cloaked figure with a child on her back carries a digging stick over the shoulder. Drawn in blue ink, the figure of the man is of solid colour but that of the second figure is without infill of the face. Explanations for this may suggest that its lack or inclusion was of little significance in determining
McRae’s depictions of Aboriginal or European descent. Evidence from the images in this sketchbook, detailing their juxtaposition would suggest otherwise. This image should be judged as a postscript, positioned as it is, following the ‘endpaper’. McRae has here, illustrated the embracing by the Aboriginal community of the ‘half-caste’- the non-full blood person, in the climate of their ejection from the Aboriginal Reserves run by the Government under the newly legislated ‘Half-Caste Act’ of 1886. This Act was introduced in December of that year and the injection of this depiction by McRae after his end paper, enforces its importance in the artist’s commentary on Aboriginal Australia.

As noted, many of the pages have been inscribed by William Lang, who may or may not have been in consultation with McRae. While the artist has provided sufficient evidence in his images to differentiate the myriad of events that required celebration there are no clues for the uninitiated as to the stories or events that underpinned the occasions. The generic descriptor, ‘corroboree’ for the two groups who have come together for observances, fails to recognise those features of attributes, demeanours and performances suggestive of contrasting occasions. The inclusion of interactions which had not been depicted previously; confrontation with an elder and the fleeing of one tribe from another, suggests that the artist was illustrating events closer to his own life rather than to Aboriginal people in general. It is perhaps the second to last page that defines his intent with this sketchbook; his comparing of Aboriginal behaviours as they interface with the European populations.

_Lang Sketchbook No 1 and Lang Sketchbook No 2 unravelled._

Considering the _Lang Sketchbook No 1 and Lang Sketchbook No 2_ in series, McRae’s narrative of 36 images commences with the fulfilment of the William Buckley saga and concludes with a resolution of the ‘Half-caste’ Act. Across the two sketchbooks there are 455 _The Aborigines Act of 1886 is often referred to as the ‘Half-caste’ Act, as it was with this legislation that the colonial Government of Victoria, through the control of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, attempted to break up Aboriginal Families and communities on the Reserves. Under the 1886 Act, the Government had the power to cause the removal of any Aboriginal person from the Reserve, who was under the age of 34 and was categorised as less than ‘full blood’. _
ceremony and celebration scenes, some subtle in their detailing of attributes, decoration and decorum. Image 6 in the first and Image 10 in the second appear to be illustrating an allied event. It should be noted that the adornment of the participants in the former scene have feathers adhered to their foreheads in recognition of a peculiar feature of their performance while the mechanics of the latter are more detailed.

There is conflict resolution on a personal level through both of the sketchbooks, but it is the two pages in the second sketchbook which illustrates the horde fleeing in the face of advancing threats, one without (image 4) and one with their material possessions (image 14). The only other example of this latter subject is depicted in the now disbanded sketchbook commissioned by George McMahon, the customs officer stationed at the western end of the Corowa-Wahgunyah Bridge during the 1890's.\footnote{The border between New South Wales and Victoria follows the southern highwater mark of the Murray River. Duties were levied on all goods, vehicles and persons crossing the border.}

From McRae's drawings, it is known that the artist frequented the Murray Valley between Wodonga, Victoria and Echuca, Victoria. He chose to make his camp at Lake Moodemere, south of Wahgunyah, Victoria. This was in the face of the Central Board which was appointed in 1860, to oversee the interests of Aboriginal people. It became a statutory authority in 1869; the Central Board for Protection of Aborigines, with the passing of the Act for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of
Victoria in November 1869. Amongst the implications of this act for McRae was firstly, ‘the prescribing of the place where any Aboriginal person or any tribe of Aboriginal people shall reside,’ and secondly, ‘the care, custody and education of the children of Aboriginal people.’ It could be proposed that the two images in the Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886, were an analogous commentary on the forced displacement of his tribe and some of his family by both the Government through the Act and by the unfolding sprawl of the invading Europeans. Thus the first depiction details the arrival of the authorities, (image 13) to take guardianship of the children against resistance. McRae was known to have moved across the border to Corowa for periods to prevent losing his children but on their return to Lake Moodemere the inevitable apprehension occurred. In comparison, the second image illustrates the usurping of Country and the dislocation of its peoples by those with greater ‘firepower’ (image 14) and by those who had arrived to occupy and transform the landscapes by clearing, fencing and introducing alien stock and horticulture. The McMahon Sketchbook image revisits the concept poignantly with the 11 fleeing figures with their spears and shields, no match for the seven aggressors armed with boomerangs, axes and one spear!

The second Lang Sketchbook also presents the dandified Aboriginal person. He first appears studying the approach of a European dressed man to a woman dressed in skirt and bodice. Towards the end of the volume he again appears in the company of vivacious and animated European men mirroring behaviours that must have seemed somewhat alien.

Finally, the Lang Sketchbooks detail the hunting of large, small, aquatic and flighted game. They are depicted in the landscapes of the Murray Valley and as the images are interpreted deeper into the volumes, only the large trees that remain and assume a dominance. It is however image 6 from Lang Sketchbook No 2 in which McRae has epitomised the elegance and dynamism of his pursuing figures with their individual

---

457 Aboriginal Protection Act 1869 (Vic): pp. 1, 2.
458 Barrett, 1935: p. 87. Mrs J A Foord, “I remember how broken-hearted Tommy was when his children were sent to Koondrook. He came to the house, and, with tears, begged my Father to use his influence to allow him to keep the children... but they had to go.”
459 Cooper and Urrey, 1981: p. 82-3.
attitudes and orientations. This is the earliest extant sketchbook in which he has struck just these postures.

In reading these as a continuous volume, the 36 sketches, the Lang Sketchbook No 1 and the Lang Sketchbook No 2 introduce and expand a number of features of McRae’s Aboriginal life and his adherence to important rituals of ceremony and celebration in the fluctuating social and physical environment. By inference, he illustrates the erosion of his social fabric through government policy and the outside influences that accompany them. These are not images that can be read superficially. They provide many clues to an understanding of the way that the Aboriginal people of the late nineteenth century were accommodating the intricacies of their culture with impositions of their changing Country.
**Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World**

**Chapter 6: Gender and the Social Climate of McRae’s Murray Valley**

In the introduction is listed Tommy McRae’s patrons and those who had commissioned sketchbooks and pages of his drawings. The only woman mentioned is Theresa Walker with whom the artist had come into contact early in his career. The pages that he drew for her revolved around events performed by the male members of the tribe with the females in supporting roles within the ‘orchestra’ and around the battles. With the majority of his sketchbooks commissioned by men, the depiction of men with their attributes and the detailing of their postures is the dominant feature in the scenes of hunting, fighting and dancing. This chapter examines the way in which McRae depicted the roles and activities of the Aboriginal men and women of his Country in the face of the erosion of their lifestyles wrought by Government legislation and the impact of alien influences.

**McRae’s figures of the hunter and the hunted**

The artist used silhouette figures to emphasise the stature, musculature and facial profile of his Aboriginal subjects but with his keen observation and skill he was able to impart their intent, speed and dynamism. This is especially pronounced in those images of the hunter and the hunted – their length of stride, angle of trunk to trailing leg and degree of flexion or extension of the torso. Each of the following examples illustrate the techniques that he utilized to engage his viewer in both interpreting and anticipating the activities on show.


In this scene from the *National Museum of Australia Sketchbook, image 13*, the figure at the lower right with hunting stick at the ready, crouches down in pursuit of the goanna. McRae defines the forward momentum of this hunter by drawing the lower trunk and trailing thigh in line as is shown here. His impetus is gained by the forward thrust of his leading leg and leading arm, but with his upper torso bowed in preparation for use of his implement, his forward propulsion is somewhat curtailed. The implications for this posture is well contrasted in the three figures of the chase in the hunting scene, *image 6*, from the *Lang No 2 Sketchbook, 1886*. 
Taken as a group, they are all pursuing kangaroos with their spears attached to their spear throwers for prompt dispatch. However, each of the hunters, through their varying postures, is at a different point in the chase. The leading figure has shortened his stride with a more upright stance. While his lower trunk remains in line with his trailing leg, McRae has slightly extended that of the upper torso to accommodate the accurate forward thrust of his weapon. Similarly, the middle hunter is shown with a greater angle of the leading hip thus maintaining the length of his stride, while he too has slight extension and rotation of his upper torso in preparation for throwing his spear. The last hunter races to catch up, his stride lengthened while his trunk, still in line with his trailing leg, is maintained in a neutral position. There is none of the hyperextension of the upper trunk that is demonstrated by the first two figures. By examining each figure individually, there is for the viewer, no doubt as to the speed of the chase, nor the role of each of the participants at this point in the endeavour.

It is vigour that McRae employed in his depiction of group hunts. In image 7 from the disbanded George McMahon Sketchbook of a chase of three kangaroos, the first of the figures has discarded his small mobile hide and carries his spear thrower in his trailing hand, having already dispatched his spear into the hind-quarters of the closest prey. He still leans forward with his head thrown back, implying that the action has only just occurred. His two companions race behind him, their hides down and their spears by their sides, no longer at the ready. The drawing is full of intent.

George Williams Sketchbook No 2, Image 9 depicts four men chasing emus.
Entering the scene from the left as distinct to that of the right of the previous two drawings, each of these pursuers carries a small mobile hide, with three wielding only their sticks or spear-throwers. The fourth, as he aims his weapon, is finely balanced on his lengthened stride as compared to the postures of his companions.

While not relating directly to the above images Andrew Lang in his Introduction to Kathleen Langloh Parker’s *Australian Legendary Tales*, was critical of the depictions of men while recognising a “good deal of spirit”. However, this examination of the detailing of the stance and positioning in McRae’s images of the hunt elicits for his audience, the intent and motivation of the roles played by each of the participants.

Through each of the above, it is the hunter that is scrutinized, but the artist was equally able to ascribe the dynamics of the pursuit through the postures of the hunted figures.

In dissecting those figures to the right of this image 5, their desperation and haste is imparted to the viewer by the length of their strides and the forward inclination of their bodies while retaining the straight line between the trailing leg and trunk. There is no hyperextension of the upper torso, rather an extension of the neck so that they can either see where they are going or attempting to intimidate their pursuers with weapons. One of these escapees has already been impaled by a spear. In contrast, the stalkers have adopted the postures appropriate to their roles in the chase. Two figures are seen running with spears, the one handling his device in a threatening manner. Another sprinter waves his axe above his head and in maintaining his speed has had to throw his head backwards to accommodate the movement. It is the two lower figures, one in profile, weight on his front leg, and the other face on and equally balanced on both feet, that disclose the magnitude of their intent to launch further weapons at the

---

Lang, 1896: p. xvi.
escaping group. McRae has depicted this action from left to right in contrast to that following.

Returning to McRae’s more usual arrangement of action from right to left, this depiction of *One Tribe defeating another*, image 4, illustrates all the features that have been discussed. The running positions of the escaping group describe their intent in fleeing with their weapons intact – the lengthened stride, the forward flexion of the trunk, the head extended, while some observe the ensuing intentions of those of the attacking horde. These latter are less inclined to pursue, rather they stand firmly balanced on both feet with slight extension of the trunk in preparation for the forward propulsion of their axes, boomerangs and spears at the backs of those fleeing. Through the positions and postures of his figures, the artist conveys with an economy of line and a simplicity of image the connotations for the hunted and the intentions of the hunters.

Dramatic events involving the human hunted and reptile hunter must have impacted on the Aboriginal population as is evidenced in depictions from 5 sketchbooks. Three of these images illustrate snakes as the pursuer. It is documented that Aboriginal people were known to eat snake, but nowhere in McRae’s narratives is there evidence of their being snared.

Inscribed *Goanna hunting*, image 3 from the *National Museum of Australia Sketchbook*, depicts two figures at the centre of the page stalking goannas, one scampers up the far side of a tree and the other along the ground. Attention is drawn to the figure at the far

---

461 Brough Smyth, 1878: vol.1 p. 199.
right of the page. His unorthodox posture, his hair standing on end and with his implement flung aside, he attempts to leap from the slithering serpent. His terror is well evident to the viewer.

Similar records of this type of event appear in National Gallery of Australia Notebook, image 23, and Lang Sketchbook No 1, image 14.

It is documented at the front of Lang Sketchbook No 2 that McRae sought medical attention from Dr William Lang for his wife, after a snake bite. The usual remedy for snake bite was to suck the incision of blood until no more was forthcoming. A hot poultice was then applied and the sucking resumed.462

With numerous depictions of goanna hunting there are however, two graphic images of a goanna attack.

![Image of a goanna attack](image)

The lower scene of image 4 from the Lucas Sketchbook, 1881, sets the stage. The hunted, on the far left, realises that the reptile, with jaws asunder, is intent on attacking him.463 Rather than being of assistance, the pursuing figure has spurred the goanna to take hold of the victim’s naked ankle. Each figure in the drama elicits intent, action and emotion according to his role.

This is an expansion of an event from image 3 of the Bremner Notebook, 1880, and because of the proximity in time of the depictions, it must have been a significant incident or series of incidents that occurred in the early 1880’s.

![Image of a goanna attack](image)

---

462 Beveridge, 1889; p. 53.
463 Brough Smyth, 1878: p. 248. ‘The blacks generally keep out of the way of the iguana when it is savage or angry... It will sometimes run after one who is trying to kill it.’
The sensations of performance

That McRae uses his skill in depicting the emotions of his figures with aggression, with fear and also with humour, is well illustrated in the National Gallery of Australia Notebook.

Image 3 from the book conveys an exuberance through the high kicking and counterbalancing of each of these bodies in a chaotic and undisciplined representation. With multiple spears and shields held aloft, their legs and bodies are flung in abandon about the scene. There is no congruity of pose nor position of attributes between the participants. It is in contrast with those more dignified performances that have been drawn in other books and is exemplified three pages later in image 5 from the same sketchbook.

This depiction should be read from left to right. The first two participants adopt a dignified spacing, their spears parallel. As the performance progresses the dancers become massed, holding their implements at haphazard angles before again distancing themselves and returning their spears to a more formal attitude. The distribution of figures across the page insinuates that the performance begins at a decorous pace, becoming bustling and frenzied while still retaining discipline before diminishing to an orderly and methodical end. The viewer is thus able to read the progression of the event.

The National Museum of Australia Sketchbook continues with further dynamic depictions of paired fighters. Image 9 begins at the bottom of the page with two figures in a bout using clubs.
Three other depictions on the page demonstrate prowess in wrestling and boxing, both clothed and naked.\textsuperscript{464} With each, the disposition of the bodies by McRae clarifies the endeavour and the power of the encounter, enabling the viewer to fully appreciate the balance and effort expended by each of the participants. The techniques and handholds of the grappling combatants have been fully expressed by the artist. This is comparable to the drawing by Wilhelm van Blandowski who toured central Victoria in the 1850’s. Commenting that the contests employed no spectator involvement, this evidences Blandowski’s ability to insinuate himself into many of the activities of the Aboriginal Australians that he was meeting at this time.\textsuperscript{465}

There are no further images of wrestling by McRae, but the physicality of boxing interactions obviously intrigued him, as he explored the positions and outcomes further in image 11.

\textsuperscript{464} This is discussed by Le Souëf, 1878: p. 293.
\textsuperscript{465} Allen, 2010: p. 118.
As the rising fist of one fighter in the lower centre image connects with the under chin of his opponent, its force sends this figure careering backwards, arms in no position to break his fall. Across the centre of the page, two figures face off in a regular stand, each with an arm protecting face and chin, however to their right, as one combatant leans forward to protect his torso, his chin is left exposed to an assault by his foe who readies his aim for the decisive undercut! The uppermost depiction draws on McRae ability to show the contortions and balance that these bouts involved. These two pages, Image 9 and Image 11, depict not just the applications and outcomes of these encounters but the mastery by the artist of the mechanics of the bout and the reactions by the human body. Towards the end of the notebook, image 27, McRae returns to the theme in a humorous postscript.

Two kangaroos stand chest to chest, balanced on their hind legs and tails, their forelegs at the ready for the bout. To their left two naked humans face off at each other, leaning forward on a wide based stance with arms positioned to engage. Both species are using similar techniques to establish their dominance, reiterating the congruity between all the living creatures around the artist.

Observations of the peculiar and unfamiliar

There are two pages in this sketchbook that are particularly poignant in their commentary by McRae, on alien influences that were now being promulgated on the Aboriginal people of his locale.
Image 10 depicts two rows of figures. The lower illustrates four musicians, all in jackets or tunics. Two wear square crowned hats and are blowing wind instruments while the other two sport the pantaloons and the conical head gear of the Chinese. The one participant waves his sticks in the air as he prepares to strike the two drums suspended about his chest. The other is playing a violin, on which McRae has detailed the scroll at the end of the instrument’s neck and the individual hairs of the bow.

Above this orchestra six figures cavort. Dressed in sleeved jackets and hats, the intensity of their involvement with the music is imparted to the viewer by the whirling and twirling of their arms and legs in gay abandon. While the dancers are disposed in pairs there is no cohesion of movement, nor physical or visual engagement. Rather the figures are involved only in their own actions – an interesting comment and comparison with the ceremony and celebration performances that McRae illustrated so extensively and where congruity and interaction between the participants were such features.

A later image (image 20) in the notebook illustrates the uninhibited prancing of figures in response to alcohol. The page is divided into three scenes. At the upper right a
musician performs. Clothed in hat, jacket and long trousers, he plays an instrument that has the signature curved outline of the violin and the detailing of the bow and neck. He is providing the entertainment to which the nine figures in the middle section are responding. All are clothed in long trousers and have hats, either on their heads or raised in celebration of their inebriation. The man to the far left lifts a glass as if to define the tone of the occasion. Those across the centre, grasp their fellows’ arms to prevent their falling, as they fling their legs about with reckless abandon. McRae has conveyed only the *bon vivant* and gaiety of this situation but in the lowest scene, a different emotion is revealed. Two clothed figures are drinking – one with his glass halfway to his mouth prances across the page. Another has thrown back his head prior to emptying the vessel at his lips. In his counter hand he clutches a bottle. From the right of the depiction, a hatted figure dressed in jacket and trousers strides purposefully onto the episode, cane raised as if to strike in indignation. This individual is being restrained by a seemingly beseeching figure who grasps at his trailing arm. In portraying the dignity of the one, McRae has emphasised the inebriation and intoxication of the others as his commentary on the imbibing of alcohol. It should be remembered that the artist was reported to be a teetotaller, though he would have been versed in the effects of ‘drink’. Dr Lang had noted the intoxication of McRae’s wife in his inscription at the beginning of *Lang Sketchbook, No 2*.

William Thomas as Assistant Protector of Aborigines had an ongoing concern with drunkenness in the Aboriginal communities with which he was involved.

He had little support against its spread. Artists were depicting its effects, promulgating the perceptions that urban dwellers had for the Aboriginal population as is seen in this lithograph by Charles Rodin.

In drawing the *National Gallery of Australia Notebook*, which is dated to the 1890s, McRae was in his sixty’s. He was thus able to observe and react to the effect of the changing attitudes of the Aboriginal populations to the social and physical conditions that had been wrought on his Country along the Murray Valley. Through this notebook, McRae has illustrated his Aboriginal fellows mimicking the Europeans. In recording some erosion of behaviours through influences that he could not condone, the artist depicted Aboriginal Australians playing as they observed their counterparts at play, while still exercising their part in their traditional and cultural lives. This is most obvious in their

---

466 Williams, 1927.
adoption of European dress. In contrast to these dynamic silhouettes in the *National Gallery of Australia Notebook*, were the earlier and more staid figures, now nattily dressed from boots to hat, that begin by appearing ancillary to the dramas that were being played – these ‘dandies in the field’.

**The advancement of the ‘dandified figure’, the Chinaman and the firearm.**

Initially, McRae depicted dressed figures observing corroborees.

![Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Walker Collection No 1, 1862, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.](image)

This event is being watched by a white-faced couple, dressed in European fashion – she in a floor length dress finished with a stole about her shoulders and hat on her head and he wears knee high boots and britches, a waistcoat, cravat and jacket and his attire finished with a square crowned hat and stick in hand.

![Lang Album, A Port Phillip Squatter, 1850, H 82.277/1, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.](image)

As a standard dress for a man, reference needs only to be made to a photograph from the Lang Album, by an unidentified photographer[^468] from the mid 1800s which illustrates each of the elements seen here except for the walking cane.

[^468]: Say, 2005: p. 73.
This image from 1864 also illustrates a man observing the festivities, but this time dressed in trousers with waistcoat, cravat and long jacket and wearing a square crowned hat. His face still retains some white features but is more hirsute. Drawn by McRae when he was known to be in the vicinity of ‘The Hermitage’ at Barnawartha North, a property owned by David Reid, an Honorary Correspondent of the Central Boar appointed to watch over the interests of the Aborigines, it can be speculated that it is this gentleman depicted.

This second image illustrates the ceremony being watched by two gentlemen. Each is dressed in britches with knee high boots, waistcoats, cravats and jackets and wearing hats. One carries his cane while the other uses his for support. The fine detail is extended to the fly of their trousers and the pocket slits of the garment beneath their coats. Each is drawn clean shaven and white faced. Again, with a date of 1864, and in the locality of the Murray River flats at North Barnawartha, this was adjacent to the Chauncy/Poole vineyard so these two men may be Captain John Poole, Theresa Walker’s husband, and William Chauncy, her brother.

---

469 BPA 1861: p. 34
470 Chapter: ‘The Art of Ceremony and Celebration
Sketch of squatters. Drawn by Tommy, an upper Murray Aboriginal. 1864 (Yakaduna or Tommy McRae, Barnes) was drawn during the same period. To whom this inscription can be attributed is unknown, but the image was published in Robert Brough Smyth’s Aborigines of Victoria, in 1878. In this volume no credit was given to McRae, it being ‘drawn by a native lad.’\(^\text{471}\) It illustrates the dress of two sets of three figures. To the left two men wear knee high boots with britches while the third is dressed in long trousers. They finish their garb with waistcoats, cravats and jackets, each detailed with pocket slits and buttons. They wear their hats at jaunty angles with one carrying a walking cane while gesturing with a pipe in his hand. Another grasps his pipe in his mouth. The threesome to the right present a different episode. Each is wearing ankle length trousers, the first, a checked pair detailed with a fly and topped by a plain waistcoat, jacket and slim tie. With nape length hair and a tall crowned hat, his facial features are clearly defined. He waves his cane demonstrably at the figure to his immediate left. This man is attired in long coloured trousers and short check jacket which has no skirt and is closely buttoned from waist to neck. In his wearing of a dome crowned hat and carrying no assignable accoutrements his uniform suggests a man of different standing. The rightmost man watches the interchange carefully. He sports the more standard dress of long coloured trousers secured with a belt. His jacket displays a faint texture while his waistcoat is buttoned up to the narrow tie at his neck. His face is well featured and covered with hair while his dress is completed with a tall crowned hat worn low over his brow. He carries a walking cane and a stockwhip. Where worn, the skirts of all the long jackets have a contrasting lining which is on show. McRae has observed the variety of clothing adopted by the white male populace, defined in this case by their uncoloured faces. He has also defined the differing status of some of his figures with their longer skirted jackets as is demonstrated by the interaction between the two central right figures.

As with the previous 3 drawings, this is a single page for which there is no known context. It has however set the scene for McRae’s depictions of uniform dress of the men he was illustrating.

Groups of formally dressed white faced but hirsute men appeared in the 1875 Notebook commissioned by Roderick Kilborn. Image 3 is spread across the double page of the notebook. Shaded by a tree, the left four figures stand engaged with each other. Each sports ankle length trousers or britches with knee high boots. They wear buttoned waistcoat with slit pockets, skirted textured jacket done to just below the necktie and their outfits are finished with a square crowned hat. Three carry their canes while the fourth leans on his. To the right stand a further two figures, looking away from each other. Wearing the standard uniform of waistcoat, jacket and tie, one has ankle length trousers while the other is attired in britches and knee-high boots. The right-hand man looks out of the frame of the drawing, gesturing with his pipe while the other turns to face the group to his left. Appearing early in the narrative, McRae has illustrated, in detail, the garb of his subjects, as if to emphasise their adherence to standards of dress in his environment.

McRae continued to include images of European men in the subsequent notebook. Image 7 from Bremner Notebook, 1880, depicting three formally dressed figures in McRae’s now standard dress observing a pursuit with somewhat different consequences. Rather than pursuing game, four Aboriginal men wielding spears, clubs and shields are chasing down a group of unarmed figures. The static stance of the dressed men contrasts with the dynamism of both the escaping group and the forward thrust of shadowing huntsmen with their weapons at the ready. It is this juxtaposing that makes McRae’s depictions so readable and that introduces indelible impressions in the mind of the viewer. It is difficult though to decipher a relationship between the two scenes.
There is a close relationship between all scenes on this double page format, *image 10*, from the *Kilborn Notebook*. The dress of the two men illustrates the alternatives available and it can be speculated that because of the discrepancy of height, this is an adult male and boy observing an event in which the Aboriginal people are performing with waving boomerangs, clubs and shields. The participants wear no body paint but are sporting fringed skirts and wear feathers on their foreheads. The viewer is enticed into the scene by the gaze of the two male observers, until the question arises as to the relevance of the dressed and hatted woman who, in the background, is scurrying from both the men and the event. The disposition of the dancers, male observers and the woman in this scene suggests that this last has been turned away from the spectacle and that it is only the men that have been allowed to remain and watch. Such an occasion is described in detail by John Hinkins, in his *Life amongst The Native Race with extracts from a diary, 1884*.

This depiction, *image 10*, from the *Bremner Notebook* is about traditions and behaviours rather than about the woman that is depicted. The lower scene illustrates 9 dancers with legs bedecked in brush and waving music sticks. The upper scene is touching and sensitive as a dressed figure presents flowers to a lady. She has her hair held in place by a bonnet and wears a bodice with deep full collar and a cinched waist. She faces her admirer and as their hands brush, his hat falls. Competition is however in the wings as a rival rushes from the right, waving his pipe and gesturing. The face of the woman is left untouched while those of the men are hirsute. The artist’s insightful observations and his ability to translate the emotions of this interaction into visual representation envelops the viewer in the occasion, becoming all the more poignant when it is

---

472 Hinkins, 1884: p. 35. Appendix 12.
considered that the artist has juxtaposed in the lower and upper scenes, his perception of the contrasting approaches to the ‘exchange of women’. The depiction is informed by the preceding pages of ceremonial dances that may be depicting the two different tribes coming together to finalize the transfer.\textsuperscript{473} In the first, the participants with brush decoration to their ankles, dance with shields and spears. In the following, the participants’ only adornment are double feathers attached to their foreheads. They too wield weapons of war – clubs, shields, boomerangs and short spears. Two tribes have thus met for the swapping of women with an inevitable outcome of a show of strength and a negotiated peace which is illustrated a couple of pages later in the notebook.

The second depiction of a similarly dressed woman occurs in, image 3, \textit{Lang Sketchbook No 2}, 1886. It is about the men to which the image is orientated.

![Image](image3_lang_1886.jpg)

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 3, \textit{Lang Sketchbook No 2}, 1886, University of St Andrews Library, Fifeshire, Scotland.

Four of them, each with in filled face, observe an interaction between a hirsute fifth man and a pale skinned woman. In European costume of ground length dress and severely cinched waist, her long hair covers the bodice and shoulders. She concentrates her gaze on the donor of the flowers, held in her right outstretched hand. She wears no hat nor carries a bag. The question arises as to whether the ‘dandies’ who have made their appearance on this page, are those same men who appear in the ceremonial dance scene preceding and the aggressive ambush and feud that follows, revealing the ability with which the artist sees his people move from important issues of their own culture into the mimicry of that being played around them. If so, this depiction is commenting on the expeditiousness with which the Aboriginal people were able to negotiate the colliding worlds of the Aboriginal Australian and the encroaching outsider.\textsuperscript{474}

\textsuperscript{473} Brough Smyth, 1878: vol 1, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{474} There is a detailed notation interpreting an image of some similarity, which appears on page 8 of the \textit{National Museum of Australia Sketchbook}. ‘This picture represents a few natives who have been employed at shearing time on some station and taken out their wages in “plenty good fellow clothes” and made themselves “along a white fellow swell”. The Australian natives are very fond of copying white men’s manners in dress when they can manage to do so.’
McRae further expands on his observed behaviours and interactions between the non-indigenous men with another image, image 13, from *Lang Sketchbook No 2*, 1886.

Three sets of figures plus one are ranged across the page. The left hand two carry walking canes and are gesturing with their pipes to those to their right and to the seventh single figure to the far right. The next are shown shaking hands, the first time that this has been illustrated. The right-hand pair are in conversation, the one with his pipe in his mouth while the other is gesturing towards his companion with his one hand whilst waving his pipe with the other. It is the far-right hand man who is the exception. With check trousers, waist coat, jacket, cravat and hat like those depicted, he has an obviously in filled face, a pipe in his mouth and with his head cocked back, looks out of the right frame of the drawing, as if dissociated from the activity illustrated. This page is preceded by fish hunting from a canoe with the family and feuding scenes between two combatants and followed by an ambush and escape. Again, this illustrates an Aboriginal Australian moving between the two cultures existent in the Murray Valley.

In the *National Museum of Australia Sketchbook*, there is only one depiction, image 10, of dandified figures. Drawn for an unknown patron and at an unknown date, this
sketchbook came to the museum in 1986 from a British antique book dealer. Each of the drawings is notated by an anonymous hand and Tommy McRae is described as "Warra-euea", King of the Wan-whanna tribe, New South Wales, Australia. The scene of the drawing in question is located by its flora – Murray pine, casuarina and weeping pittosporum. It follows an image of the hunting on water of swans, fish and tortoises, while it precedes 'stalking emus' and 'opossum catching'.

The seven figures of approximately equal height are dressed in trousers or britches, knee-high boots or shoes, collars and ties, waistcoats, jackets and hats, one with a light-coloured hatband. Three carry their walking canes while one rests on his. Only one figure smokes a pipe but the darkened visages of each is individualized by the length of beard, hair or angle of the hat. It is the right-hand figure that expresses a different demeanour. With his jacket buttoned to his throat so that no collar is visible, his hat aplomb the back of his head, he stands with his arms stretched akimbo in contrast with his more dignified fellows. McRae has set out to define this difference, though its position in the narrative gives no further clue to its interpretation. It is inscribed as 'Civilisation'.

This picture represents a few natives who have been employed at shearing time on some station and taken out their wages in “plenty good fellow clothes” and made themselves “along a white fellow swell”. The Australian natives are very fond of copying white men’s manners in dress when they can manage to do so.475

The adoption of western dress by the Aboriginal people has been evidenced in photographs from the 1850s. In the John Hunter Kerr collection in the State Library of Victoria there are two pictures of special note. The collodion wet-negative photographic process had been introduced to Victoria in 1853476 and was taken up by Kerr to record both views around his station, Fernyhurst, and the Aboriginal people who frequented the area as they traversed along the Loddon Valley between the Mission Stations at Franklinford and Lake Boga in the Murray Valley.477

The first was taken next to a traditional bark hut. While the two female figures are draped in possum skin cloaks, the male figure wears white, ankle length trousers belted at his waist, a white shirt and a bowler hat. The very whiteness of his garb accentuates his stature.

476 Willis, 2005: p. 49.
477 Kerr, 1872: p. 204.
The second photograph is sited against a roughhewn wooden cottage. With his thumb nonchalantly hooked into his waist band, this relaxed figure is dressed in ankle length loose trousers and wears shoes. He sports a long sleeved, light coloured shirt that is buttoned to the throat, finished with a cravat under a waistcoat. The effect is completed with a wide-brimmed upturned hat. He carries a coiled stock whip to define his occupation and status.

Both these photographs depict portraits of men at ease in their clothing which is well-fitting and complete. It is just such figures that McRae has drawn in his depictions.
Both extant photographs of McRae depict him in European clothing. This head and shoulder photograph presents him in a jacket, shirt with stand-up collar and tie. When this image was taken and by whom is unknown, but it shows that McRae was well versed in the intricacies of male western dress.

There is only the one dandified depiction, image 13, in the Lucas Sketchbook, 1881. This set of drawings was commissioned for an Englishman who would never have the opportunity to visit Australia. McRae was cognizant that he needed to create an environment for his depictions that was not only instructive but to which the viewer could relate. This image from the sketchbook, illustrates two well-dressed and hatted figures. One is attired in boots, waistcoat and jacket finishing the effect with a walking stick. The other is similarly dressed but wears check trousers and instead of carrying a cane stretches out his hand in welcome. The most noticeable difference is however in the hue of their skins, one has a white face against which his beard contrasts. The other has a blackened face with only the outline features apparent. Wending his way through the trees is a smaller man, recognisable as a Chinaman by his pantaloons, tunic, conical hat and yoke, on which is hanging his pannikins. The vegetation of casuarinas, weeping pittosporums and Murray pine sets the location in the Murray Valley, with two ‘dandies’, one European and the other an Aboriginal Australian. The Aboriginal Australians were adopting the dress of the race that was now successfully over-running and farming their
Country while further inroads were observed by other alien cultures from the East. The environment was where the possum, goanna, kangaroo and emu lived and had been hunted, where celebrations and ceremonies were performed, where the waterways provided fish, eggs and birdlife for the taking and where feuds had been resolved. So, a Chinaman makes up the threesome of those that now inhabited and have either changed their relationship with this landscape or are foreign to it.

McRae first introduced images of Chinamen in his *Kilborn Notebook, 1875*, and there are a further 2 depictions in his *Bremner Notebook, 1880*. The Chinese had arrived in Australia via Adelaide as the Gold Rushes took hold. They had walked up the Murray Valley to the Buckland Valley and Beechworth gold fields. As the precious metal ran out in these areas this group moved with the prospectors to Rutherglen and the Murray Valley. There they became involved in market gardening and wood harvesting for fuel used by the steamers plying the Murray River and as fencing for the newly acquired acreages.\(^{478}\) The presence of the Chinese at Rutherglen and Wahgunyah is documented with many references to their employment as woodcutters in the Foord Family Papers in the University of Melbourne archives.\(^{479}\) They lived and worked on the flats near the Murray River and *image 3 from the Lucas Sketchbook* is one of a number which exposes the animosity experienced by this group. It illustrates the changing social landscape that McRae was observing around his people and about his Country.

A depiction of a Chinaman had been introduced earlier in the sketchbook. On a page, *image 7*, that illustrates pairs of Aboriginal Australians duelling, McRae demonstrates that these people did not only spar with each other but would chase the Chinese as well. Armed with spears, axe and shield the cloaked attacker must have presented a fearsome sight, for the pursued figure is losing his yoke and panniers in his haste to escape. In the records there is no reference however to any animosity between the Aboriginal people and the Chinese. Nor are there any articles detailing this in the local newspapers. However, in Philip Chauncy’s article, ‘Notes and Anecdotes of the Aborigines of Australia’ in *The Aborigines of Victoria, volume 2*, (1878) edited by Robert Brough Smyth, he speaks of an incident documenting the contempt that the Aboriginal people had for the Chinese. This could certainly have sparked the scene for their intimidation.\(^{480}\) A precedent for antagonism toward the Chinese would however have been set during

---

\(^{478}\) *Foord 1871*: Foord 1/1 – 1/3, June 6, 1871 and after.

\(^{479}\) *Foord Papers*, 1870: May 1870 to March 1872.

\(^{480}\) *Brough Smyth, 1878*: Vol 2, p. 284.
McRae’s early adulthood and in the vicinity of his childhood home, on the goldfields in the Buckland Valley. Here, reacting to the increasing numbers of Chinese that were arriving in the mining fields of the river valley, fights broke out. By 1857, the European diggers, having initially voiced their complaints to the authorities but to which no response was forthcoming, had given the newcomers an ultimatum to leave. On this passing, the entrenched diggers formed a cordon across the river and gorge and herded those before them through the narrow and precipitous valley and out of the area. In their haste to escape some of the unfortunates fell into the river, were injured or were drowned.

A more threatening image for the viewer is this depiction from the Bremner Notebook, of the axe wielding Aboriginal person in pursuit of a figure who, in his haste, drops his panniers and loses his hat, whereupon his hair escapes from his queue. The posture of the attacker with axe poised above the shoulder, leaves no doubt as to the ferocity of intent. Muriel McGivern in her discussion of the Wahgunyah goldfields suggests that it was a fear of cannibalism that energised the Chinese response to the Aboriginal people.

This hounding of the Chinese was not just depicted on a one to one scale. Museum Victoria holds a McRae image of two Chinese being pursued by four weapon thrusting figures who are also armed with clubs and boomerangs.

In the absence of records of this form of hostility it can only be speculated that these images by McRae reflected the animosity shown by the Europeans to the Chinese because of the latter’s successes.
As early as 1862, Samuel T Gill was depicting just such interactions on the goldfields elsewhere in Victoria.

The earliest extant depiction of the Chinese in the artist’s environment appeared in image 4b, *1875 Kilborn Notebook*. Two figures dressed in pantaloons, tunics and conical hats are strolling across the page. They carry their yokes on their shoulders from which hang their panniers.

These must have been a regular sight around the properties of Rod Kilborn and John Foord where they were employed felling timber, as this more expansive depiction in image 11, *Kilborn Sketchbook* illustrates.

A similarly detailed image of a Chinaman appears on the first page, image 1, of the *National Gallery of Australia Notebook*. Recognisable from his dress, head gear and the yoke that he balances across his shoulders, this figure is however progressing in the opposite direction to every depiction that has been previously discussed. On this occasion it is a single figure in the upper left of a page of disparate images and as such would have been the final drawing that would have been executed on the page if McRae was following his usual custom of drawing from the bottom of the page.

---

486 Foord, 1870.
Other images on the page provide no context for its inclusion. It could however be seen as a content’s summary for the rest of the notebook. Commencing at the lower edge is a half-length formally dressed figure with darkened face and a curious hairdo. On the centre left is a dignified and well-dressed man in britches and knee-high boots, waistcoat, collar and tie and textured jacket. With hands in his pocket he wears a square crowned hat. His face is in filled and being drawn in profile, his beard is defined. The upper right of the page is occupied by a pair of Aboriginal people duelling with the traditional clubs and shields. Beneath them two figures in proximity to each other, take aim at a foe outside the frame of the page – the one from behind a shield with a spear while in contrast, another figure wields a gun. There are only two other extant McRae drawings in which this weapon is identified in the hand of an Aboriginal person, both hunting waterfowl.\textsuperscript{487}

This was not the first occasion in which the gun was illustrated in the arsenal of the Aboriginal people. Upper centre right of the pre-1874 bark etching from Lake Tyrell, downstream of Swan Hill, documents the weapon in the hands of a figure watching the birdlife feeding across the plains of the Murray Valley.

\textsuperscript{487} National Gallery of Australia Notebook, image 18: George McMahon Sketchbook, Image in Private Collection and illustrated in Sayers, 1994, p. 130.
In his records of Fernyhurst, in the Loddon Valley, Victoria, in the early 1850s photographer John Hunter Kerr has staged one of his Aboriginal subjects draped in a possum skin cloak and aiming a rifle out of the frame. Images alongside this detail shields, spears, tomahawks and boomerangs and other weapons of the hunt and the fight, as if the gun had become a ubiquitous addition to their arsenal.

Aboriginal people were initially supplied with firearms in the colony in 1839. They were employed to shoot lyrebirds for a supply of their tail feathers,\(^488\) it did not take long for their use to be transferred against the whites and against each other, this latter instigated by both the Aboriginal people themselves and by the settlers.\(^489\) The Protectors of the Aborigines had tried to curb the spread with little impact and there was a major clash between armed Aboriginal people and the Border Police unit at Yarra Glen, Victoria, at the beginning of 1840.\(^490\) Samuel T Gill sketched an Aboriginal person


stealing a gun from a sleeping shepherd and this may be the way in which the supply of arms and ammunition was further secured.

The National Gallery of Australia Notebook contains 29 pages of images that provide McRae’s insights and commentaries on the evolving features of the life of Aboriginal people. There are no depictions of non-indigenous figures, instead his dapper men in image 17 display their formal clothing, one mirroring that on the first page while the other four are dressed in long trousers of differing textures, with the standard waist coat, collar and tie, jacket and square crowned hat. All rest their hands in their pockets and of the central two, one smokes a pipe whilst the other holds a walking cane. Of the five, four are engaged with their neighbour while the fifth looks away to the right.

As McRae has done in other narratives, this image is sandwiched between a watery hunting scene for tortoise, swan and Murray cod from canoes and a contrasting depiction of water hens, ducks with their ducklings and an Aboriginal person taking aim at a single bird with a rifle. Within this context, the dandified figures illustrate the effortless adoption by the Aboriginal population of features of the invading culture which appealed to their vanity.
The mimicry of western dress by some Aboriginal Australians is further emphasized with image 19, in which McRae places his dignified figure from the first page in his scene of the Murray Valley with its acacias, weeping pittosporum and casuarinas. Aboriginal people were thus taking their place across the conflicting cultures.

There is only one page on which McRae has juxtaposed a resplendent Aboriginal man with a formally dressed European. This appears on the penultimate page, image 17, of the Lang Sketchbook No 2.

To the left of the depiction is the statuesque cloaked and bearded figure with an axe and long, barbed spear resting on the ground. He looks and gestures to the right and toward a European dressed and hatted figure waving an unidentifiable attribute in his hand whilst gesturing also up and to the right of picture frame. Both figures are executed in contrasting ink to the main theme of the image serving to direct the viewer’s gaze to the ultimate depiction on the following page which introduces the subject of ‘where have all the women gone?’
'Where have all the women gone?'

Image 18 depicts a family group in which both adult figures are cloaked. A naked child has scaled a dead tree after a possum to add to the collection hanging from the hunter’s hand. The faces are in filled except for the following woman who, carrying a small child and a digging stick, sports an uncoloured face. That it depicts a woman in mourning has been considered. Le Souëf, in discussing the customs of the Aboriginal people on the Goulburn, Upper and Lower Murray Rivers, makes mention of the practise, on the death of a relative, of daubing the head and hair with clay. Certain ritual behaviours would then have been performed. While this drawing could satisfy the former it is difficult to identify the latter. It depicts the family away from their camp exercising their food collecting capabilities. Rather, the prominence of the uncoloured face of the female member is a statement by McRae of her ethnicity, suggesting an Aboriginal person of mixed blood who has returned to this roaming group as a consequence of the ‘Half-caste’ Act. The Act legislated that those Aboriginal people under 34 years old and classified as less than ‘full-blood’, were to be expelled from the care and support of the Reserves and Mission Stations.

This Act was an amendment to the Aboriginal Protection Act 1869, (Victoria). The original act – To provide for the Protection and Management of Aboriginal Natives of Victoria, sought to control the Aboriginal people by regulating their employment, marriage, social and daily lives. The Act was introduced in a climate in which free education was to be offered to all the non-indigenous population and the democratic vote extended to all non-indigenous males, not just the wealthy. These were invasive restrictions on the Aboriginal population. Having curtailed the access of these people to their country, their heritage and their customs and culture, it was suggested that now, those Aboriginal people who could not verify their pure descent should take their place and make their own way in the alien society rather than continue to drain the government’s resources. With this legislation it was assumed that the Aboriginal

491 Le Souéf, 1878: p. 297.
493 The Aborigines Act of 1886 is often referred to as the ‘half-caste’ Act, as it was through this legislation that the colonial government of Victoria, through the control of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, attempted to break up Aboriginal families and communities on the reserves. Under the 1886 Act the government had the power to remove any Aboriginal person from a reserve who was under the age of 34 and was categorised as less than ‘full blood’.
population would wane, that the Reserves could be amalgamated lessening the strain on the public purse.\textsuperscript{495} The 1886 Act covered both men and women with exclusions for a half-caste woman married under Government law to an Aboriginal person or a child of an Aboriginal person where that person was of pure descent.

McRae’s depiction appears subsequent to the artist’s end paper suggesting that it was added after the legislation was enacted in December 1886. The image of this white-faced woman dressed in possum skin cloak appears in no other extant images. McRae chose to make his commentary of the Act through his drawing of this woman. Its explanation may lie in the very reason that Aboriginal women had initially sought the support of companionship available in the Missions and Reserves. Rather than seek a life and employment as unskilled ‘help’ in the alien society where they would be exposed to the vagaries of a system of exploitation, the artist posed that they could move back to the communities where some of their cultural heritage was being sustained and that would provide physical and psychological support.

It is interesting to note that in McRae’s sketchbooks there is no example where only Aboriginal women occupy the page. They are instead insinuated into the life and activities of their male counterparts about which the artist was commenting in response to his male patrons. This mirrors the referencing of the women in many of the books on the Aboriginal people of Australia and Victoria that were being written and circulated through the nineteenth century. An examination, for instance, of the index of R Brough Smyth’s \textit{Aborigines of Victoria}, makes mention of women’s reception as wives and widows and their roles as doctors and ambassadors.\textsuperscript{496} A similar assessment can be attributed to A W Howitt’s \textit{The Native Tribes of South-east Australia}.\textsuperscript{497} Their responsibilities as providers and supporters within the tribe are subsumed into the accounts of the group’s general culture. To glean details of the treatment of Aboriginal women and their contributions it is necessary to trawl the chapters of Peter Beveridge, \textit{The Aborigines of Victoria and Riverina}, (1889), Edward M Curr, \textit{Recollections of Squatting in Victoria}, (1883) and John Hunter Kerr, \textit{Glimpses of Life in Victoria}, (1872) looking for more general information. This is not unreasonable when the writers of these accounts were men and were probably interacting with Aboriginal males rather than observing the Aboriginal population as a whole.

In examining the Aboriginal population statistics listed in the reports of the ‘The Central Board to watch over the interests of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria’ which then became ‘The Board for the Protection of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria’, David Reid at ‘The Hermitage’, was, in 1862, providing supplies to 48 Aboriginal Australians under his care.\textsuperscript{498} This number had plummeted to 27 by 1864.\textsuperscript{499} It was during this period that McRae was making his drawings of corroborees that came into the possession of

\textsuperscript{495} foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/vic7i_doc_1886.pdf

\textsuperscript{496} Brough Smyth, 1878; vol 11, p. 455.
\textsuperscript{497} Howitt, 1904: pp. 817-8.
\textsuperscript{498} BPA 2, 1862: p. 17.
\textsuperscript{499} BPA 3, 1864: p. 13
the neighbour, Theresa Walker. It can thus be surmised, that McRae was included in this census but that by the early 1870s, in the absence of evidence of his exact whereabouts, he and his family were part of the wandering 100 unaligned with any station.\footnote{500}

Relevant to the picture of the status of the Aboriginal people in Northern Victoria is the statistic that in 1869, between Tangambalanga on the Kiewa River west to Echuca, 84 Aboriginal persons were counted by the relevant stations.\footnote{501} Of these 46 were male but there were only 15 females, the rest being children. Similarly, in 1877, 89 persons were recorded between Myrtleford and Ulupna on the Murray River.\footnote{502} Of these, 40 were noted as male and only 24 as female with 25 children. From these figures it can be concluded that there was a disproportionate paucity of women. It could be argued that the women of the Murray Valley were congregating at the depots and Mission Stations where there were, on average, 17.7 males to every 14.4 females.\footnote{503} However the figures for the major reserve at Coranderrk in the Yarra Valley near Melbourne, list 25.5 men to every 27.5 women.\footnote{504} For these Aboriginal women, their traditions, customs and rituals relating to specific sites on their Country had to be internalised with rare or no opportunity for their expression, the relevance of which is discussed by Jan Pettman in her article \textit{Gendered Knowledges}.\footnote{505}

While the timeframe covered by the works of McRae is greater than that of the figures presented above, a survey of the artist’s drawings will give an entry into his illustration of women in his world of the Aboriginal people.

\footnotetext[500]{BPA 7, 1871: p. 7 and BPA 8, 1872: p.11.}
\footnotetext[501]{BPA 6, 1869: pp. 16, 17.}
\footnotetext[502]{BPA 13, 1877: p. 12.}
\footnotetext[503]{BPA 6, 1869: pp. 16, 17, 32; BPA 8, 1872: p. 24; BPA 14, 1878: p. 12.}
\footnotetext[504]{BPA 7, 1871: p. 12; BPA 8, 1872: p. 9; BPA 9, 1873: p. 7; BPA 10, 1874: p. 8.}
\footnotetext[505]{Pettman, 1992: p. 121.}
Incidence of depictions of women in McRae’s single sheets, sketchbooks and notebooks across 1860 – 1898

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sketchbook</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>no of depiction</th>
<th>no of depicted</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>non-Aboriginal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 1</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 2</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 3</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 4</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Notebook</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremner Notebook</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas Sketchbook</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang 1 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lefaire Sketchbook</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang 2 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Sketchbook</td>
<td>&gt;1891</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat M A Sketchbook</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat G A Notebook</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 1 Sketchbook</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 2 Sketchbook</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G McMahon Sketch</td>
<td>late 1890’s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatlief Sketchbook</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersed Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Looseleaf</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray Sheet</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koori Heritage Trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellwood sheet</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGV sheet 1</td>
<td>c1880</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGV sheet 2</td>
<td>c1880</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the approximate 245 extant drawings that have been analysed there are only 32 that include women. Appearing in the full array of McRae’s environments, both before and during his lifetime, they can be divided into categories. Forming the most numerous (10) are those family groups of a single man or men, a woman and child or children, seeking small game. One such image appears towards the end of the Lucas Sketchbook, 1881. This book was commissioned by an adolescent Scottish boy for his delicate older brother who had not been able to make the trip to Australia. It is a book that conveys the artist’s image of his Australia through its landscape, the fauna peculiar to its environment, the changing demography and the pertinent aspects of Aboriginal battles, celebrations, fighting and hunting.
This example, image 11, Lucas Sketchbook 1881, illustrates naked men stalking and chasing goannas and possums. The cloaked woman follows with digging stick over her shoulder, bulging dilly bag and baby on her back. An ambulant child brings up the rear waving his boomerang. What lurks behind the stump in the foreground is yet to be deciphered. There was certainly no expectation of larger game as they carry no spears, but they are well supplied with provisions.

These expeditions were covered extensively by McRae in his commissioned works from the 1880s onward.

This slightly different setting, image 4, in the Gatliff Sketchbook, after 1898, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney, provides to the viewer no illustration of the woman’s contribution to the larder. She carries a digging stick, a small child and leads another by the hand. She is preceded, between the eucalypt and native pines, by four men laden with possum, goanna and a kangaroo, the procurement of which necessitated a barbed spear which the hunter also carries across his shoulder – a very successful hunting expedition. The methods of these captures are furnished on the page before with an elaborate depiction of this extended family at work and is one of the few images where a woman is part of a foraging party that encompasses large game.
Two of the adolescents are in the trees dislodging possums which, on falling to the ground, are being dispatched with sticks. The reptile is being subjected to the same fate. The woman is occupied supervising the slaughter while still carrying a baby in her arms as an ambulant child jerks at her cloak. She has thus been an integral element in the success of the outing. The central figure on the page has however been distracted by a huntsman sprinting out of the frame. The contours of his body and the position of his implements exaggerates the haste with which he is retreating. Neither the page before nor that after castes light on what he was doing or where he was going.

It is a related depiction from a much earlier sketchbook, *Lang Sketchbook No 1* (1885), that can offer an explanation with image 17.

A man, woman and child make up this small group. The woman, identified with a small child on her back, carries a hunting stick on which is speared a number of small game, perhaps tortoises. She draws attention to the goannas scurrying up a naked tree, as a further reptile escapes along the ground. It is however around the man that the drama unfolds as he concentrates on the fleeing adolescent and which unfolds in the ensuing narratives. These depict feuding figures that could lead the viewer to the speculation that the youngster was encroaching on a territory into which he was not permitted.

McRae commenced this *Lang Sketchbook No 1* with drawings that reference William Buckley. Conflating two accounts of this convict’s story as told by John Morgan, the image depicts the Aboriginal person who located Buckley beneath a eucalypt calling on
his fellow tribesmen for assistance.\textsuperscript{506} It also acknowledges the women, who observing the wandering apparition, also engaged the rest of their group to confront him.\textsuperscript{507} That both sexes are represented emphasises the extent to which McRae applied preciseness to his accounts.

A second sketchbook commissioned by William Lang and inscribed and dated by him, 1886, was sent to a brother in the UK. Subsequently some of the images were used as illustrations for Kathleen Langloh Parker’s \textit{Australian Aboriginal Tales} and \textit{More Australian Aboriginal Tales}. Pages are devoted to the family proceeding as a unit in procuring game.

This example, \textbf{image 8}, is defined by Murray Valley landscape with the full array of tree types and sizes playing host to reptiles, possums and smaller birds. At a distance is a pair of emus, but with no spear in the hunting arsenal, they are not in danger. The woman is distinguishable by the digging stick across her shoulders while carrying a child and her dilly bag on her back. The accompanying male figure displays much of the dynamism of the depiction as he prepares his assault on the small game. It is through the man’s attention to these that the viewer is introduced to the richness and diversity of the flora and fauna of the environment.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, image 8, Lang Sketchbook no. 2, 1886, University of St Andrews Library, Fifeshire, Scotland.} & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{506} Morgan, 1979: p. 32.  
\textsuperscript{507} Morgan, 1979: p. 33
This depiction, image 4, from the *Bremner Notebook* (1880) specifically illustrates the nuclear family unit. The members appear to be travelling rather than hunting as the cloaked man has shouldered his multiple spears, shield and axe while controlling the antics of a naked child carrying a boomerang. The woman, also cloaked, follows at the rear carrying an infant and a bulging dilly bag on her back with her hunting stick over her shoulder. Game of no variety attracts their attention. However, at the lower left of the page is a pair of emus. One sits on a nest while the other stands protectively, presenting an alternate family unit of which the female is an integral part. McRae’s juxtaposing of these two images may not be unintentional. He was illustrating with humour the parallelism in nature of all that was living in the indigenous communities of the Murray Valley, both human and animal, a feature not unnoticed by the Aboriginal people in the harmonious balance of the environment.

The National Gallery of Australia holds two sketchbooks that were commissioned from McRae by George L Williams when he lived in Corowa. In the first book of 13 pages, the artist has embedded a time frame through the positioning of a William Buckley image. The page, image 3, under discussion belongs in the post Buckley era.
A typical Murray Valley landscape is identified by its trees. A family enters from the right. A naked man shelters behind a small tree and carries, but has not primed, his spear. He has spied the five emus, who in turn are closely watching his advance. The woman follows with digging stick, child and dilly bag. The lack of hunting posse that would have been necessary to hunt down this fast and elusive bird and the minimal weaponry suggests that this was incidental to their expedition. It was rather an exploratory quest along the river flats in search of smaller game, of which none are in view.

The dynamic and fast-moving scenes of the chase of large game that are revealed earlier in McRae’s narratives can be compared to the later pages which illustrate the quest for smaller prey. In all, 51 images of the hunting of large and small game were identified in the sketchbooks and notebooks. 25 of the scenes showed a pursuit by a group of men while 26 illustrated that by a single stalker. Of the 13 complete books that the survey covered, in only 4 did a lone figure in pursuit of large game predate their hunting by more extensive group. Women had joined the foray for the procuring of animals in 9 of the depictions and in all but 1, these occurred later in the narrative. It could be concluded that there was a diminishing availability of kangaroo and emu and a declining Aboriginal population active in traditional activities of food procurement.

Women appear at least once in nearly half of the pages devoted to the hunt for waterfowl, amphibians and fish from canoes. She is typically but not always, accompanied by a child. The involvement of the family group is however discretionary as further images on the page depict only a single figure out spearing.

The Kilborn Notebook, (1875), National Gallery of Victoria, contains the first of only 2 unique images illustrating a party of Aboriginal women.
The Aboriginal group in image 5, is headed by two shield and spear wielding cloaked figures. Their weaponry indicates that they are the menfolk preceding women, also cloaked but of more diminutive stature. They have longer hair, carry sticks over their shoulders and have dilly bags slung across their backs. One is smoking a pipe. Their implements and accoutrements imply a foraging foray. With their bags apparently empty and no game in the hands of the accompanying huntsmen, this page suggests the group is exiting their camp.

In the unrelated George Williams Sketchbook No 2, National Gallery of Australia, is this second image, image 5, of the party of women returning for the day.

All are cloaked, with some carrying their digging sticks over their shoulders while their dilly bags and children are slung across their backs. At the centre is a figure with a barbed spear in hand on which is skewered small animals or amphibians. Behind him a woman balances a load on her head supporting it with both hands – the success of the foray in the field. Unique in its subject, this is as close as McRae came to disclosing woman’s business within his tribal life. Why it should have appeared in this sketchbook is unknown. It is perhaps the counter to Returning from the chase, a page from the now dispersed George McMahon Sketchbook, c1890, image 6. Seven naked men range across the page, some lugging kangaroos and spears over their shoulders while others have skewered smaller game on their spears with the overflow suspended from their hands. No woman accompanies this outfit!
Interspersing the depictions of the chase whether by groups early in the narratives or by a lone hunter, are records of extended groups congregating for ceremonies and celebrations. These occasions are all the more important in the light of the Legislation implemented by the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria. Aboriginal people from all over the state were being encouraged to assemble at Mission Stations and Reserves where many of their rituals and customs were prohibited. McRae, in maintaining his independence outside of these institutions, has depicted the pursuit and performance, albeit in a more fragmented fashion, of some of the traditions that preserved the culture and lifestyle. It is in only 12% (7 in all), of his extensive collection of images of dance that he documents the contribution made by the women as the musicians. They are seated on the ground, clasping their skin cloaks in a hard ball between their knees, striking it with a stick or their open palm and keeping time with increasing fervour as the dance reached its climax.

*Williams Sketchbook No 2, image 10,* is remarkable for one such depiction.

---

508 **Legislation.** In 1858 the Victorian Government established a select committee to inquire into the living conditions of Aboriginal people in Victoria. The subsequent report accepted that Aboriginal communities had witnessed 'their hunting grounds and means of living taken from them' as an outcome of the British occupation of Aboriginal land. Rather than accept responsibility for this injustice the government blamed Aboriginal people themselves for this outcome. The report recommended that a system of reserves be established in remote areas of the colony, both to 'protect' Aboriginal people from further injustices and to ensure that Aboriginal people be contained in order to restrict their freedom and place greater controls over their lives.

**Board for the Protection of Aborigines.** As a result of the 1858 report the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) was established in 1860 to administer the government reserves and missions which increasingly controlled the lives of Aboriginal people. On the reserves a system of Christian education and labour was enforced whereas the traditions of Aboriginal society, including ceremonial practices, were often banned. Additionally, any Aboriginal person who continued to live on their own land was subject to the authority of government appointed local guardians, such as police, clergymen or European landholders.

**Aborigines Protection Act (1869).** In 1869 the BPA became responsible for the administration of the Aborigines Protection Act.

509 Beveridge, 1889: p. 13, see appendix 7, appendix 8.
This ceremonial dance relates closely to those early corroboree scenes of 1860-64, commissioned by Theresa Walker and which first introduced the women as musicians. The entwining and highly decorated bodies of the participants, the extensive brush up their legs and the wavelike motion of the music sticks entices the viewer into the action. Attention is drawn to the small orchestra conducted by the ‘master of ceremonies’ that has been absent from all the depictions of communal events in the sketchbooks so far analysed, as distinct from the single page images. The three women are seated on the ground with raised hands, fingers outstretched as they beat in time to the cloaked figure before them. Their inclusion gives greater context and musicality to which the viewer can respond.

There is a disbanded sketchbook of which it is known that at least five pages came from the George McMahon Sketchbook. They can be related to each other by the grease marks across the images and have been ordered by the progression of these blemishes on the paper. Two depictions are of particular interest at this point. They can again be compared with the 1860-64 corroboree scenes. Both illustrate ceremonial dances, one a gyrating mass of highly decorated participants whose antics are orchestrated by five drumming musicians and a cloaked figure wielding music sticks, similar in layout and content to the scene described above. The seated musicians and their leader do have a prominent position on the page and recognising that McRae worked drawings upwards, it would suggest that these were his initiating idea.
The second, image 8, depicts a more restrained event where each dancer performs within his own space while still taking a lead from the musicians through the ‘master of ceremonies.’ It can be speculated that this page is about the women, as again, the orchestra holds the dominant position in the image - a departure from the McRae’s more usual representation which began with McRae’s earliest extant drawings commissioned by Theresa Walker. The 1860 depiction illustrates a ceremonial event between two groups of Aboriginal Australians in which the musicians have an important role in the traditions of these groups in the Murray Valley.

Whether the drawing was actually commissioned by Theresa Walker is unknown but it certainly came into her possession as dated. Her sympathies had been extending to the indigenous peoples since her first arrival in South Australia in 1837.\(^{510}\) By the end of 1860, she and her husband were residing next to David Reid’s property, The Hermitage, at Barnawartha North. It was from here that supplies were distributed to the local tribes and about which McRae was known to frequent.

\(^{510}\text{Kerr, 1995: p. 471.}\)
There are a further 2 drawings from the Walker source, dated 1864, in which is depicted the orchestra of women conducted by cloaked figures wielding batons. There is however in the first, a unique feature to note. Across the middle stanza of the page two groups of spear and shield wielding tribesmen are facing off against each other. At the rear of the right-hand mob is a collection of smaller cloak wearing figures with sticks over their shoulders. These are members of the tribe who, at the commencement of the engagement, rush out and retrieve the fallen spears – a role for the women.

McRae’s illustration of women in their traditional role as music makers at celebrations is observed at the beginning and end of his career with their more extensive depiction across the single page images, partial and complete Sketchbooks and Notebooks. It is here that the woman’s involvement with the family unit hunting for food is the dominant theme. It is however interesting to note that in only one sketchbook does this subject appear alongside the ambushing and running down of large game by an extended group of huntsmen. Men were instead learning farming and stock handling skills from the settlers and earning money with which to buy desirable commodities. This was in contrast to the lack of compensation that the men received within the Mission and

---

511 Beveridge, 1889: p. 132
Reserves which acted as a disincentive where their wages were being withheld for the betterment of the Institutions.\textsuperscript{514} Women were however drawn into these communities by the companionship that was lacking in some of the disparate groups remaining outside of Government control.\textsuperscript{515} In the climate of diminishing numbers of Aboriginal people observing a traditional lifestyle and the low percentage of women amongst those groups, McRae was thus commenting on the shifting dynamics – the everyday search for sustenance by the nuclear family depended on a changing contribution from its members and that the divisions of labour were less defined.

As noted, 32 depictions of women have been identified in McRae’s art. 4 of these represent non-indigenous subjects of which 3 illustrated responses to traditions and behaviours in men. A fourth is a guest at a corroboree. In this 1862 drawing he included an intricately dressed European women who would have observed no other females at the event to which she was a party. A number of features are introduced - figures dance between trees, hunt fish and turtles, chase a goanna and are poised to strike with a spear at a nesting pair of emu. The house, with pitched roof and chimney pots sets the scene for the European couple who stand arm in arm to the side, observing the ceremonial ritual. No detail has been spared in the depiction of this man and woman. He is dressed in knee high boots, with jacket, waistcoat, collar and tie. He carries a walking cane and wears a hat. The lady is dressed in a full-length gown with cinched waist and a stole around her shoulders. She too wears a hat and carries a handbag.

![Tommy McRae, Walker Collection No 1, 1862, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.](image)

The representation of both dress and pose draws on no previous artistic vocabulary for the artist. The gaze from this couple would suggest that the ceremony was being performed for them, that it was suitable for women and that the drawing had been designed in response to them. McRae was known to organise “‘exhibitions of the nude’ by torchlight”\textsuperscript{516} though there is no documentation in the Walker records, except this drawing, to support any such occasion at which they may have been present.

The 28 depictions of Aboriginal women are included in only 11.5% of the extant drawings of McRae. This compares with the census figures of between 17.9% and 27% of women in the Aboriginal communities along the Northern Victorian corridor that McRae

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{514} BPA 8, 1872: p. 21. \\
\textsuperscript{515} Barwick, 1972: p. 56. \\
\textsuperscript{516} Corowa, 1950, 2009: Corowa Free Press, 1893, p. 117.
\end{flushleft}
frequented in the years 1869 and 1877. This however is only a statistic and it is unknown how many women lived around the artist's Wahgunyah and Lake Moodemere localities.

The distribution of depictions of women in McRae’s drawings may reflect somewhat the demographics of his territory and thus be a contributing factor to their disproportionate representation. Women’s activities had been curtailed by the subsumption of sites of importance by the invading colonists whereby their conventions and intellectual endeavours could no longer be played out. Apart from those drawings commissioned by Theresa Walker, McRae was responding to his male patrons, whom he saw as his audience and for whom he considered his Aboriginal activities of consequence. In presenting his images of men, McRae cast them in the roles of hunter and hunted, carefully illustrating their physical attributes. His hand to hand combats narrated the progression of these interactions. His depictions of each of the participants in dance enlivened and informed his audience. Further, the artist charted the adaption of his community to the pressures of encroaching populations and influences. It needs to be recognised that the roles depicted by McRae were those predicated on his personal experience and of his environment. It is his stories that he was recounting through his art.

---

Chapter 7: The Tree, the Shrub, the Ground; Mapping their course.

The tree is a fundamental feature in most Australian landscapes from the coast and mountains of the eastern seaboard to the expanses of the inland deserts. Wherever its location, it has played an important part in the life of the Aboriginal people. It provided shelter. Its wood was used as a source of heat, as a medium for utensils, weapons and message sticks. It was the material for their canoes. The seeds were harvested while their trunks and canopies gave refuge to birds, insects and animals which the Aboriginal people sought for food. Across the dry expanses of the landscape some could be milked for drinking fluid.\textsuperscript{518} The Aboriginal people also used them as an acknowledgement of place, both of significance and territorial.\textsuperscript{519} These are particularly on show in the mid twentieth century paintings of Albert Namatjira, as he overlaid his propriety on his landscapes of Central Australia.\textsuperscript{520}

But it was as the Europeans, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, were pushing inland from the east that the first indicators of the importance of the tree to the Aboriginal population became apparent to the outside observer.

The tree as a medium on which Aboriginal dendroglyphs\textsuperscript{521} appeared, was identified by Surveyor-General Oxley on the Lachlan River, Central New South Wales, on July 29\textsuperscript{th},

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{518} Brough Smyth, 1878: vol. 1. p. 222.
\item \textsuperscript{519} Black, 1941: p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{520} French, 2002: p. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{521} Carved symbols, Collins Dictionary.
\end{itemize}
He recorded them as paintings and carvings up the lower trunks. Further examples were documented by the explorer Captain Charles Sturt in *Expedition down the Banks of the Macquarie River in 1828 and 1829*, and by J Henderson in *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land, 1832*. Tracts of these intricately carved and incised trees were, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, being recognized across Central NSW, both east and west of the Great Dividing Range from the New South Wales-Queensland border to the upper reaches of the Lachlan River. On some, the full thickness of bark had been removed from a vertical length of the trunk, with shapes and lines deeply cut into the heartwood – taphoglyphs or ‘grave trees’.

On others, it was only the sapwood that was exposed – teleteglyphs, or ‘initiation trees’.

---

522 Etheridge, 1918: p. 2.
523 Etheridge, 1918: plate i.
524 Etheridge, 1918: p. 3.
525 Etheridge, 1918: p. 3.
526 Etheridge, 1918: plate xxxix.
527 Etheridge, 1918: p. 11.
528 Etheridge, 1918: p. 62.
Identified as signposts for significant sites of ceremonies and burials, they displayed extensive symbols of diamonds, half diamonds, triangles, v’s and inverted v’s and concentric circles.\textsuperscript{529} There are only a few figurative goannas and anthropomorphs.\textsuperscript{530}

\textsuperscript{529} McCarthy and Macintosh, 1962: p. 292.
\textsuperscript{530} Etheridge, 1918: plates xxv (4), xxvi (1,2).
Examples of all of these had been ‘located, documented and photographed’ between 1888 and 1917 by Edmund Milne as he compiled his collection of Aboriginal artefacts. These were further expanded with his photographs and other records in two publications from the first half of the twentieth century: *The Dendroglyphs, or ‘Carved Trees’ of New South Wales*, 1918, R. Etheridge Junior, and the second, *Burial Trees*, 1941, Lindsay Black.

Taphoglyphs were found concentrated around the centre and east of New South Wales with their southernmost record at Jindabyne in the Snowy Mountains of that state. Teleteglyphs extended from South-east Queensland to a site just south of the Murrumbidgee River at Darling Point and at Ulladulla on the New South Wales coast. It can thus be concluded that, for the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi people for whom the distribution of taphoglyphs and teleteglyphs was through their traditional Country, the living tree was an important and permanent medium on which to make their mark. There is no record from this time of examples occurring along the Murray River or into Victoria.

There are rare examples of the tree as a figurative feature on rock galleries. Of particular beauty is this specimen, protected from the elements by its position, at Maddjurnai, Arnhemland and dating from 8000 years ago.

---

531 CHAH.; Edmund Milne (1861-1917). I
532 National Museum of Australia: Collectors and collections; Edmund Milne’s Collection. Edmund Milne rose through the New South Wales Railways reaching the position of Assistant Commissioner just prior to his death aged 56 in 1917. Having started his collection as a child, he acquired upward of 1400 items from around New South Wales, identifying the Aboriginals with whom they were connected. He left the collection to the National Museum and during the construction of this institution it was housed until 1985 at the Australian Institute of Anatomy in Sydney.
533 Etheridge, 1918: plate xxxix.
534 Etheridge, 1918: p. 54.
535 Etheridge, 1918: p. 75.
536 Etheridge, 1918: p. 88.
539 Chaloupka, 1993: p. 90.
From its base, the strong roots tether it to the ground while the graceful trunk curves into the leafless canopy. Included are the broken branch stumps that are so evocative of the Australian eucalypt and that became a feature of McRae’s illustrations of the species.

Out in the open and on a rock face in Central New South Wales, there is this depiction of the tree amongst the symbols denoting the presence of the kangaroo and the emu – their spoor.

According to the Aboriginal informant, Mr George Dutton, who in his discussions with N W G Macintosh \(^{540}\) during a study in the mid twentieth century of the location, disclosed that the branches were a device connecting two men integral to the mythological cycle of ‘Eaglehawk and Crow’ \(^{541}\). This legend elucidates that, prior to man, birds inhabited the landscape. They were headed by the eaglehawk and then the crow, who fought each other in various guises until they arrived at an amicable compromise. From these two arose the tribal classes, sometimes known as the Mokwarra and the Kilparra, to which the Aboriginal people of the Murray Valley belong and through and between which their

\(^{541}\) Mathew, 1899: p. 15.
relationships are regulated. The panel is thus significant in comprehending and respecting the gravitas of the site. That it is a tree that links the two, amplifies its installation.

A further exception, also from the main gallery at Mootwingee in Central New South Wales, is this grass tree, as catalogued by the authors in their study.\textsuperscript{542} From the accompanying photograph there can be little doubt as to its identity.

\begin{flushleft}
\textbf{Unknown Artist, Engraving, Grass tree, Mootwingee, reproduced from McCarthy and Macintosh, The Archaeology of Mootwingee, Western New South Wales, December 1962, plate XXIV, no 4.}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{Charles P Mountford, Photograph, Xanthorrhoea thronthonii, Grass Tree, Central Australia, ?1940, Central Australian Photograph Album.}\textsuperscript{543}
\end{flushright}

With these among the few examples, it was not until Aboriginal people were encouraged to transfer their depictions to paper, that the tree was manifest as a subject that the non-indigenous spectator could recognize. Its appearance is not extensive, but it is worth noting the exception of an undated sketchbook by the Aboriginal artist, Erlikilyka, who was born in 1865 and accompanied the Spencer-Gillen expedition in 1901 across Central Australia.\textsuperscript{544} Between 1901 and 1902 Frank Gillen and Baldwin Spencer travelled north through the Northern Territory, making notes, taking photographs and movie film and sound recordings of corroboree songs, sacred songs and on one occasion, the arguments between women and between men.\textsuperscript{545} It was from these that the pair went on to write \textit{The Northern Tribes of Central Australia}. Having crossed the South-Australian and Northern Territory border, they were joined on April 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1901, at a place called Charlotte Waters, by two Arrente people, one of whom was Erlikilyka, also known as Jim Kite.\textsuperscript{546} At Alice Springs on May 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1901, Gillen solicited Erlikilyka,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{542} McCarthy and Macintosh, 1962: pp.249-98
\textsuperscript{543} nla.gov.au/Record/4852897.
\textsuperscript{544} Sayers, 1994: p. 78.
\textsuperscript{545} Mulvaney, Ed., 1997: p. 355n.
\textsuperscript{546} Gillen, 1901: p. 28.
\end{flushright}
having already recognized that he could draw, to illustrate some blank pages in his
diary[^547] and went on to write his notes around the pictures.[^548]

![Erlkilyika, ‘Drawing of native tree’](image1)


![Erlkilyika, Drawing of native tree](image2)

Erlkilyika, Drawing of native tree, South Australian Museum, Adelaide.

A book of Erlkilyika drawings is now held by the South Australian Museum, being one of only two by the artist. All 24 sheets depict native trees with notes on their identification in both Arrente language and English.[^549] Trunks, branches, leaves and fruit are all detailed, but none are located in their natural settings.

While not pertinent to the artistic vocabulary of the Aboriginal people of Victoria and southern New South Wales, these images do demonstrate the incorporation of floral symbols that were recognizable to the European eye. Relevant to the Aboriginal art of South-East Australia is Mickey of Ulladulla, an artist living on the south coast of NSW during the latter years of the nineteenth century.

[^547]: Gillen, 1901: p. 75.
[^549]: Sayers, 1994: p. 79
Working on paper with a combination of lead and colored pencil, ink, watercolour and gouache, he incorporated trees, shrubs and undergrowth in his images, drawing stylized tree forms in two configurations.

The first of these depicts a solid thick trunk, segmented at their upper reaches as they terminate in a slight thickening. It is from these bulbs that a series of thin branches emanate blossoming into compact foliage at their extremities. The impression is completed by short sprouts out of the very top. These contrast with his more usual depictions. Straight limbs branch from regular trunks of varying thickness, each terminating in small and dense foliage and slightly reminiscent of the depiction on rock, illustrated above from Mootwingee. The sparseness of wood and leaf with which Mickey has particularized his drawings, provides a platform for the detailing of many birds and animals. He has approached the imaging of shrubs and saplings by reducing the solidity and height of the impression while the undergrowth is made up of single stalks terminating in the same compact and dense spheres of foliage.
His second manifestation can be applied to many of the trees, shrubs, bushes and plants of the Australian bush, while the first is more particular to a palm tree. These latter appear in at least two of his scenes of Aboriginal life, but where he would have observed them is unknown.

William Barak was a Victorian Aboriginal artist working during the latter half of the nineteenth century who occasionally included flora in his paintings of Aboriginal life and ceremony. There are two landscape scenes. He painted Samuel de Pury’s Cooring vineyard in the Yarra Valley against a backdrop of tall trees.

Each is stylized with segmented trunks leading into rounded canopies that are in-filled with dotted leaves through which some branches can be discerned. The viewer looks down on a scene with a house in the centre foreground surrounded by individual plots into which descriptive text has been inserted. These are divided by a double strand fence from the neat rows of the grapevines leading into the dense tree planting behind. Similar

---

trees border the roads on one side while the other is edged with gnarled shrubs. It is these that divide the painting into structured farmland in the foreground and random bush at its rear.

![William Barak, *Untitled*, c. 1890’s, water colour and gouache on paper, 44.7x47.3 irreg., Private Collection.](image)

The second painting is of an irregular shape, has a division down its middle and appears to have been cut. The foreground suggests a ploughed area around a water dam which has been edged in rocks in contrast to the background. At this left and centre is a series of tall straight trunked trees whose stylized canopies stand out against a blue sky. Many have their roots exposed. Across a road and to the right the trees have been painted on blackened ground as if on a fire-ravaged hillside. A difference in the depiction of these trees against those in the de Pury painting, lies in the clean lines of the trunks which may infer that the former are native rather than the introduced elms, oaks and fruit trees which, with their more textured barks, were part of the planting around the de Pury property.

Thus, Barak created a convention for his flora and in the absence of further information it can only be surmised as to how he saw and depicted them. He did however fill his page with action and image which is in contrast to the many illustrations created by McRae.
The Tree and Shrub in McRae’s drawings

McRae, from his earliest extant drawings, included trees in describing the environments of celebration, hunting and fighting. He went on to expand the vegetation component in his art and this chapter analyses, using those sketchbooks, notebooks and drawings for which dating can be verified, its development across the period in which the artist was working. McRae drew not only trees, but shrubs and ground growth and it is the elements of these representations that will be examined – what and how they have been depicted, and the undergrowth and ground on which the figurative images of activities, trees and shrubs are set. The characteristics of style and technique that the artist has introduced can then be mapped for use as a tool in establishing a chronology for all his works.

In the very earliest drawings by McRae, there is always at least one tree. With his Corroboree, 1860 scene of celebrations between two tribes, the artist has included this feature as was noted by the spectators of many such events. 551

This tree is depicted with a straight wide trunk terminating at a common point from which several thin branches reach up to a static and semi-circular canopy. The upper story flora listed in the Murray Valley from Barnawartha North westward to beyond Wahgunyah are the River Red Gum (Eucalyptus camaldulensis), Yellow Box (Eucalyptus melliodora), Grey Box (Eucalyptus microcarpa), Red Box (Eucalyptus polyanthemos) and

551 Allen, 2010: p. 119. The images contained in this volume were transcribed from photographs and images originally collected by Wilhelm Blandowski during his travels around South-East Australia and on his expedition along the Murray River between 1856 and 1857.
the rare Silver Gum (Eucalyptus crenulata). As mature trees of any of these species, it can only be assumed that the artist was drawing a generic example to define place.

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Corroboree No 1, Pen and ink on paper, Walker Collection No 2, 1864, State Library of NSW, Sydney.

It is in Corroboree 1864, No 1 that McRae introduces the twists and turns that are so evocative of eucalypts en mass.

By 1875 there was greater variety in the artist’s depictions. The eucalypt trunk now has a slightly tapered silhouette and though the branches still emanate from a common point they become finer as they reach into the interrupted canopy.

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 1, Kilborn Notebook, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

ala.org.au/explore/your-area/wahgunyah. The Atlas of Living Australia is an online biodiversity data management system linking biological knowledge with scientific reference collections and custodians of biological information. Its records for the Murray Valley between the confluences of the Kiewa and the Murray Rivers and the Goulburn and Murray Rivers can be traced to the last third of the Nineteenth Century.
The architecture of the tree is further emphasized by the nakedness of some of the examples, with these ‘skeletons’ of vegetation first illustrated in two of the pages from the *Kilborn Notebook, National Gallery of Victoria, 1875*. The replication of these leafless ‘stags’ suggests that they were a feature of McRae’s environment along the Murray Valley. It was in these boles and hollows that much of the small game on which the Aboriginal people preyed, took refuge.

The presence of both individual and belts of denuded trees had been noted by Robert Brough Smyth and others as they crisscrossed the state surveying the geology, minerals, flora and fauna.\(^{553}\) The theory put forward at the time was, with the introduction of hooved sheep and cattle into the Australian physical environment, that their constant pounding of the surface soil resulted in drainage courses. These diverted the rainwater from its natural runoff and thus deprived the trees of moisture. Through the resulting

---

\(^{553}\) Brough Smyth, 1869: p. 28.
erosion, the roots were exposed to the vicissitudes of heat and frost.\textsuperscript{554} While this may have been a contributing factor, McRae has clearly illustrated in his drawings of episodes and events that predate the William Buckley saga, that these naked trees were an element of his landscape before the arrival of Europeans and their alien stock.\textsuperscript{555}

The significance of these trees may lie in the tribal tradition documented by Wilhelm van Blandowski in his article “Personal Observations in the Central Part of Victoria” that appeared in \textit{Transactions of the Philosophical Society of Victoria, Volume 1, 1855}.\textsuperscript{556} In describing aspects of an Aboriginal boy’s initiation into manhood, he wrote that subsequent to the traumatic avulsion of an incisor tooth that represented the severing of the influence of his mother, the tooth was entrusted to her or her relatives for safe keeping by secretion in a tree.\textsuperscript{557} In the event of the man’s death, the bark was stripped from the base of this tree and the tree set alight as a lasting monument to the deceased.\textsuperscript{558} The presence of these ‘stags’ through McRae’s landscapes therefore added a gravity to their meaning and imposed propriety and sanctity upon the scene.

A further inclusion in the \textit{Kilborn Notebook} is that of the distinctive conical outline and foliage of the Murray Pine (\textit{Callitris glaucophyllia} subspecies \textit{murrayensis}). As the only indigenous soft wood species in the Murray valley, its cones provided palatable seeds for many of the native birds. Illustration of this species is introduced on the final page of this narrative, standing in contrast to the eucalypt. It provides protection for the emus that are being stalked by a lone hunter from behind a mobile hide.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 11, \textit{Kilborn Notebook}, 1875, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{554} Brough Smyth, 1869: p. 28.
\textsuperscript{555} Le Faivre Sketchbook, 1886, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{556} Blandowski, 1855: p. 72.
\textsuperscript{557} Blandowski, 1855: p. 72.
\textsuperscript{558} Brough Smyth, 1878: vol. 1, p. 61.; Allen, 2010: plate 130, p. 149.
The intervening decade had seen McRae develop a more naturalistic style in his living trees, the skeletal remains of a verdant flora and the introduction of not only the bush-like setting but a plant peculiar to his Murray Valley landscape - the indigenous conifer.

**Image 2** of the *Bremner Notebook, National Library of Australia, 1880*, includes an interesting depiction of a scrubby tree. Somewhat distorted by scuffing, this smallish example has short new growth about its core exhibiting the characteristics of a tree under stress. From this abundance of new growth, its branches stretch out and terminate in compact clumps of leaves.

Using this for camouflage, a single hunter takes aim at a pair of kangaroos. It is the only example of this type of vegetation that appears in his extant works and recognizing McRae’s powers of observation, it suggests it had some significance.
In **image 11** a pair of Murray Pines are illustrated between a dead tree and a fully leafed eucalypt. These formers are thick, solid and straight with rough textured trunks and the characteristic pyramidal shape with their dense and close foliage in which each frond is individually worked.

The ‘skeleton’ illustrates a freer hand. The trunk forks into limbs that, as they become finer, *divide* and *divide* until the single twigs fade into the ether. The presence of this near complete architecture would indicate that defoliation has been recent.
Its counter is fully leafed and had, as a sapling, been bent at some time to the near horizontal, perhaps as a response to the light. All the newer limbs have sprouted into the vertical and are shown bending slightly under the weight of their leaves. The angles of their tendrils are suggestive of a breeze passing through to the viewer. The possum resting in the tree confers tranquility to the scene.

The final image 17 in the notebook is a setting for a hunt. Two adult emus with their young observe a hunter poised behind a eucalypt tree. This tall tapering trunk now has its branches forking at varying heights, while the limbs narrow to canopies of differing densities. Included are some twigs that no longer bear foliage.

Across this narrative from 1880, McRae has, in only 3 of the 17 images, incorporated trees to illustrate his Country. He has drawn the eucalypt, the Murray pine and the standing ‘skeletons’ of dead trees across the landscapes.

McRae’s Lucas Sketchbook, 1881, is the earliest extant sketchbook of this format. It was commissioned for a young Englishman who had never seen Australia, its flora or its fauna. It opens with a landscape of trees, a bush with feeding emus and resting kangaroos. The specimens illustrated have the architecture and canopies with which the artist was now well practised, a low acacia bush and a defoliated ‘skeleton’ showing the ravages of time.

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 1, Lucas Sketchbook, 1881, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
An initial impression is made by a pair of the pyramidal shaped Murray Pines whose outlines stand in contrast to the adjacent statuesque eucalypt.

This tapering trunk divides into three branches at a common point with each narrowing to terminate in the thick canopy. The limbs bend beneath the weight of the foliage, each leaf of which has been textured. At its centre is a short stump which, either through breakage or lack of light, is leafless.

Next is a naked ‘stag’, of which only the trunk and larger limbs remain. It houses a possum on its main branch which arches away from its nearest neighbor as if, in the
past, it was seeking the light. It curves gracefully over two emus who are feeding on a small bush - the first time that an understory has been introduced. As omnivores, the birds could be feeding on the insects, seeds, herbage or blossoms all of which would suggest identification as an acacia\textsuperscript{559} - Kangaroo Thorn (Acacia paradoxa), Rough Wattle (Acacia aspera), Deane’s Wattle (Acacia deanei), Hakea Wattle (Acacia hakeoides), Gold-Dust Wattle (Acacia acinacea) and Golden Wattle (Acacia pycnantha). These varieties were all endemic to the stretch of the Murray Valley that McRae frequented.\textsuperscript{560}

With a kangaroo resting on the ground, the landscape is completed by a further eucalypt whose tall straight trunk trifurcates into branches which again terminate in a lush canopy, with every leaf individually drawn.

The leafless twig amongst the otherwise healthy branches has become a signatory motif adding to the naturalistic depictions that are part of McRae’s landscapes.

In images 9 and 11 there are further examples illustrating hunting scenes. The first illustrates an established tree with tall sturdy trunk, from which the artist again has drawn three branches from a common point, but which taper to a fine line.

\textsuperscript{559} Pizzey, 1997: p. 521.
\textsuperscript{560} ala.org.au/explore/your-area/wahgunyah

291
Each leaf is individually penned with the overall result being a hemispherical canopy from which a few limbs appear to wave free. The lush foliage contrasts with the leafless twigs that are characteristic of the eucalypt.

The second depicts a fine and elegant sapling which, in its height and sparseness, provides little shade and even less refuge to the goanna that is scampering up its trunk. McRae now characterizes his flora with delicacy and detail to which the viewer can immediately relate, whether they are familiar with the species or not.
As the setting for a hunt, it is into image 12 that McRae introduces new varieties. They are not depicted as understory flora but each as a tall and slender trunk with foliage that is distinctive – the Murray Pine (*Callitris glaucophylia* subspecies *murrayensis*), the casuarina (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) and acacias from the selection above plus the Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*).\textsuperscript{561}

\textsuperscript{561} Corrick and Fuhrer, n.d.: p. 152.


Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, detail of Image 13, Lucas Sketchbook, 1881, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Expanding the varieties of indigenous flora on the following page, McRae has created a landscape of significant depictions. He has peopled the scene with 'newcomers'—the dapper dressed men, Aboriginal and European, and a Chinese figure meandering through the trees. There is a shrub with a weeping habitat—Weeping pittosporum, (Pittosporum angustifolium) and a short low bush which may be Cherry Balart (Exocarpus cupressiformis). The artist has repeated this bush in image 14, from which an emu is feeding.

An element of Image 6 is the absence of water or movement around either the canoe or the fish.

By 1881, Tommy McRae was filling out his landscapes with arboreal examples of the upper story vegetation dominated by eucalypts, with their branches still emanating from a common point. The trees taper into their canopies with each leaf carefully delineated. It is the defoliated twigs that have been introduced in the illustrations that give these specimens maturity. The defining skeletal remains of the dead trees through loss of much of the branch structure, details the passage of time and their inevitable decline. The understory has become more complex with examples of acacias, casuarinas and pittosporum that were indigenous to the Murray Valley between that river’s
confluences with the Kiewa and Goulburn Rivers.\textsuperscript{562} It was, however, the inclusion of the very distinctive architecture of the Murray Pine that most locates the artist’s drawings. Integrated into these scenes are the fauna that thrive with this flora, the men, women and children of his tribe who rely on this interdependence for survival and the outsiders who are now percolating through the landscape.

The *Lang Sketchbook no 1*, c 1885, opens with the William Buckley scene of his reception by a group of Aboriginal people. The eucalypt illustrated was integral to this episode. It was, by some accounts, beneath such a tree that the escaped convict was first discovered by the Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{563}

![Image of Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 1, Lang Sketchbook no 1, 1885, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.](image-url)

This statuesque example with its tapering trunk, is enhanced by the random forking of the branches, the haphazard angles of the leaves which form the canopy into a hemi-halo from which only the odd spray brakes away from the pattern. Some of the lower limbs have become leafless as the light was excluded by the blossoming foliage above. It references perhaps Blakely’s Red Gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) which is noted for its straightness though of small to medium stature with a thickly leafed crown.\textsuperscript{564} Its importance lies in its generic character that informs the narrative. Further examples of this imposing tree are found throughout the sketchbook drawn not only with a varying architecture but also a thicker canopy, each element implying a different location, but

\textsuperscript{562} [ala.org.au/explore/your-area/wahgunyah](ala.org.au/explore/your-area/wahgunyah)

\textsuperscript{563} Morgan, 1979, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{564} Brooker and Kleinig, 1999: p. 98.
nevertheless grounded to the artist’s own landscape by the inclusion of identifying shrubs, small trees and the ubiquitous emus, kangaroos and brolgas that frequented the valley.

![Image](image1.png)


![Image](image2.png)


![Image](image3.png)


**Noteworthy is image 15**, in which McRae has drawn a vista of medium sized trees each with a different architecture. Two of those illustrated, with thick but distinctive canopy haloes, suggest differing cultivars of eucalypt along with their saplings, while the distinctive shapes of the Murray pine and casuarina make for easy identification.

![Image](image4.png)


![Image](image5.png)

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, detail of naked tree having suffered the ravages of time, Image 3, *Lang Sketchbook no 1*, 1885, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.
The leafless examples in images 3 and 5 display a branch disposition that has withstood the ravages of time. In the first, intricately decorated dancers perform with their boomerangs, shields, clubs and spears beneath one such ‘skeleton’, as if in reference to either that which would once have been or in a ritual relating to a lost tribal member.\footnote{Blandowski, 1855: p. 72.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image1.jpg}
\caption{Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 5, Lang Sketchbook no 1, 1885, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image2.jpg}
\caption{Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, detail of naked tree, Image 5, Lang Sketchbook no 1, 1885, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.}
\end{figure}

The second drawing, \textit{Bird hunting} illustrates an extensive flock of unidentified birds in a bare tree with a maze of limbs, branches and twigs. The architecture is illustrated as a solid trunk topped by a set of branches emanating from a solid and common point and then tapering to their extremities. The lack of foliage can be attributed to the causes discussed earlier or to the denuding of the leafage by the birds themselves, a characteristic of some of the parrot family, especially the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (\textit{Cacatua galerita}). This particular bird is known to feed on the flowers, seeds and fruit of many of the native species that are found along the river,\footnote{Pizzey, 1997: p. 532.} while at night they take refuge in the larger examples along the watercourses, meanders and lagoons.\footnote{Brough Smyth, 1878: vol 1, p. 195-6.} While there is no direct reference to the bird in any of McRae’s drawings, Blandowski did comment on their presence through Central Victoria and into the Goulburn Valley.\footnote{Blandowski, 1855: p. 62.} They are now observed in great numbers along the Murray River between Wodonga and Echuca.\footnote{Personal observation, 2006-2018.}
**Images 7, 14 and 17** depict only the sparse remains of trees that have fallen prey to the weather, insect infestation and other eroding influences. They provide the platform for McRae to illustrate techniques of tree climbing and the extraction of the small marsupial possum.

Nine of the 19 images in this sketchbook illustrate trees. One details examples of medium height vegetation while 3 display only statuesque eucalypts, broken stubs emanating from the lower trunk while their upper branches become finer into the semicircular canopies where each leaf is individually inscribed. The remaining 5 are depictions of skeletal trees in which McRae has detailed their importance to the everyday endeavors of the Aboriginal people. Their existence relates to the traditional activities of the Aboriginal people and the influences introduced by the ‘new’ settlers.

*Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886*, commences with a stylized upright plant of four large leaves, with its multitude of veins detailed. The interspersed circular flowers have concentric rings at their centres and a double row of smaller semicircular petals radiating from the body of the bloom.

The circles and parallel lines reference closely the incisions of the taphoglyphs illustrated earlier and with designs that are noted at the Gundabooka Rock Gallery in Western New South Wales.\(^570\) While the impression for the uninitiated lies in the artistic arrangement of the strokes, their symbolism in relation to the rock paintings and the dendroglyphs correlate with the personalities and the myths being perpetuated.\(^571\)

---

\(^570\) Black, 1943: plates 123, 124, 128.  
This is unlike any depiction that the artist has used previously and is only repeated at image 17 on the penultimate page of this Sketchbook.

**Image 2** revisits the architecture and canopy of the eucalypt illustrated at the beginning of *Lang Sketchbook No 1*. The finest of the diminishing branches is however exaggerated, creating more delicacy in the depiction.

It can only be speculated that the weeping pittosporum in **image 3** divides the two episodes being played. Rather than illustrate a tree that defined open space and prominent events, the artist has used a bush of smaller proportions that is more sympathetic to the intimacy of the occasions. It is not until **image 8** that examples of the trees and shrubs that have so far appeared in previous drawings, are reintroduced.
A densely canopied eucalypt, an example of either a red gum or a yellow box, towers at the centre of the image, above specimens of a tall Murray pine, a casuarina, a naked ‘stag’, a weeping acacia and a medium sized gum - a grey box or red box, both indigenous to the region. The ‘stag’ is the remains of a tall tree still displaying a solidity of trunk, some stubs from its lower reaches and a few tapering branches reaching skywards. The middle story is made up of compact bushes which are probably acacias. The branch structures and leaf arrangements define the individuality of each of the examples illustrated in a comprehensive bush like setting for the hunting of goanna, possum, small and flightless birds.

572 ala.org.au/explore/your-area/wahgunyah.
As a setting for the variety of bird hunting, **image 10** illustrates a clear landscape broken only by a eucalypt with full canopy and a statuesque leafless tree that has resting on a lower branch, an ibis while the remaining tendrils of the upper reaches are filled with roosting birds.

McRae has used a similar but more open setting for **image 15**. It depicts both a medium eucalypt and a smaller example interspersed with smaller oval shaped shrubs from which one of the emus is feeding, suggesting that it belongs to the acacia family. The central apparently dead tree is drawn with a solid trunk terminating in fine branching limbs.

**Image 16** illustrates a statuesque and very full canopied tree that is of some age suggested by the broken branch stubs on its lower trunk. This river red gum is defined by the disposition of the branches and the body of its leaves.
**Image 18** concludes the Sketchbook with a medium sized tree that is dwarfed by a very tall leafless ‘stag’, up which a small figure is climbing in pursuit of a possum. What remains of this specimen is illustrated with both broken stubs and diminishing branches reaching skywards.

Through this sketchbook there is a conscious defining of the different types of eucalypt. Each one exhibits the refining of the branches as they terminate in their canopies and the presence of twigs devoid of leaf that are so conspicuous when observing the architecture of these trees. The leafless ‘stags’ are more than towering trunks, each retaining its original shape but being insinuated into the landscapes as habitat for smaller native animals and birds in its boles and branches. Australia has very few deciduous trees none of which occur naturally in the far south-east of the continent though the white cedar (Melia Azedarach) can now be found along the Murray Valley and south of the border into Victoria.\(^{573}\) There is no early documentation of the species in the location in question in the *Atlas of Living Australia*. It can thus be concluded that the trees depicted have died through causes previously discussed. McRae has also illustrated a middle and lower story of vegetation in his more wooded scenes while the grasslands are dotted with larger trees.

---

\(^{573}\)Personal observation.
In the *Kilborn Sketchbook*, after 1891, McRae has included trees on only five pages.

**Image 2** illustrates a kangaroo hunt. The setting is a grassland only punctuated with acacia bushes.

**Image 4** details flighted bird hunting.

The leafless tree in which the prey has taken refuge displays the characteristic shape and stature of a eucalypt.

It is this outline which the artist has repeated in **images 8 and 9** but where the fully weighted limbs branch from the main trunk and disappear into a verdant canopy, thicker in some areas than others but with each leaf individually drawn. A leafless skeleton stands next to this depiction on **image 9** detailing that goannas avail themselves of both dead and living vegetation.
The ‘stag’ depicted on image 10 appears to be all that remains of a more verdant bushland. The emus illustrated now wend their way between the spherical shrubs of a grassland setting.

The detailing of the trees and shrubs in this sketchbook references the environments in which the Aboriginal people had been and were now living. Recognizing that McRae chronicled his sketchbooks using his motif of the handkerchief waving performers, image 2 represents conditions prior to the arrival of Europeans, while the latter examples date to after this time. The pursuit of small prey continued and when groups came together, they went hunting using the traditional techniques of the chase across a changing landscape.

*The Gatliff Sketchbook*, after 1898, displays a distinctive shift in the depiction of both trees and shrubs. Image 2 illustrates hunting of both emus and possums.


The former is pursued between bushes with spherical foliage atop short straight stems. The small game is being extricated from the boles of a sturdy but much diminished trunk, while many of the small marsupials have taken refuge in a living eucalypt. The characteristics of the main body of the tree that McRae has developed over his previous sketchbooks are emphasized in their solidity and their tapering of the branches as they reach up into the canopy. The leaves, both of the bushes and of the tree, have now been drawn with a lighter and finer touch, the distinct flourishes of foliage affecting a less semicircular and more haphazard outline.

![Image 3](image3.png)

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 3, Gatiff Sketchbook, after 1898, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

A subtle but distinctive detail which the artist has introduced in this image, but is more observable in image 3, is the strong diagonal pen strokes of the tree trunks, both living and dead. This insinuation of texture emphasizes an important characteristic of the bark of both the yellow and grey boxes and to a lesser degree the red gum. With this latter image, both a leafed and a naked example are illustrated. The first has a diminished

---

574 Brooker and Kleinig, 1999: pp. 218, 248
canopy with the thick and truncated stubs of a declining tree while all that remains of the second is the trunk and main branches.

**Image 4** is a bush setting in which there are no dominant trees - a Murray pine, a casuarina, a young eucalypt or mature acacia and finally a leafless example. The disposition of the limbs of this last, intimating a dead pine rather than eucalypt. The leaf detailing of the previous images is repeated but McRae has used vertical strokes to texturize the trunks and stems.

The outline of the leafless tree in **image 5**, repeats the disposition of the limbs as they taper to their conclusion as fine twigs.
The trunk is again particularized by diagonal strokes which have become heavier around the foot, indicative of the collection of bark about its base that is so emblematic of some eucalypts.

These weighty strokes persist in the next image 6, with a much lighter application of the pen on the branches from which stem the leaves. These again reflect a finer touch across the body of the canopy in a less formal configuration.

The depictions of trees in the Gatliff Sketchbook can be recognized by the diagonal definition of bark on the solid trunks of both the living and dead trees. The canopies are finer and more delicate in the application of the ink, resulting in a random outline of both the larger examples and the shrubs and bushes.

**The Ground in McRae’s drawings**

In the way that McRae developed the architecture of his trees and shrubs across his creative oeuvre, the artist also became more detailed in the ground that underpinned his images. It is possible to follow the unfolding of this feature throughout his sketchbooks and notebooks, giving another clue to where drawings fit chronologically in his output.
Taking the initial four depictions that came from Theresa Walker, the first Corroboree, No 1, 1860, has the ground defined by a series of scrubby horizontal lines which are used to divide the episodes up the page.

The Corroboree, No 2, 1862 depicts several images and activities and it is only beneath the dances that the scrubby horizontal lines appear.

By Corroboree, No 1 1864, the horizontal scrubby lines have become more intense and not only distinguish the episodes but also divide the actions up and across the page, with that at the upper right sloping towards the corner of the page.
The groundcover in *Corroboree, No 2, 1864*, has become more detailed with that at the centre left defined by some short near vertical marks, giving the impression of grass.

These early depictions use the ground as a dividing mechanism for the activities that are being illustrated. The grass fronds that make their appearance in the last example become a feature of later depictions.

*The Kilborn Notebook*, 1875, has 11 pages of drawings on which each of the images, whether double or single pages is underscored with scrabby horizontal lines. Beneath the trees these are thicker and heavier, casting the illusion of superficial roots and debris. In each case the ground is the first component drawn, with the overdrawing of feet of the figures, both human and animal. For activities on water, the same scrabby lines are used.

The recognizable feature of McRae’s drawings from this time is that of scrabby horizontal strokes that are both economical and quick in their execution.

In the *Bremner Notebook, 1880*, McRae defines his ground in only some of the images. Whether on land or water he has used scrabby horizontal lines and it is only the subject which details the context.
The scenes of native animals and of trees and scrubs, images 2, 4, 11 and 17, are each defined by a ground as described. In some of the scenes there is a narrow base on which the action is taking place. While this can be seen in the dueling images, images 3 and 5, those that depict pursuit have no ground.

However, all the congregations whether for dance or for confrontation, images 1, 8, 9, 13 and 15, have a base on which to perform and this has been the first element drawn before McRae has superimposed the feet.575

These sit throughout the depth of the ground in all of these images, giving perspective to the placement of the participants.

---

575 Cox, 1929: p. 1
Compared with the previous notebook there has, in the *Bremner Notebook 1880*, been less emphasis and attention to the environment in which the lives of the Aboriginal people have been set.

*The Lucas Sketchbook, 1881*, begins **image 1** with a ground cover that is unremarkable in its thick scrubby lines.
However, beneath the feet of the first dance scene, image 2, McRae has introduced some near vertical lines and the beginnings of circular motions, in some places quite fine.

These become more dominant in image 3 though the strokes are thicker and more ink filled. With several depictions in this book McRae has chosen not to illustrate the ground beneath the hunting and fighting scenes.
With **Image 6** he has detailed the foreshore with the swans, water birds and particularly the swans’ nest drawn from above. Noting that this sketchbook is dated from the end of 1881, the only other depiction of this object from this perspective appears in **image 2** of the 1880.

![Image](image1)

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, detail of swans and nest, Image 2, Bremner Notebook, 1880, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

This is an example where the artist has used an identical subject from an identical perspective in his depictions. In this instance the two images are taken from dated books that succeed each other. The presence of this presentation or event can now be extrapolated to books where the dating is questionable or unknown.

In summation of the *Lucas Sketchbook*, the artist has in subsequent depictions, used no ground at all, whether fishing, fighting or dancing. By the end of the book he has reverted to a ground of thick scrubby strokes, so, except for the examples early in the book, the Sketchbook from this time is thus.

![Image](image2)

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 1, Lang Sketchbook No 1, 1885, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

The initial image, **image 1** in the *Lang Sketchbook, No. 1, 1885*, continues the ground feature of scrubby horizontal lines executed with a finer nib, though there are a few curved strokes between the feet of the tribal group at the left of the depiction. The same
scrubby lines continue beneath the dancing figures in **image 2**, with a few at the left of the depiction that are more circular.

There is nothing of these in the next dance scene but **image 4** illustrates emus, kangaroos and brolgas, on which the finer horizontal strokes of the ground are overlaid with short near vertical fronds, an impression McRae repeats to a lesser degree in **image 5**.

The visual impression of the undergrowth of **image 6** is a base of horizontal scruby lines, overlaid with cross hatching, some of which curve at their tips.
McRae has transmuted the ground impression in **image 7**, overlaying the scrubby horizontal base with vertical curved lines which commence from the middle of the ground.

**Image 9** presents a base of scrubby lines which become thicker to the right of the depiction. These are again cross hatched on their upper edge and curved at their apex. The ground of **image 11** is predominantly fine scrubby strokes though the area around the base of the tree has been thickened out with some longer vertical fronds to its left and right. Where the ground is defined in **images 12, 13, and 14** there are only light horizontal lines but in **image 15** some light cross-hatching with curved tips emanate from just above the lowest lines.
**Image 16** again uses the light scrubby horizontal lines which are then overdrawn with a circular motion. This is very different to earlier impressions.

Repeated in **image 17**, the light horizontal base lines are all overdrawn with the continuous circular lines.

These become more complex in **image 18**. The area beneath the right-hand figure displays a variety of circular lines over the base strokes, while vertical fronds overlay the base strokes beneath the left figure. **Image 19** illustrates none of these. The ground is defined by light horizontal scrubby lines which are of differing thickness between the feet of the combatants and to the right of the spectators.

At this time McRae was still using his scrubby horizontal lines to define his ground but then overdrew this with either curved strokes, vertical fronds, cross hatching or continuous circular motions to individualize the depiction.

The impressions of water from *Lang Sketchbook No 1*, both under the canoes and around the fish and birdlife were of note in **image 11**.
He used fine horizontal ink strokes which was in contrast with those of image 12 from *Lang Sketchbook No 2*, in which the artist created movement in the water with concave strokes both under the bow of the boat and around the fish. This is in keeping with the more elaborate grounds of the sketchbook as detailed below.

From the first page, image 1 of *Lang Sketchbook, No 2, 1886, University of St Andrews*, the ground depictions are more complex. Rather than a scrubby impression, each horizontal is an individual stroke, terminating in a downward flourish. Across the uppermost and lowermost edges are curved lines, while either end is encapsulated by dotted strokes.
The following image, **image 2**, has a base of slightly curved strokes, some near vertical fronds and finally some continuous semicircular lines. This contrasts with the scrubbly horizontal grounds of earlier dance scenes that were interspersed with either circular motions or upright fronds.
The ground of **image 3** is a delicate mixture of downward facing concave lines. A fine nib is used to draw the ground cover, varying from acute to obtuse semicircles, each frond reflects the weeping habitat of the only other foliage, the weeping pittosporum and mirrors the design on the woman’s gown.

![Image 3](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 4, *Lang Sketchbook, No 2, 1886*, University of St Andrews Library, Fifeshire, Scotland.

The main scenes of **image 4** are underscored with scrubby horizontal lines above which are the heavier curved strokes. However, the smaller scene to the centre left of the page, displays at its base, the curved lines above which are long grass fronds that reach to the hips of the fleeing figures.

![Image 4](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwar, Image 5, *Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886*, University of St Andrews Library, St Andrews, Scotland.
Image 5 has a ground depicted by curved horizontal strikes which are quite insignificant in relation to the ferocity of the dueling scene.

In contrast the ground of image 6, across which kangaroos are being pursued by three spear throwing huntsmen, has been depicted with a variety of strokes that McRae has used previously. Straight scrubby lines are mixed with individual horizontal lines ending in a downward curve. There are also some concave strokes with a final touch of short vertical fronds at the upper edge of the ground. The detail of this base reflects the dynamism and vitality of the chase.

The ground strokes of image 7, which are similar on a superficial level with those of the previous page, display more constraint by the extensive use of vertical fronds from the upper edge, reflecting the less spirited character of the chase.
There is no frenetic activity in the scene. The ground of the treed landscape of image 8 is depicted by returning to scrubby horizontal lines that are overlaid from the lower to upper edges with long angled vertical strokes. The wildlife, as yet unperturbed by the approaching hunter and the woman and child, have not flattened the grassy undergrowth.

Only cursory detail is given in the animated fight scene of image 9, on which the individual curved ground strokes provide a base for the action.
**Image 10** is hunting scene in which a single hunter must decide at which of the emus, brolgas or tree birds he will take aim. The emus seem little perturbed, though they are attracted by the antics of the male brolga. The ground is defined by the artist’s scrubby horizontal lines, with some individual strokes curved or semicircular at their culmination.

McRae has underscored his dance scene of **image 11** with a ground of mixed scrubby horizontal lines that he animates with both continuous and individual curved strokes.

In the multi depictions of **image 12**, it is only the fishing scene that has been given a ground - drawn as a series of short curved lines, suggesting a rippling expanse of water.
Not unlike the technique used in image 9, its context has however been defined by the fish and canoe.

The artist has used the same technique for the ground of image 13, which could again be interpreted as water but for the stance of the seven men depicted.

The ground strokes of image 14 begin as light curved lines that are more acute at their terminal ends. It is over this area that the tribal group is fleeing. On the right-hand side of the depiction the strokes are heavier and straighter reflecting the character of the five hidden behind an extensive mobile hide and carrying a menacing array of long
spears that project above their camouflage. McRae has matched his base to the character of the activities depicted.

The ground of **image 15** reflects the quiet and solitude of the single hunter as he stalks two emus. Using a technique similar to the fishing scene in **image 12**, it has a rhythm across the width of the page made by the single light curved strokes that at times break into a continuous circular motion.

**Image 16** depicts a single tree as if suspended on the page by a circular defined ground of heavy scrubby curved strokes. These have been overlaid at its base by continuous vertical strokes from the left side and around its upper edge to the right. The weight of the ground complements the solidity of the tree and its full but delicately detailed canopy.
**Image 17** mirrors the detail of the initial image in the book but is book-ended on the left by a traditional Aboriginal figure holding a spear and axe, standing on a base of scrubby horizontal lines and on the right, a man clothed in coat and breeches posed on a similar base.

![Image 18](image18.jpg)

**Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 18, Lang Sketchbook, No 2, 1886, University of St Andrews Library, Fifeshire, Scotland.**

The base ground of the final page, **image 18**, begins on the left with light slightly curved strokes which become less rounded but heavier in delineation as the eye moves to the right until it is squiggly line from top to bottom.

The artist has used the scrubby horizontal lines, individual horizontal strokes, curved strokes, continuous circular motions with either acute or obtuse angles and vertical fronds in different combinations. There is in this sketchbook, a predominant use of the curved stroke. In 9 images it is the only technique representing the ground or water, while in a further 5 images it appears in combination with others representing the
ground. In many of the images the depiction of the ground reflects the character of the activity illustrated.

**Image 1** in the *Kilborn Sketchbook, after 1891*, illustrates a series of activities on water. This environment is defined by fine horizontal strokes beneath the canoes, bird and fish.

![Image 1](image1.jpg)

*Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, Image 2, Kilborn Sketchbook, after 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.*

Image 2 can be read in two episodes. The lower hunting scene is grounded on multiple fine horizontal lines of varying heaviness. These are overdrawn with a few diagonal strokes and finished at their upper edge with luxurious fronds that are thickened on the right side of the depiction by cross hatching. The vigour of this pursuit is reflected in the character that McRae has introduced into this ground. The ground of the upper episode again uses many fine horizontal strokes that have been overdrawn with near vertical fronds beginning halfway up its mass. **Image 3** is a dance scene that is grounded on scruffy horizontal strokes, as if the environment has been flattened by the stamping and shuffling of the many feet.

![Image 3](image3.jpg)

*Tommy McRae, Kwat Kwat, detail at centre of lower stanza of Image 2, Kilborn Sketchbook, after 1891, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.*
Back in the hunting landscape of image 4, the ground impression is first established using scrubby horizontal lines over which there are some diagonal strokes. The scene is finished with vertical grass fronds. There is however no thickening around the base of this now leafless tree.

The fighting scene of image 5 takes place on a ground of intense scrubby lines, overlaid with short vertical strokes between the duelers and to the right of the depiction. Image 6 is a further fighting scene in which one combatant is pursued by the other. The ground is based on light scrubby horizontal lines overlaid with diagonal strokes. The overall impression is of a buoyant understory that is in keeping with the nimbleness of the characters depicted.
On image 7, McRae has constructed a ground of complex lines which, while based on faint horizontal strokes, is overlaid with slightly curved diagonals and finished with a few vertical fronds. The scene is a prelude to a massed confrontation and the state of the ground complements the interplay of the many feet that stamp upon it. Image 8 is also a massed scene but depicting a dance on which the ground is drawn by many scrubby horizontal and diagonal strokes providing a solid base on which to perform.

The family out hunting is illustrated in image 9. The base has a background of scrubby horizontal lines overdrawn with slightly curved diagonal strokes and finished with the vertical fronds. The impression is spread across the width of the depiction. There is a slight thickening of strokes around the base of the gum tree and the leafless trunk.
The ground of image 10 is much busier with vertical fronds extending above and base lines around the feet of the emus and the bases of the saplings and leafless trunk.

Images 11 and 12 illustrate firstly a group of Chinese walking in single file and of four clothed white-faced men in communication with each other. The artist has used scrubby horizontal strokes to define the ground with no further embellishment. These are in contrast with the ground of image 13, where the horizontal strokes are less extensive and are interspersed with dotted lines through the base and at its upper and lower borders.

For this sketchbook Tommy McRae has continued with his combinations of techniques to illustrate the ground – fine horizontal lines, diagonal strokes both straight and curved,
vertical fronds, cross hatching and scrubby horizontal lines. The artist has made more use of the diagonal stroke, whether straight or slightly curved, overdrawn with vertical fronds. In each of the images there is a greater detail of the ground. It is possible to identify the tenor of the activity depicted in many cases from the complexity of this environment.

A sketchbook created towards the end of McRae’s career is the *Gatiff Sketchbook, after 1898*, State Library of New South Wales.

*Image 1* has a ground of horizontal lines that are overlaid along the upper border with cross-hatched semi-vertical fronds. At the outer right edge these extend down to the lower border.
Image 2 is a hunting scene of both large and small game. The base of the ground is made of horizontal strokes over which McRae has drawn continuous circular lines. Between the smaller trees and between the gum and the naked trunk he has finished the upper margin with vertical fronds. The impression is of marked abundance in comparison with the following hunting scene of image 3. The artist has here used a heavier application of the ink on a base of scrubby horizontal lines that are then overdrawn with slightly curved near vertical fronds which are across half the depth of the ground on the left and over the full depth on the right of the image.

The return from the hunt depicted in image 4 has a narrower base of horizontal lines which have been faintly overdrawn by angled fronds across its full width.
The ground of image 5 is heavier in execution with a verdant crop of near vertical fronds which in some instances, are slightly curved. The lushness suggests ground that is less compacted by man and animal.

The ground of the dance scene of image 6 is again based on horizontal pen strokes which are in some places scrubby. There are a few diagonal lines, but the impression is overlaid with slightly curved to vertical grass fronds. This terrain has not yet been stamped flat by the dancing feet. The ground of the following image 7 dance scene is not so lush with the base consisting of horizontal scrubby lines, some light and faint, which have been overdrawn with curved towards vertical strokes. The final dance scene of image 8 is based on the same horizontal lines with still fewer curved and vertical fronds, as if this venue has been well compacted by its use in the past.

The ground of each image in this sketchbook begins with individual horizontal lines which are then detailed by cross-hatching, continuous circular strokes, vertical fronds some of which are curved or a combination of any two of these.
The tabulation of ground treatment and tree and shrub architecture across time

**Corroboree Sheets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ground</th>
<th>Vegetation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Scrubby horizontal lines</td>
<td>Trees with wide solid trunks branches emanating from a common point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shrubberies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shrub activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864 (1)</td>
<td>Scrubby horizontal lines</td>
<td>Trees with wide solid trunks branches emanating from a common point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short grass fronds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Kilborn Notebook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Image no</th>
<th>Ground</th>
<th>Vegetation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Scrubby horizontal lines</td>
<td>Trees with tapered trunks branches becoming thinner into canopy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shrubbery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Murray Pines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 8b</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dead (naked) trees branches thin to fine twigs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Murray Pines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Image no</td>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>Vegetation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Image 11</td>
<td>Thick scrubby lines both horizontal and vertical</td>
<td>Murray Pine with thick trunk and thick stylised canopy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td>Scrubby bush</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lucas Sketchbook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Image no</th>
<th>Ground</th>
<th>Vegetation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Thick scrubby horizontal lines</td>
<td>Murray Pine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eucalypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fine sapling, lush foliage, canopies of varying densities, branches at differing height</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dead Tree ravaged by time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td>Vertical strokes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part circular strokes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 12</td>
<td>Middle storey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No overarching upper storey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murray pine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Casuarina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acacia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 13</td>
<td>Weeping pittosporum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cherry Balart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 3</td>
<td>Thick scrubby lines both horizontal and near vertical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image no</td>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>Vegetation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Scrubby horizontal lines overdrawn with heavy circular strokes</td>
<td>Eucalypt, random placement of branches, halo canopy, leafless leaves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 4</td>
<td>Vertical fronds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 6</td>
<td>Heavy cross hatching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 15</td>
<td>Eucalypt, different varieties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 3</td>
<td>Naked Tree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 5</td>
<td>Naked Tree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 16</td>
<td>Continuous circular strokes</td>
<td>Dead Tree ravaged by time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Image no</td>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>Vegetation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1891</td>
<td>Image 13</td>
<td>Dots</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual curved strokes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scrubby horizontal lines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diagonal strokes straight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diagonal strokes curved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vertical and cross hatched fronds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Eucalypt hemispherical canopy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Image no.</td>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>Vegetation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after 1898</td>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Cross hatched semi vertical fronds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image 2</td>
<td>Continuous circular lines</td>
<td>Solidity of trunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image 3</td>
<td>Eucalypt</td>
<td>Diagonal textured strokes of bark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image 4</td>
<td>Murray Pine</td>
<td>dead and leafless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image 5</td>
<td>Verdant cross hatched fronds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image 6</td>
<td>Eucalypt</td>
<td>Light Feathery leaves less formal configuration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of trees, shrubs and ground treatments in dating the *Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook*

These tables locate the features of floral diversity, ground cover and water in McRae’s drawings in a chronological timeframe. Applying the characteristics to the subjects illustrated in the *Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook*, held by the Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, a picture emerges of similarities with dated drawings leading to the speculation of its true place in the artist’s output. The 12 images are collated by their accession numbers though are somewhat fewer in number than in those sketchbooks with standard bindings, that were examined for the purposes of dating.

**Image 1** illustrates a naked tree about which there are scrubby horizontal lines, both features can be closely related to those in *Lang Sketchbook No 1*, 1885.

![Image 1](image1.jpg)


However, on **image 5** of this looseleaf sketchbook, the artist has drawn obviously concave downwards details for the ground, first depicted in **image 10** of *Lang Sketchbook No 2*. He has introduced saplings into his landscape, complimented by a pair of aged bare trees, with the example on the left having been in this state for some time. This last first appears in **image 1** of the *Lucas Sketchbook*, 1881 while the understory trees are drawn later in the sketchbook.

![Image 5](image5.jpg)

The detailing by McRae of the trunk of the naked trees of **Image 5** is further employed on those vibrant trees of **Image 11**. The vertical lines use the full width of the pen nib but bear no comparison with the diagonal and curvaceous components of the artist’s trunks that were a feature of the late 1890’s. In techniques they share a resemblance with the trunks of similar vegetation in **image 15** and **16** from *Lang No 2 Sketchbook*.

There are a further 2 pages, **image 7** and **image 11**, in the *Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook* which display similar canopy characteristics to the *Lang Sketchbook No 1*, that of a full hemisphere into which the fine twigs of the eucalypt penetrate and under which a ceremony is being danced out. The trunks are tapered with a random forking of the branches.
Another feature to be considered is the diagonal cross hatching of the ground in images 8 and 12 that was first observed in image 6 in the Lang Sketchbook No 1.

Image 8 illustrates the now familiar assembly of figures with brush attached to their lower legs and carrying their spears vertical with handkerchiefs fluttering aloft. This depiction refers directly to events as described in the chapter ‘Tommy McRae and the
William Buckley Legend’ and that did not become part of the artist’s drawing vocabulary until after 1881 and was first illustrated in 1885.

However, an exception in the ground is that detailed in image 10 with a multitude of concave downward lines that reflect the vibrancy and dynamism of the event being played out. It was first introduced as a characteristic in image 2 in the Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886 and became a feature in the 1890’s.
The subject of image 10 from the Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook evidences a controlled assemblage of figures with spears raised above their heads in a haphazard manner. Some but not all, protect themselves from above with their shields. The random positioning of the spears and the raising of shields by a few of the participants differentiates this depiction from image 9, Lang Sketchbook No 1 and which is discussed in relation to an initiation ceremony in ‘the Art of Ceremony and Celebration’. Images closer to that of the Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook in the detail of spears and shields first appeared in image 13 of the Bremner Notebook, 1880, and image 3 of the Lucas Sketchbook, 1881 however there is no similarity in ground treatment. Closer examination of the decoration of the figures, as is evidenced in the table below, reveals that the former illustrates no body or leg painting on the participants while the latter has only leg decoration. Five of the sketchbooks created into the 1890’s all evidence examples of the subject, inscribed in the National Museum of Australia Sketchbook, n.d., as ‘Dance of defiance’. That, most resembling the version in the Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook, is found from this later period in image 4, Williams No 2 Sketchbook, characterized by the personal leg decoration adopted by the participants in the event as well as having adorned their torsos is mirrored in each depiction. (Highlighted in the following table).
Deliberation of subject in McRae’s drawings

In supporting the examination of this dating evidence, is the incidence of commonalities in subject matter across subsequent sketchbooks and notebooks. Attention has already been drawn to this in the depictions of swans’ nests. Of relevance in consideration of the dating of the Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook, in the State Library of Victoria, is the prevalence of ‘dance of defiance’ events. Initially appearing in the 1880 and 1881 drawings they are then a feature in the artist’s later output as tabulated below.
Incidence of ‘dance of defiance’ events with their level of body decoration across a selection of the single sheets, sketchbooks and notebooks 1860 – 1898.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sketchbook</th>
<th>date</th>
<th>no of depiction</th>
<th>no of dance events</th>
<th>dance of defiance event</th>
<th>no dec</th>
<th>torso dec</th>
<th>leg dec</th>
<th>both dec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 1</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 2</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 3</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree sheet 4</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Notebook</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremner Notebook</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas Sketchbook</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang 1 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lefaiivre Sketchbook</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang 2 Sketchbook</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Sketchbook</td>
<td>&gt;1891</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat M A Sketchbook</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat G A Notebook</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 1 Sketchbook</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 2 Sketchbook</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G MacMahon Sketch</td>
<td>late</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatlief Sketchbook</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersed Collection</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilborn Looseleaf</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray Sheet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koori Heritage Trust</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellwood sheet</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGV sheet 1</td>
<td>c1880</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGV sheet 2</td>
<td>c1880</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondly, is the data from the chapter, ‘Tommy McRae and the William Buckley legend’. The artist first introduced the saga and the handkerchief bearing motif in the *Lang Sketchbook No 1, 1885*. Image 8 of the *Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook* references McRae’s motif.

**Conclusion**

The evidence can now be submitted for dating the *Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook*, held by The Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, in relation to details of images 1, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12. The 7 pages are considered under the following criteria.

1. **Ground detailing** – Scrubby horizontal lines verging into curved but not circular strokes and then to concave downward details with a small amount of near vertical cross hatching. 1885, 1886.
2. **Vegetation selection** – Naked trees, saplings and aged ‘stags’ suffering the ravages of time and weather. 1885.
3. Canopy architecture – Tapered trunks and random forking of branches, hemispherical eucalypt canopies into which the fine twigs penetrate and about which each leaf is individually scribed. After 1881 but before 1898.


5. The consideration of events and personal decoration detail in the comparable subject, ‘dance of defiance’, around the dates of 1880 and 1881 and after 1890.

6. Subjects – The insertion of the handkerchief motif through the illustration of the Buckley narrative and its implications for the Aboriginal populations. 1885, as described in Chapter 4.

The Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook was donated to the State Library of Victoria in 1903 by Rod Kilborn. It has the dimensions of 21.7 X 28.1 cms conforming to a drawing book,\textsuperscript{576} not to a pocket book dated to 1865, as described by Mrs. G. C. Kilborn in her letter, 1835, to Charles Barrett.\textsuperscript{577} From this information it can be suggested that this sketchbook was created after 1885 and before 1898.

McRae expanded his compendium of arboreal examples, serving to document his images in his Country. The distinctive architecture of structure and foliage distribution has been examined and can be traced across the artist’s works and related to confirmed sketchbook and notebook datings. The trees may not have the dendroglyphic carving or decoration that defined those examples further north into New South Wales, but the attention to detail and their individuality in McRae’s drawings emphasizes their importance as elements of a landscape, a culture and their essential contribution to his sustainable and balanced ecosystem. It was these very features that were being undermined by the increased exploitation of the tree and its wood by the new settlers as a ready source of fuel and building material. They were further diminished by the march of cultivation of the ground, with its requisite addition of fertilizers and by the introduction of hooved animals that compacted the soil and destroyed the delicate root systems. Thus, the artist’s recording of the more definable flora becomes linked with

\textsuperscript{576} Sayers, 1994: p. 126.
\textsuperscript{577} Barrett, 1935: p. 88.
the importance of the greater intricacy in the detailing of the ground cover. This is, at times, reflective of the dynamism of the endeavor or activity being illustrated by McRae. McRae evolved a style and complexity in his trees, shrubs and ground cover. In evaluating these depictions, their relative positions can now be determined in the sequence of works that McRae completed across his lifetime.
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Chapter 8: Conclusion – McRae’s drawings span the divide between the nineteenth century and the twenty-first century.

Tommy McRae was a Kwat Kwat man from North-east Victoria. He lived the majority of his life in the Murray Valley. His earliest works date from 1860 and he continued to draw until his death at the turn of the century. Most of his works appear in sketchbook and notebook form in response to commissions by interested parties from the local area, further afield and from overseas. Theresa Walker was his only female patron and it was for her that he drew the extant single page drawings from those initial years. He was by this time in his mid-twenties and the question arises as to the sources of his style.

McRae’s depictions in orientation, attitude and demeanor relate to the images on rock galleries and faces, incisions on bark and designs on leather hides from Central Western New South Wales and North-eastern Victoria that had been accessed through the 19th and 20th centuries. With his ability to transfer to paper the dynamism that engages his audience in the emotion of the occasion, the artist was elaborating on the circumstances through which he was inspired, as he imagined and imaged his scenes in his sketchbooks and notebooks. As McRae’s depictions become more interpretable with their ancillary details then they will contribute to a clearer and more extensive understanding of the rock art, of the works on bark and the artefacts of South-east Australia. The survival of these is fueling an accelerated interest. With the acquiring by relevant public institutions and the return of artifacts to those groups for which they have significance, it becomes an important milestone in their histories. It can be recognized that the preservation of these against the passages of time and the ravages of the environment have become paramount to not only safeguarding the images themselves but the histories, traditions and culture that underpin and emphasize their existence for future generations of Aboriginal people and for the interested public.

Apart from the exposure that McRae’s images enjoyed through the commissioning by patrons, the sketches enjoyed limited display in exhibitions in Victoria and on one occasion in the United States of America. The contributing institutions to these exhibitions were reliant on early donations to their collections, in particular by Roderick
Kilborn. Their subject matter was further disseminated through the exhibition catalogues and broadcast by articles in journals and newspapers.

McRae drew episodes throughout the passages of his life. The early depictions between 1860 and 1864, illustrate the events in which groups of men and women come together to celebrate with hunting and dancing. As the artist became occupied with a more expansive documentation of his lifestyle in the narratives of the notebooks and sketchbooks, prominence was given to the observance and ritualization of ceremony with specifics of decoration – head gear, body paint, accoutrements and leg adornment. By that which is hidden in the symbolism of attribute and ornament, he has reinforced the chasm that must exist in an understanding of ceremony and celebration while signaling differences of context to the uninitiated and the non-indigenous. It is this which sustains his very being and its importance in the everyday life of the Aboriginal people.

With the absence of both women and spectators except in specific examples, he was documenting, for his contemporary Aboriginal audience, important signs relating to the significance and complexity of each of the traditional ceremonies. He subtly uses space and relationships across the drawings. The physicality and antics of his participants through the compression and extension of the dancing patterns imparts the dynamism with which performance was displayed.\(^{578}\) This is observably enhanced in McRae’s illustration of the physical grounds on which these were taking place.\(^ {579}\) It is as if he was emotionally and psychologically immersed in the act that he was displaying. With over a quarter of the pages in his sketchbooks and notebooks devoted to the subject, it can be concluded that not only was he concerned that the traditions he was documenting for the declining populations within his sphere of influence, but that the invading populations understood the transformation that was being imposed on a multifaceted culture.

\(^{578}\) Image 6, Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook.

As is evidenced by the profusion of illustrative examples by non-indigenous artists as they landed on Australian shores and ventured into the interiors, celebration and ceremony were subjects that intrigued both the creators and audiences alike. It remained the preserve of the Aboriginal artist to document the intricacies of these performances from which contemporary generations of Aboriginal people could relate to their past, compliment their present and pass on to their future, the facets that engaged them with their Country and which realized respect by the non-indigenous to Australia’s First People.

In surveying the illustration of ceremony and celebration McRae returned numerous times to a group of dancers, brush around their lower legs and distinctive in their waving of spears from which handkerchiefs fluttered. There is a unique element in 2 of the illustrations; each of the participants is decorated with the now familiar accoutrements of brush covered lower legs and handkerchief waving spear with one member recognizable through his height and lack of colour. Here is the escaped convict, William Buckley, engaged in an important and enduring tradition for the tribe. Its inclusion evidences two points; the handkerchiefs signal to his audience the arrival of white men into the domain of the Aboriginal people and Buckley’s exit from his 32-year sojourn along the south-west coast of Victoria. Of the 15 pages devoted to the William Buckley legend by McRae across the 16 extant sketchbooks and notebooks, there are 9 dance scenes, each particularized by his motif of handkerchief waving spear heads. The artist used this to define events prior to the invasion of his Country by aliens and which coincided with his own birth, and the effect that this had had on the cohesion and the lifestyles of the Aboriginal people of the Murray Valley. The drawings identify and explain Buckley’s integration into the life of the Aboriginal population. They narrate the acceptance of one who was alien to their understanding. It was thus an important episode in the evolving developments that McRae would go on to illustrate. Because of the curiosity of his viewing audience, the appeal of the event was an ideal vehicle with which to convey his message of decline and fragmentation of the Aboriginal communities.

No William Buckley illustrations appeared in McRae’s sketchbooks and notebooks with known dates prior to and including 1881, the approximate time of his marriage to his second wife. She could pass on the information from the books by Morgan, Bonwick and Westgarth all of which had been published prior to 1881, and thus provide the intricacies of the story that the artist would then incorporate. The earliest images appeared in Lang Sketchbook No. 1, commissioned after 1885 and the arrival of his commissioning patron, Dr William Lang, while the latest can be dated to 1898.

In only 3 examples, are the dance scenes preceded by illustration of Buckley’s first encounters with his Aboriginal hosts and in which a woman, playing a role as part of the family or group, was recorded in the circulating literature. Identifiable by the small child in arms or on her back she is out hunting and fishing with the family. Their incidence is commensurate with the few depictions across McRae’s wider oeuvre, in which women are depicted involved with the family pursuit of possums, goannas, waterfowl and fish. One area in which women are illustrated in McRae’s narratives, was their participation in the music making at the occasions of some ceremonies and celebrations. They make no appearance in any ceremonial event around the William Buckley legend. Their inclusion thus indicates that there were events into which women were embraced and there were those from which they were excluded.

Their paucity should be considered against the diminished census figures for females in the Aboriginal settlements along the Murray River – 14.4 females to 17.7 males while the figures were slanted conversely, 27.5 females to 25.5 males, at the Missions and Reserves. It can only be speculated whether this was a reflection of the Aboriginal populations that existed during this period in the Murray Valley or a conscious decision on the part of the artist.

McRae did however, illustrate an immediate response of the segment of the Aboriginal community that was most impacted by the ‘Half-Caste’ Act with its implementation at the end of 1886 – the women, with their assimilation back into the family life of the Valley.

---

581 Under the 1886 Act, the Government had the power to cause the removal of any Aboriginal person from the Reserve, who was under the age of 34 and was categorised as less than ‘full blood’.
582 Image 18, Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886.
McRae made a point of drawing attired figures in 4 of the 5 early single sheets commissioned by Theresa Walker. Further depictions appeared in the Kilborn Notebook, 1875, and Kilborn Sketchbook, 1891. Their illustration is a poignant reminder of the changing dynamics of the Murray Valley that the artist observed as the Europeans invaded the middle reaches of the Murray. They were followed by the Chinese who had lingered on in Victoria after the rushes for gold. McRae first depicted dandified Aboriginal figures in the Bremner Notebook of 1880 and the Lucas Sketchbook of 1881, with further examples appearing post 1891, though none appeared in the Gatlef Sketchbook of 1898. His depictions elaborated on the adoption of dress by the Aboriginal people as they mirrored the behaviors that they were observing in their non-indigenous companions, in alcohol consumption, in socialization and in approaches to women.

Hunting makes up 30% of depictions across his whole output while fighting is illustrated in 21%. Of particular sensuousness in McRae’s oeuvre is his images of the chase, whether it be during the hunt for game or the battle between tribes. However, it is only on 10 pages of the former that the hunters are drawn on the run whilst there are only 5 pages devoted to the Aboriginal pursuer and pursued. With these the artist has conveyed the emotions of aggression and submission, vivacity and joy, flamboyance and restraint, precision and informality in each of the figures through the exactness of the physicality of his silhouettes. The fluidity and economy of line leads the viewer across the page and into the endeavors and intentions of his subjects. His illustrations of the hunters and the hunted emphasize his understanding and control of his medium. They created a ‘surrealistic dream quality,’ a description levelled at Peter Purves Smith’s ‘Kangaroo Hunt’, on its appearance at the exhibition of Australian art sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation in the 1940’s. This description was equally apt for those images

583 Image 3 Kilborn Notebook, 1875.
584 Image 12 Kilborn Sketchbook, 1891.
585 Image 10 Bremner Notebook, 1880.
586 Image 13 Lucas Sketchbook, 1881.
587 Image 12, National Gallery of Australia Notebook.
588 Image 10, National Gallery of Australia, Notebook.
589 Image 3, Lang Sketchbook No 2, 1886.
590 Used to describe Peter Purves Smith’s ‘Kangaroo Hunt’ by Clive Turnbull at the exhibition of Australian Art sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, 1941.
drawn 50 years earlier by McRae. With no extant specimens on the rock galleries of the south-east of Australia, these depictions are unprecedented. However, Charles Percy Mountford identified at Inyalak, Arnhem Land,\textsuperscript{591} some of ‘the most sensuous figures in Australian Rock Art’ and ‘the most spirited and beautiful examples of Australian Rock Art in existence,’\textsuperscript{592} with which parallels can also be made.

![Unknown artist, rock painting, A group of four running women, Unbalanya Hill, Inyalak, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia, Dating from 8000 years ago.](image)

Dating from 8000 years ago\textsuperscript{593} these images were brought to prominence with their publishing by the New York Graphic Society in arrangement with UNESCO in 1954, after Mountford had led the American-Australian expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948. It is an example of the panels that he was describing from the galleries that were festooned with figures in all manner of poses, each exemplified by the detailing of the musculature and the balanced relationship of limbs to torso, head and neck to trunk. Each figure occupies its own space on the panel while still relating to those around it, illustrating a phase of the endeavor with a degree of congruity that leads the eye from one impression to the next. McRae’s understanding of this importance in narrating events, whether he was depicting man or animal, resulted in their uncompromising attractiveness to the viewer through their artistic refinement and elegance as seen in image 6 in Lang Sketchbook No 2.

\textsuperscript{591} Inyalak, Arnhem Land, is east of the East Alligator River in the north of the Northern Territory of Australia.

\textsuperscript{592} Chaloupka, 1993: p. 132.

\textsuperscript{593} Chaloupka, 1993: p. 13.
It should impart an admiration equaling the emotions generated by the figures at Inyalak.

In the way in which vitality and dynamism were inherent in depictions of the chase, so McRae’s illustrations of boxing and wrestling would suggest that the bouts were not just about the superiority of one combatant over another but the antics that were used to confound and entertain the spectator.

The Tree, the Shrub, the Ground: Mapping their course catalogues the changes in technique and approach with which McRae illustrated his chronicles. The depictions of canopies and trunks of his upper story vegetation became more complex, followed by the introduction of middle story and understory examples. The grounds have added intricacy with detailing mirroring the impact of the activities that were being performed thereon. It is only through careful analysis of each of these elements of McRae’s art, with the appropriate interpretation of the factors that contributed to the development
of his depictions, that a chronology could be proposed. It was the gradations that became an important facility for the dating of drawings and the elucidation of the developments that were occurring and impacting on McRae’s social climate. This is an important factor in the recognition of the artist’s corpus of works as an historical document.

This information with other factors of body decoration and subject matter that have been clarified through this study, point to a clearer picture of where undated sketchbooks fit in McRae’s output. In applying the criteria to the Kilborn Looseleaf Sketchbook, previously dated 1865, and donated to the State Library of Victoria by Rod Kilborn in 1903, it can now be reassigned a date after 1885 and before 1898.

All McRae’s works are pen and ink on paper. Having been created between one hundred and one hundred and fifty years ago, their fragility and preservation is of major importance. Digital imagery however means that many of his drawings are now available to a wider audience.

The exploration of McRae’s drawings has inspired my appreciation of the skill of this artist in conveying the physicality of his subjects and the dilemmas confronting their ongoing survival. These depictions are about the factual concepts and constructs conceived in the face of the words being written and promulgated by authors outside of the culture. My understanding of the sensitivity and discerning qualities of his depictions was emphasized in relation to his figures both human and animal, whereby he communicated speed, agility, vigor and momentum, emotion and intent. These distinctions could only be discerned through my rigorous analysis of the precision with which each was detailed, making it possible to determine the subtle innuendoes that disclosed the individual narratives of each drawing and therefore their place in the overall anthology. These were no incidental arrangements but can now be recognized as the features that were exemplified by the artist’s facility on paper, in his representation of that which he was so closely living and observing. As he expanded the flora in his landscapes, he included further detail from which, with careful scrutiny, I was able to establish a chronology into which otherwise undated anthologies and single pages could be inserted.
Further and most importantly, there is my education by his commentary on the circumstances challenging the Aboriginal people of the Murray Valley. He introduced these into his narratives with an evolving humour in the practices of both his Aboriginal people and non-indigenous subjects. He addresses themes with an astuteness and sensitivity that should provoke his viewing audience to reassess their roles and responsibilities towards the lands into which they had expanded and the peoples that they had disinherited. Each of his drawings should be observed in the sequence in which they were created and it should be recognized that, in this, there is a relevance - he was not just filling pages but telling a story.

The works of McRae are statements of a highly perceptive man and a committed and accomplished artist. Through his pen, he was maintaining connection with Country, with the preservation of ceremony and celebration that marked the passing of seasons, time and experiences and, as he straddled the two worlds of the late nineteenth century Murray Valley, with the challenges and influences for both Aboriginal people and the non-indigenous alike.

The significance of the work of McRae can be judged in his tendering of the life of the Aboriginal people in the past and of the time, not in words but in image, illustrating through subtle insinuation the plight of his people. During the latter years of the nineteenth century he had the eyes of only a limited few, but now in the early years of the twenty-first century, McRae’s work can be seen by an extensive audience, who can assess from his drawings, the role that he played and continues to play, as an emissary and ambassador.
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Bibliography

Aboriginal Protection Act, 1869: An Act to provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria. (11th November 1869)


Armour, James, 1864: The diggings, the bush and Melbourne; reminiscences of three years wanderings in Victoria. Glasgow: G D MacKellar, 1864.


Bennett, 1860: George Bennett, ‘Platypus or Water-mole’ in Gatherings of a Naturalist in Australia, London: John van Voorst, 1860, pp. 92-146.
Beveridge, 1883: Peter Beveridge, *Of the Aborigines inhabiting the Great Lacustrine and Riverine Depression of the Lower Murray, Lower Murrumbidgee, Lower Lachlan and Lower Darling*. Royal Society of NSW, June 1883.


Bonwick, 1856: James Bonwick, *Discovery and Settlement of Port Phillip; being a History of the Country now called Victoria up to the arrival of Mr Superintendent Latrobe, in October 1839*, Melbourne: George Robertson, 1856.


BPA: Central Board appointed to watch over the Interests of The Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria, Melbourne: John Ferres, Government Printer, vols, 2(1862), 3(1864), 6(1869), 7(1871), 8(1872), 9(1878), 10(1874), 13(1877),14(1878).


Bride, 1898: Thomas Francis Bride, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers: being a series of papers on the early occupation of the Colony, the Aborigines, etc.*, Melbourne: The Trustees of the Public Library, 1898.


Catalogue 1906: Exhibition of old, rare, and Curious Books, Manuscripts, Autographs, etc., held in conjunction of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Public Library of Victoria, Melbourne: Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, 1906.

Australian Aboriginal Art, 1929: *Catalogue, Australian Aboriginal Art*, Melbourne: Trustees of the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1929.


Corrick and Fuhrer, n.d.: Margaret G Corrick and Bruce A Fuhrer, Wildflowers of Victoria and adjoining areas, Melbourne: Bloomings Books, n.d.


Crooke papers: Crooke Family papers: MS 9214, Box 3/1 3/2, State Library of Victoria.

Curr, 1883: Edward Curr, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria then called the Port Phillip District. Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide: George Robertson, 1883.

Dawson, 1881: James Dawson, Australian Aborigines, Melbourne: George Robertson, 1881.


Docker papers: Joseph Docker Papers, Ms. 10437, (Box 4631-4632) Bontherambo Collection, Latrobe Library, State Library of Victoria.


Etheridge, 1918: R Etheridge Junr, The Dendroglyps or “Carved Trees” of New South Wales, Ethnological Series No 3, Sydney: Department of Mines, 1918.


Foord 1859: John Foord Papers, Box 4, No 2. Ledger Book 1859-62, University of Melbourne Archives.


Foord, 1871: John Foord Papers, Foord 1/1 – 1/3, June 6, 1871 and after. University of Melbourne Archives.


Hodgkinson, 1845: Clement Hodgkinson, Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay with descriptions of the natives, their manners and customs, the geology, natural productions, fertility and resources of that region, First explored and surveyed by order of the Colonial Government by Clement Hodgkinson, London: T and W Boone, 1845.


364


Langhorne, 1911: George Langhorne, The Melbourne Age, July 29, 1911.


Lindsay, 1943: Daryl Lindsay, 'Forward' in Primitive Art Exhibition, Melbourne 1943, Victoria: National Gallery and National Museum, 1943.

Lloyd, 1862: George Thomas Lloyd, Thirty-three Years in Tasmania and Victoria, London: Houlston and Wright, 1862.


MacDonald-Lucas Family papers: held by the family.

MacDonald, nd (but pre 1895): Donald Macdonald, Gum Boughs and Wattle Bloom, London and Melbourne: Cassell and Company Ltd., nd.


Mathew, 1899: John Mathew, Eaglehawk and Crow, a study of the Australian Aborigines including an inquiry into their origin and a survey of Australian languages, London and Melbourne: David Nutt and Melville, Mullen and Slade, 1899.


McCrae Papers: McCrae papers: MS 12831, Box 3676/9, SLV. 2517/6, item 12, Andrew Lang to George Gordon McCrae.

McCrae papers, MS 12831, Box 3610, State Library of Victoria


Mims, 2012: Jeannie Mims, Wife of Philip Hadden Mims, descendent of Francis McCrae Cobham and holder of F McC Cobham diary. Interview, 17.01.2012.


NSW Hotel License Register, no. 826; The Travellers Rest, 17th April 1860, lic. No. 0709: NRS 14403[7/1513] reel 1242.


Parish of Carlyle, Schedule of Allotments: Map 8, image 19; Map 4, image 9; Map 5, image 10.


Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1906; Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1856-1906, *Exhibition of old, rare and curious books, manuscripts, autographs, etc., held in conjunction of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Public Library of Victoria*, Melbourne: Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1906.


Pulleine, 1926: R H Pulleine, Rock Carvings and Cave Paintings at Mootwingee, NSW. *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, 50.


Aboriginal drawings by Tommy McRae, at Collaborations and Connections: Third National Symposium of the AICCM Paper, Books and Photographic Materials Special Interest Group, Sydney, 1-3 April 2004; revised April 2009.

Wedge 1836a: John Hilder Wedge, ‘Narrative of an Excursion amongst the Natives of Port Phillip, on the South Coast of New Holland,’ The Journal and Papers of the Parliament of Tasmania, vol. 5, no. 44, 1885.


Westgarth, 1864: William Westgarth, The Colony of Victoria: its history, commerce and gold mining; its social and political institutions down to the end of 1863, London: Sampson Low, Son and Marston, 1864.


Williams, 1927: George L Williams, The Australasian, August 13, 1927.


Worsnop, 1897: Thomas Worsnop, The prehistoric arts, manufactures, works, weapons etc, of the Aborigines of Australia. South Australia: C E Bristow, 1897.

Printed Media

Port Phillip Gazette, 1839: Port Phillip Gazette, no. 88, November 20, 1839.

Port Phillip Gazette, 1840: Port Phillip Gazette, no. 23, March 21, 1840.

The Argus, Thursday 15 January 1857.

The Australasian, 2nd July 1927.

The Australasian, 13th August 1927.
Web Sites

ala.org.au/explore/your-area/wahgunyah.
daao.org.au/bio/tommy-mcrae/personal_details
en.wikipedia.org/William_Snell_Chauncy
handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/136255
handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/136357
Tommy McRae: His Cultural Interaction with the Colonial World

Thesis Appendices

Appendix 1 (Introduction)

It has been suggested that the initial use of the McCrae name was from an association with the owner of the properties on the confluence of Yackandandah Creek and Kiewa River, though its adoption can also be explained from a slightly different source. The two properties in question, Baranduda, from April 1848 to August 1852, and Merimarenbung, from May, 1850 to June 1854, were in the names of Francis McCrae Cobham and Richard Cobham. It was the custom in the McCrae family for the children to adopt, as a middle name, the maiden name of their mother. In all references to Francis he is noted as Francis McCrae Cobham or F. McC. Cobham though Richard has forgone this, referring to himself only as R. Cobham. In discussion with the descendants of the Cobham family there is no explanation as to why the younger brother omitted the McCrae but then it is never documented that he met with his maternal relatives.

Francis McCrae Cobham and his sisters were known to have visited their uncle and aunt, Andrew and Georgiana McCrae at their homes in Melbourne and on the Mornington Peninsula, on numerous occasions. Francis would thus have had opportunity to develop a rapport with his cousins and their indigenous neighbours. Georgiana, in her diaries, refers to her and her family’s interactions with the Bunurong people, (tribal territory from Werribee River, around southern suburbs of Melbourne, to the Mornington Peninsula to Anderson’s inlet) who were regular visitors with others of their group and with whom the McCrae children exchanged names.

The property at Arthur’s Seat had always been a financial strain and by 1851 Georgiana had returned to Melbourne, while Andrew took a position at Alberton in Gippsland accompanied by his son Alexander. Sandy, as he was known, was fifteen at the time,

594 Billis and Kenyon, 1932; p. 151, 216.
596 Mims, 2012: Interview, 17.01.2012
was not academic and wished only to be on the land, something to which his father’s finances could not stretch.\textsuperscript{601} In a letter to his mother on disembarkation at Port Albert, Sandy mentions that a position might be available on a property nearby\textsuperscript{602} however he went on to find work one at Omeo in the east of Gippsland, Victoria. It can only be speculated that it was on one of those run by Edward Crooke, who held the pastoral licenses for Holey Plains, north-east of Port Albert, Lucknow, midway between the former and his holdings near Omeo, Hinnomungy, Benambra and Bindi and Tongeomungie, all of which are sited in the mountains across the headwaters of the Mitta Mitta River which flowed north to the Murray Valley.\textsuperscript{603} However extensive scrutiny of the Crooke family papers makes no mention of any of the jackaroos or boundary riders employed on any of these stations.\textsuperscript{604} The other possibility was that Sandy was now working with the Meyrick brothers, who had, during the McCrae tenure at Arthur’s Seat in the Mornington Peninsula, been their near neighbours to the east at Colourt\textsuperscript{605}/Coolort\textsuperscript{606}, (the native name for Sandy Point),\textsuperscript{607} on Western Port Bay.\textsuperscript{608} By 1845 this family had migrated with their stock to the high country in Gippsland at the head waters of the Macalister River and then the Mitchell River\textsuperscript{609}, each surrounded by snow covered mountains for eight months of the year.\textsuperscript{610} Cousin Francis, had by this time, become the landowner in North-east Victoria. His properties were in the Kiewa Valley and opposite what was to become the Tangambalanga Aboriginal Reserve. For Sandy, it would be only a short ride from either the high country or Mitchell River locations, following a traditional Aboriginal route\textsuperscript{611}, over Mount Cope and down the east branch of the Kiewa River to Baranduda and Merimarenbung. This was the closest and most direct route for the new settlers in the mountains of East Gippsland, to replenish stores and to access a semblance of

\textsuperscript{601} Niall, 1994: p. 200.
\textsuperscript{602} McCrae papers, MS 12831, Box 3610, State Library of Victoria.
\textsuperscript{603} Billis and Kenyon, 1932: p. 40
\textsuperscript{604} Crooke papers MS 9214, Box 3/1, State Library of Victoria.
\textsuperscript{605} Meyrick, 1939: p. 111.
\textsuperscript{606} Meyrick, 1939: p. 238.
\textsuperscript{607} Meyrick, 1939: p. 115. It is now known as Coolart.
\textsuperscript{608} Billis and Kenyon, 1932: p. 171.
\textsuperscript{609} Meyrick, 1939: p. 238.
\textsuperscript{610} Meyrick, 1939: p. 201.
\textsuperscript{611} Massola, 1969: p. 147-8
'civilisation' that was at Yackandandah and Beechworth. There Sandy could have spent time in the company of the Aboriginal people of the Pangerang tribe to which Tommy and his family belonged and who had congregated in the area.

The Cobham agricultural enterprise began to falter and Francis retired to join the Victorian Police Force in January 1853.\textsuperscript{612} There would however, have been time for Sandy to establish a special rapport with McRae and to share his name as had been the custom from his childhood. They were, after all, of the same age.\textsuperscript{613} But it was not long before Sandy too left the area, following Francis, in December 1853, into the Police Force as a cadet.\textsuperscript{614} There Sandy came under the influence of Charles Macmahon, Deputy Chief Commissioner, later to become Commissioner, and to be knighted. In a testimonial for Sandy, Sir Mcmahon wrote that his protégé had worked on his properties in Northern Victoria.\textsuperscript{615} By 1862 Sir Macmahon was a partner with John Bear who had held, since 1852, extensive land holdings in Central Victoria and the North East of the state, these latter in McRae’s traditional ‘country’.\textsuperscript{616} Whether there was further interaction between McRae and Sandy at these locations cannot be verified but the two could certainly have had further contact as McRae passed by Seven Creeks Run at Euroa where Sandy was known to have been employed.\textsuperscript{617}

In a letter at the turn of the century to the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia, it is noted that there was an Aboriginal artist in the Corowa area by the name of Alexander McRae, who had completed a number of exercise books with drawings, an example of which was reproduced and which reflected the characteristics of McRae’s work.\textsuperscript{618} While the author may have confused the name, McRae had by that time named one of his sons Alexander, perhaps after his friend. The artist’s name was now being spelt “McRae”.\textsuperscript{619}

\textsuperscript{612} Sadleir, 1913: p. 304.
\textsuperscript{613} Niall, 1994; p. 90. It is speculated that Tommy was born around 1836 while Sandy was born 30th November, 1836.
\textsuperscript{614} Sadleir, 1913: p. 300.
\textsuperscript{615} Reference from Charles Macmahon, McCrae family papers, SLV
\textsuperscript{616} Billis and Kenyon, 1932: p. 13.
\textsuperscript{617} Niall, 1994; p. 240.
\textsuperscript{618} Murdoch, 1900; p. 136.
\textsuperscript{619} Murdoch, 1900; p. 136.
There are a number of links with the name McRae that would have been possible through the latter half of the nineteenth century. A James McRae had arrived in the Murray Valley in 1847 to manage two properties on its northern bank, Mulwala and Boroge, both owned by the Hillas family. A catalogue entry in the *Exhibition of old, rare and curious books, manuscripts, autographs, etc., held in conjunction of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Public Library of Victoria*, 1906, records that Tommy worked with a Mr McCrae of Mulwala Station after his association with Andrew Hume. However, it should be noted that the spelling of the former had never been as such and that James McRae had by 1853 taken up a publican’s license and had built and was running a punt service across the Murray River. Evidence of these continued activities in the area from 1859 to 1862 is furnished in the account books of John Foord of Wahgunyah, purveyor of corn and grains. James McRae died in January 1866 so that McRae, who was known to have worked north of the Murray during the 1850’s on Andrew Hume’s Brocklesby Station, near Corowa, could only have come into contact with the station manager come publican prior to 1854 or as the artist passed through to Yarrawonga.

The death of James did not mean the disappearance of the McRae name from the district. In 1872 four tranches of land between the township of Rutherglen and the Murray River were taken up by Duncan McRae, no relative of James. The holdings were not far from Lake Moodemere and Wahgunyah where Tommy McRae had made camp. After the survey and subdivision of land along the Murray Valley from Wodonga

621 Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1906; p. 46, Item 366. ‘Sketches drawn by an a(A)boriginal Named Tommy, known as Tommy McCrae, for many years with Andrew Hume of Brocklesby and afterwards with Mr McCrae of Mulwala Station. The writing made under the sketches is in Tommy’s handwriting: as he never was at school he must have learned to write and read from different persons on the station.’ Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1856-1906, *Exhibition of old, rare and curious books, manuscripts, autographs, etc., held in conjunction of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Public Library of Victoria*, Melbourne: Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, 1906.
622 NSW Hotel License Register, no. 826; The Travellers Rest, 17th April, 1860, lic. No. 0709: NRS 14403(7/1513) reel 1242.
624 Mulwala Cemetery.
626 Map of Carlyle, County of Bogong, Department of Land and Survey, Melbourne, 1969.
to Wahgunyah two further parcels of land at Gooramadda were purchased by the D. McRae family, between 1891 and 1900.\textsuperscript{627}

Duncan McRae had moved, with his family, to the Wahgunyah/Rutherglen district between 1858 and 1862.\textsuperscript{628} The family had first immigrated to Queensland in 1853 but shortly afterwards, loaded on horse carts, made their way to Beechworth, initially prospecting for gold before becoming timber merchants cutting and dressing wood for the goldmine shafts. With the demise of gold in that part of Victoria, they moved to Rutherglen which was still in the grip of the rush.\textsuperscript{629} The land purchased just north of Rutherglen and that closer to the river realized the timber for their continuing business. This land clearing offered up the potential for vineyard planting with further areas used for running sheep and cropping wheat. The six children all bought and developed properties in the area and their high profile through community involvement established the McRae name. There are few extant documents from the Duncan McRae family and none of them note any reference to Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{630} Tommy McRae’s second wife Lily was literate and it can be speculated that the changed spelling of his surname arose from that which was in common use in the community.

Appendix 2:

There is... a myth about Bundjel, the first man and Karween (the second man) whom Bundjel made. They quarrelled about wives, but Karween spoke to Waung the crow and asked him to make a corroboree. And many crows came and they made a great light in the air and they sang. And then there was a fight with spears between Bundjel and Karween, the former being the victor.

\textsuperscript{627} Parish of Gooramadda, County of Bogong, \url{http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/136357} pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{628} D McRae, 2012:
\textsuperscript{629} Brough Smyth, 1869: p. 89.
\textsuperscript{630} D McRae, 2012:
Appendix 3:

Hinkins, J T, 1884: *Life amongst the native race, with extracts from a diary*, Melbourne: Haase, McQueen and Co, 1884, p. 34.

The grandest corroboree I ever saw. The mounted black police who had been camping at our station for several days... invited the Murray Blacks to a corroboree held by them in a dell not far distant from my homestead... The effect was very striking as the police used their broadswords instead of sticks, and the light of fire (for it was held by night) causing swords to gleam in the light as the men turned and turned again in their dances... I proposed that the Murray blacks should give a corroboree in return... I proposed... that the men should corroboree the first evening, the women the second and the picaninny last to wind up the sports... They numbered each evening – men, women, and children - upwards of five hundred... With the men on the first evening was something beyond description. They dance by fire-light, and the performers being all stark naked, and painted all over with various coloured clays and in divers patterns, the effect was very striking... They... began to dance to the sound of their music, which was performed by the old lubras some of whom struck two bits of hard stick together, which made a sharp sound, and the others made what seemed to answer for bass by striking on their opossum skin cloaks, which they had drawn up into a lump with one hand, and then struck with the other, thus causing a hollow sound.

... Two rows of dancers from twenty-five to thirty each, stand up opposite to each other, linked together by the legs, moving as one man and twisting about in various attitudes, keeping strict time to the music, and sometimes the two rows joined in a circle... and parted again where they liked, thus changing the rows. This they kept up for about two hours, when they retired for the night. The next evening the lubras had their performance, which was very similar to that of the men, and quite equal to theirs... I considered it more graceful, some of the women having such beautiful figures. The women always have small boughs in their hands –
not spears like the men. These they shake so as to keep time to the tune, producing a peculiar sound. .. The third evening we again met for the performance of the picaninny, of whom there were rather more than on hundred... It was far more amusing, and caused great amusement, owing to the agility of the youngsters, and their odd antics were very surprising.

Appendix 4:


The Corroboree is generally danced when two tribes meet, one dancing one night, the other the next. The lookers-on congregate about the large fires made to light up the scene, and admire or criticise the performers. The women seat themselves in a body, with their opossum cloaks tightly rolled up before them, on which they beat with their right hands, keeping perfect time, at the same time chanting one of their corroboree songs. One of the oldest men, generally a man of note, acts as a leader. Suddenly through the gloom, the dancers, one by one glide upon the scene, each man painted with pipe clay on his face, legs and body and a large bunch of green leaves tied tightly round his ankles, which make a peculiar rustling noise as he dances. They commence by beating time simultaneously with their corroboree sticks (short pieces of green wood which give out a loud ringing sound when struck), and shaking or quivering their extended legs in the manner peculiar to the corroboree. As the performers become excited, the vigour of the dance increases and with loud shouts they advance in a body towards their leader, who chanting at the top of his voice, with his face turned to the dancers, slowly retires before the advancing mass – vigorously beating time meanwhile – until the large fire is reached. The dancing now ceases, and the men, rushing into a compact body, stamp with their right feet until a cloud of
dust arises, when, with a wild shout, each one at the same time, throws up his arms above his head, and they then retreat to commence again... They exhibit an extraordinary degree of elasticity and grace in their movements – indeed some seem to have no joints in their legs, so supple and pliant are they. Sometimes they perform with spears in their hands, but not often.

Appendix 5:
Edward M Curr, Recollections of Squatting in Victoria, then called Port Phillip District, (from 1841 to 1851), Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide: George Robertson, 1883. pp. 135-6.
On a suit of well-fitting black with which nature sent him into the world... he inscribes lines or figures with pipe-clay...the hair of the head... was confined either by a netted fillet, or a narrow band of twisted opossum skin, which was tied behind, the ends of the strings hanging down between the shoulders; a plume of emu or cockatoo feathers being frequently inserted in it. ..In all cases the performers wore a belt around the loins, from which depended both before and behind, a thick bunch of opossum thongs, which hung half way down to the knee. In addition, tufts of green leaves were bound tightly round each ankle. There were besides, string lines of pipe-clay which extended from the ankle upwards, along the leg, both inside and out.

Appendix 6:
Peter Beveridge, The Aborigines of Victoria and Riverina, Melbourne: M L Hutchinson, 1889. p. 131-3.
The lypoors [women]( who were seated in a semi-circle a short distance from the fires, and whose duties consisted in the orchestral portion of the performance) gave a few spasmodic thuds on the Mullangies [opossum skin drum]by way of calling the performers to the front; thereupon a hoary-headed ruffian stepped forward, birraworie [time sticks] in hands, which he clinked in concert with the mullangie thuds, at the same time beginning a tchowie in a low monotonous tone, which ere
long gradually swelled in volume. At the end of the first bar the lyoors chimed in, and the dancers sprang into the lighted space, flourishing their weapons in savage glee as their lithesome legs quivered in time to the savage music. The hoary leader of the band, becoming warm to his work, rushed backwards and forwards along the crescent row of lyoors singing out the tchowie apparently for bare life, while flakes of foam spurted from his lips...The lyoors taking their time from him, became equally energetic in their performance upon the mullangies and their high shrill treble, mingling with the leaders base, made altogether the most hideous accord...Meanwhile the dancing had become as vehement as the music, for the quivering and writhing of the forty pairs of legs, strung up to high pressure by the tchowie and its barbarous accompaniments...The time now became faster and more fast, till at length the motion was altogether so rapid that individual legs could not be distinguished... Even aboriginal muscular humanity cannot keep up such high-pressure motion for ever, so, with a deafening clang, produced by the birrawories and mullangies conjointly, the tchowie ceased instantly, and the sweltering dancers sank as one man exhausted in their tracks.

Appendix 7:


A number of males... are selected as principal performers ... and they retire to the bush away from the light of the fire, and decorate themselves, each according to his taste ... During the time the men are thus engaged, a native prepares a blazing fire ... As the flames leap up and the light flashes through the trees, the dancers may be seen emerging from their retreat. They wear boughs around their legs, just above the ankles, and a sort of apron made of dressed skins. They form themselves
into groups as they wait for the signal to commence their feats of jumping and dancing. The women who have to act as musicians are seated some little distance from the fire, arranged in a horse-shoe shaped line. They are quite naked and each holds on her knees an opossum rug neatly folded up and stretched tightly, skin outward. The leader appears in the ordinary costume of a native. He wears an opossum rug and is not painted or otherwise decorated. He carries a corroboree-stick in each hand. His station is between the women and the fire. When all things are prepared, he advances carelessly towards the women, making a droning sound as he walks and suddenly strikes his two sticks together, which makes a signal for the performers to come forward. They arrange themselves in a straight line and then there is a pause. The leader eyes the line attentively and if all of them is present, he commences to beat his sticks together; the performers strike their sticks in time with the leader and the grand dance commences. The time kept by the performers and the women who beat the opossum skins – which are the only drums they possess – and the exactness with which all the movements are conducted, are astonishing. The dancers, acting in concert, put themselves into all kinds of postures, moving sideways, advancing slightly, retreating, extending their limbs, and anon standing straight in line. The leader, all the time, is not idle. He beats his sticks vigorously, and keeps up the nasal drone, raising his voice occasionally as he takes a few steps to and from, now turning his face towards the dancers and now towards the women. As he faces the women they raise their voices in song. After posturing for some time, and getting heated with their exertions, the chief performers become violent; they hasten their movements in obedience to the more rapid beating of the leader’s stick; they shake themselves and jump to an incredible height and at last, each taking a deep inspiration and inflating their lungs, utters a loud shrill noise. The sound, so accurate is the time, appears to come from one mouth. This is the signal for retreat. Without any hint from the leader, but in this instance, in obedience to their own instinct, probably feeling
they have done enough for the time, they precipitately flee to the shelter of their bushes, where they rest for a short period. When they re-appear, they arrange themselves in a curved line and go through the same strange antics as before, with such variations as may have been agreed upon. They women remain seated in their places, beating time with their hands on the rugs and singing occasionally as the leader turns towards them. The singing of the women adds much to the delight of the natives and it certainly tends to soften what may be regarded as rather a harsh entertainment...

When the dancers have sufficiently exercised themselves, when they have gone through all the evolutions that are possible to them, having regard to the kind of dance in which they are engaged, they suddenly change their line; they mingle together for a moment, then form in lines four deep, the front men quickly separate and those behind advance and in this way they move toward the women. At this moment they appear to be a confused mass of bodies, so jumbled together as to cause alarm to white spectators, who cannot believe that in the rapid movements of their sticks they will not break each other’s heads. But the whole is concerted and is part of the machine-like arrangement of the dance. They shout, they stamp and jump; the women beat their opossum skins louder and louder, singing to the utmost pitch of their voices; and at last the leader gives a heavy stroke with his sticks, which at that moment are held high over his head and the dancers disappear; the women take up their rugs and repair to their miams.

Appendix 8:


At last all the women came out naked – having taken off their skin rugs which they carried in their hands... But the women having seated themselves by the fire, the men joined the assemblage armed with clubs
more than two feet long; having painted themselves with pipeclay which abounds on the banks of the lake. They had run streaks of it round the eyes, one down each cheek others along the forehead down to the tip of the nose, other streaks meeting at the chin, others from the middle of the body down each leg; so that altogether they made a most horrifying appearance, standing round and about the blazing fire. The women kept rugs rolled tight up, after which they stretched them between the knees forming a sort of drum. These they beat with their hands as if keeping time with one of the men who was seated in front of them singing. Presently the men came up in a kind of close solemn, they also beating time with their sticks, by knocking them one against the other, making altogether a frightful noise. The man seated in front appeared to be the leader of the orchestra, or master of the band – in deed I may say master of the ceremonies generally. He marched the whole mob, men and women, boys and girls, backwards and forwards at his pleasure, directing the singing and dancing, with greatest decision and air of authority.

Appendix 9.


The creators of all came in the form of the Eaglehawk and the Crow. They were intelligent and shrewd and through their battles the Eaglehawk gained the upper hand. On one occasion the crow killed the son of the eagle, upon which the eagle caught and killed the crow, but this latter was to come back to life and disappear. Their hostility endured for a long time but when all was resolved the Aborigines of the Murray Valley were divided into two classes named the Mokwarra (or Eaglehawk) and the Kilparra (or Crow).631

---

631 Mathew, 1899: p. 15.

The drawings reproduced were made by Tommy McCrae, chief of the Wahgunyah Tribe and were given by him to Rev. Rod Kilborn of Wahgunyah. McCrae had never had tuition so that his work was virtually primitive drawing. He always began a figure by drawing the feet and legs and completed it with the hair of the head. Mr Kilborn, who was a Justice of the Peace at Wahgunyah and did special work in adjudicating upon disputes between the blacks and white settlers, induced McCrae to make 3 books of drawings. One of these was given to the 1st Marquis of Linlithgow when as Lord Hopetoun, he was Governor of Victoria: another went to the Mitchell Library, Sydney and the third from which these reproductions have been made is in the possession of a resident of Melbourne. The drawings were made in the 80’s. The Wahgunyah Tribe, at one time numerous and virile, has vanished.


Mr George L Williams (Orange, NSW) writes as follows; Referring to the three drawings reproduced in *The Australasian* of July 2, I desire to point out the following facts regarding drawings by old Tommy McCrae. I knew old Tommy very well and provided him with the pens used in the production of the books referred to. But he did more than three books as I purchased two from him, containing ten drawings each. One I now have in my possession and the second is in the Mitchell Library. Edmund Milne, who was District Superintendent of Railways here, borrowed one book to enable him to deliver a lecture. Soon after this Mr Milne died and his splendid collection of war implements etc., together with my book went into the hands of the Mitchell Library. Tommy McCrae’s son, now in a

---

632 The Australasian, July 2, 1927.
mission station in Victoria, visited Orange about 2 years ago. He called upon me and the book of drawings was shown to him. I made him a present of one of the drawings, which he appreciated. Tommy McCrae never smoked and drank but he was a great gambler, attending shows and race meetings and spending all the silver he could get on the ‘sweet wheels of the day.’ Mr Rod Kilborn, mentioned in *The Australasian* was postmaster at Wahgunyah in the early days.

Appendix 12:

Hinkins, J T, 1884: *Life amongst the native race, with extracts from a diary*, Melbourne: Haase, McQueen and Co, 1884, p. 35.

Myself leaning on my gun, and my child by my side, being the only whites present, made a striking contrast to the surrounding blacks... The corroboree, with the men on the first evening was something beyond description... A white woman, who happened to be at the station, was very anxious to see the performance, and came to the gathering in hopes of being a witness of the fun; but as soon as she appeared the blackfellows, who were all squatting in a circle on the ground, refused to commence dancing till she had quite retired out of sight, crying out, “pull away white lubra; no dance till white lubra pull away.”