

Preface and acknowledgements

This project began with a humble request from my then Masters supervisor Dr Janice Newton to consider delivering a paper at a conference commemorating the 140th anniversary (1994) of the Eureka Stockade. She wanted me to speak about the role of Aboriginal people in that epoch-making event. At the time I was busy researching about the history of early colonial contact between the Wathawurrung people of the wider Ballarat region and the colonisers who usurped them of their lands. Unaware of the bountiful archival material that existed about Aboriginal peoples' roles on the goldfields of Ballarat in the 1850s, I confess that my initial thought was 'this will be one short conference paper'! I was completely taken aback to discover the vast array of primary source material – newspapers, miner's diaries and other archival sources – that clearly showed 'Aboriginal people had had a dynamic influence on the Ballarat goldfields'. Thoughts of researching and publishing further on this topic had to wait whilst I finished my Masters degree, worked as a teacher on several remote Aboriginal communities in northern Australia and got on with my hectic family life.

It was not until 2001 when I had completed my Masters and began teaching Eco-Tourism at the University of Ballarat that I began to seriously consider filling in the huge gap that existed in history books about the role of Aboriginal people on the goldfields of Victoria. Conversations with Professor Ian Clark at the University of Ballarat and Tim Sullivan from Sovereign Hill followed, and gradually the viability of completing a PhD on the topic of 'Black Gold' emerged as a reality.

I must thank Ian Clark for seeing the potential of the project and Tim Sullivan for agreeing to come on board as Industry Partner in what was to be a successful Australian Research Council grant.

Many people at research institutions were pivotal in my quest for what was sometimes just a rakishly thin sentence in a manuscript or rare book. Tim Hogan at the State Library of Victoria was a marvellous 'urger', the volunteer staff at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria pampered me, the librarians at the University of Ballarat were Trojan-like in their assistance and many members of the Ballarat and the wider district Aboriginal community such as Jaara Elder Uncle Brien Nelson befriended me and applauded my efforts in exploring 'our shared history'. Many people have generously contributed advice, time, information and encouragement to this study and I am indebted to all. Special gratitude goes to: my wife Sandy and my six wonderful children for listening ears, endless cups of tea and forbearance of me during hard times; my PhD supervisors, Professor Ian Clark and Dr Anne Begg-Sunter for their many invaluable insights and their guidance, encouragement, patience and friendship throughout the

study; colleagues at the University of Ballarat such as Associate Professor Margaret Zeegers for their positive unfailing support; specialist assistance from Dr Laura Kostanski who was a great listening ear; my extended family who ‘put me up and put up with me’ on my research sojourns, especially Bernie and Robin and Liam and Carmel. I also thank Sovereign Hill (PhD Industry Partner) for their accessibility and financial support; David Bannear at Parks Victoria and Associate Professor David Goodman for support when it was really needed. Finally, I wish to thank Professor Peter Read for helping to transform my thesis into a book, Aboriginal History Monographs and ANU E Press for agreeing to publish it, and Dr Rani Kerin for being an exemplar ‘nudger’.

I give thanks to Jesus Christ for sustaining me.

Fred Cahir
April 2012