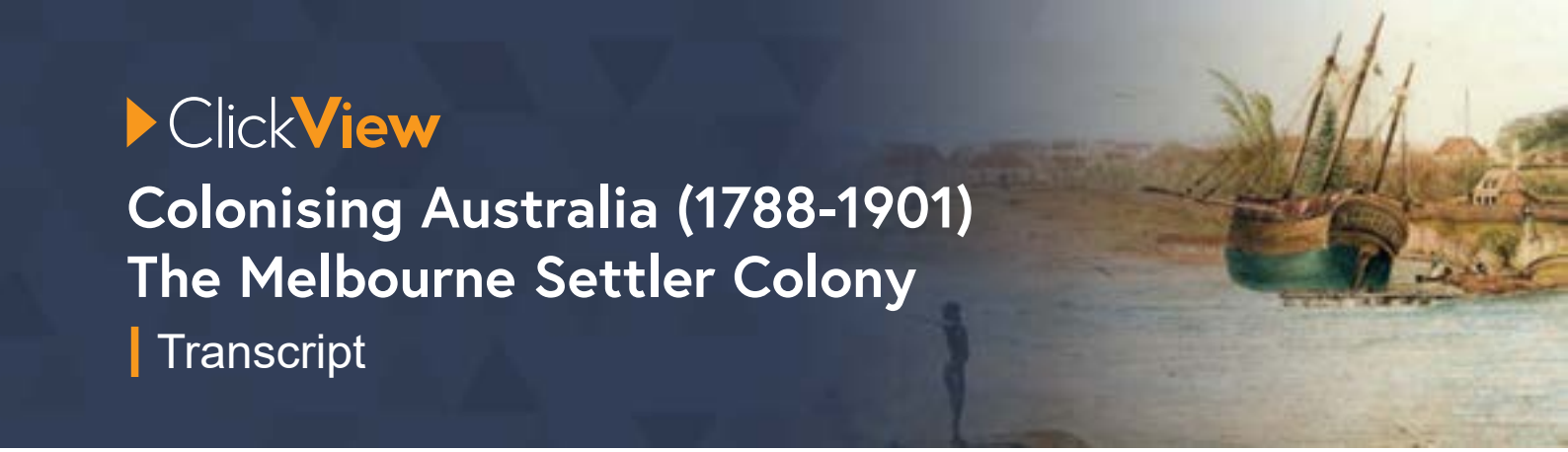

Colonising Australia (1788-1901)
The Melbourne Settler Colony
Transcript

Narrator: In 1803, a British expedition sailed around Port Phillip Bay in search of a site for a new colony. James Hingston Tuckey, the first lieutenant on board the HMS Calcutta, described what he saw.

James Hingston Tuckey: *The face of the country bordering on the port is beautifully picturesque, swelling into gentle elevations of the highest verdure, and dotted with trees, as if planted by the hand of taste, while the ground is covered with a profusion of flowers of every colour; in short, the external appearance of the country flattered us into the most delusive dreams of fruitfulness and plenty.*
(10 October, 1803)

Narrator: 30 years later, in 1835, Melbourne was founded by businessmen from Van Diemen's Land. They planned to run sheep on the lush green pastures around the bay and export the highly profitable wool to feed Britain's booming textile industry. The people of the Kulin nation had lived on this land for thousands of years. But as waves of European settlers invaded, their land and way of life was lost. Their population was decimated by disease and frontier warfare.

Settler colonies like Melbourne were founded in the name of the British Empire. They provided resources such as wool, coal and timber, had strategic and military significance in terms of protecting British interests and offered economic opportunities for enterprising individuals. Let's look at the conditions in the early years of the Melbourne settlement.

Janine Dunleavy: Free settler colonies were not dissimilar to the penal colonies in the sense that people were still finding it rather difficult to feed themselves. They found the country not particularly available for the kinds of agricultural techniques that were used in Britain.

Narrator: In 1837, Phillip Parker King, one of the first Europeans to be born in the Australian colonies, described the scene before him at the mouth of the Yarra River, eight miles from the Melbourne settlement.

Phillip Parker King: *We found here two vessels from Van Diemen's Land, each having brought 500 sheep. The whole country hereabouts is undated with them, but unfortunately not with water. A very dry season has been experienced, and stock are very badly off for feed.*
(3 March, 1837)

Narrator: The introduction of livestock decimated the country, destroying countless food and water sources for Indigenous people. The light fertile soil of the grasslands that had been a reliable source of grain for Indigenous people were now compacted and ruined by the sheep and cattle.

Establishing law and order in the settler colony was a challenge.

Janine Dunleavy: The free settler colonies were, compared to the penal colonies, actually very lawless. There was no military to enforce the law in those places and it quickly became apparent that– well, it was basically free for all.

Narrator: Reverend William Waterfield, who was new to the settlement, wrote this in January, 1839:

William Waterfield: *The day was ushered in... in the most shameful manner possible. Firing of guns, shouting, cursing and swearing, drinking and singing, breaking of windows and bursting open of doors. Where the police were, what they were doing, I know not...*
(January, 1839)

Narrator: The colonial settlements were rough, dangerous places and daily life looked nothing like it did in Britain. But they were British colonies. So did they take on British notions of society and class?

Janine Dunleavy: In Britain, class and social structures were extremely rigid. Crime in Britain, if you had been sentenced, you would never ever be able to live that down. It would be a constant blemish upon your character. Those kinds of class ideas and hierarchies began to break down in Australia because free settlers and convicts, once the convicts had come out from underneath their sentences, became citizens as well. So people that may have been upper-class in Britain were now mixing it with people that would have been the very lowest of the underclass.

Narrator: While the different classes mixed, distinctions were still noted. In 1839, Lady Jane Franklin, wife of the Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land, visited Melbourne and stayed in a hotel owned by one of the earliest settlers, John Fawkner.

Jane Franklin: *Mr Fawkner... is the son of a man who came out in the first convict ship to Port Phillip thirty-six years ago. They are not people of the first respectability but are doing well in this money-making place. He is the editor of a newspaper, the Patriot.*
(April, 1839)

Narrator: In just one generation, the Fawkner family had moved up in society. John Fawkner was now a landowner, hotel owner and publisher of Melbourne's first newspaper. As the settlement grew, it pushed ever further into Indigenous lands.

Janine Dunleavy: And of course in those early days and well into the 20th century, Aboriginal people were being shot and murdered to dispossess them of their lands. And those kinds of crimes went largely unpunished. Occasionally, there were trials for people that had committed wholesale massacre, but it was quite rare.

Narrator: Settlers boasted of their exploits in dispossessing Indigenous groups of their land. In his memoir, written decades later, James Kirby tells of an incident where, frustrated by the local Indigenous people coming onto his land, he decided to resolve it once and for all by chasing them away.

James Kirby: *The blacks ran into the lake, but the shore shelved in so far that it was not deep enough for them to swim or dive, they thus became very good targets for us. A lot of these fellows never came near the hut again, nor did they attempt to kill man or beast, no! they were very peaceable after this.*
(*Old Times in the Bush of Australia*, James Kirby, 1895)

Narrator: While many British and European settlers eventually prospered in new settlements like Melbourne, the first inhabitants of the Great Southern Continent faced death, disease and dispossession.