The Pacificator: Discovering the Lost Bust of George Augustus Robinson

Gareth Knapman, Australian National University
## The La Trobe Journal

No. 86  
December 2010

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*THE LA TROBE JOURNAL* is edited by John Arnold and published twice a year by the State Library of Victoria Foundation.

ISSN 1441-3760
Gareth Knapman

The Pacificator: discovering the lost bust of George Augustus Robinson

IN ONE OF THE BACKHANDED compliments for which Mark Twain was famous, he observed ‘in memory of the Greatest man Australasia ever developed or ever will develop, there is a stately monument to George Augustus Robinson, the Conciliator, in – no, it is to another man, I forget his name’. As a critic of imperialism and colonialism, Twain saw Robinson as a like-minded being who was on the right side of history. As far as Twain was concerned, this humanitarian hero and critic of colonial expansion was forgotten in the gilded age of 1890s high imperialism. In Twain’s time, stately monuments were devoted to the imperial heroes of empire – and Twain had little regard for those carpetbaggers. Nevertheless a stately bust of Robinson did exist. Sculpted in 1835, it was a commercial endeavour that proved unpopular and remained forgotten for at least 100 years.

In April 2010 I noticed a reference to a cast of ‘G. A. Robinson, Protector of the Aborigines’ in the 1870 Annual Report for the National Gallery of Victoria. With the help of Olga Tsara (a member of the Picture Collections staff at the State Library of Victoria), the bust was discovered in the library’s collection. It is remarkable that the bust survived to the present day. In the 1850s and 1860s, the National Gallery purchased hundreds of plaster reproductions and casts from European museums and art galleries. Deemed not worthy of a respected art gallery, many of these casts and reproductions were sold in the 1940s. The few that survived found refuge in the State Library of Victoria.

The Robinson bust was donated to the National Gallery by Henry Downie and its existence in the collection is noted in the first catalogue of the National Gallery published in 1865 but Downie must have gifted it some years earlier. By the time it entered the collection, the name of the sculptor had lost any significance, and its only importance derived from the fact that George Augustus Robinson had held the office of Protector of Aborigines in Victoria. During his fourteen years as Protector, Robinson failed to make effective accommodation between the demands of the colonial government and the protection of Aboriginal interests. In 1852 he left Australia and returned to England. The 1865 catalogue’s transcription of the bust’s signature was wrong. The sculptor’s original inscription reads ‘G A Robinson Pacificator’, a title that sits uneasily with Robinson the humanitarian ‘conciliator’ given what we now see as the contradictory tenets of nineteenth-century humanitarianism: civilizing colonialism and protective emancipation.

The origin and historical importance of the bust lies in the 1830s, when Robinson
persuaded the Aboriginal community of Tasmania to surrender into government protection – an approach described by contemporaries as ‘conciliation’ but which ultimately resulted in the Aboriginal population being exiled to Flinders Island. By 1835 Robinson had achieved his mission of ‘conciliation’; with the intent of memorialising his importance as a public figure, he commissioned Benjamin Law to produce what was an archetypal Victorian-era bust.

A representation of Robinson at the height of his pacificator/conciliator powers, the bust provides an insight into his desire for self-promotion. Robinson is a troubling figure. He was seen as something of a humanitarian hero of the 1830s, but in achieving this status, he in fact delivered a people to the place of their demise. The bust is also part of a trilogy, with Law modelling the Robinson bust in between those of the Aborigines Woureddy ‘Aboriginal Chief’ and Truganini, ‘wife of Woureddy.’ Seen in this context, Law’s bust of Robinson is a politically charged object, a memorial of the end of the settler-Aboriginal conflict known as the Black War.
This article discusses the historical and political aspects of the bust and is divided into three parts. The first explores the role of the bust as a commercially driven souvenir of the end of the Black War. The second addresses the meaning of ‘pacificator’ as a mechanism to explore complexities around humanitarianism and empire in the 1830s. Although Twain saw Robinson as a humanitarian, many twenty first-century people – and particularly the Palawa (indigenous Tasmanians) – see Robinson as complicit in an attempted genocide of the Aboriginal population of Tasmania. Therefore Robinson’s act of conciliation demonstrates a qualified nineteenth-century view of humanitarianism. The final section in this article addresses the stylistic character of the bust and the conventional, neo-classical depiction of prominent Victorians. As a memorial to Robinson the pacificator, I argue that the bust was a celebration of humanitarianism but also a critique of humanitarianism’s consequences.
Memorializing the end of the Black War

Benjamin Law arrived in Hobart with his family on 15 February 1835. Although he passed himself off as an ‘agriculturalist’, he came from a family of silversmiths and, according to his wife Hannah’s letters, had hoped to use his skill as a sculptor in the colony – only to be told that ‘the colony [was] too young’ for art. In a letter to Hannah’s guardian, Thomas Ellin, Law describes the commercial feel of the colony: ‘I have witnessed the success of others’ and ‘with a small capital we could soon realize a fortune’. Arriving during the commercial boom which followed the end of the Black War, and surrounded by people looking to make a quick fortune and return home to Britain, Law soon realized that the focus of the colony was money.

Looking to use his skills and seeking business opportunities, Law soon encountered George Augustus Robinson. An evangelical missionary imbued with the Protestant work ethic, Robinson knew how to invest money and had learnt how to link profit to God’s work. Although Robinson was passionately and personally committed to conciliation with the Tasmanian Aborigines, he made a small fortune in pursuing this policy for the colonial government. A brick-maker by trade and a Cockney product of London’s East End, Robinson climbed the rigid British colonial social ladder on the back of conciliation. In a moment of reflection in 1840, he wrote ‘a reputation won by a man’s own deeds is more honourable than what ancestry can supply’. By convincing the Aboriginal tribes to surrender themselves to government care, Robinson ended the conflict between the settlers and Tasmanian Aborigines known as the ‘Black War’. By 1835 this had made him a wealthy man and a prominent public figure. Conversely, his somewhat awkward persona combined with his rapid social rise and his monopolisation of the government’s conciliation contracts meant that he had few friends. Robinson’s career, however, demonstrated that wealth and God’s humanitarian work could go together.

As a distinguished public figure and a member of the colonial nouveau riche, Robinson was the type of patron that Law was looking for. Law began sculpting
Robinson’s bust in August 1835, but it was Robinson’s introduction of the Aboriginal leader Woureddy to Law that lead to his most commercially successful work. Praising his commercial savviness in a time of financial difficulty, Hannahh Law wrote of her husband ‘he is as steady as it is possible for [a] man to be, when we were unsettled without home he got a Gentleman to lend him a stable and there moddled [sic] the Cast of the native chief’. Unlike the prominent citizens of Hobart, Woureddy did not commission Law for the ‘privilege’ of a sitting. Rather Law decided a likeness of Woureddy would be a good investment.

Robinson recounted the sitting of Woureddy to Thomas Northover in London: ‘Woureddy sat for his bust with great patience and was highly pleased with the model. The drapery is an imitation of the Kangaroo skin worn by the Aborigines in their primitive state. The necklace is also Aboriginal and is made of the sinews of the Kangaroo tail’. As Robinson explained to Northover, ‘there is much history connected with this individual [Woureddy]’. It was this history that Law saw that would underpin his investment, and according to his wife’s letters, the investment paid off:

[The casts of Woureddy] are called for not only in all Quarters of the Colony, but are being sent to India, to Sweden, to England, Scotland, and one went last week to Cambridge College, the Gift of the rural Dean of this land the Governor has purchased one and ordered a second he is sending one to the Home Secretary, the Attorney General etc, and indeed all or nearly all the great people, here, he sells these Casts at 4/4 [ie, 4 guineas] each so that we begin now to be very comfortable indeed.

Hannahh Law’s statement celebrates commercial success, contextualised by the fact she was asking her relative to invest money in her husband’s speculative ventures. Law was not acting as a traditional portrait sculptor, producing one-off busts for wealthy patrons, but as an entrepreneur, providing the Tasmanian public with (as James Ross editorialised) a ‘very valuable memento’. Law’s busts of Woureddy were commercially driven memorials to the end of the Black War. At this time there were other mementoes produced including the Bothwell Cup (1835), ‘presented by the inhabitants of Bothwell district to Mr Robinson in commemoration of his services in conciliating the hostile Blacks’. In August 1836, another entrepreneurial artist, Benjamin Duterrau, sculpted 13 thirteen bas-relief heads (one of Robinson and twelve Aborigines) and the following year produced seven paintings of Aborigines. The difference between Law’s busts and objects such as the Bothwell Cup or Duterrau’s portraits is the commercial basis of the bust. Law’s busts were relatively cheap, and effectively mass-produced, yet because he produced them in the white plaster (to look like marble) or in the colours of stone, bronze, and black, they had a veneer of antique dignity. The busts also tapped into an emerging market for ethnographic curiosities. The production of the Woureddy and Truganini busts was a commercial venture based on filling a market niche for mementos of victory through conciliation. To some patrons, the busts were also mementos of a declining Tasmanian Aboriginal people.
Law did not finance the venture himself and Robinson may have invested some capital in Law’s commercial endeavour. Woureddy’s bust was first exhibited in Robinson’s house, where, according to James Ross, the editor of the *Hobart Town Courier*, visitors could ‘inspect it and compare its very close and beautiful resemblance to the original [Woureddy in person]’. Later the exhibition was moved to Ross’s office at the *Courier*. As a landowner with a number of tenanted properties, Robinson was possibly the ‘gentleman that lent [Law] a stable to mould the cast’. Robinson also maintained an active interest in the publicity around the bust, keeping copies of each of the issues of the *Hobart Town Courier* and *Morning Star* that carried advertisement/articles on the bust with annotated headings emphasizing Woureddy. As a ‘Native Chief’ in the 1830s, Woureddy was the celebrity figure, not Truganini. Advertisements for her bust described her simply as ‘the wife of Woureddy’. As Henry Reynolds argues, Truganini has been predominantly downplayed in historiography as ‘impulsive, child-like and naturally dominated by a strong-willed European man’ [Robinson]. By October 1836, Law had finished the busts of Robinson and Truganini and all three were on display in the office of the *Hobart Town Courier*. It is reasonable to conclude that as an astute property investor and self-promoter, Robinson blurred the line between patron and business partner.

As a promotion of his and Woureddy’s achievements, Robinson sent busts of Woureddy overseas, forwarding one to the Church Missionary Society, through the agency of Thomas Northover, and another to the London Missionary Society. This donation of the Woureddy bust was a personal tribute. Writing to Northover, Robinson confessed Woureddy ‘has been my companion and fellow traveller under most trying and perilous circumstances’ and made it clear that the success of the mission was largely a result of Woureddy’s efforts.

Robinson maintained a solitary bust of Woureddy in his Melbourne office. In 1839 the lifelike representation caused consternation with the local indigenous population, especially the females. Robinson records that ‘after much gesticulation and exclamation and shouting at a distance [sic] . . . I at last prevailed on one to venture inside in great trepidation and was only convinced when they saw me place my hand upon the bust and found it quite inanimate’. From then on that woman regularly brought Victorian Aborigines to view Woureddy’s bust but ‘was always the heroine … and place[d] her hand upon the plaster form seemingly much pleased with her courage’. Beyond Woureddy’s reported pleasure with the bust, this is the only recorded account of indigenous responses to the busts. The account suggests that the women were concerned that some form of sorcery had beset Woureddy, who they had possibly met. Apparently, Robinson did not intentionally take advantage of this and use it as a source of power within a traditional Aboriginal world-view. Possibly he maintained the bust in his office as personal memento of friendship, although most likely the bust was meant to symbolise the possibilities of civic recognition for Aboriginal acts of conciliation.
Robinson dispatched the busts to London as monuments of a great civic achievement and as a tribute to his friend. This was not however what the public wanted. Much of the press surrounding the busts focused on their value to ‘scientific gentlemen’ or ‘the philosopher’. From the moment of their creation, the market for these busts was as ethnographic curios and not as artistic monuments to a civic event.

Although Law produced some thirty pairs of the Woureddy and Truganini busts, Robinson’s head had no value as an ethnographic curio, therefore very few were cast. Law told Robinson that it ‘would not be economical to make copies unless at least four were ordered’. Gilbert Robertson, the editor of the True Colonist, suggested that Robinson’s supporters should purchase the busts only to support Law. As such, in 1838, Robinson bought four busts of himself for 5 guineas each. This was a reasonable increase on the cost of 4 guineas that Law was charging clients for casts of Woureddy and Truganini.

Writing to Gamaliel Butler, Robinson pleaded ‘I have no wish that Mr Law should be the loser in any transaction he may have with myself and you will therefore please order four copies’. The fact that Robinson took two years to purchase them suggests that very few were sold, and that the Robinson bust was a commercial failure for Law. In purchasing four at increased prices, Robinson was possibly redeeming some of Law’s expenses. As a product of memorialisation, Robinson’s bust did not appeal to the settlers of Hobart. Gilbert Robertson wrote at the time that the bust was a sop to Robinson’s vanity, presenting the undeserving Robinson as a public figure worthy of memorialisation. The citizens of Hobart did not share Mark Twain’s exulted opinion that Robinson was the ‘greatest man Australasia ever developed or ever will develop’.

**Robinson the humanitarian pacificator**

Robinson’s conciliation of the Tasmanian Aborigines established his reputation as a great humanitarian for peacefully ending the hostilities known as the ‘Black War’. Robinson was celebrated in Tasmania and in Britain for his humanitarian approach.
Within Tasmania, the government and several newspapers commended him, although, it must be said that some editors also derided him as self-promoting and vain. Town councils also expressed their gratefulness. In Bothwell, the council commissioned a memorial cup previously referred to, whilst the Campbell Town community organised a public appeal to reward Robinson in recognition of the ‘mighty benefits’ that he ‘conferred on the life and property in this island, by his wonderful exertions in the pacific capture of the Aborigines’. Visiting Hobart in January 1836, Charles Darwin singled Robinson out for praise as ‘an active and benevolent man’. In London Robinson’s efforts were reported in the *Morning Post* with the syndicated commentary that ‘we must candidly acknowledge, we were always doubtful as to the good likely to result from this gentleman’s exertions; but facts have convinced us, that no man ever yet deserved so much reward and thanks, for his having . . . ridded us of enemies of the very worst description’. Robinson was even commended for his actions in the 1837 Select Committee Report on Aborigines – a report that laid the foundations of future humanitarian policies in the British Empire. Robinson therefore became the hero of the humanitarian evangelicals.
It is with these credentials in mind that the inscription on Robinson’s bust is most peculiar: ‘G A Robinson, Pacificator’. It is possible that such a label was solely a creation of Law’s imagination, but this is highly unlikely. M. Gauci’s lithograph portrait of Robinson executed in the 1850s, also labels Robinson as ‘Chief Protector of the Australasian Aborigines and the pacificator of Aborigines in Van Diemen’s Land’.

Gauci’s label makes a distinction between ‘protection’ and ‘pacification’. This is a distinction between his official title as ‘protector’ and descriptive action as ‘pacificator’. By the late nineteenth century, the word pacification had taken on a military context of peace by force. Nevertheless, in the 1830s it was connected to humanitarian goals of conquest and was effectively interchangeable with conciliate. The distinction however speaks to the conflicting tensions within nineteenth-century humanitarianism.

To understand these conflicting tensions, we need to take a step back and look at the emergence of the humanitarian movement in the British Empire. For Niall Ferguson ‘the eighteenth century ‘British Empire had been, at best, amoral’. In comparison he argued that ‘the Victorians had more elevated aspirations[.] They dreamt not just of ruling the world, but of redeeming it. In doing so the Victorians ‘introduce[d] a way of life that was first and foremost Christian, but was also distinctly North European in its reverence for industry and abstinence’. With these aspirations, conquest and colonization went hand-in-hand with humanitarianism. This transformation from amoral empire to evangelical empire with a protestant work ethic emerged out of the abolition movement to end the slave trade. Prior to the abolition movement, civil society committees for public causes were practically unheard of in Britain. The abolitionists pioneered the use of extra-parliamentary political organisation for the harnessing of public opinion in aid of civil society reform. This network of activists came from Quaker and non-conformist religious traditions, and were inspired by their religious Christian convictions.

With the final abolition of slavery in 1833, Andrew Porter observes that the abolitionists looked to ‘redirect humanitarian efforts towards peoples untouched by the Atlantic slave trade but nevertheless [were] suffering from uncontrolled British expansion’. As a network, the humanitarians wielded considerable influence in the late 1820s and 1830s. As Zoë Laidlaw considers, ‘the years of anti-slavery campaigning created an elite who were adept in the techniques of lobbying metropolitan government and manipulating the relatively new phenomenon (in its modern sense) of “public opinion”’. With their centre of power in the missionary organisations and the House of Commons, the humanitarians sat outside the governing process but with considerable powers of oversight.

Recognising the power of the humanitarians, colonial officials increasingly used the language of humanitarianism and reform to propose or legitimise colonial conquest. For example, in 1818 Stamford Raffles advocated the preservation of Java as a British colony, writing that Britain has a duty ‘to uphold the weak, to put down lawless force, to
lighten the chain of the slave, . . . [and] to establish human institutions\textsuperscript{44}. Similar humanitarian statements were being made in India and North America. Therefore it was logical on 24 June 1824 – a month after arriving in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) – that Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur proclaimed that the ‘habit of maliciously wantonly firing at . . . defenceless Natives and Aborigines’ was to cease and that ‘the Natives . . . [are] under the protection of the same laws which protect the settlers’ and that ‘every violation of those laws in the persons or property of the Natives shall be visited with the same punishment as though committed on the person or property of any settler’\textsuperscript{45}. Like colonial governors across the empire, Arthur legitimised the colonial project by appealing to a sense of law and justice that was popularised in London metropolitan circles.\textsuperscript{46}

With the failure of his calls for restraint in the 1820s, Arthur proposed for conciliation based on the rounding-up and banishing of the tribes to one of the islands off Tasmania in 1828. This he argued was the best means to ‘impose’ on them (the Aborigines) a ‘stationary’ lifestyle and provide a ‘better chance’ of ‘success’ in ‘efforts for their civilization’\textsuperscript{47}. Expulsion therefore focuses more on transforming the Aborigines’ way of life into a sedentary farming existence. Nevertheless, in a letter to Viscount Goderich, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Arthur acknowledged the ‘extreme difficulty of this scheme’ for the Aborigines he observed ‘complain that the white people have taken possession of their country. . . [and] doubtless would be exasperated to the last degree to be banished altogether from their favourite haunts’. Henry Reynolds argues these letters were an attempt by Arthur to ‘trim his sails to the swelling humanitarian breeze blowing through the Colonial Office’\textsuperscript{48}.

Arthur’s goal was to provide peace and prosperity to the settler colony; nevertheless, reading his dispatches to the colonial office it is clear that Arthur had no all-encompassing policy.\textsuperscript{49} He did, however, realise that the ‘settlers would . . . make [sic] use of arms to drive off the natives’ and that there were ‘urgent appeals . . . to me for the adoption of harsh measures’\textsuperscript{50}. This is possibly an acknowledgment of genocide as a default position. In his dispatches, Arthur partly used the language of humanitarians to justify forced removal or isolation of the Aborigines in a remote part of Tasmania as human in comparison to the alternative – their physical extermination.

By 1834, Robinson achieved what Arthur saw as being close to impossible. With his involvement with the Wesleyan Missionary Society and committee membership to both the British and Foreign Bible Society and Auxiliary Bible Society, Robinson had clear links to, and an affiliation with, the metropolitan humanitarian movement.\textsuperscript{51} However, his London connections were through peripheral figures such as Thomas Northover. Although Robinson couldn’t draw on leading London-based influential figures to support his cause, he could refer to the same causes, which had gained importance in the British public’s imagination.

After gaining the position of superintendent to Bruny Island Mission in 1829,
Robinson submitted a ‘general plan’ to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur on what he proposed to achieve. War, he argued, only exacerbated the problem and led to further desires for ‘revenge’. Robinson declared that the ‘object to be obtained’ was ‘the amelioration of the aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land’ which followed the wording of Arthur’s notice in the Hobart Town Gazette of 7 March 1829 advertising the position. However, Robinson proposed the introduction of ‘Civilisation’ in the ‘form [of] a general establishment of a native village’ and the ‘instruction’ of the Aborigines ‘in the principles of Christianity’ thereby solidly framing Arthur’s policy within the humanitarian movement of the missionaries. This plan was similar to those being proposed and sponsored by the London Missionary Society missions in Africa. From this limited missionary activity, Robinson – through the agency of Woureddy and Truganini and his other Aboriginal supporters – contacted the other tribes and conciliated a deal.

Robinson’s conciliation, however, faced the fine line between humanitarian work and the colonial policy of the government. As Alan Lester maintains ‘missionaries often saw themselves as an anomalous element in the Empire: striving to acquire authority over indigenous people on the one hand, while resisting aggressive colonial forces on the other’. Robinson recognised this dual mandate, reflecting: ‘It was my intention to work on their [the Aborigines] feelings in order to gain their confidence and then to resort to such a mode of treatment as the circumstances of the case might require for their voluntary submission to the European yoke’ (my emphasis). His civilizing mission mandated that he was to change Aboriginal ways of life as a means of saving their soul. This he certainly believed. In achieving this, he was also fulfilling his government remit to remove the Aboriginal problem. More importantly however, he wanted the Aborigines to do this willingly and therefore wholeheartedly.

Reynolds argues that Robinson’s desire for ‘voluntary’ conciliation necessitated treaty-making and that the Aboriginal people did not in their own opinion surrender. Robinson, however, did not view the situation in this way. In persuading them to choose ‘voluntary submission to the European yoke’, he saw it as a beneficial surrender, no different to the Ancient Britons submitting to the civilizing Roman yoke. This was a civic achievement, a case that he promoted in his own ‘memorial’ (in the archaic sense of petition) in November 1836, which was forwarded to senior government officials in Tasmania and Britain, stating:

In 1829 VDL was in a great state of perturbation because of the aggressions of the natives. Roving parties and finally the Black Line were attempted to subdue them. GAR undertook to act as pacificator, in which task he suffered privations both physically and mentally. His labours were successful and resulted in security of life, peace and prosperity in VDL. The land revenues greatly increased.

Robinson wrote this document a month after Law’s bust of Robinson went on display. In his memorial, Robinson chose to identify himself as the pacificator who
suffered in the name of the civic values of security, peace, and prosperity. To Robinson conciliation was part of the broader desire to pacificate and civilise. In 1835 therefore Robinson wanted to be memorialised for his great civic achievement of pacification. This was the focus of his written memorial and the label of his bust.

To promote his achievement – possibly for posterity— Robinson forwarded in 1839 one of the busts of himself to Northover in London with instructions to donate it to the Aborigines Protection Society. Northover responded in 1840 that it was difficult to dispose of the bust, as few people in the society knew who Robinson was. Recognition of Robinson’s ‘humanitarian’ achievement was muted. He was certainly a celebrity in the colonies, although as the Black War became a distant memory, his influence soon waned – an observation made clear by Mark Twain.

Neoclassical sculpture and public individuals – the role of the bust for prominent Victorians

The nineteenth-century rise of the middle class meant that sculpture increased in popularity, with the new mercantile and industrial figures wanting to portray and preserve the image of their civic virtue. Although sculptors are best known for their monumental statures, busts were the bread and butter trade of any sculptor. Few people could afford large original sculptures, however busts were comparatively cheap and, if modelled and cast in plaster, could be produced even cheaper. As an art form, the bust was a product of the Classical Roman world, which initially came to the British ruling classes through continental academic classicism and later through the Grand Tour and associated archaeological enthusiasm. Although its Roman lineage was as works of art for the private home, the nineteenth-century bust was essentially a public portrayal of an individual. Art patrons placed busts in the ‘public’ spheres of their houses where they entertained visitors. The bust therefore impressed upon visitors, through an image of the classical world, their host’s cultural, intellectual and political refinement.

As a bust, Law’s portrait of Robinson conformed to the customs of the neoclassical sculptural portrait. Law draped Robinson in a toga that adorned a muscular torso. Through his expeditions across the West Coast of Tasmania, Robinson was most likely physically fit, but sculptors inevitably provided their patrons with athletic physiques. Robinson is depicted as having short wavy hair, certainly unlike the frizzy, unruly wigs shown in his photographs. Even more distinctive is Robinson’s facial character. Character was the focus of nineteenth-century busts. The 1865 Catalogue for the National Gallery of Victoria maintained that portrait sculpture should ‘render in the spirit of the antique, yet without slavish copying’ as well as ‘impersonate Christian virtues’ and ‘abstract ideas’. Law portrays the character of Robinson as calm, diligent and noble, at once a personification of Christian virtues and the spirit of the antique. Robinson was also presented as older than he probably was, and therefore more
esteemed and wiser. (Compare Block’s 1838 drawing of Robinson to Law’s 1835 casting, Law portrays Robinson as substantially older.) As the ‘pacificator’, Robinson worked for the public interest, and rather than using military conquest, he extended the *Pax Britannia* through civil government. In short, Law was trying to present an image of Robinson as a Roman patrician. This was the image that Gilbert Robertson found contemptible. Writing in the *True Colonist* he fumigated that in his depiction of Robinson, Law had submitted to the ‘foolish vanity’ of ‘Mister COMMANDANT [sic] Robinson’ concluding that the bust was ‘a very bad spec’. Rather than the Roman patrician, Robertson maintained Robinson was the ‘Orpheus of Flinders Island’, the mythical Greek musician that enchanted people with his music and words. Robertson was one of the early roving party conciliators that Robinson had brushed aside; therefore the animosity was personal. Indeed, the critique directly attacked Robinson’s character. For Robertson, the offence lay in the ennobling of a man he saw as a self-serving seeker of publicity who had reaped the rewards of his (Robertson’s) conciliatory ideas. Despite his dislike of the Robinson bust, Robertson commented that Woureddy and Truganini were ‘excellent likenesses’; he concluded on a sarcastic note that ‘some of the COMMANDANT’S [sic] admirers [should] buy as many casts as will remunerate Mr. Law for modelling this hero’. It was the politics inherent in Robinson’s representation as a civic and virtuous man to which Robertson objected.

Law’s portrait of Robinson as a middle-aged Roman patrician, is the total opposite of the other civic portrayal of Robinson in Benjamin Duterrau’s 1840 painting ‘The Conciliation’, based on drawings and etchings that Duterrau made in 1835 and the central scene in the much larger and now lost ‘national picture’. Duterrau here presents a young, soft-faced Robinson standing in the focal centre of the composition. Robinson is the sole white man, fearless, peaceful and reassuring, but also wise and inquisitive. He is surrounded by spear-cladded Aborigines who, although muscular adults, have a childish innocence to them. Significantly, Duterrau also uses the handshake as a central motif. Penelope Edmonds argues that the handshake was one of the key motifs emanating out of the abolition movement. With its origins in Quaker custom, the handshake motif made its way into abolitionist iconography and was subsequently adopted within American treaty motifs aimed at conciliating Native Americans. In Tasmania, it also featured in Lieutenant-Governor Arthur’s famous proclamation boards. Duterrau’s conciliation painting adopts the then current iconography around humanitarianism.

Law’s Robinson bust also speaks to a political point beyond Robinson’s self-aggrandisement. The Robinson bust was part of a trilogy, which expressed a classical vision of civilising empire and the natural liberty of the savage. As Mary Mackay argued, ‘Law’s depiction of Woureddy retains a romantic notion of the “noble savage”,’ and that ‘the idea of dignified, uncorrupted man is projected in Woureddy’s frontal posture, penetrating eyes and kangaroo skin cloak’. Mackay concludes that at the time
Woureddy sat for Law, his garment was the ‘blue serge shirt issued to all the male Aborigines on Flinders Island’ – Law therefore presented Woureddy in a noble primitive Arcadian mode that was very different to his contemporary state.76

The tendency to view Aborigines as noble savages defending their natural liberty, or, more often as ‘barbarians’ resisting civilisation, was common in Hobart. One writer likened a captured ‘native chief’ to Caractacus, the British chieftain who resisted the Roman occupation of Britain. The ‘native chief’ was paraded down the main street of Hobart, with the police re-enacting the ‘triumphal entries of a Caesar, or an Alexander, in the history of the barbarous ages, bring[ing] their captive kings in chains’ to the capital. The article criticised the government for being no better than ‘the ancients’.77 Nevertheless, by juxtaposing the native chief with Caractacus the writer connected the plight of the Tasmanian Aboriginal to the mythic lineages of British liberty. In this instance the noble savage metaphor, in the traditions of Montaigne and Rousseau, acted to blur the distinction between the civilised and the savage.

The noble savage metaphor took a variety of forms in Hobart, being a reflective statement on morality but also a mocking parody. One example of parody was the response to the 1835 Batman Treaty with the Wurundjeri people of Port Phillip. A critic of the treaty printed a spoof interview with Woureddy in the Hobart Town Courier, in which the interviewer opens ‘we did ourselves the pleasure to wait upon the aboriginal chief Woureddy (whose majestic bust, by Mr Law, now ornaments our Reading-room)’.78 Interestingly James Bonwick (John Batman’s biographer), believed that the satirical note was actually pantomime carried out in front of Law’s bust of Woureddy. With the interview lampooning Woureddy as the noble savage, the interviewer mockingly continued: ‘you are King, I believe, of all the Western part of the island, and held possession of your noble ancestors’ and then proceeding to dictate an unequal treaty to which ‘His majesty [Woureddy], like Jupiter Olympus, nodded, and the whole of the western country . . . fell into my possession. I then procured the conveyance [sic], duly drawn up in triplicate, on which Woureddy, with proper regal pomp and dignity, shaking a portion of the grease and red ochre out of his pendant locks, impressed it first with the palm of his hand and afterwards with his foot’.79 Although he recognised the treaty was unequal, the critic was no friend of Aboriginal rights, with the editorial’s argument being that the Batman treaty was skulduggery designed to prevent other colonists from gaining the fruits of conquest. For the writer, Woureddy’s bust was part of this pompous charade. He implied that the busts that ornament the reading room of the Mechanics’ Institute, should signify an individual of public importance. The writer of this spoof saw Law’s depiction of Woureddy as the noble savage as a caricature and curiosity. Although the writer rejected the idea of Woureddy as a noble savage, his sarcastic parody was also an acknowledgment of the ambiguous moral message created by Law’s representation.

Neoclassical imagery juxtaposing the noble savage with European antiquity was
used in different ways to debate the morality of colonial conquest in Hobart. In each case, the Aboriginal personifies the barbarian/savage resisting the civilisation of empire. This, however, could be interpreted in many ways, as being either noble or impertinent or even, in some cases, ridiculous. Law drew from this same neoclassical lexicon and imagery to present his humanitarian case. Taken together, the three busts of Robinson, Woureddy and Truganini tell the moralising story of conquest in neoclassical imagery. As the ‘Pacificator’, Robinson became the ‘Apollo Belvedere’ to Woureddy and Truganini who act the role of the ‘Dying Gaul’, with kangaroo-tooth necklaces standing-in for the Celtic torque.80 Robinson also reflects aspects of the noble savage in his observations on Aborigines. Nevertheless, he vacillates between seeing them as ‘docile as lambs’ and vengeful barbarians:

[Aborigines] have a tradition amongst them that white men have usurped their territory, have driven them into forests have killed their game . . . have ravished their wives and daughters, have murdered and butchered their fellow-countrymen; and are wont whilst brooding over these complicated ills . . . to goad each other on to acts of bloodshed and revenge for the injuries done to their ancestors and the persecutions offered to themselves through their white enemies.81

Although Robinson observed this resentment, his description has strong overtones of Tacitus’s descriptions of the Celts and the Germanic tribes’ hatred of the Roman yoke, a text that was familiar to any well-read Englishman.82 In descriptions such as these Robinson reflects the thinking of an era in which humanitarianism reflected classical history as much as Christianity. Robinson even placed himself in this historic analogy, writing in his journal ‘providence had certainly crowned my labours with abundant success and I remarked that with me the motto *veni, vidi, vici* was applicable’83

*Veni, vidi, vici* (I came, I saw, I conquered) was Julius Caesar’s declaration on his defeat of Pharnaces II of Pontus, however popular culture often misattributes the phrase to the conquest of Gaul and Britain. Nevertheless, Robinson’s Roman pretensions should not be overstated. Law however was informed by neoclassicism, and the busts reveal a complex story of competing neoclassical narratives.

As the first bust in the series, Woureddy’s is an image of natural authority and liberty. It sets the moral tone. In Robinson’s bust we see the elevation of the servant of empire who pursues pacification and civilisation of Aborigines rather than their destruction. This is an important point. Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and the newspapers agreed that if the Aborigines were not removed settlers would kill them. In 1835 Robinson was their saviour. Both Woureddy and Robinson are differing images of nobility: natural versus civic. Robinson, as the pacificator, demonstrates the victory of civic nobility; but the bust of Truganini presents the viewer with the consequences. As Mackay argues, ‘her features portrayed by Law suggest a certain air of sadness and resignation’.84 In this respect, Law was following a tradition in western art of using women to show human suffering brought about by politics and war. Law’s sculpture acts in a similar fashion to those of Roman historians, such as Tacitus, which used the
voices of barbarians to criticise the Roman Empire whilst also singing its praises. Law portrays conciliation as a flawed and destructive policy, yet also a noble humanitarian one.

**Conclusion**

This article has discussed several historical and political aspects of Benjamin Law’s bust of George Augustus Robinson. The bust of Robinson was a monument to the humanitarian, pacific end of the Black War; it was the dignified monument that Mark Twain believed Robinson deserved. Nevertheless as a plaster cast, the Robinson bust was also a commercial speculative endeavour. With Robinson possibly undertaking to underwrite the cost, Law produced busts of Woureddy, Robinson, and Truganini, believing that people would purchase these as mementos of the Black War. The market however had other ideas. Although people were pleased that Robinson had solved their Aboriginal problem, they didn’t care for his likeness in their sitting rooms. Colonists quickly forgot their gratitude to Robinson once the Aborigines were out of sight on Flinders Island. Robinson's celebrity was short-lived. Instead of purchasing the trio as a humanitarian memorial, people ignored Robinson and purchased Woureddy and Truganini as anthropological curios.

As a memorial to his humanitarian achievements, Robinson’s bust had a deeper political meaning. In choosing the title pacificator over conciliator, Law was playing to market perceptions. Robinson was declaring that he had solved peoples’ problems; that his pacification of the Aborigines achieved what public opinion demanded. The term ‘pacificator’ also meant something deeper to Robinson. Conciliation to Robinson was about ending Aboriginal desires for revenge. He believed this could only occur though ameliorating Aborigines and transforming them into farming Christians. He approached conciliation from a desire to pacificate. As the pacificator, Robinson became the Roman patrician implementing the peace. In this context however the busts of Woureddy, Robinson, and Truganini, become both memorial and critique. Woureddy is the proud and free noble savage controlled by Robinson the pacificator with civic nobility, whilst Truganini with her implicit sadness showed the consequences of the humanitarian victory. The Law busts are therefore not only a commemoration of the humanitarian end to the Black War, but also a critique of humanitarianism’s consequences.
204 and passim.
17. See Day Book 1844-49, King Family Papers, MS 11396, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.
21. Ibid. And see the *Hobart Town Courier* of 15 March 1845 for details of contracts awarded.
26. Patrick Coady Buckley, Diary, 1844, January 1-1861, December 31, PA 02/121, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.
27. William Wade’s Coal Hole Station, next to Buckley’s Tarra Creek run, see Billis and Kenyon, p. 191.
28. Mashfield Mason, holder of the Woodside run, see Billis and Kenyon, p. 112.
29. Joseph Davis, Emu Flat run, see Billis and Kenyon, p. 56
30. John Collins, Snugborough run, see Billis and Kenyon, p. 49.
31. Edmund Buckley, Gammon Creek run; stepfather of Patrick Coady Buckley, see Billis and Kenyon, p. 35.
32. Presumably the son of William George Thom, Gippsland squatter 1844-45, see Billis and Kenyon, p. 148.
33. Wrecked on the Port Albert bar March 1852.
39. Wrecked on the Port Albert bar, July 1850.
40. Buckley’s use of the term ‘charter’ is a little ambiguous, as he used the same word when he had organised the charter himself or if the captains approached him for a cargo.

**The Pacificator: discovering the lost bust of George Augustus Robinson**

**Acknowledgement**: In developing this article I am indebted to John Arnold, Penelope Edmonds, David Hansen, Allison Ingles, Lynette Russell, and the anonymous referee for rigorous critiques of earlier versions.

1 Mark Twain, *Following the Equator*, Stilwell, Arkansas: Digireads.com Publishing, 2008 [first published in 1897], p. 121. Twain must have missed Robinson’s bust when he visited the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery complex on Swanston Street, Melbourne, of which he commented: ‘In the museums you will find acres of the most strange and fascinating things; but all museums are fascinating, and they do so tire your eyes, and break your back, and burn out your
vitalities with their consuming interest’ (p. 79). Or perhaps it had already been taken off display!

2. David Hansen in a recent essay reflecting on the politics of historical representation surrounding the attempted sale in 2009 and displaying of Benjamin Law’s busts of Truganini and Wourredy stated ‘Law’s only other known bust, of Robinson himself, has been lost’. It is an irony that I found the bust as Hansen’s essay was going to print. David Hansen, ‘Calibre Prize: seeing Truganini’, *Australian Book Review*, May 2010, pp. 45-53.


4. It is possible that this is a typographical error. One of Robinson’s friends was Henry Downing, and he was responsible for exhibiting the busts of Wourredy and Truganini in the 1865 Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne. Unfortunately the original handwritten register note in the State Library no longer exists and therefore this cannot be verified.


6. The inscription is degraded, but a close examination using different lighting sources is definitive.


11. Ibid, p. 3


13. Rae-Ellis, *Black Robinson*.


17. Penelope Edmonds, ‘Colonial Quotations: Tasmanian Potter Violet Mace and the Proclamation Cup’, *ReCollections*, due (Nov. 2010), p. 16.

18. Mary Mackay, ‘Early Tasmanian Sculptures: a reassessment’, *Bowyang*, no. 5, April/May, 1981, pp. 6-12 (5). At the time of publishing, none of these are known to have survived.


24. Robinson annotated headings on most of these newspapers as ‘Bust of Woureddy’ or ‘Bust of Native Chief’ – he didn’t annotate advertisement/articles. See Museum Victoria, Indigenous Cultures Department Catalogue numbers XM3009; XM2971; XM2956; XM2970; XM2955; XM3022.
28. Robinson to Thomas Northover, ‘Papers of George Augustus Robinson’.
32. Gilbert Robertson, ‘Fine Arts’.
33. Plomley and Robinson, *Weep in Silence*, p. 608. This was one year after Robinson first realised that his busts weren’t selling, at which time he was proposing to purchase them at five guineas each. Robinson to Gamaliel Batter, 22 September 1837.
34. Ibid. In the context of the letter it is not clear if Batter’s purchase is in addition to Robinson’s purchase or part of Robinson’s purchase. However I would favour to the former interpretation.
45. Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, Proclamation 25 June 1824, in ‘Van Diemen’s Land. Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and His Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Colonies, on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen’s Land’, *House of Commons Papers; Accounts and Papers*, XIX. 175, 1831.
47. Copy of a Despatch from Lieutenant-Governor Arthur to Viscount Goderich, 10 January 1828, in ‘Van Diemen’s Land. Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and His Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Colonies, on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen’s Land’.
48. Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People*, p. 121.
49. ‘Van Diemen’s Land. Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and His
Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Colonies, on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen’s Land’.

50. Arthur to Viscount Goderich, 10 January 1828.
51. Rae-Ellis, Black Robinson, p. 16.
52. Musing to himself whist pursuing the Big River Tribe, Robinson hypothesized ‘what if an armed party was to pursue a band of aborigines, could they capture them? No! The whole face of the country (with few exceptions) serves as a secure retreat’, Robinson and Plomley, Friendly Mission, p. 587.
53. Ibid, p. 57.
54. Ferguson, Empire, p. 122.
56. Rae-Ellis, Black Robinson, p. 28.
57. Reynolds, Fate of a Free People, pp. 7-26.
60. Rae-Ellis, Black Robinson, p. 159.
65. Rae-Ellis, Black Robinson, p. 6.
67. Robertson, ‘Fine Arts’.
68. Rae-Ellis in Black Robinson makes the same scathing critique of Robinson that he is a mesmerist that conned his victims.
69. Ibid.
70. Robertson, ‘Fine Arts’.
72. Penelope Edmonds, ‘Colonial Quotations’.
74. Henry Reynolds argues that the handshake went beyond iconography and actually constituted a deal between Aboriginal people and the colonial government via Robinson. See Reynolds, Fate of a Free People, pp. 149-157.
76. Ibid.
77. Colonial Times, 20 August 1830, p. 3.
78. James Ross, Hobart Town Courier, 26 June 1835, p. 2.
80. I owe this analogy to a conversation I had with David Hansen.
82. Take for example, Tacitus’s account of the Caledonia general Calgacus’s speech: ‘here at the world’s end, on its last inch of liberty, we have lived unmolested to this day, defended
by our remoteness and obscurity … but there are not other tribes to come; nothing but sea and cliffs and these more deadly Romans whose arrogance you cannot escape by obedience and self-restraint. Robbers of the world, now that the earth falls into their all-devastating hands, they probe even the sea; if their enemy have wealth they have greed … [neither] East nor West has glutted them … to plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace', Cornelius Tacitus and R. M. Ogilvie, Agricola, Rev. edn, Loeb Classical Library, London: Cambridge; Mass., Harvard University Press, 1970, Book xiv, p. 30.

Or Tacitus rendition of the Boudica speech:

‘it is not as a woman descended from noble ancestry, but as one of the people that I am avenging lost freedom, my scourged body, the outraged chastity of my daughters. Roman lust has gone so far that not our very persons, nor even age or virginity, are left unpolluted. But heaven is on the side of a righteous vengeance; a legion which dared to fight has perished; the rest are hiding themselves in their camp, or are thinking anxiously of flight. They will not sustain even the din and the shout of so many thousands, much less our charge and our blows. If you weigh well the strength of the armies, and the causes of the war, you will see that in this battle you must conquer or die. This is a woman’s resolve; as for men, they may live and be slaves.’ Cornelius Tacitus, Clifford Herschel Moore, and John Jackson, Tacitus: the histories, with an English translation by Clifford F. Moore; the Annals, with an English Translation by John Jackson, 4 vols, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925, Book xiv, p. 31.

In both these instances, Robinson uses the language and argument structure of Tacitus.


In Search of Marcus Clarke: a memoir

4. Unnatural Lives: studies in Australian fiction about the convicts, from James Tucker to Patrick White, St Lucia, Qld: UQP, 1972.
8. Marcus Clarke, St Lucia, Qld: UQP, 1976.
13. Hamilton Mackinnon, ed, The Marcus Clarke Memorial Volume: containing selections from the writings of Marcus Clarke, together with Lord Rosebery’s letter, etc. and a biography of the deceased author, Melbourne: Cameron, Laing, 1884.
15. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1970. This was the first full reprint of the original serial version of His Natural Life which ran in the Australian Journal between March 1870 and June 1872. Clarke condensed the text for the first book publication, published in Melbourne by George Robertson in 1874. From 1882 onwards, this version was known as For the Term of His Natural Life. A scholarly edition of the full text edited by Lurline Stuart with historical background by Michael Roe, and

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