History in Stone: the Work of The Victorian Historical Memorials Committee

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In the early twentieth century a self appointed Melbourne based committee, the Victorian Historical Memorials Committee, negotiated with Victorian cities, towns, shires and boroughs to install stone cairns dedicated to inland exploration in their public space. Many of the built cairns still exist in Victoria yet the process to install the cairns sparked local opposition, struggle and sometimes outright rejection. This article focuses on the committee’s first undertaking in Gippsland, and the unveiling ceremonies, which were conducted in 1927.

In the 1920s a group of prominent Melbourne-based men formed a committee to coordinate the installation of site specific memorials dedicated to inland explorers throughout, primarily, country Victoria and organised a series of regulated ceremonies to unveil the memorials. The memorials were designed to approximately locate the routes and achievements of explorers on the landscape where exploration took place. Stone cairns were chosen as both symbolic and practical memorials. Committee members were afraid that the contribution of inland explorers to the progress of the nation was in danger of being forgotten and wanted to inscribe their presence on the landscape. The committee negotiated and worked with local city and town committees in order to coordinate the installation of stone cairns in their public spaces.

This article focuses on the establishment, adaptation and rejection of memorials by residents in townships and cities in Gippsland. It argues that the unveiling ceremonies and subsequent responses to the cairns by Gippsland residents must be understood as important aspects of our reading the stone cairns. A broader reading of the cairns considers them as complex objects, shaped not only by the committee, but also by twentieth-century understandings of history and by the interests and desires of Gippsland residents.

1 This research was supported by the State Library of Victoria through the AGL Shaw Summer Research Fellowship. I would like to thank the staff and fellow scholars at the State Library for their assistance and encouragement.

2 In the 1920s places in Victoria were considered cities, shires, towns or boroughs based on the earnings of the area. From year to year places could be reclassified, for instance Sale graduated from a shire to a town in 1924 and a city in 1950. Townships could also sit inside shires. The Shire of Maffra governed the townships of Maffra, Heyfield and Benambra.
In the early twentieth century, memory and local histories were used to create national narratives of progress and success. When people regard themselves as having a common history, a sense of national memory is created.\(^3\) The committee’s attempts to fuse local memory and history with the stone cairns was not a simple process; rather, it was a result of extended negotiation between the committee and the residents of many cities, towns, shires and boroughs. The committee supplied towns and cities with maps and designs which prescribed the subject of the cairn, what the inscription should be, where it should be located and how big it needed to be. The creation of memorials through commemorative activities may appear harmonious yet the process is often one of contest and struggle.\(^4\)

The creation of the memorials was part of larger twentieth-century history making practices, which were concerned with creating and presenting a respectable story of national progress and triumph,\(^5\) and also inscribing the settler presence on a land that was seen as devoid any antiquity.\(^6\) Yet it is also important to recognise that the activities of the committee were not always

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4 Ibid., 5.
5 These include commemorative holidays, war memorials and historical tourism
necessarily productive. Additionally, the commemorative activities which occurred were not always shaped by the actions of the committee, nor were they always permanent (such as the unveiling ceremonies). The committee negotiated and compromised with residents in Gippsland, with varying success, and there is still a sense of lasting discontent about the results of commemorative activity. The committee’s activities ignored complex local histories and commemorative activities in attempts to create a universal narrative of inland exploration and peaceful triumph. This included erasing local memories that incorporated an Aboriginal presence, the violent conflict between the original inhabitants of the land, the Kurnai people, explorers and settlers, and local figures outside of those selected for memorialisation by the committee. Beliefs of the period also meant areas of Gippsland refused to install the cairns or altered their appearance.

After the installation of the cairns, the committee unveiled them in a series of ceremonies. The ceremonies were subject to changes of location, and took on a different format at each town in Gippsland. However, the ceremonies also allowed the committee to lecture Gippsland residents about the committee’s own concerns; on topics such as preventing population drift and British loyalty. Members of the committee, specifically Sir James Barrett, A.S. Kenyon and Frank Tate, were strong advocates for rural reform and country life. Additionally, Barrett and the Governor General of Victoria (Lord) Somers used the ceremonies, and particularly Angus McMillan’s cultural identity, as a point to advocate for imperial loyalty and support for Empire settlement. Throughout the work of the committee, there were tensions between the enforced commemorative activity, local historical knowledge and the interests of the Gippsland settlers. These concerns mean that the stone cairns cannot be read as straightforward products of memorialisation. The historical, social and cultural context of the cairns reveals disjunctures in the twentieth-century settler project, such as attempts to use complex local histories in national narratives of progress, the perceived and real differences between city life and country life, and issues of Australian identity and Empire loyalty.7

THE FORMATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

During the 1924 Hume and Hovell centenary celebrations, a committee was formed which was dedicated to establishing a series of memorials along Hume and Hovell’s route. The initial committee contained representatives from the Historical Society of Victoria, National Parks Association, the Tourists Resort Committee and the Automobile Club of Victoria. Over thirty Hume and Hovell memorials were installed from Albury and Geelong, and the committee took a seven-day trip to unveil the cairns. The Victorian Historical Memorials Committee was subsequently formed after the success of the Hume and Hovell committee. The aim of the second memorials committee was to coordinate the installation of cairns to mark of the routes of other inland Victorian explorers.

The Victorian Historical Memorials Committee had roughly the same composition as the original Hume and Hovell committee, and Barrett was elected its chairman. The committee resolved to mark out the routes of the Gippsland explorers Angus McMillan and Paul de Strzelecki first. The committee was aware of the growing sense of historical consciousness in Australia, and they believed that historical thought needed to be controlled and directed. In the twentieth century there was a sense that Australians needed to be reminded of the historic events which occurred in the previous century as shaping modern Australia. The committee believed that the contribution of explorers and pioneers to the development of the nation was at risk of being forgotten. For instance, aside from well-known inland explorers such as Hume and Hovell and Burke and Wills, they thought that many other explorers were not known to the general Australian public.

The creation of a memorial is a buffer against the tide of history sweeping away memories of certain figures or events. Memorials enduringly and publicly legitimise histories which are then tied to the act of remembrance. In the view of particular people, memorials are required because the general public are naturally forgetful, and uncontrolled memory can not be trusted. Memorials therefore act as external deposits of memory in public space.

12 Gillis, ‘Memory and Identity’, 15.
The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were periods of worldwide memorial mania and war memorials were a particular focus for towns and cities. Between 1909 and 1929 Sale built a memorial to the Boer War, a Cenotaph, a general war memorial and a Soldier’s Memorial Hall. The movement to erect a war memorial in Melbourne also ran parallel to the committee’s work. Construction on the Shrine of Remembrance began in the same year that committee marked out the routes of McMillan and Strzelecki.

**STONE CAIRNS**

The committee chose stone cairns for symbolic and practical reasons. The committee considered the physical Australian landscape completely devoid of markers of past civilisations such as temples, palaces, urns and busts. The cairn’s classical image—its long association with Western history—suited the committee’s aim of overcoming this deficiency in the landscape. As studied by historian Tom Griffiths, the cairns were an attempt to create a local geography of the past which bound European traditions to the colonial era and settler society. Meanwhile, members of the committee, such as Kenyon, were actively stripping the land of Aboriginal stone objects: collecting Aboriginal stone objects was a popular pastime for educated Victorian men. For them, Aboriginal stone artefacts were not considered part of the settler past or present but symbolic of primitive man.

Local stone was suggested as the committee’s preference, though bricks or concrete were other less preferred options. Local stone was inexpensive, and this meant that the cairns were formed from the same stone that the explorers had walked on. The cairns were framed as modest memorials, operating in opposition to large, expensive urban monuments. The rough materiality of stone was perceived as reflecting the rugged nature of the explorers themselves. Explorers were generally understood as simple, ordinary men who had taken a chance, and therefore a memorial built out of a natural, easily sourced material was considered a fitting match. The idea of explorers as ordinary, rugged

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16 Ibid., 151.
17 Ibid., 159.
18 Ibid., 159.
20 ‘Address to the Rotary Club Wed 11 May 1927’ (Pamphlet, 1927), A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
21 Ibid.
men allowed them to be identified with the masculine world of the idealised Australian type such as the pastoralist, the bushman and the digger.22

**PLACE**

Site was a vital part of the creation of the cairns. Unlike the placement of monuments to exploration in cities, the specific placement of cairns in Gippsland was considered far more impressive.23 As opposed to the civilised landscape of the city, the countryside was seen as a repository of the past.24 The bush especially stimulated the historical imagination and provided a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by explorers.25 As they were situated along the approximate routes of explorers, the cairns provided the basis for educational visits, lessons and lectures and a deliberate attempt was made to speak to ‘boys and girls’ during the unveiling ceremonies.26

**MEMORY**

The cairns were intended to both emphasise the history of and stimulate the memory of inland exploration as ‘no greater duty can be imagined than keeping bright the memory of our pioneers’.27 Historical thought and memory were linked through the act of remembrance. While remembering the inland explorers, Victorians were also expected to acknowledge the debt owed to explorers for their work. The inland explorers were posited as having won the country for the present-day inhabitants, laying the foundation for settlement and development, having passed the title property deeds onto the present-day settlers.28 In the early twentieth century, local Gippsland historian R.T. Easterby described the need for a statue to acknowledge the debt owed to McMillan, which highlighted the perceived capacity of memorials to link the past and the present.29 Early historical work documented the idea that the Australian

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27 ‘Address to the Rotary Club’, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
nation was a product of events and actions of the past and invited a sense of cohesive nationhood based on common feelings of debt and gratitude. Much early Australian history was consumed in popular forms such as song, literature and commemorative activity. Public memorials were considered easily accessible sites which could stimulate Australians to link the historical actions of explorers with the era in which they lived.

**GIPPSLAND, EXPLORATION AND COMMEMORATION**

Exploration in Gippsland was intertwined with the existing, extensive settlement of the area and was prompted by a desire for fresh pasturage for pastoral runs. Men such as George McKillop and James McFarlane were considered both pathfinders and settlers. The exploration of East Gippsland has been attributed to McKillop and McFarlane, who later settled there. The mountain peak, called McFarlane’s lookout, marks the traditional spot of the discovery of the Omeo plains. McMillan himself also became a squatter and a settler when he took up a central pastoral run in Gippsland and established his station Bushy Park. The local process of naming and differing the primary Gippsland explorers began during McMillan and Strzelecki’s lifetimes. In the nineteenth century James McArthur, who accompanied Strzelecki, commented, ‘I feel like I have the right of at least participation in the honour of exploration’. This process was enacted by various interest groups such as historical groups, families of explorers and early pastoralists, as part of the broader production of local history and knowledge.

McMillan was commissioned and supported by Lachlan McAllister and James McFarlane to take two separate trips through Gippsland to find fresh pasturage. Their second Gippsland trip culminated in his discovery of a port for the region, and the committee selected this trip for memorialisation. This port was significant because it meant that cattle farmers, like McAllister, could more easily ship stock to Van Diemen’s Land. Strzelecki was a Polish scientist, who in 1840 joined a trip led by pastoralist McArthur. After climbing

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the highest peak in mainland Australia and naming it Mount Kosciuszko, Strzelecki made the trip back through Gippsland. He named Gippsland after the Governor of New South Wales, Governor Gipps. Although Strzelecki had previously made a geological survey of Gippsland in 1839 his later trip was selected by the committee to be mapped out.

Both McMillan and Strzelecki crossed the same paths, and also paths that had already been forged by previous settlers. An account also exists of men leaving Melbourne in a vessel called the *Singapore* and reaching port before McMillan and then returning again at the same time McMillan reached the port. McMillan and Strzelecki also used Aboriginal tracks to further their exploration. Aboriginal guides and knowledge were key aspects of Gippsland’s exploration—as was true for the colonisation of Australia. Inland explorers frequently used Aboriginal tracks, which crossed many districts and were maintained via fire and constant usage. As highlighted by archaeologist Sylvia Hallam, Aboriginal movement across the landscape and their land management practices enabled European settlement. Strzelecki and McArthur both employed the Indigenous man Charlie Tarra to guide them. Strzelecki employed also an extra local guide called Jackie. Jackie most likely directed Tarra and Strzelecki on the best route over the Gibbo Range to Omeo and into Gippsland. Aboriginal guides were sought out by groups, such as McMillan’s and Strzelecki’s parties, which were seeking new farming country. Aboriginal guides were valued for their ability to lead explorers through to open country with access to water. McMillan’s second trip was travelled along Aboriginal paths, and he utilised the assistance of two local Jaitmathang men, Cobbone Johnny and Friday.

By the twentieth century there was a strong push by organisations in country towns to officially preserve the past and chronicle significant local events. Highlighting and celebrating local history could be an antidote to the steady decline in the population of towns, helping towns strengthen their identities.

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41 Ibid.
Local histories in Gippsland were written from the memories of McMillan, early explorers, settlers and pioneers and also the growth of individual townships, shires and boroughs. For instance, the Bairnsdale centenary stone marks the first marriage in Bairnsdale between Thomas Jackson and Rosanna Kelly, Bairnsdale’s first settler and the birth of the first settler child. The first sub-history centre of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria was established in the Gippsland town of Yarram in 1911. Reverend Cox and R.T. Easterby were both historians who worked with local pioneers to collect, document and preserve local history. Beginning during McMillan’s lifetime, there was push to specifically commemorate McMillan’s achievements. C.J. Tyers—the son of the first Land’s Commissioner in Port Albert—attempted to preserve a tree which bore McMillan’s mark by erecting a sundial there. This plan did not come to fruition. Instead a series of oil paintings were commissioned, to hang in the shire hall in Yarram.

**Tom’s Cap and a Local Memorial Movement**

Prior to the committee’s establishment, questions were already raised about the adequacy of local remembrance and commemorative activity. In 1913, Charles Long—who would later join the committee—stood up in front of the Royal Historical Society and asked:

What has been done to keep green the memory of him...Angus McMillan? Beyond a portrait in the Mechanics Institute, Sale, and a tombstone over the family grave in the cemetery of that town, nothing has been done, nothing! Surely it is time Gippsland folk awoke to the privilege they posses to recognise worthily the work of their energetic pioneer.\(^{44}\)

On 14 February 1926, three hundred Gippsland residents made a pilgrimage to Tom’s Cap. Tom’s Cap was a significant point in McMillan’s journey. Cox described the above event, and other previous pilgrimages, as an answer to the reproach by Long.\(^{45}\) The event was organised by the Yarram Traders Association. At the top of Tom’s Cap, the area was dedicated to McMillan and a pledge was made to create a lookout dedicated to McMillan on that spot. A pledge was also made to support any movement which had the object of placing a memorial on Tom’s Cap. The Gippsland-led pilgrimage took place during the life of the committee, and was seemingly in response to suggestions

\(^{44}\) Cox, ‘Angus McMillan’, 46.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.
by the committee, yet it was not officially a part of the committee’s work.\textsuperscript{46} As captured in Cox’s account, there was a strong sense of ownership and enthusiasm expressed during the pilgrimage, including for a lookout dedicated to McMillan. The willing support for a local-led memorial movement was captured in the comment of Ensay student Tissie Fraser:

As a tribute to our gallant explorer, I think it would be a grand idea to erect a suitable memorial to McMillan. The form it would take and the place where it would be erected could be decided by the people of the district.\textsuperscript{47}

**THE COMMITTEE AND GIPPSLAND**

In the mid 1920s the committee selected Gippsland as the first site for installing the cairns. The reasons for choosing Gippsland are unclear, although the committee may have still been unsatisfied with how McMillan and Strzelecki had been previously memorialised. The committee chose to commemorate specific expeditions taken by McMillan and Strzelecki and selected and honoured them as the sole Gippsland explorers. This narrow selection privileged McMillan and Strzelecki’s trips above the exploration of others. There was little recognition of other significant explorers both before and after McMillan and Strzelecki: such as McKillop, Andrew Hutton and later Baron Ferdinand Von Mueller, who furthered the scientific work of Strzelecki and documented much of the previously unknown alpine vegetation. The committee’s selection also obscured the contribution of the Aboriginal men to exploration and the use of Aboriginal tracks and knowledge. The role played by the men who accompanied McMillan and Strzelecki was also downplayed or ignored. Presented through the cairns was a simple narrative of individual exploration, a public service which was beyond reproach.

The committee’s narrative of exploration, courageousness, selflessness and lawfulness, was inconsistent to both later histories and the memories of the Gippsland explorers. The narrative presented by the committee was a universal one which erased the local histories of exploration. This conflicted with the value that the committee placed on site as an important factor in their commemorative activities. Local Gippsland histories readily acknowledged the commercial motivations for both McMillan and Strzelecki’s exploration, and the part that local pastoralists played in organising, financing and directing

\textsuperscript{46} John Adams, *From these Beginnings History of the Alberton Shire* (Yarram: Alberton Shire Council, 1990), 221.

the trips of both explorers. Five months after the discovery of Port Albert, local official Tyers wrote to superintendent La Trobe and stated:

A part of Gippsland is in occupation of Mr McAlister, the discoverer of Gippsland, who, I am informed, at enormous expense of £2000 to £3000 had opened up a road into this beautiful district.48

The importance of McAlister’s role entered local histories, in which McMillan’s trips are referred to as the McAlister expeditions.49 Pastoralist McArthur funded Strzelecki’s trip, yet it was understood as primarily a personal scientific endeavour. He meticulously documented the geological, meteorological and scientific aspects of Gippsland and freely shared knowledge of the area.50 In contrast McMillan, presented as a true pastoralist who knew the value of the land, kept his discovery a secret.

The members of the committee acknowledged white explorers and that early pioneers had killed Aboriginal people, and yet framed these killings as lawful, humane and justifiable. Barrett stated generally that there were ‘no wholesale or callous murders by the whites’, and collisions were ‘inevitable but our pioneers remain clear of the charges of inhumanity’.51 Kenyon believed that all slayings were committed in accordance with the law and no credence should be attached to tales of massacres and atrocities.52

Yet violence between Aboriginal groups and settlers was part of Gippsland’s folklore and local written history. Historian Chris Healy has written about the continued presence of Aboriginal memories in local histories, particularly in South Eastern Victoria, in contrast to the twentieth-century official white historical silence.53 The 1840s were a time of intense conflict between settlers and Kurnai. The fierce retaliation by the Kurnai and the participation of McMillan and other Gippsland settlers and pioneers in violence and brutality against

51 ‘Address to the Rotary Club’, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
53 The fifty year anniversary of free, compulsory education in Victoria was marked by an exhibition in Melbourne at the Royal Exhibition buildings. The Inspector General of Education wrote to every school and asked for an account of the history of the district and these were included in the Jubilee exhibition. Healy noticed, in the Jubilee texts, the persistent chronicling of Aboriginal presence, and the sometimes violent encounters with settlers: Healy, From the Ruins of Colonialism, 102.
Kurnai is an acknowledged part of local history.\textsuperscript{54} In the nineteenth century, Henry Meyrick, one of the first settlers who travelled through Gippsland to Maffra, wrote letters about the massacres and violence committed against the Kurnai, and he estimated the death toll at 450.\textsuperscript{55} In an account of the history of the Avon Shire, an attack by the Kurnai against McMillan at Bushy Park was described as a large-scale slaughter of Aboriginal men.\textsuperscript{56} In \textit{The Gap}—a children’s magazine produced in Gippsland—the numerous, retaliatory attacks against Indigenous people and the acts of cruelty committed by early settlers and pioneers were freely mentioned. The Warrigal Creek massacre was described as pioneers firing at Kurnai until the waterhole was red with blood.\textsuperscript{57} Framing the exploration and early pioneering as humane also obscures the strong Aboriginal retaliation in Gippsland. The Kurnai were never passive victims. They fought back in a strong and sustained manner against the explorers, settlers and pioneers.\textsuperscript{58}

Historian P.D. Gardner has written extensively about the massacres in Gippsland and has drawn on a variety of sources including official sources, personal accounts, folk evidence and archaeological evidence. Although he concedes that many of the specifics were deliberately suppressed at the time, it is clear that McMillan participated in at least four massacres, and folk evidence convincingly indicates that the Kurnai were hunted at various places in Gippsland during McMillan’s exploration and settlement.\textsuperscript{59} In particular, the Warrigal Creek massacre remains strong in local memory. Different sources indicate that 60 to 150 Kurnai were killed in the Warrigal Creek massacre, and McMillan may have led the attack.\textsuperscript{60}

Believing in the measures of protection extended to a dying race of Aboriginal Victorians—which continued right through to the twentieth century—may have enabled Gippsland residents to speak freely of earlier violence and massacres. The protection extended to Aboriginal Victorians created a sense of historical distance from the violence of the frontier. From the 1860s, the Board of the Protection of Aborigines maintained a policy of isolating Indigenous Victorians from the white population. In the 1860s two mission stations were

\textsuperscript{55} Jean Court, \textit{Aborigines of Gippsland} (Traralgon: Traralgon & District Historical Society, 1973), 8.
\textsuperscript{56} Wilson, ‘Official History of the Avon Shire’, MS 10889.
\textsuperscript{57} ‘Early History’, \textit{The Gap}, 1925, 6.
\textsuperscript{58} Gardner, \textit{Gippsland Massacres}, 13.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 61.
established in Gippsland: Lake Tyers and Ramahyuck. Mission stations were intended to provide basic material needs and protection to Aboriginal Australians and operated in Gippsland right up until the 1970s. The origins of Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers station were described as a story of love and care bestowed upon the Kurnai. In 1908 Ramahyuck closed and the remaining residents were transferred to Lake Tyers and the mission came under government control. In the first half of the twentieth century, Lake Tyers was considered a modern place with new three-roomed weatherboard buildings where ‘the few remaining blacks live happily’. Lake Tyers was also a tourist destination. By the mid-1930s the annual visitors to Lake Tyers numbered in the thousands and the mission was an important point of contact between Aboriginal Victorians and the rest of the world.

THE COMMITTEE’S WORK

In order to install the cairns in Gippsland, the committee needed gain the support of local residents. The committee also encouraged the development of local memorial committees to provide financial and organisational support to the Melbourne committee. The committee needed to direct the support and enthusiasm for local commemorative activity towards their work. The committee worked with the Yarram and District Traders Association to establish a cairn at Tom’s Cap. The cairn at the junction of the Alberton, Tarraville and Port Albert Roads was built by the Port Albert Memorial Committee. Mr J.T. Knox, a local businessman, erected the cairn at Leongatha with concrete blocks produced from his own quarry. All built cairns were financed by funds raised through local committees.

When instructing towns to create the cairns, the committee also faced local resistance and sometimes even refusal. The initial idea of the cairns did not arouse much enthusiasm in parts of the Gippsland district. At first Sale refused to be involved and needed convincing from Barrett to erect a cairn. The township of Maffra chose not to unveil a cairn. It is clear from the Maffra council minutes that the Maffra Shire council supported the work of the committee; however, the people of the Maffra township did not cooperate

61 Court, Aborigines of Gippsland, 8.
66 Ibid.
with the construction of a cairn. In July 1926 the council received the map and
design of the cairn, that they were instructed by the committee to create, and
then asked for cooperation from the people of Maffra.\textsuperscript{67} In September 1926
the secretary of Maffra Shire Council was authorised to receive subscriptions
for the Bushy Park cairn.\textsuperscript{68} By November 1926 no action had been taken to
realise the Maffra cairn.\textsuperscript{69} In January 1927 the president of the shire council
implored the people of Maffra to fall in line with the work of the committee
as the council had made a promise and the people of the close townships
of Heyfield, Briagolong and Bundalaguah were supporting the activities.\textsuperscript{70}
A possible reason for the lack of support for the committee was the discord
between the Maffra Advancement League—a public committee which worked
alongside the council—and the Shire Council.\textsuperscript{71} The committee made special
appeals to progress associations and leagues in Gippsland for their assistance
with the cairns.\textsuperscript{72} The Maffra League put forward motions to the council, such
a proposal to clean up a local swamp, create a swimming pool and to put more
public seating in Maffra.\textsuperscript{73} Disagreement between the Council and the League
may have led to a lack of enthusiasm for the council backed Maffra cairn.\textsuperscript{74}

In certain townships, residents took charge, exerting ownership, altering the
cairns. For instance in Mirboo, the cairn was not the simple stone structure as
suggested by the committee and was instead an imposing structure designed
by a local engineer and lit with electric globes.\textsuperscript{75} By altering the cairns, local
Gippsland committees prioritised their own local memories, amidst the
work of the committee. At Swifts Creek the memorial marked McMillan’s
movements as well as the site gold buyer Cornelius Greene was murdered by
bushrangers in January 1859. In Heyfield the committee specifically instructed
that the cairn be solely dedicated to Strzelecki. However, residents of Heyfield

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\textsuperscript{67} Council Minutes 1 Sep 1925–3 Jun 1930, Maffra Shire series number VPRS 16777/P0001 item
number 15, Public Record Office of Victoria.  
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{71} In country towns, it was common to have public-led leagues or associations which worked
alongside council to push for the concerns of town residents. This was not always harmonious.
In the Gippsland shire of Mirboo North, the Mirboo North Progress Association advised to
the council. There was conflict between the Association and the council, as the association
constantly needled the council to improve the town’s amenities. John Murphy, \textit{On the Ridge:}
Minutes 1 September 1925, Maffra Shire, VPRS 16777/P0001.  
\textsuperscript{72} ‘Editorial’, \textit{The Gap} (1926), 3.  
\textsuperscript{73} Council Minutes 1 Sep 1925, Maffra Shire, VPRS 16777/P0001.  
\textsuperscript{74} Minute Book, Historical Memorials Committee, Heyfield. 1926–27, Box 253/5 MS 00096,
Royal Historical Society of Victoria (hereafter cited as MS 00096).  
\textsuperscript{75} ‘Governor in Gippsland’, \textit{The Argus}, 9 April 1927, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
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 objected to this idea, and their cairn was dedicated to both McMillan and Strzelecki, representing local loyalties. In Benambra, the town residents nominated that James McFarlane and John Prendergast be commemorated alongside McMillan, and so the cairn was altered. The cairn at Corinella, which was dedicated to Strzelecki, was amended to recognise the Indigenous guide Tarra who saved Strzelecki and his men from starvation. Other local dedications to Tarra included the Tarra river, Tarraville and Tarra Valley. In a later historical publication, Bairnsdale Looking Back, the author commented on the date inscribed on the Bairnsdale cairn, ‘it is sad to note that both of the dates on this are still incorrect’. This statement expresses the tension between local memory and the history that was articulated, nominated and given a sense of permanence by the committee.

**The Unveiling Ceremonies**

At beginning of April 1927, after the majority of the cairns were completed, the committee and Somers embarked on a special visit to Gippsland to unveil the cairns. Figure 1 is a photograph of Somers unveiling the McMillan cairn at Sale. The unveiling ceremonies for the cairns were planned for and situated at each locality; performers and audiences were drawn from the area; and the ceremonies were characterised by strict social conventions. The ceremonies provided the opportunity for Somers and the committee to deliver a series of speeches as part of which speakers spoke on concerns such as preventing the drift of populations to the city, country life and imperial loyalty.

The ceremonies were more than simply speeches or the ritual of unveiling the cairns. The context, such as the audiences, performers and location, are all significant aspects to understanding the ceremonies. Although each ceremony had a standard structure and repeated the unveiling ritual, the variability of performers, situations and audiences meant each ceremony was unique. The ceremonies were elastic and dynamic performances. As the committee moved from town to town, local residents changed the ceremonies,

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76 Minute Book, Historical Memorials Committee, MS 00096.
78 It is not clear when the dedication to Charlie Tarra and the rest of Strzelecki’s party was added to the Corinella cairn. The cairn was reportedly installed with only the names of James Riley and Strzelecki ‘Gippsland Explorers. Governor’s Tour’, The Argus, 11 April 1927, 8.
81 Ibid., 106.
particularly the local members of parliament, shire presidents and mayors. As Governor, Somers was in charge of proceedings; however, he did not always undertake the ceremonial unveiling of the cairn. For instance in Omeo, W. Sloan, one of the oldest residents of the area, removed the flag from the cairn.\textsuperscript{82} Crucial to these ceremonies was their performative aspects, the conventions and forms employed by at once the ceremony hosts and the audiences.\textsuperscript{83} Some of the ceremonies were steeped in highly figurative and formal behaviour while others were more informal. In Sale Somers was met on the border of the town and then escorted to the municipal chambers, where he was formally welcomed by the Mayor. The councillors, their wives and prominent citizens of the town were then presented, and the town clerk read an address of welcome, to which Somers formally replied.\textsuperscript{84} At the unveiling ceremony in Sarsfield, Somers and the committee were met by the head teacher at the gate of the school. Somers was then welcomed and greeted by the school children.\textsuperscript{85} Acknowledging the context and the changes and discontinuities enables a deeper understanding of the ceremonies.

The members of the Committee used their personal cars for the journey through Gippsland, which enabled the ceremonies to take place. After World War I, Australia was rapidly motorised, with only America having a higher car ownership rate.\textsuperscript{86} The car symbolised progress and modernity, and owning a car was a signal for being up to date, noting however that in the 1920s cars in Australia were still expensive and predominately British-made.\textsuperscript{87} It was only later in the 1950s, with the availability of consumer credit and lower cost American and Australian made cars, that working-class families could purchase cars.\textsuperscript{88} In the early 1920s the car fuelled the historical imagination of Australians.\textsuperscript{89} Instead of fighting their way through ‘unkind bush’ the car enabled the committee to follow the tracks of explorers.\textsuperscript{90} The ceremonies also

\textsuperscript{82} ‘To Pioneers’, \textit{The Sun}, 5 April 1927, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks MS 12839.
\textsuperscript{87} Graeme Davison, \textit{Car Wars} (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 16.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{90} ‘History in Stone’, \textit{The Argus}, 4 April 1927, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
revealed the perceived differences between life in Gippsland and Melbourne.\textsuperscript{91} Almost from the beginning, Australia was polarised between the city and the bush, and most people regarded the ways of life of city and country people as quite distinct.\textsuperscript{92} Somers stated his main reason for the trip was to get in touch with people in the country and understand the conditions under which they lived. At one point, the committee ‘expressed so much surprise at finding such fine townships, buildings, roads and healthy prosperous people’.\textsuperscript{93} Committee member Tate described motors, telephones and wireless as important elements to taking away the loneliness of country life.\textsuperscript{94}

Somers and the committee members took the opportunity at the ceremonies to encourage children in Gippsland to remain there and develop the land. Somers expressed dismay at the declining population of Gippsland, and he ‘hoped the children reared in the country would remain there, for there were far too many in the cities’.\textsuperscript{95} The imbalance between the population of towns and cities was considered a serious problem nationally and worldwide. In the United States President Theodore Roosevelt had appointed a Commission on Country Life in 1909. In Victoria individuals and organisations took up the cause of promoting country life. Barrett and his fellow committee members Tate and Kenyon were all strong personalities and reformers in their professional fields and were advocates for rural reform and country life.\textsuperscript{96} The Institute of Pacific Relations, Victorian Branch, held at meeting in 1928 regarding the problems of appropriately populating Australia. Kenyon spoke at the meeting about settling areas with low rainfall such as the Mallee, and had also written numerous articles on this topic.\textsuperscript{97} Kenyon believed that the country would deliver great economic wealth to the nation and was considered an authority on the pastoral occupation of Victoria.\textsuperscript{98} Barrett was thought of as a foremost supporter of country life in Victoria and rural reform.\textsuperscript{99} Alongside Tate, he

\textsuperscript{93} ‘Omeo Memorial Hall’, \textit{The Argus}, 16 April 1927, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
\textsuperscript{94} ‘Unveiling of Memorial Cairns’, \textit{The Maffra Spectator}, 11 April 1927, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
\textsuperscript{95} ‘Angus McMillan Honoured’, \textit{The Age}, 7 April 1927, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
\textsuperscript{96} Barrett was a doctor who worked to clean up city slums in Melbourne. Tate was an educator who reformed the training of teachers and the school system. Kenyon worked for the water board and was considered an expert on rural Victoria and mapped parts of the Mallee.
\textsuperscript{97} A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839, Book 1.
\textsuperscript{98} Griffiths, \textit{Hunters and Collectors}, 150.
\textsuperscript{99} Davison, ‘Country Life,’ 1.
advocated for agricultural high schools and bush nursing hospitals.\textsuperscript{100} Barrett believed that the developed of rural Australia was vital to the moral character and security of the nation: children needed to stay in Gippsland in order to make sure the country was held by the British race.\textsuperscript{101} As members of the committee, the ceremonies enabled Kenyon, Barrett and Tate to speak about their interests in strengthening country populations.

**Australian, English or Anglo-Saxon Explorers?**

Both Somers and Barrett used the unveiling ceremonies to encourage imperial loyalty. This was achieved by placing McMillan in a public role as a representative of the British Empire. Barrett was part of a Victorian state movement between the wars to inspire allegiance to Britain.\textsuperscript{102} He believed that the peace of the world depended on the maintenance of the Empire.\textsuperscript{103} During the ceremonies, Somers emphasised the links between Australia and Britain, and the need for the residents of Gippsland to advocate for British migration to the area. Somers instructed Australians to demand a vigorous migration policy which targeted British migrants.\textsuperscript{104} He saw ‘no reason why this great country should not be populated up to the economic point with British stock’.\textsuperscript{105}

Barrett and Somers argued that McMillan was not an Australian bushman, rather that he was in fact a Scot and therefore this was a proven link between Australia and Britain.\textsuperscript{106} Somer’s stated that the deeds of McMillan were part of the bond between Australia and Britain. However, at Rosedale Somers was recorded as saying that McMillan was both a great Scotsman and a great Australian. The claims about McMillan’s cultural heritage were not always consistent. In Australia from the late nineteenth century there was an acceptance of national identities as being fluid and having hybrid aspects, such as being simultaneously imperial and also national. It was perfectly feasible to speak of a cultural identity that was at times Scottish, British and Australian.\textsuperscript{107} This was

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Hilary L Rubinstein, ‘Empire Loyalism in Inter-war Victoria’, *The Victorian Historical Journal*, 70, 1 (1999): 68.
\textsuperscript{103} ‘History in Stone’, *The Argus*, 4 April 1927, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
\textsuperscript{104} ‘Lord Somers on Tour’, *The Argus*, 8 April 1927, in A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
\textsuperscript{106} ‘The Governor’s Tour’, *The Argus*, 6 April 1927 in A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, 12839.
especially true in Gippsland, which was home to large and established Scottish communities. Somers and Barrett linked the ideas of memory and identity by encouraging people to remember the shared history between Australia and Britain as embodied in the memory of McMillan. A shared history thereby made sense of national identity, which was both British and Australian, while also justifying colonial settlement.

Polish and wealthy, Strzelecki’s identity was not understood in the same way as McMillan’s identity. There was no sense of a shared Polish-Australian history expressed at the ceremonies, and Strzelecki’s national identity was not mentioned to encourage European migration. In Traralgon Somers commented that both Strzelecki and McMillan’s names were honoured throughout the Empire; however, Somers then made the point that Gippsland needed to be populated further with migrants from Britain. Strzelecki’s identity was at times described alongside McMillan as Anglo-Saxon. While still a racialised category, Anglo-Saxon is different to British. In the early twentieth century the white Australian identity could be considered British: Aboriginal people and non-British people were excluded from that national identity. Somers stated at the Sale cairn ceremony, to an appreciative audience, that he was as enthusiastic as an Australian in his wish to keep Australia British. In the decades following Federation most Australians were unsure about their national loyalties and a form of nationalism which was at once independent and also part of the Empire was apparent and exhibited.

A Polish connection to the cairns was, however, expressed during the Corinella unveiling ceremony. Committee member Charles Daley announced at the Corinella cairn ceremony that he had received letters of thanks from the Polish consul and Strzelecki’s grandniece, and had also received requests for

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an account of proceedings for publication in Polish newspapers.\textsuperscript{114} This Polish connection was again revealed many years after the unveiling ceremonies. In 1966, the Polish community restored the Traralgon cairn and fixed a new plaque bearing the name of the Polish Association Latrobe Valley. In 2015 the Traralgon Strzelecki memorial was restored and moved about 250 metres. The Victorian roads authority VicRoads consulted the local Polish Community about the move, and on 2 April 2015 the Polish Community held a ceremony to celebrate the restoration. During the ceremony the association highlighted the place that Strzelecki’s exploration held in Polish Australian history as well as Australian history.\textsuperscript{115}

The emphasis placed on McMillan and Strzelecki during the ceremonies was noted with displeasure in recollections of the Rosedale ceremony: ‘None of the speakers mentioned either George McKillop, Andrew Hutton, Walter Mitchell or Matthew Macalister’.\textsuperscript{116} The local reflections on the Rosedale ceremony illustrated the gaps between the commemorative activity of the committee, and contemporary memories of the residents of the Avon Shire.

**Conclusion**

Considering the rejection, adaption and unveiling of the stone cairns in Gippsland enables a deeper understanding of the built cairns which still exist in the region’s public spaces. Memorials relate local memories to broader narratives, yet the production of memorials never happens in straightforward ways.\textsuperscript{117} In the activities of the committee there was a sense that McMillan and Strzelecki needed to be remembered in more concrete ways than simply existing in local memory. The committee sought to have their version of Gippsland history accepted, used and funded by the residents of towns and cities of Gippsland. Meanwhile, the directives of the committee were ignored, adapted and shaped by local residents, who lived in the areas that had been chosen for the placement of the cairns.

Taking a broader view of the cairns as not simply products of the committee allows a more complex understanding of the cultural production of the cairns. This includes the tensions between the committee who were personally

\textsuperscript{114} ‘Gippsland Explorers. Governor’s Tour’, *The Argus*, 11 April 1927, A.S. Kenyon Scrapbooks, MS 12839.
\textsuperscript{116} Wilson ‘Official history of the Avon Shire’, MS 10889.
\textsuperscript{117} Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, 128.
preoccupied with mythologies of country life and the ways in which residents of Gippsland asserted their own desires. In also enables an understanding of the disjuncture between a national narrative of progress and success and the complex memories that existed in local histories, and also the issues of loyalty to Empire and a sense of emergent national Australian identity. As initiated by the committee, and also by Gippsland residents, the cairns often transcended the boundaries of memorialisation and reflected present day actions and thoughts.