

## BUCKLEY'S RE-ENTRY TO COLONIAL LIFE

After thirty-two years William Buckley could see that the day he had long warned Kulin people about, was approaching fast. Ever more ships had been plying the waters of Bass Strait. Sealers had established camps along the coast and the Henty family had already settled at Portland.

Then Buckley heard in early July 1835 that white men had established camp at Djillong, so he decided to come in. He came alone to Batman's camp and spun them an inventively detailed story of being a shipwrecked sailor.

Three weeks later he came clean that he was an escaped convict. The surveyor Wedge and Henry Batman then arrived at Djillong on 7th August 1835. Wedge immediately sought a pardon for Buckley, on the basis that Buckley would be an invaluable interpreter and mediator for the colonists.

Over the next three weeks Buckley guided Wedge in his survey work around the Geelong area. Then in early September 1835 Wedge went to Melbourne, only to find Fawkner's boat already moored there. Buckley was soon exposed to the bitter rivalry between Batman and Fawkner.

Retained by Batman as a guide and interpreter, Buckley in February 1836 took the lawyer Gellibrand on a tour of the Geelong hinterland. Gellibrand was literally gobsmacked by the rapturous welcomes Buckley received from tribal people everywhere they travelled.

The expedition was then later capped by the news that the King had signed Buckley's pardon on 25th February 1836. In gratitude for Batman's support, Buckley rediscovered his previous training as a bricklayer and in April 1836 built the chimney to Batman's new house, near present day Southern Cross railway station.

Captain Lonsdale then arrived in the district, having been appointed by Governor Bourke as the Police Magistrate. One of his first actions was to appoint Buckley as a police interpreter in October 1836, for a wage of sixty Pounds a year.

Then in February 1837, Joseph Gellibrand set off from Geelong for a further exploration of the hinterland, and simply disappeared. Buckley was assigned to investigate, but his journeys proved fruitless. He was also angry at the mindless retribution that was then exacted on the Aboriginal people who were suspected of having killed Gellibrand.

Buckley was grateful to Batman for having advocated his pardon, but was annoyed at his bogus claim to have negotiated a treaty with them. In an interview with Reverend Langhorne in early 1837 Buckley dismissed Batman's treaty claim as simply '*...another hoax by the white man*'.

By October 1837 Buckley was dispirited at the inexorable dispossession of the Aboriginal people. Batman was now gravely ill and would be dead within two years. Buckley therefore resigned his position under Lonsdale and left for Tasmania in late December 1837.

On arriving in Hobart he found himself still as the sensation of the day. A theatre entrepreneur wanted to stage a London play featuring Buckley as 'The Giant Hacho' who according to the publicity, '*...delighted in securing all the beautiful damsels who came his way, and securing them in his castle, till they yielded to his infamous desires*'. To his credit Buckley refused to demean himself, but everybody still wanted a piece of him.

This included John Morgan, a journalist and aspiring author who saw Buckley as the real life version of Robinson Crusoe, from the 1719 novel. Buckley agreed to tell his story, but being completely illiterate in English he had no way of exercising editorial control.

The book was finally published in 1852 and it is Morgan's voice that puts eloquent and moralising words into Buckley's mouth. The book pandered to public taste, with salacious details and violence. Morgan's prejudicial distaste for Aboriginal people is also quite evident. However there are also many unfiltered gems of information that slip through and give a keen insight into Buckley and his Kulin hosts.

In the meantime having rejected a stage career and before any book royalties came in, Buckley in 1838 still had to earn a living. Although now aged 56, Buckley was still a powerful and imposing giant of a man. So in May 1838 the government offered him the job of being gatekeeper to a convict women's dormitory in Hobart.

In his job he met the recently widowed Julia Eagers, who had a young daughter. Buckley proposed, she accepted and they were married in January 1840. By this time he was now age 58 and she was 26, but their contrast was not just in age. Julia was fully two feet (60cm) less than him in height. Unable to walk arm in arm, William made a double loop of material and they walked with his arm in the top loop and hers in the bottom loop.

It was no doubt a marriage of convenience for both, but it lasted for the next sixteen years. The end came when William Buckley was thrown from a cart and received a mortal head wound and died on 30th January 1856.