

READINGS IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY -The History you were never taught

compiled by Jim Poulter

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

The readings before you have been produced by Jim Poulter over several years. During this time Jim has tutored U3A classes in Australian History and given innumerable talks to schools and community groups, in order that we might better share and take pride in our rich Australian Aboriginal history and heritage.

Over the last few years Jim has also written a popular monthly column 'Birrarrung Stories' for the Warrandyte Diary Community Newspaper. A retired Social Worker, Jim's close knowledge of our rich Aboriginal history and heritage does not come from abstract academic study, it comes from lived experience.

Jim Poulter's family first settled on the Yarra River at Templestowe in 1840. Close relationships were established with the local Aboriginal community, and these have endured through the generations. Jim has therefore been privy to the oral history both of his own family and Aboriginal families. He has known and worked with many iconic Aboriginal Elders and tribal people who have trusted him with their knowledge. Many of his thirty books on our Australian Aboriginal history and heritage have been in collaboration with or the endorsement of Aboriginal Elders.

The nearly sixty articles in this course have been grouped within eight themes, in order to guide your learning about what has previously been a much neglected aspect of our Australian history. To aid student reflection about the content and issues raised in each of eight themes, questions will be posed for consideration and as a stimulus for discussion with others

THEME 1: FARMS WITHOUT FENCES

Over untold millennia, Aboriginal people developed knowledge systems that allowed them to live in sustainable harmony with the land. Despite being regarded by Europeans as 'simple, primitive, pagan and nomadic' it was a society free of poverty, hunger, pestilence and war, with the highest common standard of living in the world. This first collection of seven articles examines the nature of Aboriginal environmental management and how Aboriginal 'Permaculture Farming' was largely invisible to European eyes.

[AH 1.1 Just how long have Aboriginal people been here?](#)

[AH 1.2 All Aboriginal knowledge served ecological purposes](#)

[AH 1.3 What the early explorers saw](#)

[AH 1.4 A managed environment](#)

[AH 1.5 Songlines are everywhere](#)

[AH 1.6 A Red River Gum guards your journey](#)

[AH 1.7 Significant sites in the Middle Yarra](#)

Theme 1: Questions for Consideration

1. In your lifetime, how far has the estimated time of Aboriginal occupation moved

backward?

2. In view of the specialization of western science, is 'knowledge splitters' an accurate term?
3. Did early British artists paint what they saw, or was it an idealized image of England?
4. Can you identify any main roads in your area that must have been Songlines?
5. What evidence is recorded in your own municipality of prior Aboriginal occupation?

THEME 2: ABORIGINAL THOUGHT SYSTEMS

Virtually no effort has been in the past devoted to understanding the status, integrity and merits of Aboriginal philosophy and religion. Everyone has heard of the concept of 'The Dreaming', but practically nobody knows what this actually means. It rates no mention whatsoever in the Oxford Dictionary of World Religions.

Based on his decades of discussion with tribal people such as Donald Murrawilli and Elders such as Uncle Reg Blow, Jim offers some insights into the complex and sophisticated Aboriginal thought systems.

[AH 2.1 An analysis of Aboriginal philosophy](#)

[AH 2.2 Understanding the Dreaming](#)

[AH 2.3 The basic tenets of Wandjinist religion](#)

[AH 2.4 The environment as a living entity](#)

[AH 2.5 Sorry Time](#)

Theme 2: Questions for Consideration

1. If everyone on Earth died tomorrow, would the universe continue to exist without anyone to know it?
2. What difference is there between the Big Bang theory, the biblical story of creation and the First Dreaming of fire?
3. If a child makes a birthday card to give you, does it become more than just a card?

THEME 3 ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

Building on the discussions of Aboriginal thought systems in the second theme, the eight articles in the third theme of 'Aboriginal Society', show how these concepts and principles apply in practice.

As is warned in the first article of this section, students may be put at risk of brain hemorrhage when reading these articles. This is particularly so in the second and third articles on totemic kinship. This is partly because the cyclical Aboriginal systems are so different to the linear systems of western thought. However gaining even a faint grasp of these concepts will hopefully enrich your practical understanding of the Aboriginal mindset, as outlined in the five final articles of this section.

[AH 3.1 The complex world of Aboriginal kinship](#)

[AH 3.2 Understanding totemic kinship](#)

[AH 3.3 Kulin Nation Skin Groups](#)

[AH 3.4 The training of Elders](#)

[AH 3.5 The Aboriginal sense of humour](#)

[AH 3.6 Just imagine, a society without war](#)

[AH 3.7 Understanding a different mindset](#)

[AH 3.8 The lingering infection of Terra Nullius](#)

Theme 3: Questions for Consideration

1. Are your granddaughters only girls and your nephews only boys?
2. If you are group C and your marital partner is D, to what group would your children belong?
3. Is war part of human nature or just a product of economics?
4. Is the level of a civilization measured by the degree of technological

THEME 4: THE COLLISION OF WORLDS

One year after the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in January 1788, a smallpox plague mysteriously broke out in April 1789. It spread through the whole country, killing 90% of the Australian population. The event is preserved in legend, story and song. The cause, course and impacts of this first ever Australian pandemic are discussed in the first three articles.

The nature of Aboriginal resistance is then discussed, with the focus in the final two articles shifting locally to Melbourne's Yarra Valley.

[AH 4.1 The Darkest Day in Australian History](#)

[AH 4.2 Just imagine Coronavirus 100 time worse](#)

[AH 4.3 The social effects of our greatest pandemic](#)

[AH 4.4 Aboriginal resistance to colonisation](#)

[AH 4.5 The history of the Yarra](#)

[AH 4.6 Place names and meanings in Manningham](#)

Theme 4: Questions for Consideration

1. In checking what is historically recorded about the Lieutenant Governor, Major Robert Ross, would he be capable of deliberate genocide?
2. Is it reasonable to estimate an Australian death rate of 90% from the 1789 smallpox plague?
3. Did the level of smallpox deaths materially affect Aboriginal resistance to colonisation?
4. How many Aboriginal place names do you know the meaning of in your local area?

THEME 5: THE KULIN SEASONS

Melbourne is famed for its variable weather of 'Four Seasons in One Day'. However the Kulin people of the Port Phillip region defined eight seasons, but not just by the weather patterns. What had to be done at each particular time of the year also helped define each season.

These annual seasons were also related to the Aboriginal use of a 28 day lunar month within a 13 month annual calendar. This was however not rigidly fixed as each coming season was preceded by a sequence of environmental signals in insect, animal and plant behaviour.

[AH 5.1 The Eight Aboriginal Seasons in Melbourne](#)

[AH 5.2 Hot north wind and fix the fish-traps season](#)

[AH 5.3 Eel harvest and inter-clan business season](#)

[AH 5.4 Thunderstorm and rug making season](#)

[AH 5.5 Burning-off season](#)

[AH 5.6 Cold west wind and artifact making season](#)

[AH 5.7 The special month of August](#)

[AH 5.8 Women's Business season](#)

[AH 5.9 Men's Business season](#)

Theme 5: Questions for Consideration

1. Is it reasonable to spend the heat of summer by the river?
2. Given the fuel loads that worsened the Australian bush fires last summer, do you think this will lead to more use of 'mosaic pattern cold-fire burning'?
3. In the Aboriginal scarred trees you have seen, has the scar usually been on the south-east side?
4. Do children tend to get born in particular months of the year?

THEME 6: FIRST CONTACT IN PORT PHILLIP

Within this section, events are discussed relating to the colonisation of Port Phillip in 1835. The names of the principal characters involved, that of William Buckley, John Batman, John Pascoe Fawkner and William Barak are well known to the public. However as the saying goes, history is written by the winners.

This section therefore endeavours to lift the veil on this period of our colonial history through an understanding of the Aboriginal perspective. A little understood narrative dictated by William Barak in 1888 is examined to reveal new insights about the influence of William Buckley on Aboriginal thinking, and the location of the 1835 treaty meeting with Batman.

[AH 6.1 Buckley's Adjustment to Tribal Life](#)

[AH 6.2 Murrungurk's Law](#)

[AH 6.3 Barak's meeting with Batman](#)

[AH 6.4 Interpreting Barak's story](#)

[AH 6.5 Batman's second bogus treaty](#)

[AH 6.6 The Naming of the Yarra River in 1835](#)

[AH 6.7 Melbourne's feuding founding fathers](#)

Theme 6: Questions for Consideration

1. If Buckley survived 32 years in Aboriginal society, was he as dumb as he was painted by some colonists?
2. If Batman had his treaties signed by eight Aboriginals, in ink, on a log, in middle

of winter, how come there is not one ink blot, smudge, fingerprint or raindrop?
3. Who was the nicer person, John Batman or John Pascoe Fawkner?

THEME 7: THE IMPACTS OF COLONISATION

This section explores the impacts of colonisation in the Port Phillip area over the twenty years from first contact in 1835. This exploration is from both the Aboriginal and settler perspectives, with Jim drawing heavily on his own family's oral history.

Themes of both conflict and accommodation are recounted and show how a true Australian identity began to emerge from this period.

[AH 7.1 How Bunjil got promoted to God](#)

[AH 7.2 Jagga-Jagga, the Black Pimpernel](#)

[AH 7.3 Billibelleri, an astute leader in testing times](#)

[AH 7.4 Two starkly different types of colonist](#)

[AH 7.5 The legendary Jimmy Dawson](#)

[AH 7.6 Growing up in frontier times](#)

[AH 7.7 Lanky Manton, the last initiated man in Victoria](#)

[AH 7.8 Strange old Uncle Willie](#)

Theme 7: Questions for Consideration

1. Is the toenail of Saint Thomas a Totem?
2. Jagga-Jagga has a federal electorate named after him and two local Parishes, Jika- Jika and Bundoora are named after his sons, but did you know his story?
3. Were most settlers hostile, benign or indifferent to Aboriginal people?
4. What is the origin of the saying to 'Keep your ear to the ground'?

THEME 8: SURVIVING COLONISATION

Over the twenty-five year neo-colonial period from 1850 to 1875, one Aboriginal figure, Simon Wonga, stood head and shoulders above all others, yet he is hardly known. Wonga's vision for the Kulin people within the new world confronting them was to establish a viable economic base as farmers, whilst still retaining their cultural roots.

Thirteen years after becoming paramount Kulin leader in 1850 at the age of twentyeight, Wonga's strategic acumen and persistence finally paid off. Against enormous odds and skulduggery Wonga achieved the establishment of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station at Healesville in 1863.

Coranderrk then went on to become economically and socially the most successful Mission in Australia. This section maps Wonga's life Journey and shows how William Barak continued Wonga's legacy after succeeding him as paramount Kulin leader in 1875.

[AH 8.1 Simon Wonga, a man of destiny](#)

[AH 8.2 Wonga's baptism of fire](#)

[AH 8.3 Warrandyte's first festival in 1852](#)

[AH 8.4 The original Aussie Rules](#)

[AH 8.5 Three experiences of Burke and Wills](#)

[AH 8.6 Let's celebrate Wonga Day on May 24](#)

[AH 8.7 How Barak got his act together](#)

Theme 8: Questions for Consideration

1. How many students at Wonga Park Primary School do you think know about how Wonga Park got its name?
 2. Has the refusal by the AFL to recognise Marngrook as a precursor to Australian Rules football, been an example of 'institutional racism'.
 3. Is it an overstatement to say Simon Wonga stands alongside Sir John Monash as the two greatest Victorians?
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