

Merri-bek City Council

# Ballerrt Mooroop History Commission: Research Report

29 May 2025



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# 1 Overview

## 1.1 Background and scope

In December 2024, SHP was engaged by Merri-bek City Council to write a research report and conduct oral histories for the Ballerrt Mooroop site in Glenroy. 'Ballerrt Mooroop' means 'Strong Spirit' in Woi-wurrung Language and the site holds great cultural and educational importance for First Nations People living on and associated with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country.

The primary objectives of the Ballerrt Mooroop History Commission are:

1. **Historical research** presented as a research report that:
  - (a) Investigates the historical context of Ballerrt Mooroop
  - (b) Examines the site's development over time
  - (c) Analyses implications for current on-site development
  - (d) Identifies and compiles historical data with a focus on First Nations perspectives
  - (e) Addresses the imbalance favouring colonial history in existing records.
2. **An oral history collection** that documents personal and diverse experiences and stories related to Ballerrt Mooroop.
3. **An accessible presentation** that can be easily understood and is suitable for people of various socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

This research report addresses the first objective. The findings in this report will be used by Merri-bek Council to consider how Ballerrt Mooroop will be used, developed and celebrated in the future. The findings may also be used in support of the site's significance to First Nations people and to produce accessible informational and interpretive material.

## 2 Methodology and research findings

SHP conducted extensive historical research between December 2024 and May 2025, using a range of primary and secondary sources and the content obtained from interviews with a number of prominent people associated with Ballerdt Mooroop. This section of the document outlines key findings in the research material. It is followed by Section 3, a short history of Ballerdt Mooroop based on the research findings.

### 2.1 Documents and research provided by Merri-bek City Council

Our research began with a review of four key documents provided by Merri-bek City Council at the project's inception: *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study* (Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, 2010), *The City of Moreland Thematic History* (Extent Heritage, 2020), *Report on the Place Name: Moreland* (James Lesh, 2022) and *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping* (Greenshoot Consulting, 2024). The focus of our research was the area's First Nations People.

These four documents gave us a solid foundation for understanding the environmental, cultural and political context of Ballerdt Mooroop. We also reviewed research conducted by Merri-bek City Council. This included documents obtained from Broadmeadows Historical Society that detailed key eras in Ballerdt Mooroop's history and newspaper articles dated 2010 – 2015 that concerned the closure of Ballerdt Mooroop College.

#### 2.1.1 Key findings

Our key findings from reviewing the above sources were:

***Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study* (Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, 2010) and *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping* (Greenshoot Consulting, 2024)**

- Merri-bek City is on the traditional lands of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Wurundjeri willam people. Before colonisation, the Traditional Owners of these lands had a symbiotic relationship with Country: the flora, fauna and waterways nourished Wurundjeri willam people and, in return, Wurundjeri willam people cared for Country. They did this by only using resources as needed and through cultural practices such as firestick farming.
- Wurundjeri willam people lived on the country that includes the Ballerdt Mooroop site. They were one of two local patrilineal groups who belonged to the Wurundjeri balug clan. The Wurundjeri balug clan, in turn, was one of at least four clans that belonged to the greater Woi-wurrung collective.
- There are relatively few archaeological traces of Wurundjeri willam people in Merri-bek City. This is because pastoral and urban development since the early 1800s has largely disturbed and dispersed any potential deposits.
- Suburbs in Merri-bek City that were established relatively early, such as Brunswick, are more likely to contain archaeological deposits from Wurundjeri willam people than Glenroy. This is because older methods of road and house construction were less disruptive to the ground. By

comparison, younger suburbs such as Glenroy have experienced a higher rate of ground disturbance in recent decades.

- Archaeologists do not know precisely how Wurundjeri willam people travelled across or lived on Country. However, key archaeological sites across Glenroy (e.g., the scar tree at the Northern Golf Club, a midden near HM Prison Pentridge) indicate Wurundjeri willam people collected resources and likely camped along the area's waterways such as Moonee Ponds Creek and Merri Creek.
- The few Wurundjeri willam archaeological deposits that have been found within Merri-bek City are located within 200 metres of key local waterways including Moonee Ponds and Merri creeks. This further illustrates how important rivers and creeks were to Wurundjeri willam people as a place for gathering food as well as resting.
- Wurundjeri willam people sustained their traditional way of life for thousands of years. They were heavily disrupted with the onset of colonisation in the mid-1830s, particularly when the Protectorate system (1838-1849) was introduced. During this period, First Nations People across the Port Phillip District were being driven off their traditional lands as Country was progressively seized and divided into pastoral runs and towns.

***The City of Moreland Thematic History (Extent Heritage, 2020) and Report on the Place Name: Moreland (James Lesh, 2022)***

- Merri-bek City (2022-present) was formerly known as the City of Moreland (1994-2022), the City of Broadmeadows (1956-1994), the Broadmeadows Shire (1871-1956) and the Broadmeadows Road District (1857-1871). The municipality's recent adoption of the name 'Merri-bek' ('rocky country' in Woi-wurrung Language) was due to the contentious history of the name 'Moreland'.
- The municipality was named 'Moreland' in 1994 to honour Farquhar McCrae. McCrae was a Scottish doctor and land speculator who purchased land in the area during the late 1830s and named it 'Moreland', which was the name of his paternal grandfather's slave-operated sugar plantation in Jamaica.
- Compared with other suburbs in Merri-bek City, Glenroy is a relatively young area. Glenroy's first colonial land sales were held in 1838, but urban development and settlement remained sparse until the late 1940s-early 1950s. During the early years of colonisation, Glenroy's population comprised mostly of Scottish farmers and their families. It continued to be a farming region until the mid-1900s.
- This history did not reveal anything substantial about the Ballerit Mooroop site. However, it was still essential for understanding the site's contextual history, particularly following colonisation.

**Research by Merri-bek Council (Glenroy Aerodrome and local newspapers)**

- For a brief period (c.1920-21), the Ballerit Mooroop site sat just south of the former Glenroy Aerodrome. The aerodrome was established during Australia's heyday of small-scale, private aviation companies but was abandoned once the Essendon Aerodrome (now Essendon Airport) was built.

- Ballerdt Mooroop College was established in 1995 on the former grounds of Glenroy High School. It was known by various names over the years, including Box Forest School (Glenroy Campus) and Ballerdt Mooroop College. The school operated as a Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) school and later a Koorie Pathways School, with a special curriculum catered towards First Nations children.
- Ballerdt Mooroop College had a relatively small student cohort throughout its lifespan. Despite closing in 2012 due to low enrolment numbers, the school played a vital role in the local First Nations community. Not only did Ballerdt Mooroop offer alternative education for disadvantaged students, but it also acted as a community gathering place.
- The school community and Merri-bek Council have been engaged in a long and difficult fight with the Victorian Government for ownership of Ballerdt Mooroop. The site's future use and how it will serve its community is still under discussion.

## 2.2 Research provided by Merri-bek Residents for Reconciliation Action Group (MRRA)

The next research document we surveyed was the MRRA's 'Impact of Colonisation' progress report. The report explored the history of First Nations people in the Merri-bek City Council area and discussed the results of this research process. It referred to the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, William Thomas, who lived at present-day Bush Reserve, Coburg and near Moonee Ponds Creek. He frequently travelled there and to Country near Merri Creek and noted that the area was a hub for First Nations People, both local and visiting from off Country. However, the research report did not specifically discuss pre- or post-contact First Nations history regarding Ballerdt Mooroop. We later examined Thomas's published journals when undertaking additional historical research.

*SHP would like to thank Rodney Spark and Linda Bennett for providing this report and taking the time to discuss their findings with us.*

### 2.2.1 Key findings

Our key findings from reviewing the report above included:

- MRRA's report provided an overview of traditional Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung life, including in the Merri-bek area before European settlement, based on research into a range of primary and secondary sources. This was useful as contextual information and in providing an understanding of information and sources that had been identified previously.
- MRRA found few references to First Nations people in the area in postcolonial newspaper articles. This contradicted William Thomas's journals, which described how Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other First Nations groups continued to use land within the Merri-bek area over 30 years after colonisation.
- There is a range of pre- and postcolonial sites of significance for First Nations people within the Merri-bek area.

- Although the MRRA's report did not contain specific reference to Ballerdt Mooroop, we were able to follow its lead on William Thomas's journals for further research (see Section 2.4.2 for a summary of Thomas's journals).

## 2.3 Archival research

We visited and liaised with the following repositories for sources relating to Ballerdt Mooroop:

### 2.3.1 Public Record Office Victoria (PROV)

Sources at PROV gave us an understanding of Ballerdt Mooroop's development during the early decades of colonisation. We discovered that, for much of its early colonial history, the land where Ballerdt Mooroop is located was used as farmland. These records also helped us establish a chain of land 'ownership' between c. 1838 and c. 1920 that was previously unclear.

Key sources included:

- Historical plans of the Parish of Will-Will-Rook
- Applications for Certificates of Title relevant to the land at and surrounding Ballerdt Mooroop
- Will and Probate for past owners of Ballerdt Mooroop
- Department of Education correspondence relating to the former Glenroy High School.

#### 2.3.1.1 Key findings

These primary sources allowed us to understand Ballerdt Mooroop's development during the early years of colonisation, particularly regarding land ownership. We used them to cross-reference information gleaned from secondary sources that related to Glenroy more generally. We discovered the following:

##### **Historical plans of the Parish of Will Will Rook**

- Ballerdt Mooroop was within the historical boundaries of Section 6, Parish of Will Will Rook. This large tract of land was one of several properties auctioned at the first colonial land sales in present-day Glenroy. Section 6 spanned from the eastern bank of Moonee Ponds Creek to approximately where West Street stands today.

##### **Applications for Certificates of Title**

- We uncovered an initial chain of ownership following the first land sales. Historic applications for certificates of title revealed that Section 6 (including Ballerdt Mooroop) was purchased by John Terry Hughes and John Hosking in 1838. The land was promptly leased to Duncan Cameron until c. 1843, then sold to Donald and Duncan Kennedy that year. In 1857, Donald Kennedy assumed sole ownership of Section 6 and divided it into two farms – Pasture Hill Farm and Bayside Farm.



## Will and Probate records

- John Kerr, a recent tenant of the Kennedys, bought Pasture Hill Farm and Bayside Farm in 1874. Kerr's Will and Probate refers to the fact that he had subdivided and sold most of his land by 1892, retaining only the portion surrounding his residence, 'Kerrsland'. This information flagged the possibility that Ballerit Mooroop was either (a) sold off as part of Kerr's downsizing endeavour or (b) retained as part of Kerrsland.

## Department of Education correspondence

- These sources revealed the Department of Education's initial steps towards establishing Glenroy High School, which was located at the Ballerit Mooroop site from 1953-1992. These steps included a land valuation that described the site's general appearance, a plan of the subdivisions within present-day Ballerit Mooroop and a list of property owners.
- The plan of subdivisions provided only an indicative sense of who owned land at Ballerit Mooroop in 1951. Unfortunately, the correspondence did not include parcel or allotment numbers, which could have been used to match against present-day details for a conclusive answer about land ownership in 1951.

## 2.3.2 State Library Victoria and Prahran Mechanics Institute

These repositories were helpful for their extensive collections of local histories. We interrogated a range of secondary sources to piece together a contextual history for Ballerit Mooroop and Glenroy more broadly (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this report).

We also used primary sources such as maps and street directories to gain an understanding of how Ballerit Mooroop and its surrounds evolved from the 1920s to the 1940s, the period between the site's connection with the Glenroy Aerodrome and its use as Glenroy High School. Transcribed oral histories revealed invaluable memories of the area dating back to the late 1800s, adding colour and personal recollections to our research database.

Key sources included:

- *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria* (1920 – 1945)
- Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) plans
- *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800* (Richard Broome, Crows Nest, 2006)
- *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History* (Andrew Lemon, Melbourne, 1982)
- *A Time to Till: A History of Box Forest and Glenroy in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Judith Faulds, Glenroy, 1990)
- *Glenroy Township: A Local History as Told by the Old Timers* (Judy Archer, Bacchus Marsh, 2023)

- *'The Toorak of the North': An Oral History of Glenroy, Hadfield and Coburg by the Students of the 1981 Year Eleven Alternative Course* (Hadfield High School, Hadfield, 1981)

In some instances, these sources provided insight into First Nations experiences in the area, both during early colonisation and more recently. However, most sources focused almost exclusively on non-First Nations histories and experiences.

### 2.3.2.1 Key findings

- The *Sands & McDougall's* directories were helpful for illustrating a general picture of Ballerdt Mooroop's residents during the early 1900s. However, because street numbers were not specified, it was difficult to trace precisely who lived there at the time.
- Glenroy's MMBW plans were created in preparation for the suburb's drainage and sewerage system. They indicated that the streets around Ballerdt Mooroop were in the process of subdivision during the late 1940s, but still very much underdeveloped with few built structures.
- *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800* provided little information relevant to Ballerdt Mooroop, Glenroy or present-day Merri-bek City. However, it briefly outlined the purpose of Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) schools – a crucial piece of information that is not in other records.
- *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History* is a comprehensive local history on the former City of Broadmeadows, focusing on its colonial past. It did not contain any enlightening references to Wurundjeri willam or other First Nations People. However, it helped us fill gaps in Ballerdt Mooroop's timeline, particularly between Donald Kennedy's ownership (1857-1874) and the site's conversion to Glenroy High School (1954-1992). We uncovered the site's chain of ownership following its sale in 1874, which included John Kerr (from 1874 until c. 1888) and Alexander Pearson (from c. 1888 until 1911).
- *A Time to Till* referred to primary sources used in *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History* and those we reviewed at PROV. As such, it did not reveal anything new about Ballerdt Mooroop or Glenroy.
- *Glenroy Township: A Local History as Told by the Old Timers* focused on memories of Glenroy dating from the c. 1940s to present day. Although there was a notable lack of First Nations perspectives in the oral histories, this book provided colourful descriptions of Ballerdt Mooroop when it was home to Glenroy High School. Some of the participants' unpleasant memories of Glenroy High School starkly contrasted against the positive associations shared by former Ballerdt Mooroop College students.
- Similarly, an earlier oral history project (*'The Toorak of the North'*) contained no references to First Nations People or their perspectives. However, it was helpful in constructing a picture of Glenroy's rural character from the c. 1890s to the 1950s.

### 2.3.3 Broadmeadows and Coburg historical societies

Following our research at the above repositories, we compiled a list of names (places and people) relating to Ballerdt Mooroop's history. We then approached the area's two key historical societies: Broadmeadows Historical Society (BHS) and Coburg Historical Society (CHS).

BHS provided correspondence relating to the former Glenroy Aerodrome, which is known to have operated from near Ballerdt Mooroop in c.1920 – 1921. CHS provided excerpts from key local histories that briefly alluded to Woi-wurrung people.

At the time of our research, BHS was undertaking a collection assessment and was only able to provide a small amount of material. CHS provided helpful research that was specific to Ballerdt Mooroop, but there was very little available on First Nations People.

SHP would like to thank Mark Moore (Communications Secretary, BHS) and Tim McKenna (Secretary, CHS) for their timely assistance with our work.

#### 2.3.3.1 Key findings

Our key findings were:

- The Aviation Ltd correspondence from BHS suggested that Ballerdt Mooroop may have sat outside the boundaries of the Glenroy Aerodrome. The correspondence refers to an attached plan of the aerodrome site; however, this plan has since been lost and has been replaced by BHS with a more recent map of the site. The map suggests that Gordon Grove formed the aerodrome's southern boundary.
- Sources provided by CHS confirmed our findings from earlier primary and secondary research; notably, that Ballerdt Mooroop is on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country and it was formerly owned by John Terry Hughes and John Hosking.

### 2.3.4 Merri-bek City Council Libraries

We searched Merri-bek Libraries' Local History Catalogue for additional sources. Our research returned similar results as well as a small number of historical photographs taken around Glenroy during the 1920s – 40s.

#### 2.3.4.1 Key findings

We found a small collection of photographs taken around Glenroy and at the former Glenroy Aerodrome. None contained a clear view of the Ballerdt Mooroop site.

### 2.3.5 Koorie Heritage Trust

SHP contacted the Koorie Heritage Trust but did not receive a response.

## 2.4 Additional desktop research

### 2.4.1 Trove (National Library of Australia)

Having established a clear timeline of Ballerdt Mooroop's postcolonial development, we were able to conduct targeted searches relating to the place and the people connected to it. Digitised newspapers on Trove were invaluable for gaining insight into the daily happenings around Glenroy from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s. In some instances, these articles referred directly to Ballerdt Mooroop and its surrounds, including the report on packs of native dogs patrolling Duncan Cameron's farm.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, digitised letters from Jessie and Donald Kennedy to Duncan Kennedy offered glimpses of farm life at Ballerdt Mooroop during the mid-1800s.

#### 2.4.1.1 Key findings

Unfortunately – but perhaps not surprisingly – these primary sources did not reveal anything about First Nations People between the 1830s and 1950s. Although our reading of the *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study* (2010) indicates that Moonee Ponds Creek is a significant site in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung culture, this connection has been largely ignored by colonial primary sources. This reflects the standard historiography of the time, which was characterised by silences or omissions in relation to First Nations People.

### 2.4.2 The Journals of William Thomas (1839 – 1867)

William Thomas was appointed Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip in 1839 and later Guardian of the Aborigines of Victoria. He wrote extensively about his interactions with First Nations People in the colony in his journals, offering valuable insights into how Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other First Nations groups used their traditional land in the Merri-bek area and how this use changed over time with the impacts of colonisation. Although Thomas's descriptions of locations were often vague, he did make a handful of comments about Country within the vicinity of present-day Ballerdt Mooroop. The journals also contain numerous references to groups camped in the Moonee Ponds and Merri Creek areas.

#### 2.4.2.1 Key findings

The journals were useful for their anecdotal references to First Nations camps around the Moonee Ponds and Merri Creeks from 1839 – 67. However, they shed very little light on how Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people lived on Country in the northern part of the Merri-bek area and did not specifically

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<sup>1</sup> 'Local Intelligence', *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, 4 July 1842, p. 2.

mention the land on which Ballerrt Mooroop is located. Thomas did mention breaking up a camp of First Nations People at Essendon and sending them to Broadmeadows in 1862, but the specific reason for this is unclear. Our discussion with the MRRA suggests that Thomas may have sent the group to Broadmeadows because the area was a meeting and gathering place for various clans.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.4.3 Title history search

Before investigating the sources at PROV, we conducted a title history search via Landata to determine Ballerrt Mooroop's chain of ownership since colonisation. This generated a long list of parent titles, that is, certificates of title that were cancelled as the land was progressively subdivided. However, we decided not to proceed with a title search because to establish Ballerrt Mooroop's chain of ownership in this way would have involved investigating the title histories of each parent title and so on. This extremely costly exercise would likely have resulted in title certificates not relevant to Ballerrt Mooroop. We also navigated this challenge by cross-referencing the primary sources cited in local histories. For instance, Andrew Lemon's *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History* referred to a record at PROV that contained a plan of Donald Kennedy's estate when it was sold in 1874.

#### 2.4.3.1 Key findings

The title history search did not immediately reveal anything about Ballerrt Mooroop's history.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Historical research does not always reveal information sought about historic sites, particularly when it relates the post-colonisation history of First Nations People. As outlined above, our research confirms that there is a notable bias in historical sources towards documenting the machinery of colonisation and the lives, memories and experiences of non-First Nations People. In these sources, we often do not have the opportunity to hear the voices and perspectives of First Nations People either at all or without a colonial filter.

Moreover, First Nations histories are largely passed down between generations in the form of storytelling. Where these histories have been lost or forgotten, archaeology is typically used as the go-to source for interpreting First Nations histories. However, this practice often neglects the postcolonial experiences of First Nations People that encompasses dispossession of traditional lands, removal to missions and reserves, Stolen Generations, the destruction of significant places and sacred sites, the ongoing effects of colonisation on people and Country.

Therefore, First Nations histories in this report have largely been gathered from archival records and archaeological evidence where stories have been lost. Because there are few colonial sources that refer to First Nations People in the Glenroy area, these records (together with the oral history interviews generated for this project) are all the more valuable.

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<sup>2</sup> Ballerrt Mooroop Commission: conversation with Rodney Spark and Linda Bennett of the Merri-bek Residents for Reconciliation Action Group (MRRA), 20 March 2025.

## 3 A history of Ballerit Mooroop

### 3.1 Contextual history

#### 3.1.1 The Deep Time of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country

Ballerit Mooroop is located in Merri-bek City on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, which has been home to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people for over 40,000 years.<sup>3</sup> Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country is within the Victorian Volcanic Plains bioregion, which was historically characterised by open grasslands, gently sloping hills, shallow wetlands and large basalt deposits. This bioregion has sustained Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people for tens of thousands of years.<sup>4</sup>

Archaeological records show that Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people were living on Country by the onset of the Pleistocene era (c. 40,000 – 10,000 BCE).<sup>5</sup> During this time, the seas were much lower and the climate was cool and arid. *Birraring* (Yarra River) flowed southwards onto the Bassian Plain – a great landmass where *Naarm* (Port Phillip Bay) currently lies that connected mainland Australia to Tasmania.<sup>6</sup> By about 4,000 BCE, the sea levels gradually rose and *Naarm* became the body of water it is today.<sup>7</sup>

#### 3.1.2 Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and their Country

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people belong to the East Kulin language group, whose traditional lands cover most of central Victoria, from *Naarm*'s eastern shore to the Murray River in the north.<sup>8</sup> The Woi-wurrung group consisted of at least four clans, including the **Wurundjeri balug clan**, who lived in the area now known as Merri-bek City.<sup>9</sup> Within the Wurundjeri balug clan, individuals belonged to either the **Wurundjeri willam** or the **Bulug willam patriline**. Individuals inherited their father's clan membership and moiety, which was *Bunjil* (the eaglehawk) or *Waa* (the crow).<sup>10</sup> All Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people today are descended from surviving members of the Wurundjeri willam clan.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, 2010, pp. 10–11 <<https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/globalassets/website-merri-bek/areas/living-merri-bek/community-services/diversity/merri-bek-pre-contact-aboriginal-heritage-study.pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, February 2024, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>6</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 10.

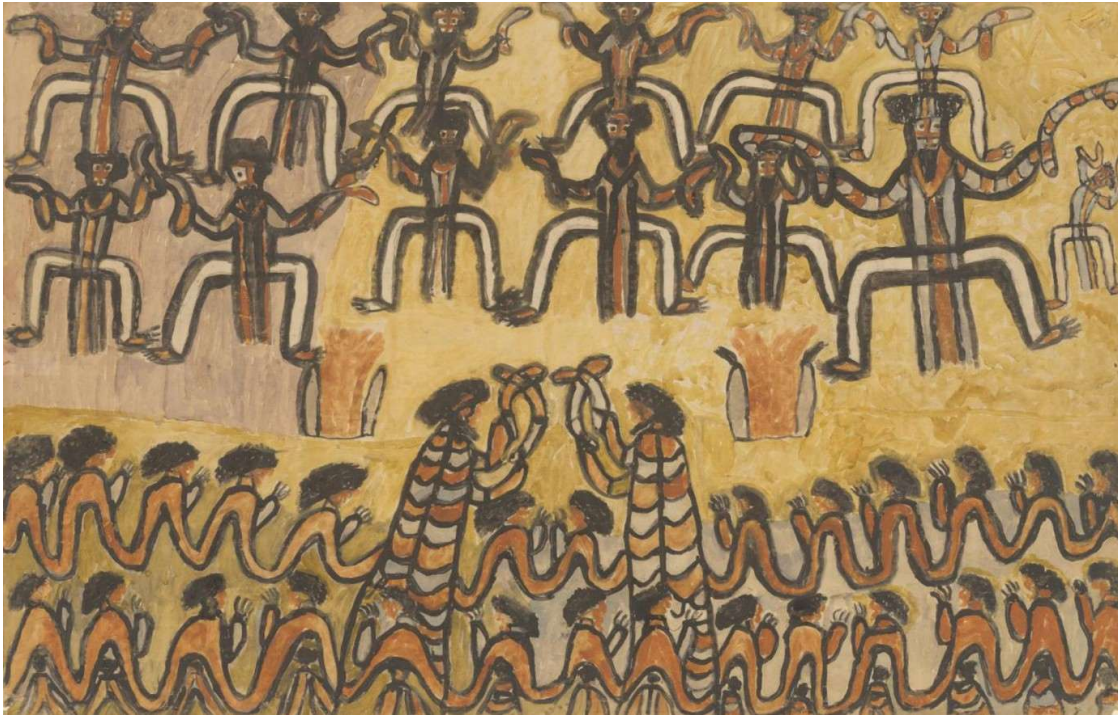
<sup>8</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>11</sup> 'Wurundjeri People', *Deadly Story*, n.d. <[https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Aboriginal\\_Country\\_Completed/Wurundjeri/Wurundjeri\\_People#:~:text=Today%2C%20those%20people%20who%20descend,as%20the%20Yarra%20Yarra%20Tribe.>](https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Aboriginal_Country_Completed/Wurundjeri/Wurundjeri_People#:~:text=Today%2C%20those%20people%20who%20descend,as%20the%20Yarra%20Yarra%20Tribe.>)>.





Ceremony, 1898  
William Barak, National Gallery of Victoria

The Wurundjeri willam ('white gum tree dwellers') patriline consisted of smaller groups, including the mob lead by Billibellary, who was also known as Jika Jika. Billibellary's mob lived on the Country that included present-day Merri-bek City, particularly the area between the Saltwater (Maribyrnong) River and Darebin Creek, then northwards to the greenstone quarry at Mount William.<sup>12</sup> This part of Country would have included where Ballerit Mooroop stands today.

Although there are few archaeological sites that demonstrate precisely how Wurundjeri willam people lived on this part of Country, the area's waterways were clearly a significant part of daily life.<sup>13</sup> Moonee Ponds Creek, one of the oldest waterways on Country, was originally a chain of waterways that fed into the West Melbourne Swamp. Before colonisation, the creek was home to an abundant supply of eels and yabbies that Wurundjeri willam people captured in stone weirs and fibre nets.<sup>14</sup> A midden uncovered near the former HM Prison Pentridge demonstrates that Wurundjeri willam people collected freshwater mussels on Country.<sup>15</sup> They also hunted kangaroo and emu on the grassy plains, possum in forested areas and harvested *murnong* (Daisy Yam) near Moonee Ponds Creek.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 18; Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, December 2020, p. 31 <<https://merri-bek.vic.gov.au/globalassets/website-merri-bek/areas/exploring-merri-bek/about-the-city-of-merri-bek/merri-bek-thematic-history-2020---adopted.pdf>>.

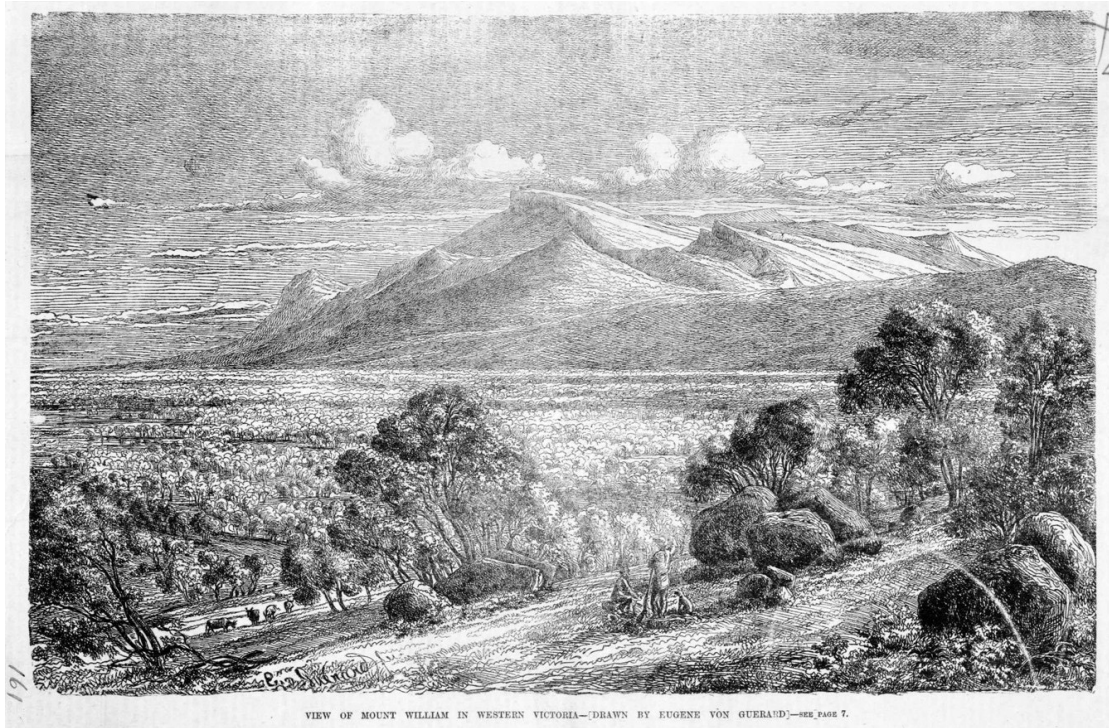
<sup>13</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 24; Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 13; Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 18.

Moonee Ponds Creek was also likely a favoured camping spot, because Wurundjeri willam people typically set up camp near water and confined their hunting and gathering within a five-to-10 kilometre radius of that site.<sup>17</sup> In this light, Ballerit Mooroop may have been a hunting ground many years before colonisation.<sup>18</sup>



View of Mount William in Western Victoria, 1865  
Ebenezer and David Syme, *State Library Victoria*

In the millennia before colonisation, Wurundjeri willam Country was dominated by vast grasslands of Kangaroo Grass and forests of River Red Gum, Drooping Sheoak, Hedge Wattle, Woolly Tea Tree and other native vegetation.<sup>19</sup> Wurundjeri willam people nurtured Country not only by practising sustainable ways of living, but also through firestick farming. This involved periodically burning selected parts of Country to encourage new vegetation growth, which in turn cleared traditional pathways (known as Songlines) and attracted animals for hunting. Firestick farming also greatly diversified the flora and fauna of Wurundjeri willam Country.<sup>20</sup>

Wurundjeri willam people travelled across Country using Songlines, traditional pathways that were used by the community for long stretches of time. These pathways were called Songlines because their landmarks and directions of travel were included in a song. Travellers then memorised the song to help guide their way.<sup>21</sup> Songlines also held important information about safety and respecting

<sup>17</sup> *The Wurundjeri Willam: The Original Inhabitants of Moonee Valley*, ed. by Peter McQuinlan, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, Ballerit Mooroop Commission oral history interview, 17 April 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, pp. 14–15, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> 'Songlines', *Deadly Story*

<[https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/Life\\_Lore/Songlines#:~:text=Songlines%20are%20the%20Aboriginal%20walking,ance](https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/Life_Lore/Songlines#:~:text=Songlines%20are%20the%20Aboriginal%20walking,ance)



Country.<sup>22</sup> These paths were so well travelled that many early colonial roads were built on them, including Sydney Road.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, land clearing carried out during the early 1800s removed many traces of Wurundjeri willam people from the Country between the Moonee Ponds and Merri creeks.<sup>24</sup> However, archaeological surveys conducted since the 1980s have uncovered several important sites, including a scar tree at the present-day Northern Golf Course and a stone artefact scatter at K W Joyce Reserve.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.1.3 Colonisation

Wurundjeri willam people probably did not encounter Europeans until 1824, when explorers Hamilton Hume and William Wilton Hovell arrived at the uppermost part of Moonee Ponds Creek from New South Wales.<sup>26</sup> Before this, European explorers, scientists, sealers and whalers had been visiting the shoreline of *Naarm* since the beginning of the century.<sup>27</sup> In 1835, it is certain that Wurundjeri willam people (and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people more broadly) encountered Europeans. This occurred when John Batman initiated his sham 'treaty' that involved barring Traditional Owners from their own lands.

Batman was a pastoralist from Van Diemen's Land who arrived in the Port Phillip District with the aim of securing more land to own.<sup>28</sup> He met with the area's Traditional Owners, including Billibellary, on 6 June 1835. This meeting was within the boundaries of the present-day City of Whittlesea, likely on the banks of Edgars Creek at Thomastown or near Darebin Creek at Bundoora or Epping. Here, Batman presented the Traditional Owners with a 'treaty' that offered blankets, weapons, beads, flour and other items in exchange for 60,000 acres of land. Billibellary was one of the eight *ngurungaeta* (clan heads) who signed the treaty, unaware of the injustices that would soon follow.<sup>29</sup> Because land purchase and ownership were alien concepts to the Kulin Nation groups, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung

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stral%20stories%20attached%20to%20them.&text=What%20are%20song%20lines?&text=If%20playback%20doesn't%20begin%20shortly%2C%20try%20restarting%20your%20device.> [accessed 3 March 2025].

<sup>22</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, pp. 34–36.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History* (Hargreen, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> John Batman, 'The Journal (10 May - 11 June 1835)', *State Library Victoria*, 2010, pp. 62–65 <[https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/flipbook/john\\_batmans\\_diary/files/assets/basic-html/page-65.html#>](https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/flipbook/john_batmans_diary/files/assets/basic-html/page-65.html#>).

<sup>29</sup> Isabel Ellender and Peter Christiansen, *The People of Merri Merri: The Wurundjeri in Colonial Days* (Merri Creek Management Committee, 1999), p. 35; Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800* (Allen & Unwin, 2005), p. 33; Records and Archives Branch of the City of Melbourne, *The History of the City of Melbourne* (City of Melbourne, 1997), p. 8; Ian D Clark and Toby Heydon, *A Bend in the Yarra: A History of Merri Creek Protectorate Station and Merri Creek Aboriginal School 1841-1851*, Report Series, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), p. 8; Giordano Nanni and Andrea James, *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013), pp. 6, 9, 201; 'Ancestors and Past', *Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation* <<https://www.wurundjeri.com.au/our-story/ancestors-past/>> [accessed 3 August 2023]; Robert Wuchatsch, 'The Plenty Valley - an Historical Perspective', in *Cultural Landscape of the Plenty Valley*, ed. by Lucy Grace Ellern, Plenty Valley Papers, 1995, p. 33.

people may have believed that Batman intended only to use the resources of Country – not to claim Country as his own.<sup>30</sup>



Batman's treaty with the aborigines [sic] at Merri Creek, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1835, 1888  
John Wesley Burt, *State Library Victoria*

Despite the illegality of Batman's actions, the event set a precedent for the seizure of traditional lands throughout the Kulin Nation. By 1838, squatters occupied immense tracts of Country, particularly in Melbourne's northern plains. Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country (notably the area currently comprising Merri-bek and Hume cities) was highly sought after for its rich soils and arable land.<sup>31</sup> Western agricultural practices that were introduced at this time devastated Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country for years to come. Livestock hooves destroyed the soil where precious *murnong* grew and the settlements that sprang up on waterways restricted the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People's ability to hunt and fish.<sup>32</sup>

By 1841, there were over 350 colonists living on the Country of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People. These colonised areas would later become the suburbs of Coburg and Brunswick.<sup>33</sup> Much of the native vegetation in the district was also eradicated to make way for the introduced plants that the colonists cultivated in preference to native plants.<sup>34</sup> Within a few short years, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country had been irrevocably changed.

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<sup>30</sup> John Batman, 'The Journal (10 May - 11 June 1835)', pp. 62–65; Robert Wuchatsch, 'The Plenty Valley - an Historical Perspective', p. 33; Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800*, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Dr James Lesh, *Report on the Place Name: Moreland* (Deakin University, April 2022), p. 8 <[https://hdp-au-prod-app-more-conversations-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/4416/4973/4128/A4\\_Name\\_Change\\_Report\\_30p\\_FA\\_WEB.pdf](https://hdp-au-prod-app-more-conversations-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/4416/4973/4128/A4_Name_Change_Report_30p_FA_WEB.pdf)>.

<sup>34</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 23.

### 3.1.4 First Nations People on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country since colonisation

Our people were pushed off our lands and forced onto missions in the 1860s so they could be controlled. All these forms of persecution [were] ... genocidal activities to get rid of our mob so that British occupiers, settlers, could actually take over without any concern.<sup>35</sup>

- Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 2025

By the 1860s, members of the Kulin Nation were being forced off their traditional lands by laws and movements that advocated for their 'protection'. These included the *Aborigines Protection Act* 1869, which established a Central Board for the Protection of First Nations People and set up missions, reserves and government stations across Victoria for them to live on.<sup>36</sup> The deeply offensive contemporary mindset was that 'full-bloods' would eventually 'die off' in these controlled locations and that surviving children of mixed ancestry (i.e., First Nations and European) could be 'civilised'.<sup>37</sup> This policy of assimilation, and other violent colonial acts such as the stealing of children from their families in the 1930s (known as the Stolen Generations), are considered acts of genocide by some people.

However, not all colonists supported the land grab. The Exeter Hall movement, a collective of British philanthropic groups that argued for the westernisation of First Nations People, was particularly influential in the Port Phillip District (now Victoria) where the Aboriginal Protectorate was established in 1838.<sup>38</sup> Missions, stations and reserves also operated from this time and continued to do so long after the Protectorate was abolished. Missions could be particularly repressive, because First Nations People were subjected to a western (Christian) education and banned from speaking their own languages and practising traditional customs.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, stations were tightly controlled environments where First Nations People were educated in preparation for work and provided with rations. Station managers also often had legal guardianship over the First Nations children on their property. At the other end of the spectrum, reserves were set aside for First Nations People to live on as they wished.<sup>40</sup> The missions, reserves and stations on or closest to Wurundjeri willam Country were the Merri Creek School (1845-51), the Yarra Mission (1837-39) the Narre Narre Warren Station (1841-43) and Coranderrk (1863-1924).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>36</sup> 'Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines, Colony of Victoria', *Find & Connect*, n.d. <<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/vic/E000425>>.

<sup>37</sup> 'Missions, Stations and Reserves', *AIATSIS*, n.d. <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/missions-stations-and-reserves#>>.

<sup>38</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> 'Missions, Stations and Reserves'.

<sup>41</sup> 'Mission and Reserve Records', *AIATSIS*, n.d. <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/family-history/family-history-sources/official-records/mission-and-reserve-records>>.



Aboriginal Station Coranderrk Healesville, 1890  
 Imaging 19<sup>th</sup> Century Victoria Digitising Project, State Library Victoria

Although many First Nations People were forced off Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country from the 1830s onwards, some groups continued to live on and travel through present-day Merri-bek City. In 1837, the colonial government established the Native Police Corps that, for a time, frequented the Country around Moonee Ponds and Merri creeks. Members of the Native Police were often recruited by manipulation or force and were required to participate in violently dispossessing other First Nations People.<sup>42</sup> A detachment of the Native Police worked at the new Pentridge Stockade (later H M Prison Pentridge) between 1850 and 1851, with the First Nations men in this detachment known as ‘the Commandant’, ‘Corporal Cowan’, ‘Tallboy’, ‘Moonering’, ‘Muggins’, ‘Lankey’, ‘Charlie’, ‘Beerack’ and ‘Andrew’.<sup>43</sup> Because First Nations People were often given nicknames or ‘jocular’ names by their European employers and overseers, these were certainly not the men’s real names.<sup>44</sup> The men’s traditional names are unlikely to exist in colonial records and are therefore probably lost.

The journals of William Thomas (Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip and Guardian of the Aborigines of Victoria, 1839 – 1867) offer further insight into the movements and practices of First Nations People in the Glenroy area during the mid-1800s. Thomas lived in Moonee Ponds in 1847 and in 1854 – 55 travelled there every one to two weeks. He frequently noted seeing First Nations People camped between Moonee Ponds Creek and the Saltwater (Maribyrnong) River, although rarely specified their locations.<sup>45</sup> Thomas actively persuaded First Nations People to leave this area

<sup>42</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 36.

<sup>43</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Indigenous Names’, AIATSIS, n.d. <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/family-history/you-start/indigenous-names>>.

<sup>45</sup> Ian D Clark and Toby Heydon, *A Bend in the Yarra: A History of Merri Creek Protectorate Station and Merri Creek Aboriginal School 1841-1851*, p. 20; Marguerita Stephens, *The Journal of William Thomas: Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip & Guardian of the Aborigines of Victoria 1839 to 1867* (Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, 2014), 3: 1854-1867, pp. 1–5.



during the 1850s, on one occasion sending them from the encampment at Essendon to an unspecified location in Broadmeadows.<sup>46</sup>



Natives' [sic] Camp up the Yarra, c. 1859-63  
*Richard Daintree and Antoine Fauchery, State Library Victoria*

Between the mid-1800s and 1920s, many First Nations People in Victoria lived on missions and reserves across Kulin Country. Most began moving into Melbourne's inner suburbs once government policy allowed them to do so.<sup>47</sup> By the 1950s, inner suburbs such as Fitzroy and Glenroy had developed a strong First Nations presence – primarily in the newly-commissioned flats and housing estates.

Today, Merri-bek City is celebrated for its strong First Nations community. Its suburbs have long been associated with prominent First Nations sporting figures, including footballers Joe Johnson (the first First Nations captain of an Australian sporting team), Greg Lovett, Joe Narbaluk and the Chessells brothers.<sup>48</sup> Other well-known First Nations community forces include the Chessells family, who opened their home to needy residents from the 1970s, and the Murray family.<sup>49</sup>

In 2022, local government officially embraced its long First Nations history when it adopted the name 'Merri-bek' ('rocky country' in Woi-wurrung Language).<sup>50</sup> The municipality had been controversially known since 1994 as the City of Moreland after the McCrae family's slave-run sugar plantation in

<sup>46</sup> Stephens, *The Journal of William Thomas*, 3: 1854-1867, pp. 1–5, 396.

<sup>47</sup> Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 46.

<sup>50</sup> Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 7.

Jamaica.<sup>51</sup> A community survey in early 2022 supported scrapping the name 'Moreland' in favour of a First Nations name. 'Merri-bek' was one of three names put forward by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and chosen because it reflected many residents' connections to Merri Creek and the area's landscape.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.1.5 The development of Glenroy

Glenroy is a suburb located primarily between Moonee Ponds and Merri creeks in Merri-bek City. In the years since colonisation, Glenroy has sat within the Broadmeadows Road District (1857-71), Broadmeadows Shire (1871-1956) the City of Broadmeadows (1956-94) and the City of Moreland (1994-2022).<sup>53</sup>

As explored above, Europeans arrived on this part of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country as early as 1824.<sup>54</sup> The following decade, a portion of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country was divided into the parishes of Will Will Rook, Jika Jika, Tullamarine, Yuroke, Mickleham and Doutta Galla for the purpose of land sales.<sup>55</sup> These land sales occurred in September 1838 and were followed by a small land boom that attracted speculators and graziers alike.<sup>56</sup> Sydney-based speculators John Terry Hughes and John Hosking purchased sections 1, 6, 8, 9 and 13 in Will Will Rook parish, an area that amounted to thousands of acres.<sup>57</sup> Hughes and Hosking's leaseholder, a Scottish farmer named Duncan Cameron, dubbed the land 'Glenroy' in honour of his birthplace.<sup>58</sup>

The Glenroy district's early colonists tended to be Scottish farmers, speculators and investors.<sup>59</sup> Sitting right between Sydney and Pascoe Vale roads and only eight miles away from the markets in Melbourne Town, the area was just about perfect for prospective farmers. It was also well-watered, being serviced by Moonee Ponds Creek to the west and Merri and Darebin creeks to the east.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Dr James Lesh, *Report on the Place Name: Moreland*, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> 'Renaming Moreland', *Merri-Bek City Council*, n.d. <<https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/renaming>>.

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 42, 63, 185; 'Renaming Moreland'.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>57</sup> 'SydneyW12; Will Will Rook; Urquhart; Doutta Galla Will-Will-Rook', 31 December 1847, PROV, VPRS 8168/P0002, SYDNEYW12; WILL WILL ROOK; URQUHART; <<https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/0FC20A03-F844-11E9-AE98-1D2AE1509A5F/content?image=1>>; 'PROCW25; Will Will Nook', 1878, PROV, VPRS 8168/P0002, PROCW25; WILL WILL NOOK <<https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/C9B8F607-F843-11E9-AE98-5DF8B627048C?image=1>>.

<sup>58</sup> Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, p. 64; Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, p. 35.

<sup>60</sup> Judith Faulds, *A Time to till: A History of Box Forest and Glenroy in the 19th Century* (J Faulds, 1990), pp. 2, 6.

Between the 1850s and 1880s, very little changed in colonial Glenroy. The region was virtually unaffected by the population boom brought on by the 1850s gold rush; as such, there was no imperative for developers to subdivide the expansive pastoral runs that dominated the area.<sup>61</sup> Poor weather in the 1860s forced many local farmers to pivot from cultivating wheat, oats and barley to livestock production.<sup>62</sup>



Along the valley of Moonee Ponds Creek at Glenroy, 1930  
Merri-bek City Council Libraries

The Glenroy district experienced another short-lived land boom when, in 1886, a syndicate called the Glenroy Land Company purchased most of the land formerly owned by Hughes and Hosking with the aim of establishing a new township. The company set about subdividing land just east of the North-Eastern Railway Line and named it 'Glenroy Estate'.<sup>63</sup> Promotional material touted the new settlement as the 'Toorak of the North', complete with its own train station, high street (Wheatsheaf Road) and a smattering of tasteful mansions.<sup>64</sup> Just two years later, a second syndicate acquired land to the north and east of Glenroy Estate.<sup>65</sup> The New Glenroy Estate Company advertised its offerings in the *North Melbourne Advertiser*, hoping to attract a new wave of migrants to this idyllic settlement:

The pleasantest spot to be found within half-an-hour's journey of the city is undoubtedly the hamlet...of Glenroy...once *en route* for Glenroy, the holiday-seeker passes the prosaic landscape around Newmarket, he is soon entranced by a delightful

<sup>61</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>62</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 23; Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>63</sup> Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, p. 86.

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 81; Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, p. 86.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 82; *Victoria Government Gazette*, 2 March 1888, p. 660, Victoria Government Gazette Online Archive 1836-1997  
<[https://gazette.slv.vic.gov.au/view.cgi?year=1888&class=general&page\\_num=660&state=V&classNum=G21&searchCode=8998412](https://gazette.slv.vic.gov.au/view.cgi?year=1888&class=general&page_num=660&state=V&classNum=G21&searchCode=8998412)>.

panorama of cosy cottages, snug farmhouses, palatial mansions, surrounded by copse and hedge, by garden and orchard, and varied by breaks of hill and dale, belts of indigenous timber, and ever-running pellucid watercourses.<sup>66</sup>

Despite these alluring words, a large portion of the New Glenroy Estate Company's land holdings remained unsold. By 1891, the town still consisted only of a train station, a small high street and a smattering of 40 homes spread very thinly. Glenroy's population at this time worked in a diverse range of professions, from managers to labourers, shopkeepers and teachers.<sup>67</sup>

Between 1891 and 1901, Glenroy's population hovered around 230.<sup>68</sup> The town retained its distinctly rural character until well into the 1900s, as former resident Charles Mutton recalled:

It was all open country from here to Coburg Railway Station ... From when we moved into Glenroy [in the early 1890s], right up until 1925, we had no water or anything; nothing whatsoever; just an open country ... Life was hard in those days, but the good spirit was always there ...<sup>69</sup>

Residential and commercial development gathered speed from 1950, when the Victorian Government's Housing Commission acquired the sweeping farmlands north and east of Glenroy township.<sup>70</sup> The Housing Commission's project area spanned from Hilton Street (the present-day location of Ballert Mooroop) to Somerton Road near Campbellfield.<sup>71</sup> Fewer than a dozen shops had operated from Glenroy before the Second World War; by 1956, there were over 50 retailers working from Wheatsheaf and Pascoe Vale roads.<sup>72</sup>

The suburb retained a predominantly working-class character throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For some local families, children were also expected to contribute to the household income. Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray recalled being sent to work at the local fish and chip shop in Wheatsheaf Road. It was back breaking work for an eight-year-old:

... out the back they had these bags of 200 pound potatoes, and I'd just move the potatoes into these six tins and then they'd cut 'em for the chips and that. I'd get sixpence a bag.<sup>73</sup>

- Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 2025

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<sup>66</sup> 'Beauty Spots of Melbourne: No. 1 Glenroy', *North Melbourne Advertiser*, 9 June 1888, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 91–92.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 92.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Mutton, as cited in 'The Toorak of the North': *An Oral History of Glenroy, Hadfield and Coburg by the Students of the 1981 Year Eleven Alternative Course, Hadfield High School* (Hadfield High School, 1981).

<sup>70</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 177–82; 'Model City to Be "as Big as Ballarat"', *The Herald*, 12 April 1951, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> 'Model City to Be "as Big as Ballarat"'.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 182.

<sup>73</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, Ballert Mooroop Commission oral history interview, 17 April 2025.



At the end of the evening, Murray was rewarded with about 36 pence and a packet of chips and potato cakes to take home to his family.



Aerial view of Glenroy, 1957  
*Merri-bek City Council Libraries*

## 3.2 The Ballertr Mooroop site

### 3.2.1 'The Glenroy Run' (1838-57)

Ballertr Mooroop is located on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri willam group.<sup>74</sup> Although there are no known archaeological deposits at Ballertr Mooroop itself, remains found nearby (a freshwater mussel midden at Merri Creek, a scar tree at the Northern Golf Course and a stone scatter at K W Joyce Reserve) are poignant reminders that Wurundjeri willam people lived on and cared for this part of Country for many years and that the land has never been ceded.<sup>75</sup>

[Ballertr Mooroop] is part of a land grab from 1839 ... 29 British men were sold land ... no blackfellas, just British. And they bought it from a land sale from a government that authorised it that wasn't here! The Victorian government hadn't been established until the 1850s. So who authorised [the land sales]? Who negotiated that transition from us? ... Our ancestors never gave [Country] up. We never ceded our sovereign rights ... and we never made anything out of those land sales.<sup>76</sup>

- Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 2025

In 1838, Ballertr Mooroop was part of the first colonial land sales in the area. Colonial records show that the site sat within Section 6, Parish of Will Will Rook.<sup>77</sup> This was an enormous tract of land that spanned 1,143 acres from the eastern bank of Moonee Ponds Creek to the approximate present-day location of West Street.<sup>78</sup> Sydney-based land speculators John Terry Hughes and John Hosking purchased Section 6 for 10 shillings per acre, along with Sections 1, 8, 9 and 13, with the intention of leasing it out for large-scale farming.<sup>79</sup>

Like most of the parties who purchased land at Will Will Rook in the late 1830s, Hughes and Hosking did not intend to live in the area. The pair leased their land to the Camerons (Angus, Donald, Duncan and George Gordon), a family of Scottish farmers. Duncan Cameron is typically credited as the family member who dubbed the land 'the Glenroy run', in honour of his birthplace.<sup>80</sup> The Camerons had a property near present-day Canberra and overlanded their sheep to Glenroy, where they

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<sup>74</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, p. 18.

<sup>75</sup> Terra Culture Heritage Consultants, *Moreland Pre-Contact Aboriginal Heritage Study 2010*, pp. 34–36; Greenshoot Consulting, *The Coburg Conversation: Context Mapping*, p. 19.

<sup>76</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballertr Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

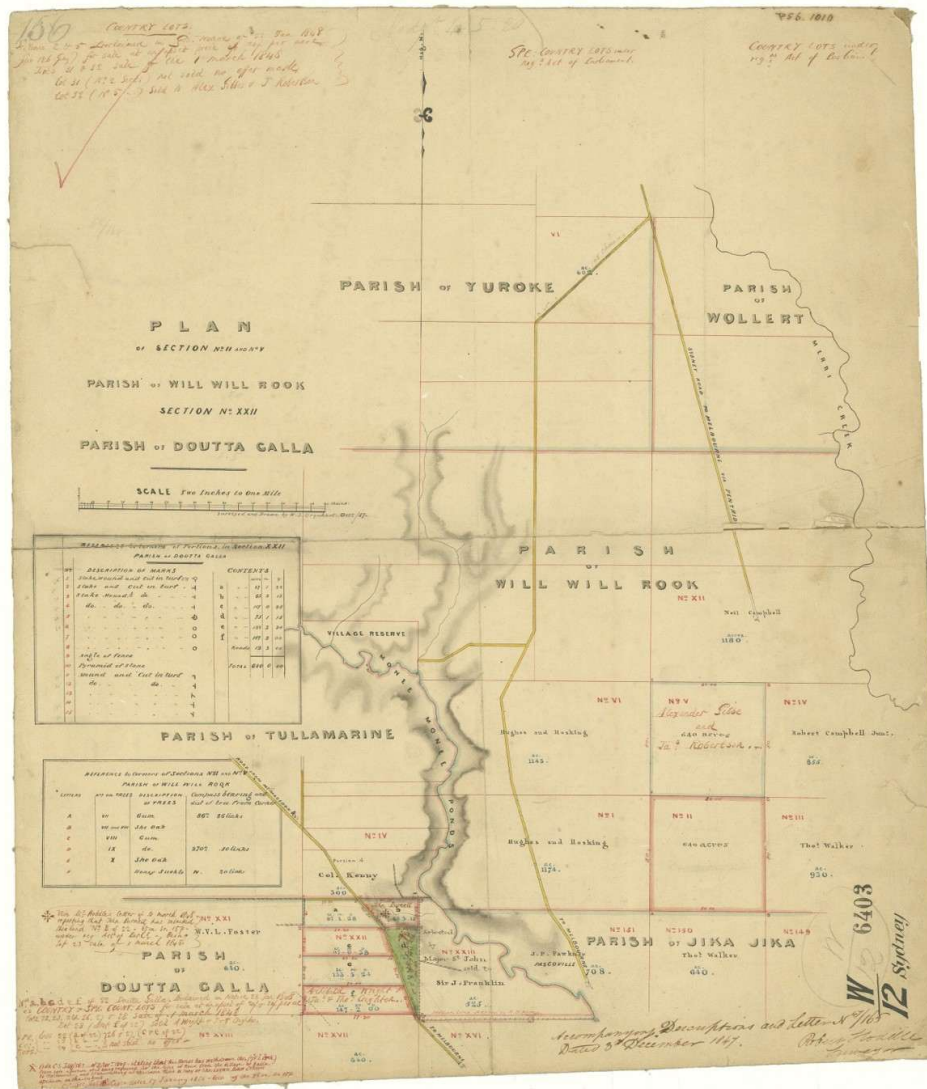
<sup>77</sup> 'Will-Will-Rook(Psh)LOImp(P)W3831-1.Prf Will-Will-Rook Parish Plan (P), Imperial Measure W3831-1' (Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2002), PROV, VPRS 16171/P0001/11, Will-Will-Rook(Psh)LOImp(P)W3831-1.pdf <<https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/4C61086E-F42B-11EA-BE8C-3515415F2D93/about>>.

<sup>78</sup> 'SydneyW12; Will Will Rook; Urquhart; Doutta Galla Will-Will-Rook'; 'PROCW25; Will Will Nook'.

<sup>79</sup> Judith Faulds, *A Time to till: A History of Box Forest and Glenroy in the 19th Century*, p. 16; 'VPRS 460/P0000, 13091 Application for Certificate of Title', 1874, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 460/P0000, 13091; Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, p. 64; 'Hughes & Hosking', in *Dictionary of Sydney* (State Library New South Wales, n.d.) <[https://dictionaryofsydney.org/organisation/hughes\\_hosking](https://dictionaryofsydney.org/organisation/hughes_hosking)>.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 15; Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, p. 64.

farmed until the early 1840s.<sup>81</sup> Little is known of the Glenroy Run's operations at this time but the *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser* commented that 'native dogs' were a particular nuisance around the Glenroy region and the open land around Melbourne Town. In July 1842, two packs (totalling 16 dogs) were seen prowling on Cameron's farm.<sup>82</sup>



VPRS 8168/P0002, SYDNEYW12; WILL WILL ROOK; URQUHART, 1847  
Surveyor General's Department, Port Phillip Branch, Public Record Office Victoria

Duncan Cameron left Glenroy when his son tragically drowned on the property in the early-to-mid 1840s. The family moved to South Australia, where they put down roots in the Penola region.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, p. 64.

<sup>82</sup> 'Local Intelligence'.

<sup>83</sup> Extent Heritage, *City of Moreland Thematic History*, pp. 34, 64; 'Sources and Notes, Place Names of South Australia' (State Library of South Australia, n.d.), p. 43  
<[https://published.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/placenamesofsouthaustralia/Sources\\_and\\_Notes.pdf](https://published.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/placenamesofsouthaustralia/Sources_and_Notes.pdf)>.

Brothers Donald and Duncan Kennedy then bought the Glenroy Run from Hughes and Hosking, whose partnership had failed during the economic depression.<sup>84</sup> Donald and Duncan appear to have managed the Glenroy Run jointly, occasionally travelling into Melbourne or abroad to London for business matters.<sup>85</sup> Donald's wife, Jessie Grace Kennedy, periodically wrote to her brother-in-law with local and family gossip, as well as the occasional update on the run's health:

I am happy to say that we have had delightful rains lately ... the country is completely changed within the last few weeks, fields becoming abundant, and the stock beginning to look well again.<sup>86</sup>

In March 1851, Jessie also shared her impressions of a recent holiday to the bush, remarking:

I adored the mountains. They are the most beautiful I have ever seen, and the countryside about the station I think exceedingly pretty, but not to be compared to Glenroy.<sup>87</sup>

The Kennedy brothers decided to split the Glenroy Run between themselves in 1857, with Duncan taking most of the land between Moonee Ponds Creek and Pascoe Vale Road. Donald assumed ownership of the remaining land to the east of Pascoe Vale Road and split it into four farms. From north to south, they were: Ruthven Estate (near present-day Dallas), Pasture Hill Farm (Lot 2, Section 6), Bayview Farm (Lot 3, Section 6) and Glenroy Farm (Lots 4 and 5, Section 1).<sup>88</sup> Ballerdt Mooroop sits within the former boundaries of Bayview Farm.

### 3.2.2 Bayview Farm (1874 – c. 1888)

Donald Kennedy died in 1864 and his estate remained with his executors (his wife Jessie, brother Duncan and brother-in-law Charles McAlister Shannon) for a decade.<sup>89</sup> The four farms were then sold separately at a public auction in December 1874.<sup>90</sup> John Kerr, a dairy farmer who had leased Pasture Hill Farm from Donald Kennedy, successfully bid for Bayview Farm (Lot 2, Section 6, Parish of Will Will Rook).<sup>91</sup> At this time, Kerr was an up-and-coming pastoralist who had recently been elected to Broadmeadows Shire Council. Having primarily leased farmland for most of his career, Kerr was now wealthy enough to buy his own land.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> 'Hughes & Hosking'; Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 15, 79; 'VPRS 460/P0000, 13091 Application for Certificate of Title'.

<sup>85</sup> Jessie Kennedy, 'Jessie Kennedy (Glenroy and Melbourne) to Duncan Kennedy', 1853 1850, National Library of Australia, Collections of the Bedfordshire Record Office relating to Australia <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1115062098>>.

<sup>86</sup> Jessie Kennedy, 'Jessie Kennedy (Glenroy and Melbourne) to Duncan Kennedy', pp. 10–11.

<sup>87</sup> Jessie Kennedy, 'Jessie Kennedy (Glenroy and Melbourne) to Duncan Kennedy', pp. 5–6.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 15, 79; 'VPRS 460/P0000, 13091 Application for Certificate of Title'.

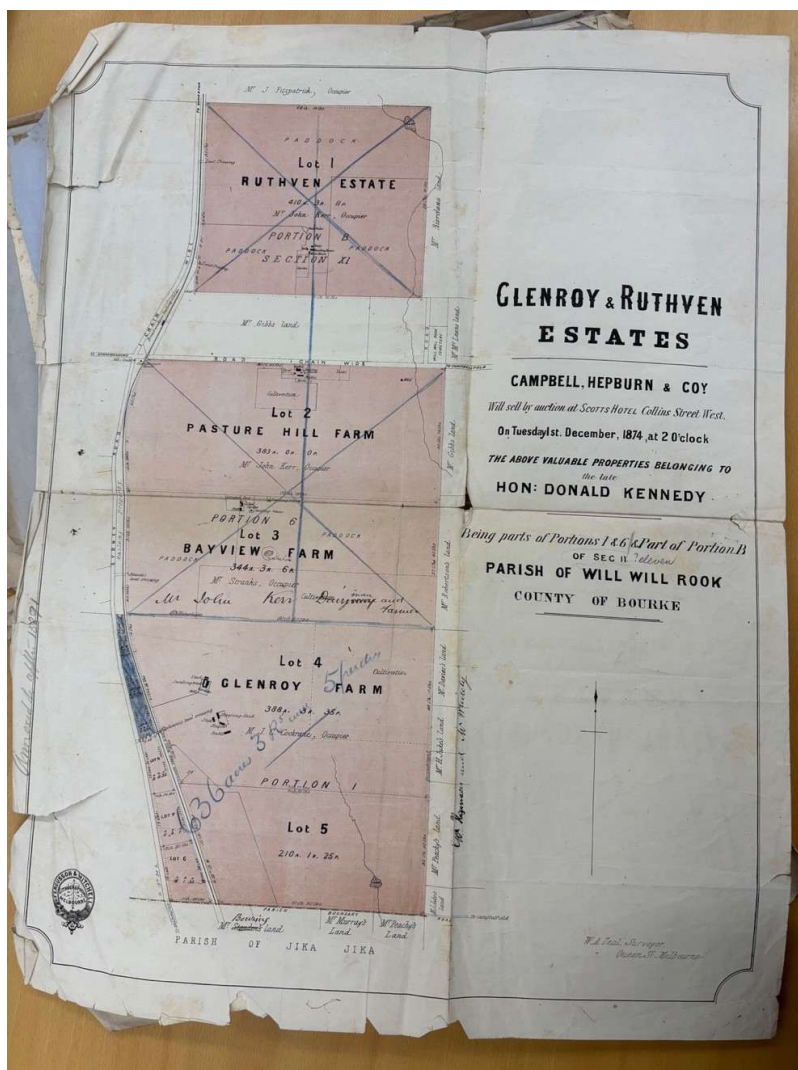
<sup>89</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 79; 'Will of Donald Kennedy of Melbourne', 14 April 1858, National Library of Australia, Collections of the Bedfordshire Record Office relating to Australia <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1114685019>>.

<sup>90</sup> 'Advertising', *Leader* (Melbourne, 31 October 1874), p. 15; 'VPRS 460/P0000, 13091 Application for Certificate of Title'.

<sup>91</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 79–80.

<sup>92</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 79–80.





VPRS 460/P0000, 13091 Application for Certificate of Title, 1874  
Campbell, Hepburn & Co, Public Record Office Victoria

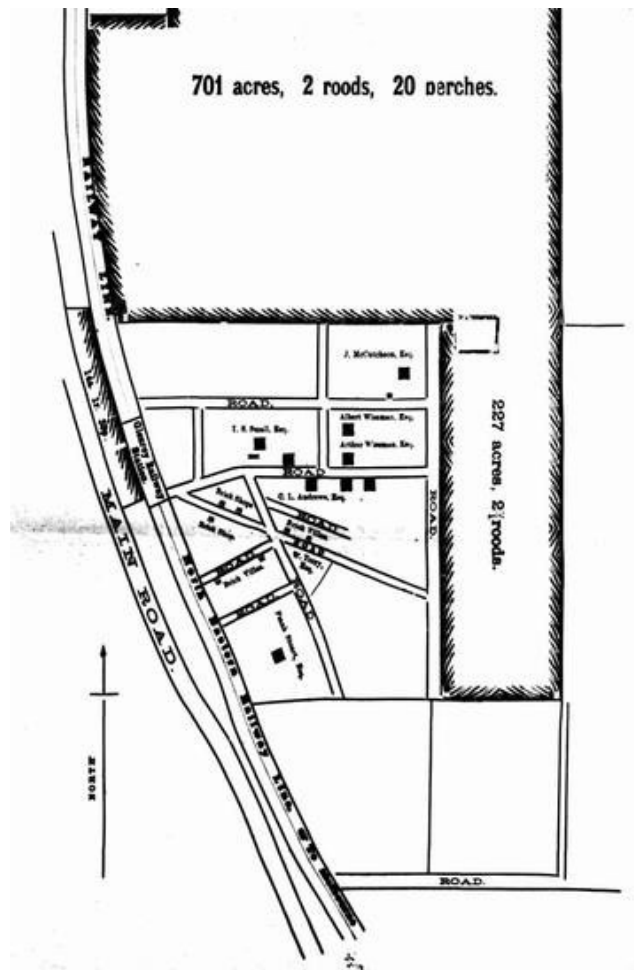
Bayview Farm was a long and rather narrow piece of land that extended from the Northern Railway Line in the west to an adjoining property in the east. An 1874 site plan shows the farm had a small concentration of buildings (two dwellings, a shed and stables) clustered against its northern boundary, surrounded by a garden and cultivation yard. The southern portion of the farm was occupied by a Mr Stranks, who may have also been responsible for the vast cultivation paddock at that end of the property. The farm featured two conveniently located waterholes – one in the property's centre, the other near its south-west corner – and its own level crossing ('Strank's Crossing') at the railway line.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 15, 79; 'VPRS 460/P0000, 13091 Application for Certificate of Title'.

Kerr primarily used Bayview Farm for dairying.<sup>94</sup> By 1882, he had acquired over 4,500 acres in the district, which made him Broadmeadow Shire's largest landholder.<sup>95</sup> In the years before his death, Kerr began selling off his property but retained his primary residence and its surrounding 25 acres.<sup>96</sup> This property, known as 'Kerrsland', was carved out from the north-west corner of Pasture Hill Farm with frontages to the Northern Railway Line and Camp Road.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.2.3 Hilton Estate (c. 1888-1911)

In 1888, Bayview Farm was part of an enormous land acquisition made by the New Glenroy Estate Company (see section 3.1.5). Alexander Pearson bought Bayview during this brief land boom and built his grand estate, 'Hilton', on the north side of present-day Melbourne Avenue.<sup>98</sup>



The New Glenroy Estate Company, 9 June 1888  
*The New Glenroy Estate Company and North Melbourne Advertiser, National Library of Australia (Trove)*

<sup>94</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 109.

<sup>95</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 15, 79–80.

<sup>96</sup> '47/749 John Kerr: Will; Grant of Probate', 1892, PROV, VPRS 7591/P0002, 47/749 <<https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/FFF9D866-F530-11E9-AE98-6946B1610A55?image=1>>; Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 72, 104.

<sup>97</sup> '47/749 John Kerr: Will; Grant of Probate'; Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 72, 104; 'Beauty Spots of Melbourne: No. 1 Glenroy'.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 96, 110.

Little is known of Pearson's time at Hilton or how he used its extensive farmlands. He advertised the 337-acre property in March 1911 as a series of subdivisions for sale: the estate's top paddocks were split into two 75-acre blocks and the land running along the Northern Railway Line into one-to-five acre blocks.<sup>99</sup> *The Herald* published a compelling summary of Hilton's qualities, noting:

The position commands wide views of the city, the bay, and the surrounding country. The stabling accommodation, with very modern and complete horse boxes, is most extensive, and this beautiful house would make a charming homestead for a stud farm.<sup>100</sup>

There appear to have been few, if any, expressions of interest. Hilton was soon placed in the hands of Messrs A E Gibson and Co, who sold the incrementally subdivided estate between late 1911 and 1915.<sup>101</sup>

By the end of the First World War, Glenroy was still noticeably dominated by farmland and wide, open spaces. This made it an attractive spot for an exciting new mode of travel: aviation.

### 3.2.4 Glenroy Aerodrome (1920 – c. 1921)

Aerodromes were established across Australia following the First World War. The pioneering companies that ran these aerodromes recognised the great potential that aircraft offered not only for travel but also for delivering services and recreation.<sup>102</sup>

Aviation Ltd (established in 1920) was just one of these companies. In its founding year, the company spent £3,000 on 67 acres of the former Hilton Estate, which it converted into an aerodrome.<sup>103</sup> The site was bounded by View Street to the north, Gordon Street (now Gordon Court) to the south, Widford Street to the east and the railway line to the west, that is, just north of Ballerit Mooroop.<sup>104</sup> In a letter to the Director of Aerodromes, Aviation Ltd's Managing Director commented on the prime conditions at Glenroy:

The surrounding country to the North, East, and West is open ground and forced landings can be made anywhere in the locality. To the south of the aerodrome is

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<sup>99</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 110; 'Hilton Estate', *The Herald*, 2 November 1911, p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Anonymous, as cited in 'Hilton Estate'.

<sup>101</sup> 'Hilton Estate'; 'Country Property', *The Herald*, 6 November 1913, p. 4; 'Houses and Land', *The Argus*, 2 July 1914, p. 5; 'Glenroy', *The Herald*, 28 October 1915, p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> Broadmeadows Historical Society, 'Glenroy Aerodrome', n.d.

<sup>103</sup> 'Aviation in Australia: New Company Registered', *The Herald* (Melbourne, 14 February 1920), p. 1; Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 153.

<sup>104</sup> Broadmeadows Historical Society, 'Glenroy Aerodrome'.

situated Glenroy township ... there are a large number of pine trees in the vicinity.<sup>105</sup>



Glenroy Airfield, 1919 – 1924  
*Merri-bek City Council Libraries*

From the outset, Aviation Ltd aspired to run a comprehensive suite of services from the Glenroy Aerodrome: mail and newspaper deliveries, passenger flights, aerial photography and surveying, flying boat services between Melbourne and Tasmania and importing, manufacturing and selling aircraft.<sup>106</sup>

The Glenroy Aerodrome launched a series of successful 'long haul' flights throughout 1920 and 1921, including Lieutenant R J Parer's return flight to King Island, together with passenger flights between Ararat, Bairnsdale, Flinders and South Australia.<sup>107</sup>

By 1924, the Glenroy Aerodrome was considered 'a thing of the past'. This was likely due to competition from the new Essendon Aerodrome as well as the construction of a transmission line near its landing strip.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Managing Director, Aviation Limited, 'Aviation Ltd to the Director of Aerodromes', 6 April 1920, Broadmeadows Historical Society.

<sup>106</sup> 'Aviation in Australia: New Company Registered'.

<sup>107</sup> 'Lieut Parer Reaches Melbourne', *Advocate* (Burnie, 1 December 1920), p. 3; 'Aviation Business Brisk', *The Herald* (Melbourne, 10 January 1921), p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> 'Broadmeadows Council', *The Sunbury News*, 19 July 1924, p. 2; Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 154.



### 3.2.5 From farmland to model city (1921-53)

Following the aerodrome's closure, its former grounds and surrounding land were sparsely occupied by farmers, graziers and other residents. The stretch of Hilton Street between Trevannion Street and Widford Street was only ever occupied by two residences between 1920 and 1945.<sup>109</sup> These included the Goeby family and various other tenants or landowners who came and went.<sup>110</sup>



Scene of the Wiseman murder, 1938  
*Merri-bek City Council Libraries*

Aerial photographs and sewerage plans from the 1940s indicate that Ballerit Mooroop and its surrounds at the time were distinctly rural. The Goeby family home and one other residence stood on the north side of Hilton Street, between Widford Street and Ballerit Mooroop's eastern boundary.<sup>111</sup> By 1948, a small structure (possibly a shed or water closet) was erected on Ballerit Mooroop's present-day grounds but the area remained noticeably underdeveloped.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria: 1920* (Sands & McDougall, 1920), p. 394 <<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/404515>>; *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria: 1925* (Sands & McDougall, 1925), p. 460 <<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/404556>>; *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria: 1930* (Sands & McDougall, 1930), p. 372 <<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/400937>>; *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria and Canberra, ACT: 1944-1945* (Sands & McDougall, 1944), p. 399 <<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/401771>>.

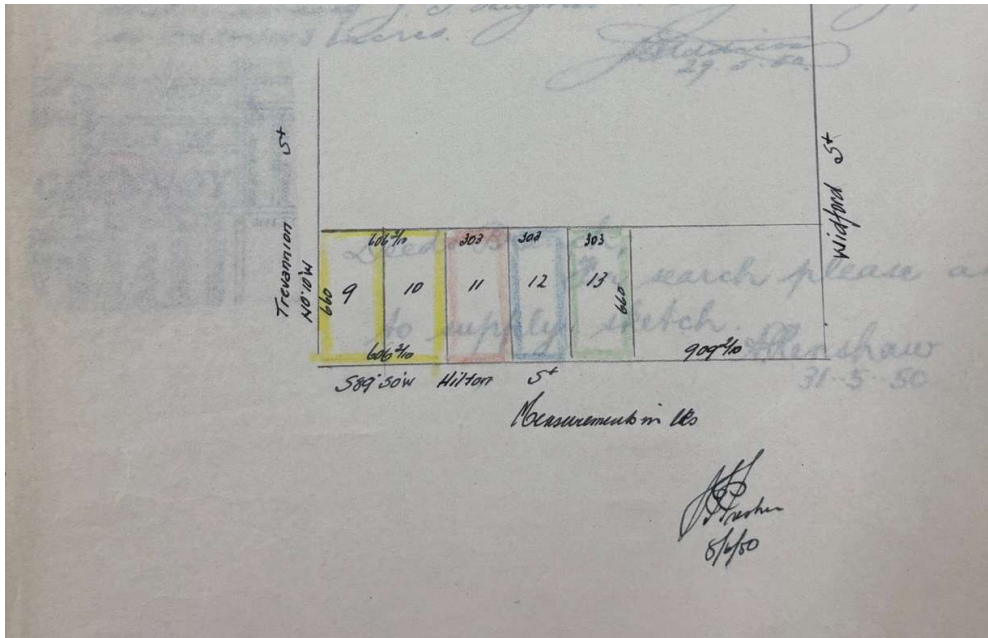
<sup>110</sup> *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria: 1930*, p. 372; *Sands & McDougall's Directory of Victoria and Canberra, ACT: 1944-1945*, p. 399.

<sup>111</sup> 'Melbourne 1945', n.d. <<https://1945.melbourne/>>.

<sup>112</sup> Melbourne and Metropolitan Board Of Works, 'Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Plan, Scale 160 Feet to 1 Inch. No.461, Municipality of Broadmeadows [Cartographic Material]' (Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, 1948) <<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/143084>>; Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, 'Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Plan, Scale 160 Feet to 1 Inch. No.462, Municipality of Broadmeadows [Cartographic Material]' (Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, 1948) <<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/143012>>.

Residential development gathered speed from 1949-50, when the Victorian Government's Housing Commission seized 5,550 acres of farmland at Glenroy.<sup>113</sup> The government justified compulsory acquisition by claiming that most of Glenroy's farms were maintained by absent owners. The takeover was resisted by a handful of locals but ultimately their protests were ignored.<sup>114</sup>

In 1951, the Housing Commission announced its plans to develop a 'model city' spanning from Hilton Street in the south to present-day Broadmeadows. The scheme proposed to provide enough prefabricated homes to house 40,000 people as well as glorious public parks, shops, churches and other suburban amenities.<sup>115</sup> The first homes under this scheme were built from December 1953 to July 1954, between Hilton Street and the SEC transmission line (east of Widford Street).<sup>116</sup>



VPRS 242/P0000, C92451 Valuation of Land in Glenroy with Frontages to Hilton and Trevannion Streets and Gordon Grove for Education Department for a Proposed Post-Primary School Site, 1951  
Department of Lands and Survey, Public Record Office Victoria

The land at Ballerit Mooroop was subdivided by 1951 in preparation for residential development. A hand-drawn plan by the Department of Lands and Survey indicates that some of these allotments had already been sold off. William Frederick Goeb, railway clerk John Thomas French and schoolteacher Richard Alroy Dance owned the allotments within present-day Ballerit Mooroop.<sup>117</sup> However, this land was also being closely watched by the Department of Education.

<sup>113</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 175; 'Model City to Be "as Big as Ballarat"'.

<sup>114</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, pp. 176-77.

<sup>115</sup> 'Model City to Be "as Big as Ballarat"'.

<sup>116</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 179.

<sup>117</sup> 'VPRS 242/P0000, C92451 Valuation of Land in Glenroy with Frontages to Hilton and Trevannion Streets and Gordon Grove for Education Department for a Proposed Post-Primary School Site; Will-Will-Rook; 9 to 13 to 45; 13-0-24', 1951, p. 242, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 242/P0000, C92451.

### 3.2.6 Glenroy High School (1953-92)

In March 1951, the Department of Education requested a valuation for the block of land bounded by Hilton, Trevannion and Widford Streets and Gordon Grove. With tens of thousands of new homes being built, the Department anticipated a sudden need for post-primary education. This was non-existent at that stage in Glenroy.<sup>118</sup> T R Sorrell of the Department of Lands and Survey performed the valuation, noting that 'considerable building activity is taking place east and south east of the site' and Hilton Street was being upgraded.<sup>119</sup> In 1953, the Department of Education released its plans to open a new high school at Glenroy, along with a ring of 22 other primary, high and technical schools to service Melbourne's burgeoning outer suburbs.<sup>120</sup>



VPRS 14517/P0001/8, E606, n.d.  
*Education Department (VA714): 1873 – 1985, Public Record Office Victoria*

Glenroy High School opened its doors on the first day of Term One, 1954. During its first three years, the school offered schooling from Third Form (Year Nine) and up to Leaving (Year 11) from 1957.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>118</sup> 'VPRS 242/P0000, C92451 Valuation of Land in Glenroy with Frontages to Hilton and Trevannion Streets and Gordon Grove for Education Department for a Proposed Post-Primary School Site; Will-Will-Rook; 9 to 13 to 45; 13--0--24'.

<sup>119</sup> 'VPRS 242/P0000, C92451 Valuation of Land in Glenroy with Frontages to Hilton and Trevannion Streets and Gordon Grove for Education Department for a Proposed Post-Primary School Site; Will-Will-Rook; 9 to 13 to 45; 13--0--24'.

<sup>120</sup> '23 New Schools Soon to "Beat" Crisis: City Ring', *The Sun News-Pictorial*, 1 July 1953, p. 11.

<sup>121</sup> Andrew Lemon, *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, p. 182.

Author and long-term resident Judy Archer recalled that the school was 'dumped onto a cow paddock' and still under construction when she arrived.<sup>122</sup> Beyond the school grounds, Glenroy's pastoral landscape was rapidly disappearing and stray dogs roamed free. Judy Archer recalled the suburb's appearance at that stage:

I found the new high school on the northern edge of Glenroy with the barren landscape beyond, allowing a clear view north to the St Joseph's Babies Home on Camp Road...Towards the east, hastily erected War Service and pre-fab Housing Commission homes, as yet without modern sanitation, were rapidly occupying the former farmland. The splendid stands of gum trees that had bordered farm properties were removed in the process.<sup>123</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, Glenroy High School employed around 200 teachers and had approximately 1,000 enrolled students. Former student Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray recalled a multicultural student body that was academically 'average' but strong in sports. The school also offered electives such as woodwork.<sup>124</sup> Here, he reflects on the importance of sport at the school:

Sport was the tool that got you out there and your networks grew from that ... I remember one day we were down at the Oak Park swimming pool ... there was an under 17s game and I was playing football and I was kicking a few goals. And this tall white guy, he was just giving it to me ... the funny thing was that the following week, Glenroy High joined up [with] the schools in the area and we had this demo. And we marched down the road towards Strathmore High, where this fella that was bagging me went to school. And funnily enough, he was in the march. So my white mates jumped him, [gave] him a belt and [taught] him another lesson ... we had friends from the Maltese community, Italians, Yugoslavs, the whole lot ... we all banded together.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Judy Archer, *Glenroy Township: A Local History as Told by the Old Timers* (J Archer, 2023), p. 287.

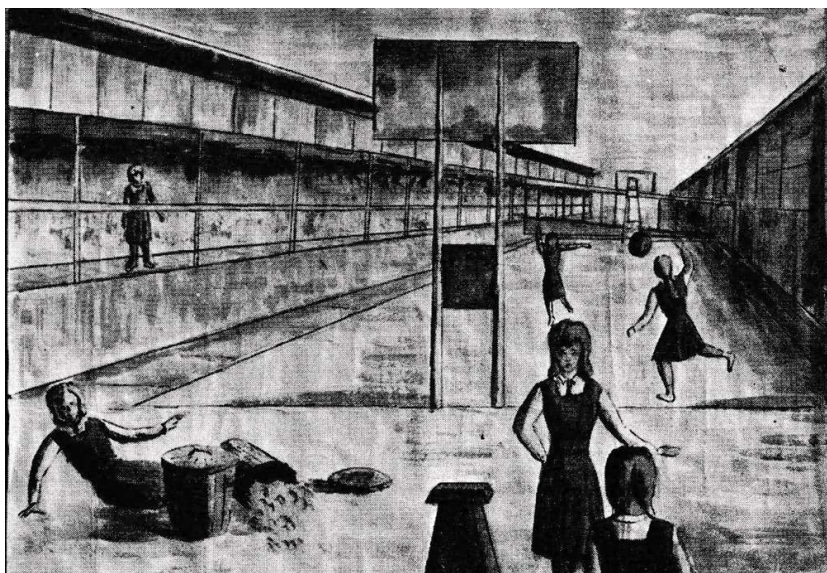
<sup>123</sup> Judy Archer, as cited in Judy Archer, *Glenroy Township: A Local History as Told by the Old Timers*, p. 286.

<sup>124</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>125</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.



- Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 2025



'About School', 1964  
B. Kruger, *The Record* (Glenroy High School magazine)

Gary's sister, Aunty Beverly Murray, attended Glenroy High School from around the 1960s and remembered that a creek ran through the school grounds, which attracted flocks of birds.<sup>126</sup> At the time, the Murray family was the only First Nations family in Glenroy. Aunty Beverly recalled that her family 'really stood out' among Glenroy's predominantly white, working class population and that her school experience was 'tainted with a little bit of racism':

I remember another class where the teacher was reading out from this, you know, racist history book ... about the savage blacks. And [a girl] made a comment about me, "Oh, Bev's not that savage" or something like that. And everyone turned around to me and laughed ... luckily for me, I had very strong parents ... they made sure they always said to us, "Be proud of who you are and always stick up for yourself."<sup>127</sup>

- Aunty Beverly Murray, 2025

The school became the focal point of a scandal in the late 1960s, when the principal expelled Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray. He was then in his final year of school and had been incarcerated at H M Prison Pentridge for between two and four weeks. Gary's father, John Stewart Murray, mounted a successful media campaign and court case that resulted in his son's reinstatement at Glenroy High School and the principal's transfer to Mildura.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Bev Murray, Ballerit Mooroop Commission oral history interview, 5 March 2025.

<sup>127</sup> Bev Murray, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>128</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

Glenroy High School operated until 1992.<sup>129</sup> Some of its former pupils shared their experiences for Judy Archer's oral history of Glenroy, including one who claimed to have buried her school uniform after graduating!<sup>130</sup> Others continue to reminisce and reconnect through the Glenroy High School Facebook group.<sup>131</sup>

### 3.2.7 Ballerdt Mooroop College (c.1995 – 2012)



Ballerdt Mooroop College, n.d.  
*Ballerdt Mooroop College Strong Spirit Network Facebook page*

Ballerdt Mooroop College was founded in 1995 and its opening day was celebrated with a Wominjeka (welcome) by Aunty Margaret Gardiner.<sup>132</sup> From its inception, Ballerdt Mooroop was a registered Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) school with a tailored curriculum to help First Nations students progress to tertiary education, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment.<sup>133</sup> It was one of four KODE schools introduced by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI) in 1995; the others were at Morwell, Mildura and Swan Hill.<sup>134</sup> KODE schools attracted some controversy at the

<sup>129</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Ballerdt Mooroop History', *Merri-Bek City Council* <<https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/living-in-merri-bek/community-services/diversity/reconciliation/ballerdt-mooroop-history/>> [accessed 17 January 2025].

<sup>130</sup> Rosemary, as cited in Judy Archer, *Glenroy Township: A Local History as Told by the Old Timers*, p. 290.

<sup>131</sup> 'Glenroy High School', *Facebook* <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/20796206900/>>.

<sup>132</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Former Ballerdt Mooroop College Site - Timeline', n.d., p. 1.

<sup>133</sup> Peter Reynolds, 'Campaign to Retain Glenroy's Former Ballerdt Mooroop College for Community Use', *Moreland Leader*, 21 July 2015; Chris Peterson and Sue Bolton, 'Picket Resumes Defending Indigenous School', *Green Left Weekly*, 17 August 2011.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800* (Allen & Unwin, 2006), p. 372, ProQuest Ebook Central <<https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/231938?accountid=13905>>.



time (both from First Nations and non-First Nations parties) due to perceptions that students were effectively isolated from mainstream education and the broader community. However, the schools offered a critical alternative for students who had difficulties attending mainstream schools.<sup>135</sup> Ballertr Mooroop College in particular played a crucial role in providing for First Nations students in Melbourne's north-west, many of whom had attended Northland Secondary College in Preston.<sup>136</sup>

Ballertr Mooroop College initially catered for all ages from preschool to Year 12 but gradually reduced its scope when it was registered as a Koori Pathways School and faced dwindling enrolments. At its peak in 1997, the school had 86 students enrolled; by mid-2011, this had fallen to 18 students across Years Seven to 10.<sup>137</sup> However, despite the shrinking enrolments, Ballertr Mooroop College was a special place. Some of its built and natural features, including Uncle Tom's Tree and *Be-al* (a River Red Gum), became cultural landmarks not only for former students but also for the broader First Nations community.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, the school was where local First Nations children learned about traditional music, dance, stories and practised spiritual cleansing.<sup>139</sup>

Ballertr Mooroop operated as a KODE school for about 14 years before it was registered as a Koorie Pathways School.<sup>140</sup> In practice, this meant the Ballertr Mooroop College could no longer accept students unless they had been given a referral after being expelled from another school. This drastic change significantly affected enrolment numbers.<sup>141</sup> By the end of 2010, Ballertr Mooroop College was under threat of closure.

### 3.2.8 The fight for Ballertr Mooroop

In December 2010, the Department of Education announced that most of Ballertr Mooroop's grounds would be transferred to the Glenroy Specialist School. The specialist school had previously been located on Box Forest Road but now required new facilities, including an extensive car park. The proposed works would mean not only that Ballertr Mooroop's gymnasium would be demolished, but also that the school's operations would be severely affected. To many of Ballertr Mooroop's supporters, the state government was effectively pitting two disadvantaged communities against each other.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800*, p. 372.

<sup>136</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Candid Community Podcast, Episode 3, Part 2: Yarning with Gary Wyrker Milloo Murray' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHLvLbeaC8>> [accessed 27 March 2025].

<sup>137</sup> Chris Peterson and Sue Bolton, 'Picket Resumes Defending Indigenous School'; Peter Reynolds, 'Campaign to Retain Glenroy's Former Ballertr Mooroop College for Community Use'.

<sup>138</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Ballertr Mooroop History'.

<sup>139</sup> Anonymous, 'Supporters Stand up to Protect Spirit Tree', *Moreland Leader*, 3 August 2015.

<sup>140</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Former Ballertr Mooroop College Site - Timeline', p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> *First Nations School Set up for Failure*, dir. by NITV News (YouTube, 2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmn3a-KVKbU>>.

<sup>142</sup> Selena Black, 'Aboriginal School Needs Support', *Green Left Weekly*, 5 December 2010; Chris Peterson and Sue Bolton, 'Picket Resumes Defending Indigenous School'; Sue Bolton, Ballertr Mooroop Commission oral history interview, 15 May 2025.



Ballerit Mooroop College, c. 2011  
*Ballerit Mooroop College Strong Spirit Network Facebook page*

Ballerit Mooroop's community rallied in response. Led by Aunty Margaret Gardiner, Aunty Barbara Williams and school council president Dottie Bamblett, the community occupied the school gymnasium for a period of 10 months.<sup>143</sup> A core group of approximately 20 students, parents and young children stayed there day and night while going about their usual work and school routines. Most had never been involved in any kind of political activity before.<sup>144</sup> The protestors also organised 'headline' events, including performances, a march to Premier John Brumby's office on Wheatshaf Road and a smoking ceremony.<sup>145</sup> Those who participated in the special events included current and former students, parents and supportive members of the school's extended community. Some shared their perspectives on the school's importance in helping its students find a sense of purpose and preventing history repeating itself:

If our young ones didn't have a school like this, where would they be? They would be on the streets doing alcohol, drugs, things that they're gonna regret in life ... with our Elders ... with their past history of being taken away and stuff, they don't want our young ones to be like what they went through ...<sup>146</sup>

- Nettie, 2010

<sup>143</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'; Sue Bolton, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>144</sup> *Save Ballerit Mooroop College Campaign*, dir. by Bruce Skewes (YouTube, 2011)  
 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtAOXwYe3fl>>; Sue Bolton, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>145</sup> Selena Black, 'Aboriginal School Needs Support'; Chris Peterson and Sue Bolton, 'Picket Resumes Defending Indigenous School'; *Ballerit Mooroop College Part 1*, dir. by SHARONLOV65 (YouTube, 2010)  
 <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t8FSe4\\_0ec](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t8FSe4_0ec)>; Sue Bolton, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>146</sup> Nettie, as cited in *Ballerit Mooroop College Part 2*, dir. by SHARONLOV65 (YouTube, 2010)  
 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6qiswxTpuk>>.

Former Box Forest Secondary College student Djida Gulpilil Murray added that his view on Ballerit Mooroop had changed since it converted to the KODE curriculum:

I came to this school when it was a mainstream school and I quickly learned that this school didn't provide me and my cousins the opportunity to extend our understanding and build our capacity of our cultural heritage, our language, our songs, our dances. We know now that this school does ... the children here will have that value of understanding their own culture, language, art, songs, music and dance, their heritage, their genealogy ... who they are and where they came from.<sup>147</sup>

- Djida Gulpilil Murray, 2010

The fight for Ballerit Mooroop also caught the attention of the Socialist Alliance party, which released a statement in support of the school. Sue Bolton, the party's candidate for the Seat of Wills, recalled that the specialist school's principal was openly hostile towards the protestors and Ballerit Mooroop's community.<sup>148</sup> During the occupation, one of Ballerit Mooroop's Elders, Uncle Tom Slater, died beneath a tree on the school grounds. Uncle Tom had become heavily involved with the school during the early 2000s and was an integral part of its day-to-day operations. The tree became known as his Spirit Tree and remains a memorial to this day.<sup>149</sup>

To take a tree away that means so much ... not only to his family ... not only to the community, but to these kids that go here to the school ... if they take away that tree, they take away a memory of him being here.<sup>150</sup>

- Marjorie Slater Williams, 2011

The threat to Ballerit Mooroop was so severe that community leaders investigated alternative uses for the site that would allow the school to stay open. But, towards the end of 2011, the state government finally announced that Ballerit Mooroop College could continue to operate without fear of closing.<sup>151</sup>

Between late 2011 and early 2012, the Education Department appointed a formerly retired principal to Ballerit Mooroop. The principal's role was a subversive one on the department's behalf: instead of being employed to build the school back up, the new principal gradually expelled the remaining students until there were only two remaining.<sup>152</sup> The principal's name was not mentioned in subsequent press or by interview participants during in interviews held for this project.

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<sup>147</sup> Djida Gulpilil Murray, as cited in *Ballerit Mooroop College Part 1*.

<sup>148</sup> Sue Bolton, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>149</sup> *Save Ballerit Mooroop College Campaign; Ballerit Mooroop College Part 1*, p. 1.

<sup>150</sup> Marjorie Slater Williams, as cited in *Save Ballerit Mooroop College Campaign*.

<sup>151</sup> Sue Bolton, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>152</sup> Sue Bolton, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'; Henrietta Cook, 'Andrews Government Approves Closure and Sale of 10 Schools', *The Age*, 4 December 2015; Peter Reynolds, 'Campaign to Retain Glenroy's Former Ballerit Mooroop College for Community Use'.

The school's closure had a profound impact on its remaining students, many of whom lost a sense of safety and purpose. Some parents tried to recreate the stability that Ballertr Mooroop instilled within their own homes:

I still have contact with the children from the school. I listen to their cries ... myself and a couple of other mothers, you know, we've taken some of the children into our own homes to try and give them ... some sort of stable life.<sup>153</sup>

- Aunty Barbara Williams, 2013

The school's supporters picked up the fight again following a tragedy that struck at the heart of Ballertr Mooroop's community. In late 2012, three teenagers who had been enrolled at Ballertr Mooroop stole a car and were killed in a crash on Pascoe Vale Road. Many in the community believe that the accident would not have happened if Ballertr Mooroop were still open and available to support the teenagers.<sup>154</sup>

The second phase of the campaign to save Ballertr Mooroop began with vigour in late 2012. Supporters drew up petitions, made an appearance at a NAIDOC march and sought support from both the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community and Moreland (now Merri-bek) Council. Their efforts intensified when the state government flagged its intention to sell Ballertr Mooroop off for real estate development.<sup>155</sup> In 2014, Moreland Council submitted an offer to purchase Ballertr Mooroop from the Department of Education, but the state government chose to retain the site for future educational purposes and opened the Will Will Rook Preschool.<sup>156</sup> Although the bid was unsuccessful, council obtained a series of ongoing leases for Ballertr Mooroop. It then sublet the school to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC).<sup>157</sup>

Since 2015, both Moreland/Merri-bek Council and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Native Title Full Claim Group have been working towards transferring Ballertr Mooroop's title to the WWCHAC.<sup>158</sup> The WWCHAC commissioned the *Ballertr Mooroop Feasibility Study*, which was completed in 2021. The study found that Ballertr Mooroop is a highly significant site for First Nations People, not just in Glenroy but also across Merri-bek and Hume cities.<sup>159</sup> For some of

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<sup>153</sup> Barbara Williams Weston, as cited in *First Nations School Set up for Failure*.

<sup>154</sup> Mariella Teuira, Ballertr Mooroop Commission oral history interview, 3 March 2025; Sue Bolton, 'Ballertr Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'; Bev Murray, 'Ballertr Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'; Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballertr Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>155</sup> Sue Bolton, 'Ballertr Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>156</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Former Ballertr Mooroop College Site - Timeline', pp. 1–2.

<sup>157</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Former Ballertr Mooroop College Site - Timeline', p. 3; Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballertr Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>158</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Former Ballertr Mooroop College Site - Timeline', p. 3; Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballertr Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>159</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Former Ballertr Mooroop College Site - Timeline', p. 4; Merri-bek City Council, 'Ballertr Mooroop History'.

Ballerrt Mooroop's supporters, the time for transferring the site to the WWCHAC is well overdue:

[We want] an education space that transfers cultural heritage from our mob onto people who want to bring school groups here ... it's going to have a youth focus, a women's focus, a men's focus, Elders' focus ... there's a lot of planning that's been put into the development of the site. It needs state government support. [The] Minister for Education needs to pull the pin and actually do the right thing and hand the land back, because this is part of a land grab from 1839.<sup>160</sup>

- Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 2025

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<sup>160</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

### 3.2.8 Timeline of the Ballert Mooroop site

Based on this research, we have constructed a timeline of the Ballert Mooroop site:

<b>c. 40,000 BCE – present</b>	Wurundjeri willam people and their ancestors live on Country.
<b>c. 6,000 BCE</b>	Woi-wurrung people and other Kulin Nation groups witness the sea levels rise and <i>Naarm</i> (Port Phillip Bay) form.
<b>1824</b>	Wurundjeri willam people encounter Europeans, possibly for the first time, when Hamilton Hume and William Wilton Hovell arrive at Moonee Ponds Creek.
<b>1838</b>	The Wurundjeri willam people's traditional lands are seized for the first land sales in the newly-established Parish of Will Will Rook. Section 6 (the future site of Ballert Mooroop) is sold to Sydney-based land speculators John Terry Hughes and John Hosking.
<b>c. 1838-43</b>	Hughes and Hosking lease Section 6 to Scottish farmer Duncan Cameron before their partnership is dissolved. The farmland becomes known as the 'Glenroy Run', after Cameron's birthplace.
<b>c. 1843-57</b>	Hughes and Hosking sell Section 6 and the rest of their nearby land to brothers Donald and Duncan Kennedy. The brothers manage the farmland jointly for over a decade.
<b>1857</b>	Donald Kennedy assumes sole ownership of Section 6. He splits the property into two farms: Pasture Hill Farm to the north and Bayview Farm to the south.
<b>1864</b>	Kennedy dies, leaving his estate in the hands of his wife, Jessie Grace Kennedy.
<b>1874</b>	Kennedy's estate (Pasture Hill Farm, Bayview Farm, Glenroy Farm and Ruthven Estate) is put to public auction. Pasture Hill Farm and Bayview Farm are purchased by John Kerr.
<b>1874-c. 88</b>	Kerr runs Bayview Farm (the future site of Ballert Mooroop) as a dairy farm while he lives at Pasture Hill Farm.
<b>1888</b>	Bayview Farm is acquired by the New Glenroy Estate Company for the purpose of land sales. Alexander Pearson buys Bayview Farm and renames it 'Hilton Estate'.
<b>1911</b>	Pearson sells Hilton Estate, initially as a 337-acre farm and later incrementally as subdivided allotments.
<b>1920-21</b>	The land immediately north of Ballert Mooroop (present-day A T C Cook Reserve) is purchased by Aviation Ltd and used as the Glenroy Aerodrome.
<b>c. 1921-54</b>	Ballert Mooroop comprises one of many semi-rural properties in Glenroy. Those who own or live at the site include the Goeby family (Harry, Leslie and William Frederick), Edward J Broome, John Thomas French and Richard Alroy Dance.
<b>1954-92</b>	Ballert Mooroop becomes the site for Glenroy High School.



**1995-2012**

Glenroy High School closes and is replaced with Ballerdt Mooroop College, a Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) School.

**2012 – current**

The fight for Ballerdt Mooroop to be returned to the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung CHAC continues.

## 4 Reflections on Ballertr Mooroop

The following chapter contains personal recollections based on interviews with people who had, or continue to have, a strong connection with the Ballertr Mooroop site. SHP conducted interviews with the following people in early 2025:

- Mariella Teuira, 3 March 2025, audio interview with Carissa Goudey
- Aunty Bev Murray, 5 March 2025, audio interview with Carissa Goudey
- Mark Rose, 24 March 2025, video interview with Carissa Goudey
- Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 17 April 2025, video interview with Nicola Henriksson
- Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 17 April 2025, video interview with Nicola Henriksson
- Sue Bolton, 15 May 2025, audio interview with Nicola Henriksson
- Trevor Barker, 27 May 2025, audio interview with Carissa Goudey

Because the fight for Ballertr Mooroop is contemporary and evolving, it is impossible to write a chronological narrative. Instead, we have collated quotes under different headings not only to allow each person to speak for themselves but also to allow the many diverse views about the site to be expressed without analysis.

### 4.1 The Department of Education's 'dumping ground'

Ballertr Mooroop took in First Nations and non-First Nations students who struggled in conventional school settings and came from difficult backgrounds. Although Ballertr Mooroop sought to provide a safety net for these students, the school's facilities were in dire need of upgrading.

**Mariella Teuira**, *former student*:

I was expelled from another site, it was called Oak Park. Back then, back in those days, KODE [Ballertr Mooroop College] was regarded as a dumping ground ... [Ballertr Mooroop College] was the only school that took me at the time...My brothers found themselves in the same predicament as well. Starting to go through the justice system, was expelled from Glenroy College ... Ballertr Mooroop was the only school that would take my brothers. And being a previous student, even though I'm not Indigenous ... they opened their arms for my brothers.

Let's be honest about the facilities. I went [to Ballertr Mooroop] before it was KODE as well. The facilities back then were rundown ... we didn't have nothing. Even when my brothers went there it was the same buildings, same crap ... nothing was upgraded.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Mariella Teuira, 'Ballertr Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

**Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray**, *activist, former Glenroy High student and partner of Aunty Margaret Gardiner.*

[Ballerrt Mooroop] was for disengaged Aboriginal kids, basically Form One to Form Four ... it was set up as part of the Northland Secondary College court case ... Jeff Kennett was the Premier. He wanted to close Northland. So Gary Foley and all the teachers that got together ran a class action against Jeff Kennett, and that went through a court process. Kennett brought in the Aboriginal Education Association as his witnesses, and they basically ran the line that they were setting up KODE schools all over Victoria ... so it was really designed to knock off Northland, but it didn't work. Northland won the court case.<sup>162</sup>

**Trevor Barker**, *founding committee member of KODE:*

I was on the committee that founded [Ballerrt Mooroop]. [It] was actually all done through VAEAI, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association. There were a few KODE schools opening up around the state ...

... I was working for Enmaraleek Association, which was our local Aboriginal community group in Broadmeadows. And that was a local co-op and that's how [I] got involved ... [I] was a mentor through VAEAI and I worked for different schools for the kids, and I travelled from as far as Werribee back up to Coolaroo ... or to Kalkallo. Mostly schools that had Indigenous kids. That was my role, to go around and support these kids in the schools. And when the opportunity came up for [Ballerrt Mooroop], that was a really good idea ... to have all the kids in one school, not just to be a black annexe, which we did not want it to be. It was open to other ... kids who [didn't] have to be Aboriginal ...

... we had the interviews [and] we had a week, basically, to set the school up and have it running. They'd send a few people, principals ... and get families involved with the kids' enrolments and all the rest of it.

[Ballerrt Mooroop] came under the auspices of the Box Forest Campus. Any money went to Box Forest and basically stuff that had to be done at the Hilton Street Campus [Ballerrt Mooroop] had to go through Box Forest for the principals and so on.

When we first moved in there, it was a bit rundown because [Glenroy High] was actually closed ... so there was a lot of rubbish just left there. [There was] a lot of community work, with community and so on getting the place up ... getting it ready for the kids as well. There [were] areas they couldn't go into because [there were] dangerous spots, but it was a lot of work ... it was enjoyable.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>163</sup> Trevor Barker, Ballerrt Mooroop Commission oral history interview, 26 May 2025.

**Mark Rose**, *Principal 1997-98*:

Every bad, sad kid was dropped at the KODE school from other schools in the area, whether they were Aboriginal or not. So other schools [in the area] at the time saw a chance to clear their tough cases.

[Ballerrt Mooroop] was placed in an area about four or five kilometres from Fawkner, which was the headquarters of the Nazi Party at the time. And the graffiti that we got on the school ... I actually would go out to my car and there'd be death threats sticky taped to my windows ... the perception in the community was that they had ... lost a school that was given to black fellas. A sentiment that hasn't changed much.

You know, a lot of emphasis is [placed on] talking about people in remote communities, and that's important that they need the support. But if you're living in Glenroy or Broady and the local milk bar has got your card waiting for your pension or dole to come in so they can repay the money you owe them, that's pretty damn remote, too.<sup>164</sup>

**Uncle Andrew Gardiner**, *Deputy Chair of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, Wurundjeri Elder and brother of activist Aunty Margaret Gardiner*:

[Ballerrt Mooroop] was about having Aboriginal kids go to a place where they felt most comfortable. Because all of these kids that went to the KODE school ... those kids were disengaged from the mainstream education system ... the Education Department was actually letting them down by enabling them to be forced out of their educational opportunities. Then KODE was picking that up, because one of the key elements to KODE was that it was actually engaging kids to make them culturally resilient, to add value to their cultural knowledge of who they are so they can be proud of being an Aboriginal person, so they can actually be a contributor to society and their community into the future.<sup>165</sup>

**Aunty Beverly Murray**, *VACCA educator and former Glenroy High student*:

[Ballerrt Mooroop] was set up to fail, really. Because [the Education Department] weren't prepared to invest in it and help it grow. And it was in an old part of the school. The rest of the school was just disused. So it wasn't really a good atmosphere in a lot of respects. I mean, it was great that those kids were together. At least they had that. They had Aboriginal teachers ... an Aboriginal principal. But the structure around it was still the same structure of the former school.

But when I got involved in it, you could see that, really, [the Department of Education] was just setting aside some space there and weren't prepared to put in the funding to

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<sup>164</sup> Mark Rose, Ballerrt Mooroop Commission oral history interview, 24 March 2025.

<sup>165</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

create the right sort of atmosphere and resources that [were] needed for the Aboriginal kids that went there. Because there were kids ... that were disconnected from their, you know, mainstream school. It just wasn't relevant. And [the department] wasn't prepared to provide the opportunity for Aboriginal kids to reinforce their identity ... provide them with knowledge about their culture and give them opportunities, you know, to connect to their Country ... it was about providing a uniform education system that really wasn't even catering for non-Aboriginal kids, let alone Aboriginal kids.<sup>166</sup>

**Sue Bolton**, *Socialist Alliance and Merri-bek City councillor*:

[Ballerrt Mooroop] didn't just cater for kids in Glenroy in the Merri-bek area. It covered the northern suburbs. So there were ... a lot of kids who came from Broady, probably more came from outside of Merri-bek than inside of Merri-bek. It's sort of on the border between the two local council areas.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Bev Murray, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>167</sup> Sue Bolton, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

## 4.2 Breaking down barriers: the role of teachers, Elders and an alternative curriculum

Ballerrt Mooroop was run very differently from conventional schools because it had a strong focus on community and cultural identity. Elders played an important part in maintaining discipline as well as in supporting the students and teachers.

### **Mariella Teuira:**

Let me just say ... you had to be a teacher with balls ... Teachers had to be strong enough and emotionally strong to withstand what's happening with these young people at the time. You had a lot of kids coming from a lot of broken homes.

A lot of teachers didn't want to teach there ... it was a school where [they'd] say, "Oh, okay, it's a dumping ground. It's too hard." But once you break down those barriers with young people, and the young people know that, they move forward. Everybody moves together.

Yes, the classes were a lot smaller, but it was all one on one. The kids felt like they wanted to come to school. They wanted it. They found a safe space for them ... when you're expelled from a mainstream school, you find it very hard to get back into normal, everyday education. Whereas at Ballerrt Mooroop ... there was always a teacher there to help, there was always an Elder there to teach cultural things.

It was more of a community. We had a lot of kids from high-risk backgrounds, like myself. So you always had an Indigenous Elder in the back ... it would be either an Aunt or an Uncle that would be in the background. So if the kids even thought about playing up, they just got the look, you know?

It was a school that you could really connect with, for the kids that ... like myself, that [weren't] connected ... couldn't stay in mainstream school, had issues at home or in the justice system. So it was more about community.<sup>168</sup>

### **Mark Rose:**

We were given some very seasoned teachers, non-Indigenous teachers, because there were very few Aboriginal teachers that we could get at the time ... but some of the more seasoned teachers, when they came to face the challenges of an Aboriginal setting, were really challenged.

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<sup>168</sup> Mariella Teuira, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.



There was a bit of distance between the kids who were told it was their school and the non-Indigenous teachers who tried to run the school ... Some were harder on the kids and some of them were too soft ... I phoned [Alf Bamblett] up and asked him to come to the first assembly ... it was my first day as principal. He called up all the non-Indigenous teachers and he presented them with an Aboriginal flag and an Aboriginal badge and he commissioned them to teach for and on behalf of the community. And he turned to the kids and said, "[They] are teaching on behalf of the Elders of your community. You know what it's like if you don't follow what the Elders say."

At 8:45, the didge would play across the school, and that was the time for people to go to their kinship groups ... Every person in the school belonged to a kinship group, so there were primary kids, secondary kids and one adult in it. And the adult, you know, was not in charge ... that kin group was in charge ... some kids had hard conditions at home. So they'd make sure everyone was fed with breakfast and the big kids would walk the little kids to class, and that was kind of like the start of the day.

[When you have] a school assembly in a conventional school ... you have the kids in their grade levels and the teachers, and it's very militaristic, very industrial. When we had assembly [at Ballerit Mooroop], we put a flag on the centre of the carpet in the hall ... and we sat in concentric circles around that and we affirmed who we were as black fellas. And then everyone had a chance to talk. Elders would talk first, I would talk as principal second, teachers could talk, kids could talk. And we'd solve problems collectively ... as a tribe, I guess.

I had a policy that, if a kid felt they were losing, then they had the option [of] going to the principal and going out to what I called the ... Garden of Ancestors. [There was] a lot of death in the community at the time, and kids were able to plant a tree. That's why that ground's important. A tree for their Uncle or Aunt or brother or sister who'd passed. And there's a seat in the middle. They could go and sit in the middle of that garden and sort of calm down and ... commune with the ancestors that have passed.

Parents immediately got excited because it was their school. Then they saw that there's some parts of the process that have to be Western ... and some of them thought maybe it could be more Aboriginal ... and who knew what an Aboriginal school looks like? You know, I went back to the core basis of respect ... and that's the one rule, the core Aboriginal principle.<sup>169</sup>

#### **Aunty Beverly Murray:**

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<sup>169</sup> Mark Rose, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

I was working at VACCA and one of my previous projects was to develop some resources for Aboriginal children in care ... I had to come up with some resources for different age groups ... and we organised to work with the students in the KODE school.

These young fellas, they didn't have any recipes. They were just excited to be in a class where they could get to cook. And we come up with some recipes for them. And they just loved it. It was such great fun ... and I've got some of my mama's recipes in here, too, so it's a very special recipe book. So the idea was for it to be very informative as well. Had some shopping tips, cooking and storage stuff ... we had a bit of a launch and also gave each of the kids a certificate, you know, had a ceremony around that ... and people I know are still using [the cookbook]! So I'm pretty proud of it, to be honest, and happy that we did it with the kids in the KODE school ... it was such a lovely project, that one.<sup>170</sup>

**Uncle Andrew Gardiner:**

The value that [the students] got out of it was to have the acceptance that they could turn up and learn ... learn about who they were, their background, some cultural elements, participate in some dancing, some painting, some artwork that would build their spirit and their self-esteem and their knowledge of who they are, so they're more resilient for life ahead as well as having a curriculum which actually improves their writing and written skills and knowledge about a whole range of different things ...<sup>171</sup>

**Trevor Barker:**

The kids were really good kids. The teachers were fine. Some of them. You had your days, different days ... most of the families [were] local families. Even some families moved down with the kids in the school ... we didn't have large numbers. At the start we did. But then it started to peter off a bit, because people were dying in the community. People moving back and forth. Very [transient] area.

... further down the track ... I was a community corrections officer and I actually asked to be involved in [Ballert Mooroop]. And I went there one day. And [in] the art classes, they were actually painting on cardboard cutout boomerangs. And it really upset me. I'm thinking, well, these kids ... why can't they be painting on the proper things? So I spoke to the principal back then ... and asked him if we could use the woodwork room because they weren't using that anymore. They had no school woodwork teachers and said we could use that. So we did community work on a Saturday at the school and we started making artefacts ... [we made] your boomerangs and clap sticks and didgeridoos ... and everything we made, we actually gave to the school ... everything

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<sup>170</sup> Bev Murray, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>171</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

that was made was given to the school [so] they could sell it and make a little bit of money for the kids, you know, buy lunches or outings and so on.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Trevor Barker, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

### 4.3 Involving the community

Ballerrt Mooroop encouraged both the school community and the broader community to participate. This included running social events and inviting parents to help out with classes.

**Mariella Teuira:**

Parents were welcome to come sit in the back of the classroom. It was a meeting ground for the parents and to keep an eye over their kids as well and a sense of belonging, you know? A lot of them had issues themselves, but to be [told], “You’re an Elder, we need you to come and help. Just sit in the back of the room and make sure these kids aren’t playing up.”

It was a community site ... yeah, it was an education site, but you also had ... the gymnasium. We had mobs coming in, playing basketball. It was a safe space. They’re not out on the street mucking around. They’re all there together.

I believe [Ballerrt Mooroop] was essential for the Indigenous community ... back then, it was either Fitzroy or ... Glenroy. Broady was on its own. So to have the school situated where it was meant a lot to the community.<sup>173</sup>

**Mark Rose:**

It was the community who got their kids to school. The thing is that we live in extended families. So the other [KODE school] campus was Morwell, and sometimes the kids would spend a couple of days in Morwell and come back to Glenroy.

I went to staffing and said, “We’ve got school reports coming in and parent teacher interviews” and they go, “Oh, no, these parents never come in.” ... So this is where adaptive thinking came in ... and so what I did, I went and hired six Hertz rent-a-cars and got teachers to go pick up our parents from home. The teacher parent interview happened in the car on the way in. And when they got into the school [there was a] barbecue and [they] looked at the kids’ work and then a bus take them home.

One of the problems we had was ... some really nasty graffiti. Ku Klux Klan symbols ... Nazi symbols ... [I asked the kids] “How are we going to handle the graffiti?” One kid in the circle said, “I know where some of those kids go to school. Let’s go do it to their school!” And I go, “As attractive as it might seem...” So what we did, we had this big day. We brought the community ... some of our partners, classes, schools in from around the area. Invited them for a big barbecue ... we got the kids to write messages

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<sup>173</sup> Mariella Teuira, ‘Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview’.

of hope for the future. We tied them to helium balloons ... we stood face to face [with] the graffiti and affirmed who we were and affirmed that [the graffiti] got no power. So we let the balloons go.<sup>174</sup>

**Trevor Barker:**

... not that we had many Indigenous teachers, but we had an Indigenous principal and all supported through community. And there was a lot of activity through community with families and that being involved with the school, doing lunches and breakfasts and so on ... [we] even had the homework centre there for after school. I was actually a bus driver back then, working at the KODE school through Enmaraleek. I drove the kids home every night ... drive home from the homework centre.

... when we were doing community work there, we actually painted the school at one stage. We had a lot of people in there working on Sundays ... Sundays was the day we would work on the school [grounds ... cut down trees when there [were] no kids around, all that stuff, and clean up the grounds around the school, maintain them.

We actually had my awards through [the] Department of Justice [at Ballerit Mooroop] as a centre for community work, and we set up to start with these Aboriginal clients. And in the end, [we] actually had ... all different groups ... we'd have lunch and we'd sit in a circle and we would ask different mobs about their culture. We had Vietnamese, we had Greeks, we had Italians, [Turkish], [Lebanese], Maori. And we'd just sit there and talk ... about their culture, and they'd explain it and give people a better understanding of different culture instead of, you know, just stereotypical ... we got to know what their culture was about and also what the people were about, which was really good.

They were very proud, the young fellows [that] were coming [to Ballerit Mooroop]. We had a couple of them get through to their VCE and so on. But it's just more like ... community. It's more [of a] family. Everyone being involved ... you [had] your LAECG, which [was] the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. So you [had] a lot of parents that sit on that.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Mark Rose, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>175</sup> Trevor Barker, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

## 4.4 Fighting for our school

A wide range of people fought to keep Ballerit Mooroop open: former and current students, members of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other First Nations groups and non-First Nations community activists.

### **Aunty Beverly Murray:**

When they did the review of the KODE school and their report came out, I was just devastated. Because it was just blaming Aboriginal people ... having this great concept but ignoring the fact that the resources and the investment wasn't put in there once it was set up.

We were up against this huge organisation ... it was a giant battle because [the Glenroy Specialist School] had all the resources. They were able to access media and get all the attention on their side. And, of course, who would not ... support them because of the great work they were doing there for children? It was just so unfair ... there were other spaces they could have had. Why did they have to take ... the only space around here? [Ballerit Mooroop] should have remained ours.

It was a shameful episode, really. On behalf of the Education Department, on behalf of the people who took it over ... took it away from us and did all they could to take it away from us.

It's a memory of ... what it should have been ... and how we were screwed over. And how our kids don't count.<sup>176</sup>

### **Mariella Teuira:**

My two brothers were some of the last students at the school ... they'd already been incarcerated, then to have them not do anything, it broke me, you know? So I was like, "Okay, I've gotta fight to keep this school open." [And] they fought for me when I needed it most, too. So that's where my campaign come in with Dottie Bamblett ... I had four biological children and my two brothers. So I actually had six kids living in there with me, with other community members as well ... I think we were [at Ballerit Mooroop] for about three to four months straight. I was the last person to lock up the gates and close it once we had a settlement. But during that period of time ... we're talking about kids that didn't have a feed at home. We were feeding the kids, we were feeding the mob to make sure everyone was there together.

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<sup>176</sup> Bev Murray, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.



...it broke my heart that we had to close the doors. But in the end, you know, it was a negotiation back and forth and we thought we won the battle. But then, you know, government changed their minds and everything else.

I think [the government] failed us, you know? ... and the argument was, "Oh, it was only 11 kids or nine kids left." Well, the Education Department cut [those numbers] down, let's be honest about it. And we weren't allowed to involve more kids unless they had an interview. So it was what the system was trying to do to us ... because the government was trying to shut us down bit by bit, it was [presented as] a fight against the disability school ... two diverse ... disadvantaged communities ... when it wasn't like that. In reality, it was the government playing games ... so not happy about that. But you, know, you can't change history. We can only just move forward and learn from it and grow from it. But what I've seen is there hasn't been much growth for the young people ... we're talking about, you know, youth crime. Okay, but you're taking away ... crime prevention ... what we had at Ballerrt Mooroop was crime prevention. We had like a foster centre. We had our Elders there. We had community members there ... parents were looking for their kids ... they knew their kids were fed, that they were safe.<sup>177</sup>

**Mark Rose:**

[The Education Department] decided that sending kids to general schools and making general schools more adaptable was much better ... history will work out whether that was the right move or not. The hard part is ... the KODE school didn't accommodate the fact that our community is so dispersed, and we had kids coming from Craigieburn on the bus and we had kids coming from the west every day.<sup>178</sup>

**Uncle Andrew Gardiner:**

... my late sister, older sister was a prime activist for the site as it was finishing being a KODE school in 2012 and then ... fighting to have the site, allocated, handed over through the Education Department to Wurundjeri to progress a project here, which will have educational and cultural heritage value for everybody in the area and also for our community, employment opportunities and a whole range of things ... a gathering place that shares information, our cultural heritage and all that.<sup>179</sup>

**Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray:**

[KODE schools] were struggling over many years. Lack of resources and all that, lack of participation in it. So around about 2010 ... they were on the line. They were going to be wiped out ... lack of numbers. And the main body, Victorian Aboriginal Education

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<sup>177</sup> Mariella Teuira, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>178</sup> Mark Rose, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>179</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

Association, to their shame weren't supporting [the KODE schools]. And in the end, they all went down ...

[I got involved] when [the Victorian government] decided they were going to turn it down, knock it off ... we got involved [in] about 2010. Marg Gardiner passed away in '23. She was ... leading that with Barbara Williams and ... Dottie Bamblett, she was school council president. So she asked us for help and we bought into it ... I remember the first time I went there in recent times. I rode my bike from here to there ... there was a big rally out the front and they had megaphones and placards. It was good.

[The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation] wanted to maintain the site. And the locals wanted it. So we had rallies and protests and wrote letters and petitions ... in the end, we had to concede seven acres to the Glenroy Specialist School. Nobody takes on kids with disabilities ... so we let that one go ... also, there was five Aboriginal kids that had disabilities in that school as well. So we maintained the battle. And in the end, the state agreed that they would lease it to [Merri-bek] Council ... and a sublease would be given to the Wurundjeri Council.

[Ballerrt Mooroop] should have been scoped and developed ... we could have had a couple hundred kids on that site, and that's what we've missed out on. And kids, you know, there was one incident where we lost three young fellas who stole a car ... they were kids that were going to that school before [the government] shut them down. Why were they out at midnight stealing cars and getting killed? That drove home to me that we need to battle the state about getting that school restored.<sup>180</sup>

#### **Sue Bolton:**

My first involvement with the site was before the Ballerrt Mooroop school was forcibly closed down ... I think it was late 2010 when the Premier of the time, Labor Premier John Brumby, had his office in Wheatsheaf Road in Glenroy, which is just down the road from where I live. And I heard that there was a protest going to be marching down to his office to try and stop the closure of Ballerrt Mooroop ... not very often you see protests happen in suburbia in Glenroy.

... what the government was proposing to do was to close down the Ballerrt Mooroop College and shift the specialist school for children with disabilities from the other end of the same street ... onto Hilton Street to occupy most of the site of the Ballerrt Mooroop school. And so, in a sense, playing one disadvantaged community off another disadvantaged community ... and the principal of the specialist school was quite hostile, I'd say, to that Aboriginal school.

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<sup>180</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

My party, Socialist Alliance ... has always had a strong position of supporting First Nations struggles. I think we might have even put out some sort of public statement saying along the lines of what the leaders of the protest were saying ... the Ballerit Mooroop school should be able to stay on the site, and there might be other locations that might be more appropriate for the specialist school.

The Glenroy Specialist School was plonked on top of the [Ballerit Mooroop College] oval ... and it was sort of ironic, really, because just 12 months before that happened, [Ballerit Mooroop College] and [Merri-bek City Council] ... had signed a shared use agreement. So, [Merri-bek] Council spent thousands of dollars planting trees ... the idea was that the broader community would be able to use ... that reserve when [Ballerit Mooroop College] wasn't using it ... And then, 12 months later, the Education Department plonked the [Glenroy Specialist School] ... onto that site.

My understanding is that the state government decided to close down the school behind the backs of the school community. So the school council wasn't even aware of the plans to close down [Ballerit Mooroop]. And my understanding is that one of the reasons why the government chose to close it down is that, within the Education Department bureaucracy, there was a prejudice against special schools catering for special groups of kids. And it probably wouldn't have mattered who was in power ... at that time, it was a Liberal government in power ... but it probably wouldn't have mattered whether it was Liberal or Labor. They probably would have tried to do the same thing. And they use the argument that there was very low enrolment at the school ...

[Ballerit Mooroop] included Year One through to Year 12 ... when it started as a ... KODE school. And then it went through various transformations [under] the Education Department. First of all, [the Education Department] shut down the primary school and the junior high school [and] just left the senior school. And then they turned it into a Koori Pathways School, so that any Aboriginal parent couldn't just ... enrol their kid and send them there. They had to be expelled from another school with the expelling principal recommending that they go to Ballerit Mooroop. And that's why the numbers were so low in the end.

... when I got involved in 2011 and started visiting [Ballerit Mooroop], that was when the school committee had already started a protest ... they occupied the school gym and renamed it a gathering place. They occupied the school gym on and off for 10 months. And these were just working-class families ... these weren't parents who were involved in Aboriginal politics or any kind of political activity at all. These were just, you know, grassroots of the community just trying to save their kids' school ... they were camped in the school gym and then they might have to go off to work next day as truck drivers or whatever. But organising, you know, breakfasts and lunches for their kids and

sending them off to school ... as well as working and doing everything else they had to do ... it was quite a remarkable achievement.

... people slept [at Ballerrt Mooroop] overnight. There was a bit of a security patrol ... people took shifts. It was very well organised ... there might have been, you know, probably a hundred people camping there overnight ... a lot of people came to show support. But the bedrock, the core of it was actually families themselves.

Around September in 2011 ... the [Ballerrt Mooroop] community thought they got agreement from the state government to give the school a reprieve, [so] that the school could stay open. And so the protest ended ... but at the end of the year, or maybe before the school year started ... the state government brought a retired principal in on contract to expel all the remaining kids and close the school. And there wasn't any educational pathway offered to those kids.

There was a big car crash at Coolaroo near Broadmeadows ... this was a group of mostly Aboriginal teenagers, and one of them was very popular and was a student at [Ballerrt Mooroop]. And I think one or two kids died and others got seriously injured ... one of the Elders in the school community ... Aunty Barb, she came to me to say, "We've got to get the campaign going to win back the school." Because if the school was still going, these kids might not have nicked this car and died.

... it was probably a fairly small group [of] people who'd been connected to the Ballerrt Mooroop campaign. We started meeting probably [in the] later part of 2012 after this car crash, and we started creating a bit of a campaign ... including recognition of the fact that [there] is contemporary Aboriginal history or First Nations history on this site, and also an Elder had passed away during the school occupation ... [Uncle Tom Slater] passed away under that tree.

... after getting elected [to Merri-bek Council] with the support of the group, I put forward a motion at the first council meeting that I was able to move a motion to try and get the land back for a Ballerrt Mooroop cultural project ... this is where the protest was quite amazing in 2011 because they put forward a master plan for the school ... they had plans for a cultural centre ...

... after [Ballerrt Mooroop] closed, people sort of did scatter ... people had a lot of other things on their plates as well. Health problems and so on and so forth. So at various times there wasn't a lot of activity, and other times there was a lot of activity. So once there was a plan [to] sell off the school site by the state government, we realised we needed to act. Otherwise, we'd never get the land back. And so we went on an intensive campaign of trying to get motions up in council ... we had a contingent at the NAIDOC march ... we tried to get support from the local MP ... so we went into

overdrive ... [and] the state government started to back away from the plans to sell off the site.

...Uncle Gary Murray suggested that we actually organise an event at the Glenroy Tennis Club, which is right beside the site ... we invited all of the Elders from [the] Wurundjeri Council and also invited some representatives of Merri-bek Council ... and that was a massive success, because all the different family groups within Wurundjeri attended ...

People were outraged about what the government was trying to do. But people were also optimistic ... and I think that was reflected by the fact that people went and found support from academics at Melbourne Uni to do up this Ballerit Mooroop masterplan ... so it wasn't just a protest against the closure, but how to advance the school.

[Ballerit Mooroop] should never have been closed down. And it was done in the most deceptive way possible.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Sue Bolton, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

## 4.5 Ballerdt Mooroop's legacy

Ballerdt Mooroop has permanently touched the hearts and minds of those who studied and worked there. For some, the site itself is a poignant reminder of the broader struggle against colonisation.

### **Mariella Teuira:**

... during [the fight for the school], myself and Dottie Bamblett, Barb Williams, we vowed to keep something going for our young people. So adjacent to [the] Ballerdt Mooroop site is the Glenroy Tennis Club that I manage. And I started a not-for-profit named Itiki Sporting Club. But that initiative actually come from us three women. We promised the young people that we would, you know, we'd carry on. We'll use what they were good at, which was sport, to engage them back into education and employment. So we've been quite successful in running our not-for-profit adjacent to the Ballerdt Mooroop site. We've been going for 12 years now.

After we closed the gates [at Ballerdt Mooroop], we lost three young people in a stolen vehicle accident on Pascoe Vale Road. That trauma really destroyed all three of us. We all sort of backed away, thinking, "Maybe if it was still open ... we wouldn't have had to bury three young people."

I was one of the founding students. There's a lot of us, starting in that era, that are all working in the community sector. Probably about 75% of us are working in the sector, which is a great success!

The school and the teachers, they always gave us what we were good at ... Nathan Lovett, he played for Essendon, he was [at Ballerdt Mooroop] a couple years younger than me ... we've had a lot of talent that's come out of there. A lot of ex-students, a lot of us in the community sector now. And I guess we've used our life skills to build who we are; from a broken young person to actually going out there now in the industry and helping the next generation.

The values at Ballerdt Mooroop were around family, community. And that's what I loved. Everybody stuck by each other ... even now, they still pull me up.

Alternative schooling like this actually works. You don't see the benefits now, but you will see the benefits later down the track ... if I didn't have a teacher that believed in me like I did at Ballerdt Mooroop, I wouldn't be who I am today. I wouldn't be the person I am. All the awards I've won and all the work I've done comes from my foundation of being at Ballerdt Mooroop.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Mariella Teuira, 'Ballerdt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.



**Mark Rose:**

I got a call at 8:30 [on the first day of school holidays], phone call from regional security ... and he said, "Your kids. There's been a breach at your school." I said, "I'm on my way", [and] he goes, "No hurry. It's your own kids who have broken into school. What they've done is made some breakfast and they're sitting in beanbags, reading books." ... So it was a place where the kids felt safe ... where the kids were challenged.

I go out there now and see some of the kids are in community organisations ... some of the kids are really making a difference. Not all of them got the qualification ... that they'd intended, but they saw the value in education. And they saw that education could be delivered in a meaningful way, and that they have insisted upon that for their kids.

We had that hiatus for many years for our mob that education was the oppressor. And we were able, through the KODE process, through VAEAI, to make sure that we gave humanity to the education system. And it became the liberator, not the oppressor ... I'm proud of the end of my two years [as principal].

I recognise [Ballerrt Mooroop's legacy] every time I see the children of the kids I had there ... walk across the stage to receive a qualification from a uni, which a number have ... in the way that those kids have [worked towards] liberating themselves, their family and their communities. And education would be the major plank in that.<sup>183</sup>

**Aunty Beverly Murray:**

When we went through the Covid lockdown, I used to go over there to that space where that art piece is and just sit there. And that was really helpful for me ... that's what really helped with my wellbeing, was just being in that space. So yes, it is such an important space because of the history, but because of ... our kids and how they count.<sup>184</sup>

**Uncle Andrew Gardiner:**

There [were] a number of kids who actually ended up finishing KODE school, ended up ... going to university. So to make out that the system was a failure—it was a failure because the Education Department failed it. And, you know, people need to recognise that. Government needs to recognize that and say, yeah, ... we didn't get it right then and we need to make sure that we right some of those wrongs.

[The ceremonial ground] was developed post-KODE school ... the digging stick and the parrying shields were put into installation ... to have that cultural heritage recall. All the artwork on it is from Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung imaging ... the fine lines and

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<sup>183</sup> Mark Rose, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>184</sup> Bev Murray, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

crosshatches. The fire pit is synonymous with it being a campsite and somewhere to make sort of decisions ... it adds that formal site of significance.

[Ballerrt Mooroop] means 'strong spirit'. So it means a little bit of defiance. It means a little bit of making sure that we've got something here for the future to pass on to our younger generations; that there's educational opportunities for our kids, but also the broader community.

You know the old tree here. This is the old spirit tree from the old fellow who was a part of the ... connection to enabling the KODE school transition to having it being a community engagement facility ... it's got a lot of significance, this tree.

I'm thinking that tree couldn't be more than, you know, 60 or 80 years old. So it's not a pre-contact tree, but it's probably a tree that was here and saw a lot of kids run around here as it being a high school site. So it's got some ... memory and some nostalgia and some history.

The whole site has that intrinsic value to it. It shouldn't be just thought of as the former Glenroy High School. It was our traditional lands in the first place. Other ceremony may well have occurred here ... it may have been a hunting and gathering ground, which makes it holistically a cultural heritage site of significance.<sup>185</sup>

**Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray:**

... the one thing that always stood out in my mind about [Glenroy High] was my wife ... she went to Pascoe Vale Girls School, but they only went to Form Five. So to do Form Six, they had to come to Glenroy High. And she lived in Broadmeadows, up the road. So anyway, we sort of hit it off and we used to sit next to each other in Australian history. And everybody was watching us, like "What's going on here? A black fella and a white woman, girlfriend and boyfriend?" ... And then all the other couples started sitting together. Well, the school hit the roof! ... But they left us alone. And that was probably because of my Australian history teacher, Mr Hughes. He recognised it for what it was. Reconciliation, you know? Race relations, all that sort of stuff.

[There's] always been an emotional relationship with that site. Brothers and sisters and all my friends and that went there ... you know where the Glenroy Specialist School is? That used to be the football oval ... and we'd run home, kick the footy, kick it into Mum's front yard and then we'd wag school. Pretend to go and get the footy. So that then goes into ... 1995, when my late partner got involved with the school. She did the first welcome.

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<sup>185</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

[Ballerrt Mooroop] didn't really get the chance because it wasn't there long enough. Even though it was there, you know, 10 or 12 years ... it wasn't resourced properly when it was operating, you know. And it was just starting ... it was really an excuse to knock off Northland. And that's the way they treated [Ballerrt Mooroop], I reckon ... it was doomed from the start ... it was just a second option.

Ballerrt Mooroop is 'strong spirit' ... and that's what it's about. How strong is your spirit to correct our dispossession, dispersal, decolonisation, stolen lands and waters, loss of language over the last 230 plus years? So [Ballerrt Mooroop] is about addressing that in a small way. Traditional Owners and orgs, we own about 25,000 acres [in Victoria]. That's [a] little black dot on the Victorian map. And [Ballerrt Mooroop] is the biggest piece of land that any Labor government could hand over.<sup>186</sup>

**Sue Bolton:**

... it's clear that, unlike kids from a lot of schools where they don't maintain links after they leave school, [Ballerrt Mooroop] was a big part of people's lives. It was more than just a school. It was really ... a community.

[There] were many people involved in this school community that had a lot of obstacles in their way. And these are people, you know, First Nations people – some of whom have gone through, or in their family, horrendous experiences. And I think a lot of ... non-Aboriginal Australians don't really understand intergenerational trauma.

... anyone who lived around Fitzroy, where a lot of the Aboriginal organisations started out, unless they live in public housing or have a really fantastic income ... has been pushed well out of Fitzroy. And so it means that when ... [the] bulk of the [First Nations] community was located in Fitzroy, it sort of meant [that] the whole transmission of culture was much easier because people are all living in a similar area. You know, parents, grandparents, kids, et cetera and different family groups. Where since [First Nations] people were pushed out of Fitzroy, it means that [they] are really scattered across Melbourne ... so I think this Ballerrt Mooroop school actually did bring people together.

I remember also doing a petition to save the Ballerrt Mooroop school from closure. This was earlier in 2011 when the school gym was being occupied. And I did, you know, some stalls with a petition in Glenroy, just in the shopping centre there. And really being struck by, you know, the fact that [the] Aboriginal community [in Melbourne] is so much bigger than you get the impression of, because colonisation happened in the south-eastern corner of Australia first and there [were] so many Aboriginal people with very fair skin who were stopping to talk about [Ballerrt Mooroop].

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<sup>186</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

... this was a community that had everything against it. But they stood up and they fought hard to save their school. And I think it was shameful, the bureaucrats who signed off on closing that school behind the backs of the community ... yes, there are other activists involved in the campaign, but that's the spirit of the struggle for me, which really needs to be celebrated.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Sue Bolton, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

## 4.6 Ballerrt Mooroop today and into the future

Ballerrt Mooroop has been incrementally reduced and readapted since the school closed in 2012. Some individuals have visions for how the remaining portion of Ballerrt Mooroop should be used to service the community.

### **Mariella Teuira:**

I would like [Ballerrt Mooroop] to be recognised as a place that we can share with Indigenous communities and also the local community ... the concept of having a precinct that reflects on Indigenous studies ... I'm also a local as well, we'd love to share the space. So it's all about learning and sharing the space ... that's what I would hope would happen.

When you are there, even now though the building has gone ... you sense there's history there.

When you're sitting out there and you're sitting at the ceremonial ground and you look around and you see the trees, we don't have any spots like that in Glenroy left. We've only got the Ballerrt Mooroop area, the Sewell Reserve. You feel like you're not in the city anymore.

We need to find ways to better educate our next generation ... maybe in putting more alternative schooling around. That is a crime prevention as well. You know, more community minded, more cultured and not around black-and-white and what's on a book. More life skills and learning off Elders that have been there; people that have history, not people that are straight out of uni trying to educate a young person ... These are the things that the government needs to take into account ... learn from our history to move forward for our next generation. We need schools like Ballerrt Mooroop. We need spaces like this community space.<sup>188</sup>

### **Beverly Murray:**

It really doesn't take a lot to create something that's going to be so valuable for community ... we're not talking about trillions of dollars. How hard would it have been to ... create something like they have there now, for our kids?

My idea is that there should be a year where our young brothers can learn at a school just for them. And they learn about culture ... they mix with their own mob, they learn from one another and they're very supported in their identity.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Mariella Teuira, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>189</sup> Bev Murray, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

**Trevor Barker:**

... they really need to get a hygienist to come in there and go through the place, because there'd be a lot of asbestos left behind [from] when they'd demolished the school.

... a lot of the stuff that was at [Ballerrt Mooroop] went to Enmaraleek and was left there. And then Enmaraleek closed down. So yeah, a lot of stuff just disappeared.

... when it was the KODE school, my main thing I wanted to get done out there was to set up a memorial garden for when people would pass in the community. I wanted the kids to plant trees out there, for their uncle or their grandfathers ... their fathers or grandmothers, family members. Where the kids could look after that tree, a family tree. [That] never happened though, but yeah, [it was] my big thing I wanted to do out there.

There's a lot of community members that have passed on. I would like to see some of the areas named after them ... even to have days were you could have like reunions for the kids, for all these ex-students to attend ... they need to advertise it. But I would have these days ... at the school. They need to get out there and advertise it more for the community so you get a lot more people attending, because people moved out of the area. But I'm sure some of the younger ones that were students back at the time would like to get back there. And, you, know, there's nothing there now ... the heart's gone from it.

I wouldn't like to see it going into a housing development, no way. To preserve it would be great for [the] community. Just to have somewhere to go, even as a keeping place ... put some of that history back in there. If they do build a centre, to put some of the photos [of] ... when it was the school, and families that were there. [It] would be great to have ... kind of like a little museum, I suppose.<sup>190</sup>

**Uncle Andrew Gardiner:**

The [Will Will Rook] preschool building [is] the old KODE school ... so when the preschool sort of took that over, they did a lot of renovations to the building. And when you go ... you still have a bit of that feeling that's in there ... it's continuing to be an education facility. And that's what we want for this site. An education space that transfers cultural heritage from our mob onto people who want to bring school groups here.

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<sup>190</sup> Trevor Barker, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.



So it's going to have a youth focus, a women's focus, a men's focus, an Elders' focus. And so there's a lot of planning that's been put into the development of the site. It needs state government support. You know, Minister for Education needs to pull the pin and actually do the right thing and hand the land back, because this is part of a land grab from 1839.

... there's lots, not just local Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders here, there's local non-Aboriginal people that [are] strong supporters [of the plans for Ballerri Mooroop]. They want their kids to know more about our culture, our heritage and that past history and that shame that Black history shows and shadows onto the Victorian community. We want to have that equality and equity so we can stand up to be the true First Nations people that are from here.

We've developed a better relationship than [there] was with Yooralla, the special school here. And so that's been really good to have that. The senior management of Will Will Rook Preschools, they've come on board really practically, because all the kids there they take out on a walking tour nearly every day, and they get to ask questions about what the different trees are and ... the bird life and what used to happen here and that sort of stuff. So kids actually get a little bit of cultural content in their preschool learning, and I think parents appreciate that. And that actually supports the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who continue to want to access this site.

... since 2018, there's been this special connection now. You walk on this Country, you feel the difference because it's been enlivened. You know, the land's got a spirit. And I've lived in other parts of Australia and I felt that difference.

We've been kept out of the economic opportunities of this state, in this country. And so we need to advance ourselves through equity so that we can have the means to develop our future opportunities for our young people ... but also have some equality because we're still not part of the mainstream. We're still the lesser part, the poor cousins.

Because if you get it right for our mob, you get it right then for refugee communities ... coming to Australia, or even people from other countries who are coming for a better life to Australia. They still get disrespected because "you don't speak English like us, so you're going to be lesser than us". So if we're going to ... flatten out racism, you've got to do it from the start. You've got to do it with the ... First People who've actually had that impact for 200 years and survived it.

... there's still a lot of us who don't have that better life and we need to make sure that our mob is lifted up and we're all moving forward together, that nobody gets left behind. This can be undertaken through the statewide Treaty. It's been negotiated with the state government right now. In 2025, the state government, the Allan Labor government, is on

notice ... They've received a negotiation brief from the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria who were properly elected, democratically elected people from around Victoria, speaking on behalf of their communities. And the government, through their negotiating team, have lodged an initial response to those. And there's lots of areas that we can collaborate and continue to negotiate on our treaty aspirations. But statewide Treaty affects housing, health, education, employment opportunities, but also importantly, the justice system, because our people are still too overrepresented in the justice system based on community and numbers. As a percentage of our population, there's only, you know, 65-70,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria. So if we're overrepresented as a community, that's something that the government needs to do something about. There [are] systemic issues that are causing that. And this harks back to kids being stolen back in the early 1900s. You know, purposefully stolen, taken away from their families and put into foster care, adoptions, not to know who their parents are. Can you just imagine some of the women who had those kids, having their doors kicked in and their kids taken from them, how they felt, how they still feel today, how those kids feel? It's generational, and some of that impact has caused their lives to be hugely disturbed.

All those broader issues come back to roost here [at Ballerit Mooroop] ... the cultural energy here needs to have its time and needs to be uplifted so that it can be re-engaged for broader community benefit. So education for this place as a gathering place, so we can cross fertilise our information and add value to the special school next door and the Will Will Rook Preschool ... we've got a health service plan here too, which can be bulk billed for everybody in the local area that doesn't have to travel four or five kilometres to go and see a doctor. A lot of our mob have to travel quite a way. They're going to Fitzroy over to Epping to ... see a doctor. So these things can be made available and be part of that intrinsic value of the whole site. All that based on cultural engagement and that cultural heritage that brings us all together as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>191</sup>

#### **Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray:**

We've got to focus on getting that land title off the state ... we can fund that in the next six months. People got together and worked it out. Now the need is here because in [the] Merri-bek Council area and Hume next door, there's about 3,000 of us. And the nearest services for us are in Preston and Fitzroy and Epping.

I used to run Camp Jungai up in the Thornton area ... it was a 57 hectare site bought there by the state back in the seventies. They set up as a race relations program; it was culture, recreation ... That concept of getting kids involved in education. We used to test kids going from Grade Six into Form One. We'd put them through literacy and

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<sup>191</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

numeracy stuff in the morning, then we'd take 'em horse riding and [canoeing] in groups of five with ... a group leader and a skill leader. We'd take 'em out to ... hike and cultural stuff and all that. That concept is what I call a transferable project, but no one has done one in the urban environment. But Glenroy could do it [at Ballerri Mooroop].

It's economically viable as well as culturally viable ... and you can aim that at university students. Why go to Alice Springs to do archaeology when you can come to [Ballerri Mooroop] and we'll teach you about all that stuff? And we might scar some of the gum trees, for example, and show them how it works.

We've got a legal entity that can chase funding for services ... we've got to put a health service in there. There's no medical service in that immediate neighbourhood. So we expect locals to get involved in it, be patients and clients ...

The nearest [health] services for us are in Preston and Fitzroy and Epping. For me to go there, I don't drive. I've never driven in my life ... I have to get a bus to Coburg, then a train to the city, then a tram out. Two-hour time slot.

We will come back to it being a school. But we'll be aiming it at a lot of people – Elders and kids that are disengaged ... and the university sector has got to be involved in it, too. So it's multipurpose in every sense of the word. It's got to be a safe environment ...

I'd love to see the Black Parliament that's proposed. First Peoples Assembly have an office [at Ballerri Mooroop] ... We did a three-year research study with [the] Faculty of Architecture, Melbourne Uni, back in 2013 to about 2015 ... the study was about how do you answer the question of where do you see First Peoples in the CBD? ... the short answer was you don't see us. There's no building that looks like us, right, inside and out ... and that's what we've got to do. When you look at that site at Glenroy, you know it's us from inside and outside and everything we do there.

I think, simply, you know, we've got to get it done. We've had long enough. We know what the issues are and the economics of it is, the cultural stuff ... we've got a corporation now set up to support the Wurundjeri Council. We're not going to be a competing interest. We're there to complement what Wurundjeri's doing. And we want them to get the land title and to get the funding to manage it. But we also want the off-Country First Peoples and also the general community to be involved in it, because that makes it viable ... morally, culturally, politically, legally.

We've got to get it funded, got to get the land title transferred over to Wurundjeri. And that should be done this year. They've gotta put a time on it ... they're going too slow. And we've gotta do it for the Elders who aren't going to be here much longer. You know, we've lost three of the main ones in the last three years that were leading the

protests ... and we don't forget that's their legacy that we have to implement as soon as possible.<sup>192</sup>

**Sue Bolton:**

... as Aboriginal services developed, they went out [in] the north-eastern direction as organisations were pushed out of Fitzroy because it was so expensive ... whereas there was a lack of Aboriginal services in the north-western suburbs. And so the implication of that is that because a lot of people won't want to use non-Aboriginal services ... they don't engage with medical services for preventative health ... and it's too difficult to get from Broadmeadows or Glenroy across to the services on the north-east. So the view was always that ... the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service come in and have a satellite within [Ballert Mooroop].

Where we've got to today is that we've probably got more support than we ever had through official channels ... not just council, but the local MP is supportive of [the] Ballert Mooroop cultural centre happening on site. And it seems that the Wurundjeri Council ... is now fully on board with this site.

I think if we can win land back from the government ... that would be very significant in terms of land back in Melbourne ... other than land along the creeks being given back to the Wurundjeri, I don't think any other land has been given back. So that would be very significant if that happens. And that's really what we want.

I think for a society to move on, because of colonisation ... you actually need to come to terms with history. But that also means not just, you know, window dressing and a cultural dance or two here and there. You actually have to give back to that community in a real way, in an economic way. And that means land back and assistance to that community in a community-driven project that's not chosen by governments or corporations, but the community driving the project ... [Ballert Mooroop] would involve a range of things, from passing on of culture [to] spaces for Elders, spaces for youth, spaces for women, spaces for men but also services.

And I think that people recognise the need for a First Nations community-led project. And also, there needs to be an understanding and recognition [that] not only are there Traditional Owners, but Aboriginal people who are living off Country and so it needs to be an inclusive project reflecting all the different parts of the First Nations community.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>193</sup> Sue Bolton, 'Ballert Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

## 5 Conclusions

Our research comprehensively showed that Ballerrt Mooroop is a site of cultural importance for Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and other First Nations People in Merri-bek City. The Country surrounding Ballerrt Mooroop has been frequented by First Nations groups (specifically Wurundjeri willam people) for millennia, including for some decades after colonisation. This is demonstrated not only by the cultural artefacts found across Glenroy between Moonee Ponds and Merri creeks but also early colonial references to First Nations People in the area.

However, it is the site's recent history as a KODE school that makes Ballerrt Mooroop a significant place for First Nations People living in Merri-bek and Hume city council areas. For some former students, Ballerrt Mooroop was their last chance at a formal education. It was also an environment where they felt heard, nurtured and supported in their cultural identity:

The value that [the First Nations and Torres Strait Islander community] got out of it was to have the acceptance. They could turn up and learn some stuff, learn about who they were, their background, some cultural elements, participate in some dancing and some painting themselves, some artwork that would build their spirit and their self-esteem and knowledge of who they are. So then they are more resilient for life ahead. As well as having a curriculum, which actually improves their writing and written skills and knowledge about a whole range of different things ...<sup>194</sup>

- Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 2025

This palpable connection is obvious from the amount of time and dedication these students and their families put towards campaigning for the school to stay open.

The interviewees all clearly articulated the profound impact that Ballerrt Mooroop has had on their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Some directly benefitted from the culture-focused curriculum that Ballerrt Mooroop instilled, while others saw their teaching efforts rewarded every time a student graduated. For some activists who continue to champion its cause, Ballerrt Mooroop's closure evoked genocidal colonial acts of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These included the stealing of children from their families (known as the Stolen Generations). Likewise, the fight to have the site transferred to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation holds enormous symbolism in the broader land rights struggle. Many of its supporters hope to see the Ballerrt Mooroop site rightfully reinstated to its Traditional Owners via a transfer of land title from the Department of Education to the WWCHAC. As Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray observed, 'historically, over 230 years, [Ballerrt Mooroop is] the second piece of land [the government] is going to hand back to us'.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>195</sup> Deadly Story, 'Coranderrk Station', *Deadly Story*, n.d. <[https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Community\\_Places/Coranderrk\\_Station](https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Community_Places/Coranderrk_Station)>; Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerrt Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

However, Ballerit Mooroop has been given little attention by the mainstream media. Much of its recent history is only accessible in the public sphere through an occasional local newspaper article or social media post. However, the oral history interviews show that public sentiment runs deep and that an enormous amount of work is still being done to save the site. This includes Merri-bek Council's bid to purchase the Ballerit Mooroop site back in 2014 and its ongoing support for the transfer of land title to the WWCHAC. Merri-bek Council continues to champion Ballerit Mooroop through its facilitation of Ballerit Mooroop Day, which is a popular community event held each year during Reconciliation Week. Ballerit Mooroop Day is a celebrated event in Glenroy, where all members of the community can watch and participate in cultural activities.<sup>196</sup> Council also publishes a regular newsletter for Ballerit Mooroop's supporters and has released podcasts with key activists such as Mariella Teura and Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray.<sup>197</sup>

Today, Ballerit Mooroop remains a fundamental part of the Glenroy community, both as a site of education and as a gathering place. Will Will Rook Preschool takes its children on daily walking tours through the site to learn about the long history of the place and local flora and fauna.<sup>198</sup> The site is also still used for smoking ceremonies and other First Nations-focused gatherings, including the annual Ballerit Mooroop Day and has strong connections with affiliated organisations such as the neighbouring Itiki Sporting Club, which was founded by Mariella Teura, Aunty Barbara Williams and Dottie Bamblett for the students who had been left behind when Ballerit Mooroop closed.<sup>199</sup>

Ballerit Mooroop's supporters are currently focusing their efforts on developing the site into a multi-purpose hub that can be shared by First Nations People of all groups as well as the broader community. They maintain that the site can and should be reclaimed for educational purposes: as a place where people from all walks of life can learn about different First Nations cultures:

... there's lots, not just local Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders here, there's local non-Aboriginal people that [are] strong supporters [of the plans for Ballerit Mooroop]. They want their kids to know more about our culture, our heritage and that past history and that shame that Black history shows and shadows onto the Victorian community. We want to have that equality and equity so we can stand up to be the true First Nations people that are from here.<sup>200</sup>

- Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 2025

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<sup>196</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Ballerit Mooroop Day 2025', *Merri-Bek City Council*, 20 May 2024 <<https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/my-council/news-and-publications/news/ballerit-mooroop-day-2025/>>.

<sup>197</sup> Merri-bek City Council, 'Ballerit Mooroop History'.

<sup>198</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>199</sup> Mariella Teura, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'; Sue Bolton, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'. Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>200</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerit Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.



In practice, this will involve building a cultural centre and running outreach programs where students can learn traditional practices from Elders.<sup>201</sup> Because there are no medical services in the neighbourhood, Ballerri Mooroop is also a prime location for a clinic<sup>202</sup>:

Last Saturday, we had a meeting at the Glenroy Hub and we decided to incorporate a legal entity ... we've got a legal entity that can chase funding for services. You know, we're going to put a health service in there [because] there's no medical service in that immediate neighbourhood. [And] we expect the locals to get involved in it, be patients and clients ...<sup>203</sup>

- Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 2025

Whatever its future, there is strong sentiment that Ballerri Mooroop's development must be a First Nations-led community project but one that benefits all who live in Glenroy. The interviews also made clear that the time for action at Ballerri Mooroop is now:

Well, I think time's up. [It's] got to get funded. Got to get the land title transferred over to Wurundjeri, and that should be done this year. They've got to put a time on it ... they're going too slow, and we've got to do it for the Elders that aren't going to be here much longer. You know, we've lost three of the main ones in the last three years. They were leading the protests ... and we don't forget that's their legacy that we have to implement as soon as possible.<sup>204</sup>

- Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 2025

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<sup>201</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerri Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'; Bev Murray, 'Ballerri Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>202</sup> Uncle Andrew Gardiner, 'Ballerri Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'; Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerri Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'; Sue Bolton, 'Ballerri Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>203</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerri Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

<sup>204</sup> Gnerick Gnerick WyrkerMilloo Gary Murray, 'Ballerri Mooroop Commission Oral History Interview'.

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