

2. Discoverers and fossickers

The first discovery of payable gold in Australia has usually been attributed to Edward Hargraves, but there have been consistent reports that others preceded him. John Calvert claimed that with the consistent assistance of his Aboriginal companions he had found gold in New South Wales several years before Hargraves:

[He got] good results by 'simple crushing and rough washing – with the assistance of his native labourers – Naturally the finder did his best to keep his discovery secret and was for years successful in doing so, having no white allies and treating his black fellows so well as to secure their silence about his searches for the 'medicine earth' ... All had gone well so long as he had contented himself with falling back on black labour.

Geoffrey Blainey's history of Australian mining, as mentioned earlier, is studded with references to Aboriginal people in a number of significant capacities. The pivotal roles that Blainey attributes to Aboriginal people included discovering, prospecting and guiding others to some of the most prominent mineral fields in Australia, including the Murchison, the Kimberley, Bathurst, Mount Magnet, White Feather and Tennant Creek. Eyewitness observations from a number of historical sources also reveal that several Victorian diggings were initially discovered by Aboriginal people. Paul Gootch, a non-Indigenous miner at Ballarat, recorded how the rich Eureka Diggings at Ballarat were discovered by an unidentified, presumably Wathawurrung, person. Likewise, Joseph Parker, the son of Assistant Protector of Aborigines Edward Parker, claimed that: 'The first gold in the district [the Loddon valley] was discovered in 1849 by an aboriginal boy in picking up what he supposed to be a stone to throw at a wounded parrot, but it turned out to be a nugget of gold! A European shepherd secured it and kept it secret for two years'.

A plethora of 'how to' books was spawned by the discovery of gold. Writers conveyed to prospective gold diggers the merits and pitfalls of various goldfields and what to take into the bush. Many goldfield promoters discussed the 'Native population' of Australia, and miners such as Charles Ferguson, mining at Linton (south of Ballarat) acknowledged the integral role that Wathawurrung people had played in miners' quests for gold. Miners' accounts record in local histories Indigenous gold miners who struck out successfully on their own. One humorous account revealing the envy displayed towards successful Aboriginal miners, was recorded by Jonathan Moon, who published a short history of Maldon in 1864:

Time and again a member of the tribe would drop in at a local bank to sell a parcel of gold. Knowing ones about town got to hear of this, and considerable manoeuvring went on to win over the confidence of the seller. The blacks maybe were on a “good thing” unknown to all others.

The day came when a certain slick townsman invited Jackie for a ride, and in gleeful anticipation the pair drove off into the country. The merry travellers lubricated at every pub on the way and finally arrived at Newstead. A couple more drinks, then the driver got down to business on Jackie who was thoroughly enjoying himself.

“You a very fine fellow Jackie.” Jackie agreed with a wide grin. “You sell em plenty gold?” “Yes, Boss.” “Now you tell me where you get the gold and I like you very much.” Jackie unabashed and apparently not a bit stupid with liquor, immediately replied: “Boss, blackfellow no b_____ fool!”

Most accounts are of anonymous Indigenous gold seekers. Typical of this record is an account of the diggings in the Evansford district in central Victoria. One digger noted the ‘natives learned the value of gold and they soon became searchers for the precious metal’. In 1853 JF Hughes, a digger at Porcupine Flat (near Maldon), wrote that: ‘Among those gold-seekers might have been found representatives of nearly every phase of human society [including] the Aboriginal’. Other miners such as William Tomlinson saw Aboriginal people setting off for the diggings from town centres like Geelong: ‘I yesterday saw five of the natives in town, they wore blankets over them like shawls. They had all sticks with them. They are perfectly black and very quiet they appear. I saw four of them starting for the diggings this afternoon’.

It was not long after the initial discoveries of Victorian alluvial gold that reports of Aboriginal fossickers occurred with some frequency in both newspaper reports and published accounts of the diggings. There were prolific reports of Aboriginal people forming their own successful gold mining parties across Victoria. The Native Police Corps, who were at first the only police force on the diggings and had prospected for gold at Daisy Hill themselves in 1849, began leaving the force as gold seeking was more attractive. So alluring were the diggings for Aboriginal people that Superintendent of the Native Police Corps, Henry Dana, wrote to Governor La Trobe informing him that he was finding it difficult in May 1852 to prevent the Aboriginal troopers from leaving.

Surprise was often shown that Aboriginal people would show commercial enterprise as it was felt that ‘the labour of digging and washing was not of a nature to suit their habits’. F McKenzie Clarke noted that the Aboriginal (Djadjawurrung) fossickers he saw near Bendigo were typical of all miners,

in that they sold their gold to purchase subsistence goods such as tea, sugar, tobacco and, flour and beef 'but beef and tobacco were the principal commodities bought'. Clarke further noted the avidity of the Djadjawurrung fossickers who 'during and after every shower of rain, in the gullies, more especially Eaglehawk Gully' were observed.

There was a camp of blacks [presumably Djadjawurrung people] camped at Myer's Flat [at Bendigo in 1852] they could be seen picking up gold from the red clay and heaps of mullock around the holes. Each one would get a few pennyweights and one called Peter (more civilized than the rest), who had been a bullock driver on a station, could show a few good ounces of gold in a chamois –leather bag, with which he made a trip to Melbourne and imitating the example of a good many of his white brethren, got rid of it in a few days and returned to look for more.

At Castlemaine the *Mount Alexander Mail* (21 March 1862) reported similar observations of a by now very savvy group of Djadjawurrung gold fossickers:

Aboriginal Fossickers – We noticed the other day a party of native men and women fossicking about the old holes in one of our gullies. Their keenness of sight enables them to detect particles of gold that would escape the observation of most Europeans ... Though too much adverse to steady labour to dig himself for the root of all evil, and probably thinking the white fellow a fool for doing so, the black man does not disdain the yellow dust, when he can procure it for the trouble of picking it up.

Other reports also locate Aboriginal people fossicking for gold over an extended period of time. Some reports emphasised searches of a sustained nature. An inquest held into the death of Fanny Simpson, a Djadjawurrung woman in March 1865 was told 'The Loddon natives had been some time fossicking at Daisy Hill'. A correspondent for *The Argus* reported in 1867 that 'Another instance of good fortune to one of the aboriginals occurred' and further stated that one of the party (Djadjawurrung) had 'stooped down and extracted a nugget, which was sold the same evening for the sum of seven pounds, eighteen shillings and ten pence'. This independent yet intermittent style of gold seeking suggests that there were large degrees of moving in and out of gold mining work at will, a practice that echoed to a large degree their urban work experience and their pastoral work experience. Traveller James Bonwick described an encounter with a newly materially rich Djadjawurrung group which exemplifies and confirms numerous similar accounts of their Indigenous roving and independent lifestyle.

Even the Aborigines are wealthy. I met a party of them at Bullock Ck well clothed, with a good supply of food, new cooking utensils and money in their pockets. One remarked with a becoming expression of dignity “me no poor blackfellow now, me plenty rich blackfellow”.

A selection of articles in Victorian central highlands newspapers, reproduced below, spanning eight years (1862-70) clearly demonstrates not just a heightened aptitude for finding gold existed – especially among Djadjawurrung people – but also a commercial attitude. The Djadjawurrung people in central Victoria had had a long and sustained association with Edward Parker, the Aboriginal Protector, and the station at Franklinford (and subsequently were able to live traditional lifestyles and still have the Franklinford reserve as a backstop). This tribe was located in the centre of some of the most spectacular alluvial goldfields and was positioned better than other language groups to engage in mining for gold.

Tarrengower Times, 27 June 1862

A party of aborigines on Wednesday sold a very handsome nugget to Messrs. Warnook Brothers; it was slightly intermixed with quartz, and weighed 7oz. 15dwt, which had been in a hole ... The blackfellows were evidently in high glee at their luck.

Argus, 26 July 1864

A party of aborigines had a windfall the other day near Talbot, in the shape of nuggets. Walking over the old ground in Blacksmith Gully, they picked up two nuggets, one weighing a trifle over 1lb, and the other about 1oz. 2dwt. These nuggets had evidently been thrown up from some of the neighbouring claims by the original workers. “Possessed of so much wealth, viz., 51 pounds 14 shillings” says the [Talbot] *Leader*, “the party proceeded to invest themselves in black suits and bell-toppers, and having thus dressed themselves, they swaggered about Amhearst, cutting such airs as to greatly amuse everyone who chanced to see them. The last time they were seen they were trying to make a bargain with Mr Harling for the purchase of a buggy, but the price being beyond their means, taking into consideration the outlay for black suits and bell toppers, they at last requested the loan of a horse and buggy to drive into Talbot, but their wish in this request it appears no one would gratify.”

Argus, 6 June 1865

The *Daylesford Mercury* remarks that a small party of aborigines, the remnant, and a very sickly one too, of the Daisy Hill tribe, on Saturday picked up a nugget weighing two ounces on Amherst Flat.

Argus, 7 June 1865

We are indebted to the *Talbot Leader* for the following interesting incident: Our readers will remember the paragraph which appeared in our last issue, notifying that a party of aborigines had found a thirty-ounce nugget at the Emu. This gold realised about 120 pounds for them.

Despite the appearance of luck, it is evident that Aboriginal miners in Victoria were expending effort in a manner that at times closely aligned with Western concepts of time, work discipline, and industrial capitalism. The 'traditional' Aboriginal view of work, that is, maintaining an intense religious relationship with the land and kinship affinities, was not so at odds with the monetary work of alluvial gold mining. Arguably, some groups of Aboriginal miners forged a niche in the dominant economy 'speccking' for gold which did not compromise their ideas of work.

Argus, 21 September 1865

"The Aborigines of this district" says the *Talbot Leader*, "seem to have a peculiar faculty for picking up valuable nuggets of gold. On Thursday, the remnant of the Daisy Hill tribe, while wandering about the old holes in Blacksmiths Gully, Amherst, picked up a nugget weighing six ounces. Mr Douglas of that town, having changed their gold for notes, the party spent about half of the cash upon new clothes, and adjourned with the balance into the bush."

Argus, 1 July 1866

"A party of Aborigines who have been for the last few days camping near the old lead at Homebush", remarks the *Maryborough Advertiser*, "met with a slice of good luck on Saturday last, in the shape of a four and a half ounce nugget picked up by one of them amongst a heap of tailings in one of the shallow gullies running into the Homebush lead.

Argus, 3 October 1866

"On Saturday morning," says the *Maryborough Advertiser*, "a party of aborigines commenced a search for gold on the heaps of pipeclay at the White Hills, near Mr Mark Drewin's store, and in a very short time they discovered pieces which they sold for 12s., 15s., and 10 pounds odd. The same party were successful some time since in the neighbourhood of Amherst and Talbot. They say, 'whitefellow dig for gold, and blackfellow pick it up.' Their eyes seem more serviceable than many men's picks and shovels."

As noted earlier a greater number of goldfield correspondents merely noted an Indigenous presence in the vicinity of the gold diggings without any direct attribution to their role as gold seekers. A typical example of miners' references to their presence is CW Babbage's illustration of a 'Blackfellow at the tent, Currency Creek, December 1858' entreating gold diggers to 'Give me sugar'. Newspaper reports too inferred a prominent presence on select goldfields. Buckley, an Aboriginal man (Djadjawurrung) 'and his followers' was reputed to be 'perhaps as familiar to the diggers on the Amhearst and Mia Mia Flat workings as any of the settled residents'. Mrs Charles Clacy, on her visit to the gold diggings of Victoria in 1852-53, emphasised her point, stating that 'All nations, classes and costumes are represented there' including 'Aborigines, with a solitary blanket flung over them'. Later at the Ovens district goldfields William Rayment recorded that 'We fell in with a goodly number of natives at different places on the Road but the most favourite resort of these people are the Public Houses'. Oliver Ragless, a miner at Mount Alexander also had sufficient opportunity to make a number of observations on his neighbours:

opposite our tent there are a good number of natives [presumably Djadjawurrung] camped. I saw one of them catch an opossum. The men here are generally cleaner than any that I have seen, and rather better looking. They are fond of white clothes and some of them keep them very clean. The women wear their hair long and keep it in good order with a red or blue braid tied around their heads.

The half yearly return of Aboriginal people in the Western Port district for June-December 1852 noted that the two hundred plus Jajowrong [Djadjawurrung] and Malleegoondeet [Barababaraba] tribes 'have been chiefly congregated about the Loddon, Campaspe, and in the vicinity of the diggings at Mount Alexander'. Others such as Morley Roberts emphasised Aboriginal presence in the gold towns, rather than in the bush or on the fields themselves. Roberts wrote a short story about 'King Billy', a Wathawurrung man whose country incorporated Ballarat's goldfields but provides only reference to his urban associations.

King Billy was given to strolling up and down the streets of Ballarat when that eviscerated city was merely in process of disembowelment, before alluvial mining gave way to quartz crushing ... Old Billy was mostly to be found where there was chance of a drink.

Teaming up

The celebrated cosmopolitan nature of the gold diggings has been well documented in the historiography of gold, but rarely is the active Indigenous input alluded to or unpacked by historians or writers. Yet in the primary

records the coming together of ‘different races’ including Aboriginal people in the search for gold was an often commented upon subject. William McLachlan, in his deposition to the Goldfields Reward Board, acknowledged that when digging for gold in May 1853, a ‘blackfellow from Glenorchy’ had seen him fossicking at Pleasant Creek (near Stawell) and had then returned with a non-Indigenous miner, ‘Dublin Jack’, who stated that he intended claiming the reward for finding the first gold. Other miners too remarked on the mixed assemblages of mining parties such as JF Hughes who struck out for the gold diggings in 1853. He exclaimed:

Porcupine Flat had now rapidly developed into a gigantic rush of some 40,000 people. Among those busy gold-seekers might have been found representatives of nearly every phase of human society – from the Aboriginal, the ticket-of-leave man from the Derwent, the stockman from the Riverina to the enterprising merchant and the Oxford graduate.

The Victorian gold rushes were also responsible for attracting a Tasmanian Aboriginal family to leave Tasmania to settle in the Bangor district in 1853 at Eurambeen Station. John Briggs, his wives Louisa Strugnell Briggs and Ann Briggs, and their family joined the rush to the goldfields, where they lived independently from any government assistance until the early 1870s. In November 1857, John was earning £58 and meals, pitching hay and carting split timber from the mountains. In 1858, his wages rose to £70 and meals. Briggs, not unlike many non-Indigenous workers of the time, went off to the diggings in March but returned to build a new hut on the station, and other bush work such as cutting bark at sixpence a sheet.

William Thomas wrote in 1856 of the large numbers of immigrant Aboriginal people arriving in Victoria during the gold rush period, noting that: ‘There have been a greater number of Aboriginals from the neighbouring Colonies than in any other previous year since I have been among them [1838]’. JC Thomson, Crown Commissioner of Lands, alluded to the fact that immigrant Indigenous miners were present on the goldfields of Victoria when he wrote (rather erroneously) that: ‘With the exception of one or two brought from distant parts of the country by parties of white men, none have been known to attempt the labour of the goldfields’. Several brief references to immigrant Aboriginal people occur in the historical records, locating them at the goldfields or in close proximity. In 1873, for example, George Brown, an Aboriginal man from Sydney, was arrested near the gold mining town of Steiglitz for deserting his illegitimate child. William Thomas also recorded meeting two gold seekers, one Aboriginal (Thomas Walker) and one non-Indigenous, the Aboriginal man having travelled from the Sydney district with a consignment of horses for Geelong. Thomas Thompson, one of 16 Aboriginal people from Tasmania who joined GA Robinson in Port Phillip, was considered to possibly ‘have been on

the diggings'. Andy Pittern, an Aboriginal man from Adelaide was known to have lived in Victoria throughout the 1860s but it is not recorded whether he visited the goldfields.

Chinese contributions

It has not been possible to locate any archival records describing Chinese perceptions of Aboriginal people. One fragmentary account of Chinese people by two Queenslander Aboriginal drovers in Victoria is contained within the reminiscences of James Sinclair who wrote that upon the subject of Chinamen being broached, one of them:

gave us an exhibition of his wonderful powers of mimicry, [he] at once started yabbering away like a Chinaman. So perfect was his imitation of their language that if any person was approaching our camp at the time they would have imagined there was one of the "yellow agony" in our midst. When he finished he laughed heartily and from what he and his father said about the 'longtails' as they termed them, it was evident that they held 'John' in thorough contempt.

The reverend Arthur Polehampton, who spent much time in the Western district of Victoria in the 1850s, considered that 'The blacks are said to have a strong prejudice against the Chinese, whom they accuse of being neither black nor white', and a *Ballarat Star* correspondent reported in 1862 on an 'exchange of insults' between an Aboriginal and a Chinese man in Avoca. Similarly, Peter, a Djabwurrung man, was imprisoned for a week in December 1866 at Ararat for 'assaulting a Chinaman whilst drunk'.

A cartoon which appeared in the *Melbourne Punch* (11 February 1875) titled 'Outraged Majesty' intimates the scorn which Aboriginal people may have held for Chinese people or may simply reflect the racist opinions endemic to large sections of Victoria's non-Indigenous community. A cartoon shows an Aboriginal in a stove pipe hat with nose in the air walking along track and a new chum with swag stopping to ask directions.

New Chum: "Hi John, is this the right way to Toowambie?"

King William: "Who you call 'um John, take me for dam Chinaman? Go to the debbil."

A painting by Tommy McCrae, a Waywurru man from north-eastern Victoria, depicting Chinese miners' people being chased by Aboriginal warriors was interpreted by historian Michael Christie as depicting an actual historical event. There is some evidence that Victorian Aboriginal people saw all Chinese people

as ‘*mainmait*’ (undesirable foreigners) and therefore McCrae may have painted a scene which took place in an earlier period (1840s) but depicted the attire of Chinese miners in the 1860s. Chinese workers were certainly present in Victoria prior to the gold period, and thus Aboriginal people in some districts were probably at least aware of their presence. In some areas Chinese-Aboriginal work interactions would have been very common, such as at ‘Bushy Park’ on the Avon River in Gippsland, where in 1854 there was a Chinese cook in the midst of ‘a suburban environment of blackfellows’ camps’. Illustrations by goldfields artists such as George Rowe clearly depict Aboriginal people in close quarters with Chinese people, demonstrating a large degree of familiarity.

There is also a solitary allusion reported in the *Argus* (21 July 1864) to the possible monetary trade in emu eggs between Aboriginal and Chinese people in Victoria and ample evidence that friendly relations between Chinese miners and Aboriginal people had formed as a result of the attraction to smoking opium by Aboriginal people. The Reverend J Bulmer, under examination by the 1877 Victorian Royal Commission into the welfare of the State’s Aboriginal peoples, elaborated on the endemic abuse of opium by Aboriginal people and confirmed they had acquired the habit at the Kiandra diggings, adding that ‘they tell me that they buy it from the Chinamen’. According to historian Sue Wesson, the selling of opium by Chinese miners to Aboriginal people occurred in gold mining camps at Yackandandah, Beechworth, Delegate, Craigie, Major’s Creek and Nerrigundah.

This pall mall of human society was relatively free of discord: ‘You have of course every grade of character amongst the diggers – from the most courteous gentleman to the commonest black – but all seem to harmonize with each other’, William Nawton, a miner at the central Victorian goldfields, observed in 1852. An anonymous writer at the Mount Alexander diggings in central Victoria echoed Nawton’s observation.

Where all have much the same aspect and association is necessary for work, while no guarantee of character can be obtained, groupings are formed, not of the most pleasant description to some of the parties. That of a gentleman, two convicts, a black native, and a Zomerzetzire boor, may be taken as a sample.

Unfriendly relations

There were many occasions when relations were anything but harmonious on the goldfields. An anonymous and undated letter written to Philip Johnson recounts a tale of greed and suspicious circumstances on an unspecified goldfield (probably Ovens Valley) of Victoria.

You doubtless remember Black Jim a tall fellow that used to work with Thomson and Jim Lorman he was found dead since you left the blacks are strongly suspected of having murdered him as he was going to the blacks camp when last seen alive he had a good many small nuggets in his possession when last seen amounting in all to about 10oz. So one day the blacks brought in a nugget rather more than an ounce and sold to Mcilveen. So him and a lot of the diggers got the blacks to go out with them to show them where they got it. So the blacks took them up on to the dray road on the side of the mountain and said they got it there in the little ditch made with the dray wheels it was a wet day and there was a stream of water in it. So the people all began to search it. I was coming up from the post office and just as I came to them one of the black fellows pulled his hand out of the water and a nugget in it about 8dwt there was such a rush there as you never saw about twenty or thirty of them all down on their knees shoving one another in the gutters ... but no more was to be found. So Thompson saw one of the nuggets and immediately identified it as one the missing man had in his possession when he saw him last so this aroused suspicion and two of the blacks were taken into custody. The commissioner asked them where the man was, one of them said Jacky can tell you. So Jacky another black fellow was immediately seized and ordered to tell. So he took the commissioner right to the spot ... the blacks all made their escape the next morning and has never been seen since.

The rationale for having an Indigenous companion on a prospecting party was at times explicitly explained to newcomers by goldfield writers such as James Montagu Smith who believed Aboriginal people were believed by the miners to be more adept at certain tasks than non-Indigenous people. Montagu Smith provides an example:

We again tried the hole minus two of our hands; and Dick amongst the number showed the white feather, leaving us with only nine good men and true. We repaired the race and set two aborigines at work to cut bark for us, they being so much more ready at it than Europeans.

Writers such as GB Earp wrote effusively of Aboriginal expertise in making huts, keeping the lines of communication open between outstations, locating hapless non-Indigenous stockmen and tracking sheep and cattle. These time-honoured skills were marvelled at and exploited both on and off the goldfields. Short references in miners' diaries relating to the teaming up with Indigenous people are not uncommon and appear to be corroborated by miners' artwork such as 'digger and native'. Thomas Blyth is typical of this occurrence. Having kept a diary on the goldfields of Bendigo and Ballarat in 1852, Blyth devoted two small fragments to his contact with Aboriginal people: 'Proceeded about 3

miles and camped near a gentleman with two blacks ... Crossed the Campaspe taking the horses and cart through the R[iver] and paying a native with a canoe to cross our goods'. Other miners were deeply indebted to the Aboriginal assistance proffered to them. A desperate tale of near disaster was retold by George Mackay in which a miner's wife, suffering great privations and on the brink of committing suicide and infanticide in the Loddon River, was rescued by a Djadjawurrung youth.

According to her own account, she felt impelled to drown herself and her children. Standing there, looking at her shivering, little ones through her scolding tears, and hesitating as to which of them she would throw into the river first, she was startled by a sharp, shrill cry. Turning round, she perceived a young black boy bounding towards her ... he quickly explained to her that he was with a dray, which was returning home from an out-station ... "No, you cry, Mrs. Charley," said the boy affectionately. "You all right now – directly." "Bless his dear black face," she used to say afterwards in telling her pitiful tale. "It seemed to me like an angel come down from heaven".

George Rowe, at Forest Creek and at Bendigo, also experienced the Djadjawurrung's generosity in the shape of gifts and their willingness to be models for his sketches of them on several occasions. Rowe wrote often of his encounters with the Djadjawurrung, actively seeking them out as he recognised paintings of them were a very saleable commodity.

I have got some black fellows to draw which I can do by candlelight ... A few days since Billy or King William the chief of the Bendigo tribe with one of his gins sat for me for their pictures. I made a sketch of them he had an opossum rug thrown over his shoulders she a blanket ... Since I took a sketch of King Billy, I have had a visit from all the tribe every day – they bring me small quantities of gold which they pick up from the surface ... they brought me a young kangaroo rat and have promised to get me a young possum ... I heard there was some encamped so I walked over and made a sketch of them from which I have today painted a group for 2-2-0 they are a very harmless people ... I must try to get hold of some more of the natives and make portraits of them as I find they sell so well ... I shut up shop and went over the hills to see an encampment of natives we found them in the forest about sixty to eighty ... many of them speak English ... This afternoon I walked across the hill into the bush with the intention of taking some sketches of the natives but I found them all gone but 4 old men and a woman with her daughter – of one of the men I took a sketch of them and I hope I shall be able to make money of it.

One of the major setbacks perceived by non-Indigenous people in employing Aboriginal people, reported by employers in pastoral, maritime, service and mining sectors, was the kinship structure that had to be acknowledged by the employer. In the earlier pastoral period squatters and others quickly came to recognise that convivial workplace relations could be often enjoyed only if the families of their valued Aboriginal workers were provided for. JN McLeod of the Western Port district of Victoria, in his reply to the 1858 Select Committee into the condition of Aboriginal people in Victoria, stated that he ‘always employed them when he could but found them expensive work people, for if you employed one you had to feed ten’.

Sexual unions

There are few recorded instances of non-Indigenous women openly choosing Aboriginal partners in nineteenth century Victoria. By comparison relationships between non-Indigenous miners and Aboriginal women were not uncommon. Some of these relationships were long-standing ones such as that formed between a Djabwurrung woman from Mount Cole, known as Lady Sutherland, who lived with a miner named Sutherland for 45 years. Dublin Jack, a shepherd and miner on Pleasant Creek in 1853 was reputed to have ‘lived six years with the blacks and has two fine sons’. He also had the reputation for being one of the first miners at Pleasant Creek after being advised of the good prospects by an unidentified ‘blackfellow from Glenorchy [local sheep station]’. William Thomas, the Guardian of Aborigines reported in 1852 the on-going success (and strains) of an intercultural marriage between a non-Indigenous miner and an Aboriginal woman.

The white man who many months back was desirous of being married to an Aborigine has kept true to her and she to him, though on account of his occupation, he cannot be continually with her; when he can he returns and brings her clothes and what she requires. She has been in my district from the time she left my roof at Pentridge, and is a kind, faithful, and affectionate servant.

John Morrow relates the story of Annie Griggle, an Aboriginal woman, who came onto the Mitta Mitta diggings, stayed and lived with a non-Indigenous miner (Jack Forrester) and became ‘a delight to all her “white piccaninnies” and a respected figure in the valley’.

Many of these relationships between Aboriginal women and non-Indigenous gold miners produced children. One important example is the case of the Connolly family, a prominent Victorian Aboriginal family which is descended from John Connolly. Connolly was born between the years 1855 and 1860 at

the Pleasant Creek diggings where his Aboriginal mother (Djabwurrung) lived with a gold digger, and was raised by his maternal great uncle. William Howitt observed that near the banks of the Ovens River

there was an encampment of natives. Many of them were in the most wretched condition from measles and influenza. We observed that there were whole flocks of children, but nearly all were half-castes. On inquiring how the men tolerated these, we were told, as we had been before, that, up to a certain age, they were very fond of them, and after that they [the children] disappeared!

Wathen also noted the presence of children of mixed Aboriginal and non-Indigenous descent, as did Edward Wilson who wrote in 1859 that: 'These [Murray River] tribes still muster a certain proportion of children amongst them; many of them half-caste.' According to Peter Beveridge, a squatter near present day Swan Hill, by 1861 the only children in the district were those fathered by Europeans. This observation was echoed in other areas and mining regions too. The reportage of mixed descent progeny was often highlighted in government publications. In 1869 the Central Board of Aborigines' sixth report noted that 'at Coranderk twenty two of the children are blacks, and sixteen are half-castes', though there is little evidence of the Kulin themselves making any such distinction.

The case of 'Buckley', an Aboriginal man murdered on the Mount Alexander goldfields after making petitions to two white miners for two 'lubras' to return from the miners' tents, is in all likelihood an example of non-Indigenous miners abusing the prostitution of, or gift giving, of Aboriginal women that occurred frequently in the earlier squatting period. Seweryn Korzelinski wrote of the ease and affordability of procuring sexual services from Aboriginal women, noting 'a stick of tobacco is sufficient to gain friendship amongst men and favours from women. It is cheap, but then the ladies do not wear lace petticoats'. Robert Young, a commentator on the Victorian goldfields, was told by a teacher at the Aboriginal station at Franklinford in central Victoria that non-Indigenous miners often sought the sexual services of Djadjawurrung women, and that the resultant children were becoming numerous: 'The whites in this locality are continually seeking to seduce the females, and are but too successful; so that the half-caste population is increasing much faster than the natives'.

For Aboriginal women in longer-term relationships, the main benefit was the likelihood of being able to remain in their own country; for the white miner, expert local knowledge and freely-available bush produce. Mossman and Bannister, two miners who wrote about their experiences on the Victorian goldfields in 1853, discussed the constraints and advantages of one such inter-racial union:

Old Bill Cowper would dig away at the side of a mountain and chance it. Very few of the diggers would chance it as Bill did; he never seemed to move from the place where he first commenced. Perhaps it was very inconvenient for him to shift, as he had an Aboriginal woman living with him, which might be a potent reason for his always remaining at one place. Bill had evidently great faith in the mountain... he continued to always dig, digging in the side of the mountain, and washing with the assistance of the Aboriginal woman. A lad who assisted him on one occasion said that he got six hundred pounds worth and that it would keep him and his gin a long time. Bill had been about twelve years beside his hole in the mountain, when I saw him last, and he is likely to die there.

There are some notable examples of fictional liaisons which were published during the gold mining period in which non-Indigenous characters vie for the romantic love of an Aboriginal woman such as Raffaello Carboni's musical play titled '*Gilburnia*'. *Gilburnia* tells how mayhem ensued when miners invaded the traditional territory of the Tarrang tribe and kidnapped Gilburnia, the daughter of the tribal elder. W Dobie also employed this literary sexual entrapment device in his fictional piece 'An Australian Pastoral'.

The relationships that were forged between many non-Indigenous miners and Aboriginal people on the goldfields of Victoria were considered meaningful and educative and it is clear that Aboriginal workers on the goldfields of Victoria were deemed a very desirable adjunct to the non-Indigenous miners who utilised them, but they were generally not an essential condition of success. There were, however, some skilled occupations where Aboriginal traditional knowledge was vital and one of the most notable of these was in the role of guide.