

The surveying career of William Swan Urquhart, 1845-1864 Ken James

Abstract

I first became aware of surveyor William Swan Urquhart when researching a history of the Elphinstone district, Central Victoria, with a friend, Noel Davis, for it was Urquhart who surveyed the township and parish of Elphinstone. I started to investigate his background only to discover that information about him was almost non-existent. My interest in him was heightened when I discovered that he had laid out many other settlements, including Ballarat and Castlemaine, and that Urquhart Bluff on the Great Ocean Road was named after him.

By now I was determined to find more about the man and struck gold at Public Record Office Victoria where I discovered his Taradale Survey Office Outward Correspondence Register 1854-1856 in [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1. It was there that I also found outward correspondence from survey headquarters in Melbourne to Urquhart in [VPRS 6/P0](#). Fortunately the correspondence has been indexed so I was able to find a list of all entries relating to Urquhart. I also discovered some of his correspondence to the Head Office in Melbourne for the period 1847 to 1852 in [VPRS 97/P0](#) and for the late 1850s to 1862 in [VPRS 44/P0](#). In addition, I was able to identify 231 of his map plans in [VPRS 8168](#) Historic Plan Collection (a copy of which can be accessed on microfiche in PROV reading rooms as [VPRS 15899](#)).

Article

William Swan Urquhart's career surveying for the Victorian Government commenced in 1845 as an assistant surveyor and ended as a district surveyor. He retired in 1864 and died in 1881 in East Melbourne. Much of his early work involved surveying county boundaries and his skills were quickly recognised by Superintendent La Trobe who referred to him in 1849 as 'a man of excellent character, diligent and able in the performance of his various branches of duty'.¹ Urquhart Bluff on the Great Ocean Road was named after him by fellow surveyor George Smyth.² Settlements laid out by Urquhart in the period up to 1853 include Ballarat, Carisbrook, Castlemaine, Elphinstone, Lockwood, Malmsbury, Sunbury and Taradale, and most of these have an Urquhart Street in recognition of his work.

As the district or senior surveyor of the central goldfields from mid-1853, Urquhart undertook very important work directing the layout of agricultural lands, towns, roads and reserves in 47 government parishes. Evidence of his career from 1845 to 1864 can be found throughout the 231 survey map plans bearing his name, accessible on microfiche at Public Record Office Victoria as part of [VPRS 15899](#) Historic Plan Collection. These maps were prepared by other surveyors while working under Urquhart as assistant surveyors.³ His is a story worth telling.

Born in Ross Shire, Scotland in 1818, Urquhart arrived in the colony of Victoria around 1840. He first worked as a private surveyor for squatters in the Western District, then as a contract surveyor for the colonial government. In December 1845 he was appointed to the public service as an assistant

surveyor, then in 1853 promoted to the position of surveyor. In 1854 he is referred to in Melbourne Survey Office internal correspondence as the surveyor in charge of the Mt Alexander goldfield and the senior surveyor on the goldfields.⁴ In 1861 he was granted leave and notifications of this in the *Victoria Government Gazette* refer to him as District Surveyor of Castlemaine.⁵ His staff at one stage included six assistant surveyors. Urquhart was responsible for organising the surveying of township reserves, roads and agricultural lands, his assistant surveyors being responsible for carrying out the work. In 1857 his duties increased when he was one of two district surveyors appointed by the government as a census enumerator. In 1859 his duties further increased with his appointment as a Crown lands commissioner, then in 1860 as a Crown lands appraiser and collector of imposts.⁶

Appointed Assistant Surveyor, 1845

On 24 October 1845 Urquhart was informed by Robert Hoddle that there was a probability that an assistant surveyor might be required and could he be in Melbourne within ten days to a fortnight.⁷ Hoddle followed up with further correspondence on 14 November, informing Urquhart that indeed an assistant surveyor was needed as he (Hoddle) had been instructed by the Surveyor-General to mark the boundaries of the counties of Bourke and Grant.⁸

The extent of the county boundary survey work accomplished by Urquhart is astonishing, but more so when one considers the conditions under which it was achieved. He was assisted by a team of four labourers, a bullock driver and a tent keeper, acquiring an assistant only in 1851. The men were with him for eight months of each year, the other four months being spent drawing up his maps. His surveying equipment consisted of theodolite and circumeter, 'and the ranges and creeks were carefully traversed and corrected by back sights and trig points and all lines carefully checked so that no errors could occur'.⁹

Commencing his duties in December 1845, Urquhart surveyed the boundaries of the counties of Bourke and Grant between Mt Macedon and Mt Blackwood near the sources of the Loddon and Werribee rivers.¹⁰ The following year involved a number of surveys including the boundary of the County of Grant between Cape Otway and the mouth of the Barwon River; part of the County of Bourke near the Mullum Mullum Creek; and a general survey of the Dandenong Ranges between the Yarra River and Westernport as well as a general survey of the ranges north of the Great Dividing Range, including the sources of the Lederberg River.

Survey of part of the Murray River from Swan Hill to the Gunbower (detail), PROV, VPRS 8168/P2, Unit 3575, Murray River Survey 9



This work on county boundaries continued in 1847 and included a survey of the Lal Lal Creek and the sources of the Moorabool and Yarrowee rivers; the ranges of Mt Buninyong, Warraneep and Black Hill;

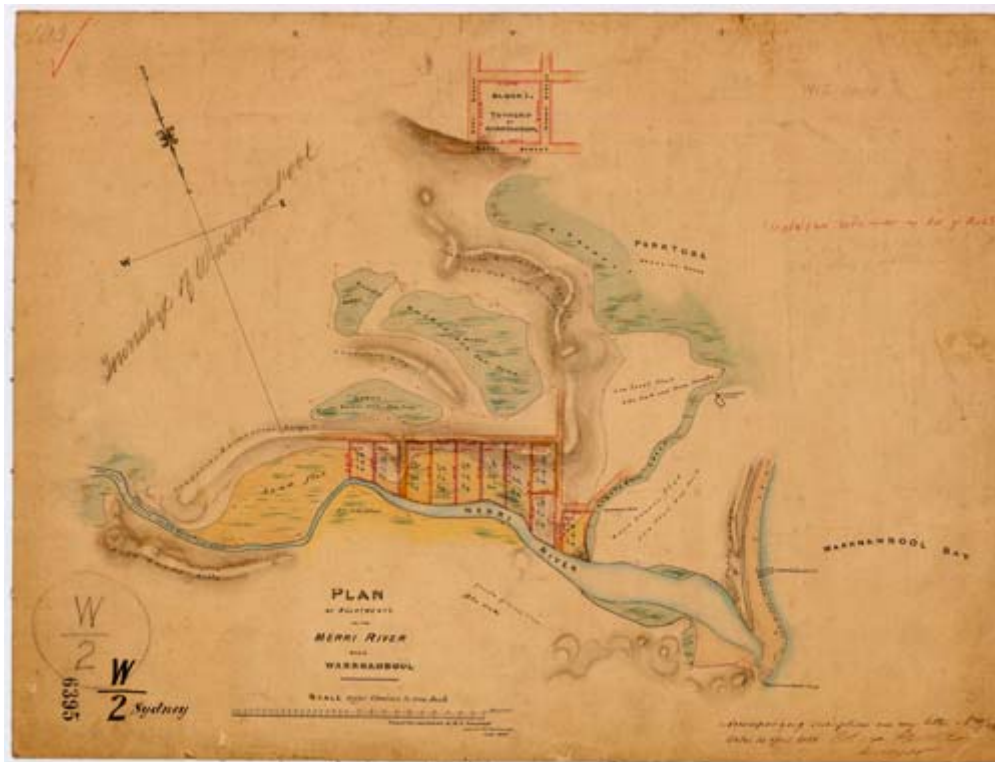
and the Dividing Range between the Werribee and Yarrowee rivers, including the future site of Ballarat and its surrounding goldfields. Urquhart finished the year with a survey of part of the Great Swamp 'Kooweerop' as far as 'Bunee Bunee', Western Port.

In 1848 he surveyed about 2,000 acres of rich agricultural lands into suitably sized lots for farms of 80 to 200 acres each between Geelong and Point Richards; a line of road from Keilor to Pentland Hills through Bacchus Marsh; the Loddon River from Jim Crow Creek to the Murray River and the Avoca River rivulet; and the ranges between the Avoca and the Loddon. The following year (1849) he surveyed the Avoca River, Callums Creek, Deep Creek, Bullarook and Burrumbeet creeks and Lake Learmonth as well as the Dividing Range from the sources of the Yarrowee to Mt William in the Grampians including Mt Misery, Mt Cole, Mt Ararat and the ranges now known as the Pyrenees. Mt William became the northern boundary of the County of Ripon. He also surveyed the volcanic hills around Dowling Forest and Glendaruel. This led to the experience in his career which forever touched him.

In 1849 I was deeply impressed with a circumstance that came under my notice. The subject has never escaped my memory and I trust never will. I was at the time surveying the general features of the rich volcanic hills around Dowling Forest, Learmonth, Burrumbeet and Glendaruel, the fine rich quality and beauty of which could not be surpassed. About 50,000 acres of this fine country lay before me, where I could have run a plough furrow without stump or stone to stop my progress for 8 or 10 miles either way. On this same rich land many thousands of Merino sheep were scarcely able to walk and were miserably poor from foot rot. At the same time, Mr W Clarke of Dowling Forest was boiling down thousands of his big Leicester sheep, each weighing from 80 lbs to 120 lbs, for their tallow.

At that very time I happened to peruse a copy of the London Times, and by it saw that thousands, both in the west of Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland were dying of starvation. I felt deeply for the poor creatures and their families, nay I am not ashamed to own it, I wept for them. This of itself is not much and is only what any individual situated as I was would have done. But here I was in a land at that very time too rich for the sheep and thousands being melted for the fat. Seven years after I saw the same country waving with as fine and healthy fields of corn as any in Europe. And I also had the satisfaction of seeing that the new inhabitants really enjoyed the comforts of their new homes with renewed vigour, they have a fine country before them - long may they be blessed with health and peace and sweet content. ¹¹

Plan of allotments on the Merri River near Warrambool, PROV, VPRS 8168/P2, Unit 6272, Sydney (pre 1851) W 12



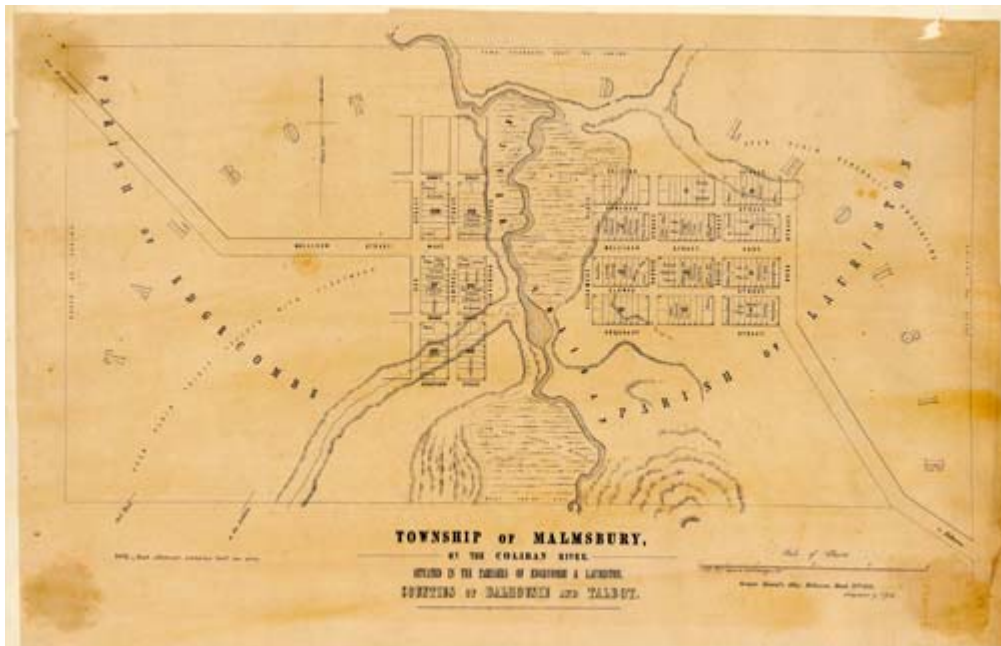
On 8 February 1850 Urquhart was instructed by Surveyor-General Hoddle to survey the Murray River from the confluence with the Campaspe River down to Swan Hill. Hoddle wrote: 'I know no one more competent than yourself to undertake this duty and request you will at once finish the measuring of land

now in hand and inform me by means of post when you will be able to start with your equipment and party'.¹² He then surveyed land for sales in the neighbourhood of Warrnambool and Belfast as well as Mt Hope Creek, Pyramid Creek and Pyramid Hill and the Terrick Terrick Ranges. Urquhart was lucky to escape with his life while undertaking this work when an Aboriginal man tried to murder him. The circumstances were that this person had been erroneously informed by someone on a station that Urquhart planned to take him to Melbourne to be hanged for stealing possessions belonging to Urquhart's party.

*I happened to be examining part of the County back from the River Murray for water, I was alone and it being the time of the full moon was not in a hurry to return to my encampment and just at dusk about three miles from my camp I came on a native encampment, an assembly of about 100 young and old who met for the 'savage feast' and corroboree. I was known to nearly all of them, we were always on the best of terms. My friend Tommy (who was then unknown to me to be accused of theft) walked up and looked wild and very excited felt me over the back made a jump and a wild holla, which roused the rest. Three of the principal leaders of the tribes immediately sprang up, and after a few seconds of the most exciting debate between them, Mr Tommy was turned about and ordered away. One of the three 'Bonney' in a very decided manner told me that Tommy was no good. We ultimately departed good friends, and I felt for the first time a little timid with a tribe of blacks around me. It was many days before I found out the cause of Tommy's ire.*¹³

In 1851 Urquhart surveyed 31,000 acres near Sunbury, known as Clark's Survey, and marked sites for townships and building allotments at Sunbury, Woodend, Carlsruhe, Malmsbury and Carisbrook. At each of these places he marked both town and agricultural lots.

Township of Malmsbury on the Coliban River, PROV, VPRS 8168/P2, Unit 6458, Sale (Crown Lands 49)



While carrying out survey work at Carisbrook he was encamped at Mt Greenock Creek which was flooded at the time. One of his party informed him that the mailman who delivered settlers' letters about once a week from Kyneton was on the other side of flooded creek with the official despatches for the electoral officer, Mr Hall of Glenmore near Amherst, but was not willing to cross the creek.

*As soon as I was finished I examined the creek and found the current flowing very rapidly, and no likelihood of a fall that night. My party were engaged with a bottle fastened to a cord about 60 yards long endeavouring to through [sic] it to the opposite but failed in the attempt. This contrivance would not suit the purpose there was no alternative but to swim. I was confident that I had swum bigger and stronger currents before. I determined to make the effort and was soon in the water and gained the opposite bank. Mr Fitzmaurice Chief Constable tied the despatches round my head. I was soon on the west bank of the creek again. In half an hour I was on my way to Glenmona on a favourable Romeo mare. Mr Hall received the Governor's official despatches with authority to act as the Returning Officer and Mr Wm. Campbell of Strath Loddon was returned the first member of Council for the Electoral District of the Loddon on the following day.*¹⁴

During Urquhart's work at Carisbrook gold was discovered at Clunes and Ballarat and in early October he went to Ballarat and completed a general survey of Golden Point, Black Hill and neighbourhood and marked the site of Ballarat including about 40 building allotments. He later wrote: 'Ballarat was the first gold fields town surveyed by me in Victoria, and was always my favourite; commanding a fine position; a bracing fine climate equal to any in the colony; about 1,400 feet above sea level, with rich lands on all sides, in some places second to none in Victoria'.¹⁵ At the same time he marked out 20,000 acres of agricultural lands that could be found near the goldfields of Ballarat in the localities of Dowling Forest, Lake Learmonth and Lake Burrumbeet, Miners Rest and Glendaruel in lots varying in size from 80 to 320 acres each. On one occasion he and his men were confronted by a bushfire started when some diggers left a fire burning and the surrounding grass was set ablaze by embers blown by the strong wind. Urquhart found refuge for himself and his surveying equipment in a waterhole while his men escaped to safety on ground which had already been burnt. They were fortunate only to lose the men's tent and not the whole encampment.

Plan of Ballarat township reserve in the County of Grenville, PROV, [VPRS 8168/P2](#), Unit 1493, Feature 553



Urquhart spent the first six weeks of 1852 finishing his maps as his party left him for the goldfields and no reasonable wages would be accepted by anyone in the vicinity of the goldfields.

Marking the road to the Mt Alexander Goldfields, 1852

In February 1852, Urquhart was instructed by Hoddle to make up a team of five men including a bullock driver and proceed to Mt Alexander for the purpose of surveying Forest, Friar's (sic) and other creeks

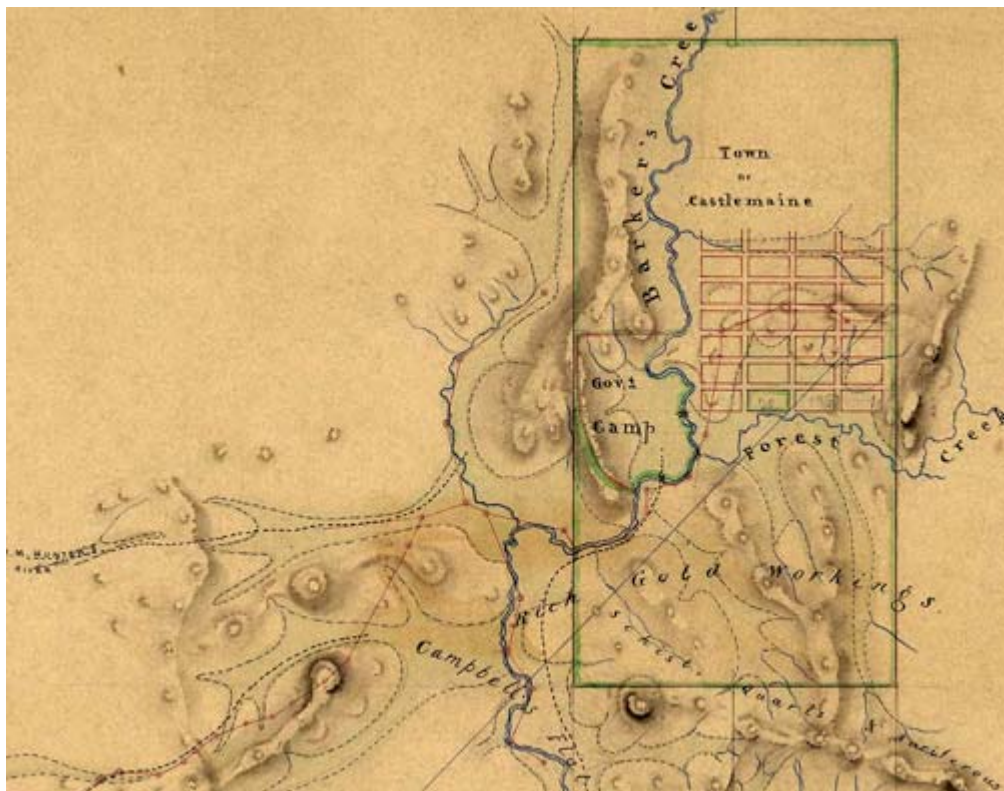
not yet laid down. He was instructed to mark a township reserve at the junction of Forest and Barker's creeks and lay off some half acre allotments for sale, and to report as to other sites most suitable for townships. He was informed that draftsman Edward Bagshawe would be placed under his direction and would afford him any assistance.¹⁶ But first he had to mark a road through the Black Forest to the goldfields of Mt Alexander, a task he started in March.

Instructions were always arriving from Robert Hoddle. For example, on 12 March 1852 Urquhart was instructed that on his arrival at Woodend he was to measure some half acre allotments for sale in that township.¹⁷ Then on 15 March that he was to forward a tracing of the road marked between Keilor and the Bush Inn at Gisborne through Mr John Aitken's purchase and the road between the same points passing more to the north east, and to examine and report on both roads.¹⁸ On 24 March 1852 he was given a notice to pass on to squatter James Orr giving him 14 days to remove any obstructions or encumbrances on that portion of the line of roads from the Coliban Bridge to Mt Alexander diggings where it passed through his paddock.¹⁹ On 3 April 1852 he was given permission to temporarily increase the size of his party and to immediately start marking a new line of road over the Mt Macedon Ranges.²⁰ On 10 April 1852 Hoddle acknowledged receipt of tracings and reports and informed Urquhart that 'I highly approve of your suggestions regarding the roads and will take early opportunity of laying the above before His Excellency'.²¹

General Survey of the Bendigo and Castlemaine Goldfields, 1852

On reaching the goldfields, Urquhart then made a general survey of Mt Alexander and surrounding ranges, and of the Bendigo and Castlemaine goldfields. He fixed the site of the townships of Sandhurst and Castlemaine and at the latter marked about 400 building allotments for sale. On 13 July 1852 Hoddle informed Urquhart that, as Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe wanted a tracing from his survey of the Mt Alexander gold workings on a reduced scale, he was to complete his plan and forward it to Melbourne, accompanied by a report, and that on arrival at the Bendigo Creek he was immediately to mark out a reserve at the junction of the Golden Gully with the Bendigo, being the site proclaimed for holding the court of petty sessions. It was to include the camp on the west side of the creek about a mile below the junction.²²

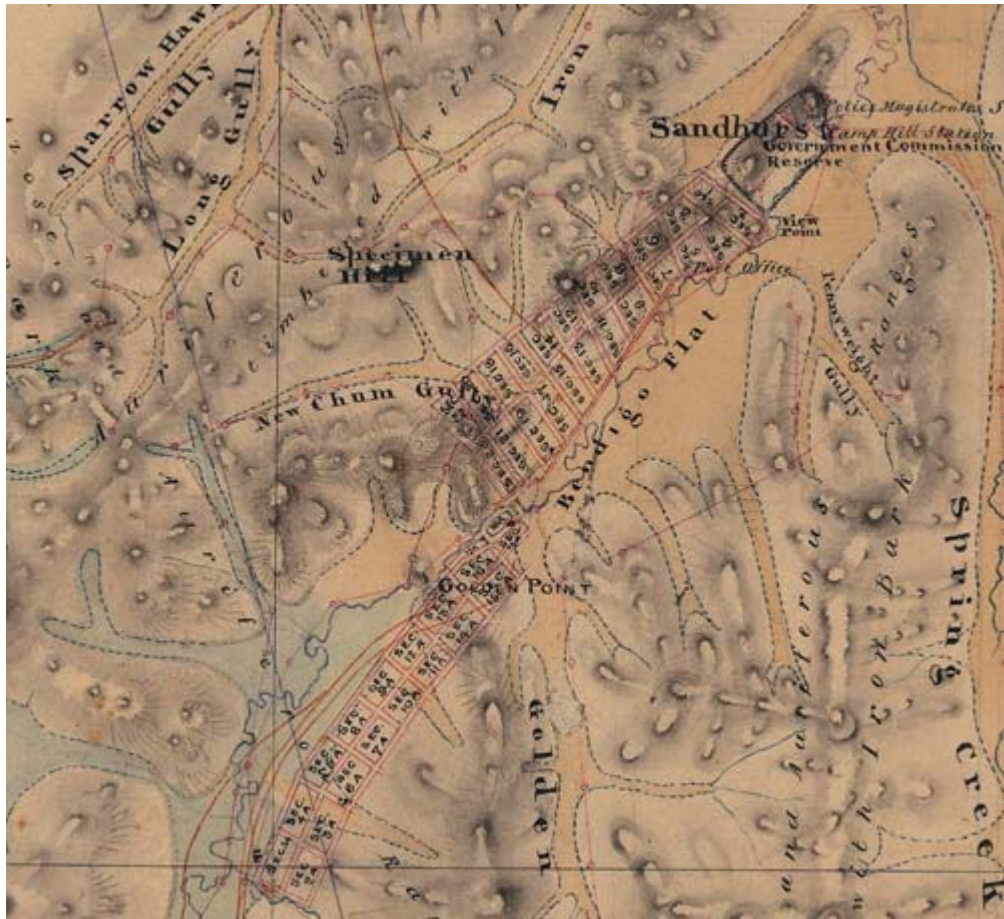
Survey of Mr Wm Campbell's station Strath-Loddon, also the town of Castlemaine (detail), PROV, [VPRS 8168/P2](#), Unit 2818, Loddon River Survey 94



In late August 1852 Hoddle informed Urquhart that La Trobe wanted him to report upon the best position in the gold districts for agricultural reserves with as little delay as possible.²³ Hoddle also requested to receive as soon as possible the descriptions of the township reserves marked at the junction of Forest and Barker's creeks, and also those of Saw Pit Gully, Porcupine Inn at Mt Alexander and Campbell's camping ground at Bullock Creek.²⁴

On 15 November 1852 Hoddle acknowledged receiving tracings from the general survey of the gold districts which had subsequently been approved by La Trobe, and Urquhart was informed that he could commence at once to mark off the various reserves.²⁵ On 26 November 1852 Hoddle acknowledged receipt of tracings on the half inch scale of Bendigo Creek and Myers Creek which he was very glad to receive 'as it filled a blank in the general map of the district'.²⁶

Bendigo gold fields
(detail), PROV, [VPRS](#)
[8168/P2](#), Unit 1969,
Goldfields 19



In his 1852 survey of the Bendigo Valley and its environs, Urquhart included township reserves at Bullock Creek, Ravenswood and Happy Jack where the nucleus of settlements already existed.²⁷ His plan was entitled 'General Survey of the Bendigo Goldfields showing the proposed reserves for townships. Drawn by W.S. Urquhart, Melbourne, November 1852'.²⁸ On 10 January 1853 Hoddle forwarded the plan of the township of Castlemaine as marked by Urquhart to the Colonial Secretary John Foster.²⁹ When preparing plans of new townships, Urquhart was instructed to provide a full report as to the various sites recommended for national schools, churches, markets and other public purposes in order that they might be reserved from sale and to communicate these instructions to his assistant surveyors.³⁰

A product of Urquhart's survey of the goldfields was a map produced in 1853 by John Arrowsmith entitled 'Trigonometrical Survey of the Gold Bearing Region near Mount Alexander in the Province of Victoria, Australia by W.S. Urquhart, Depy. Survr. Genl'.³¹ The Victorian Government would have sent Urquhart's tracings to Arrowsmith, a renowned English geographer and mapmaker based in London.



Mt Alexander Goldfields District Surveyor 1853-1864

Urquhart was appointed District Surveyor in early 1853. In October he selected for his survey office a site at Back Creek, later renamed Taradale, centrally located between the agricultural lands to be surveyed around Kyneton and Kilmore and convenient to the goldfields of Mt Alexander. On 19 April 1853 Robert Hoddle wrote to Urquhart: 'With reference to your letter of the 19th ultimo enclosing a plan for a proposed Survey Office in the neighbourhood of the Gold Districts, I have to acquaint you that his Excellency the Lieut. Governor has been pleased to sanction the erection of the building in question, and to direct that the sum of £250 be appropriated for the purpose'.³²

The site included a holding paddock for the bullocks and horses used by the survey teams and in total was an area of 50 acres (46.6 hectares) of Crown land fronting the Coliban River.³³ Urquhart's initial depot staff included a bullock driver, clerk, cook, groom, housekeeper, labourer, two assistant surveyors and two draftsmen.³⁴

All was well with the survey paddock until the discovery of gold near Taradale in August 1855 led to the miners demanding the right to prospect there. Miners also wanted to search for gold along sections of Back Creek and the Coliban River for which they needed access through the survey paddock.

In October 1855, a meeting at the Talbot Hotel, Taradale, attended by between seventy and eighty people saw a petition to Governor Sir Charles Hotham drawn up asking for access to the Coliban River through the survey paddock, as the water supply in Back Creek was inadequate for the needs of diggers

and the general public, whereas the Coliban River had an unlimited supply.³⁵ Urquhart was accused by local storekeeper William Thwaites of behaviour 'reprehensible in a public officer', telling the meeting that he considered that Urquhart had made 'a monopoly of the water for his exclusive benefit' by purchasing land in early 1853 on either side of the survey paddock and on both sides of the Coliban River, thus cutting off public access to the river.

Matters escalated and on 6 January 1856, Urquhart wrote to Captain Bull, Resident Warden Castlemaine, suggesting a few police be stationed at the paddock that evening as a large body of men were preparing to rush the paddock the next morning.³⁶

Ten days later, on 16 January, Captain Bull finally forwarded the miners' petition to the Colonial Secretary in Melbourne.³⁷ On 18 January 1856, Urquhart sent another message to Captain Bull to the effect that 'diggers again this morning entered the Survey Paddock and about 100 men started working the ground up. I cautioned the miners in the impropriety of their present course and they temporarily desisted. I shall be glad to be informed what is best to be done in the circumstances'.³⁸

On 24 January, he received a letter from the Surveyor-General's Office, Melbourne stating that mining could take place but setting out certain conditions, namely that all operations had to be confined initially to areas along the creek or gully considered by Bull likely to be worked with profit; a deposit of five pounds had to be paid to cover the expense of filling in the holes and making good any damage; and that if the mines turned out well, an arrangement was to be made with the miners to work the land systematically by removing the earth to bedrock so as to form a reservoir for water and, if the land permitted, construct a dam.³⁹

Captain Bull also received this message and informed the diggers that he would meet at 11 am on 26 January with a committee chosen by the miners in order to identify the land to be mined and other matters. When Bull arrived, the miners' committee met with him and expressed the opinion that they thought gold was plentiful in the paddock but that the fee of £5 was excessive. To the question of whether he had any further instructions, Captain Bull replied in the negative. The committee then set their own rules, namely that 200 feet (60 metres) each side of Back Creek and the whole of the flat on each side of the creek be open to the digging community; that any damages to the fence would be made good by a committee formed for that purpose; no trees would be wantonly injured and no tents erected in the paddock. Captain Bull accepted these terms and, after wishing the diggers well, sanctioned the opening of the paddock at 8 am the following day.⁴⁰ The next day, 27 January, more than one hundred holes were sunk by three hundred miners but not a speck of gold was found!⁴¹

In the following week, a question was asked in parliament about the propriety of yielding government land to the miners. Captain Bull was later forced to admit he had departed from government policy over the issue 'in a moment of embarrassment'.⁴²

Regardless of the survey paddock controversy, Urquhart was a prominent member of the Taradale community. As already mentioned he surveyed the village of Taradale (later upgraded to the status of a township) and recommended the sites for such things as church and school reserves, a police station and police paddock. When a meeting was held in August 1853 to consider establishing a national school, he was one of six people appointed to the School Board.⁴³ He was a trustee of the Presbyterian Church which opened on 1 March 1861.

In September 1861 Urquhart played a prominent role in the proceedings associated with the laying of the foundation stone of the northern abutment of the Melbourne to Echuca railway viaduct. The foundation stone was lowered, laid and squared then christened by Urquhart with champagne. After a toast Urquhart presented the workmen with a 'liberal donation'.⁴⁴ William married Margaret Finlason of Castlemaine in 1866, two years after retiring. He was 48, she was 37. They lived at Taradale for much of their married life and had no offspring.

Achievements as the District Surveyor July 1853-1861

The laying out of town and village reserves and opening up agricultural land were Urquhart's main priorities. Initially he had two assistant surveyors, one in the neighbourhood of Kyneton, the other between Castlemaine and Bendigo. But during his eleven years as district surveyor, Urquhart had at his disposal from four to seven assistant surveyors and two draftsmen, responsible for surveying the agricultural lands and town allotments in the goldfields, mostly in the counties of Talbot and Dalhousie. The approximate area of land surveyed by Urquhart and his assistant surveyors was 800,000 acres.⁴⁵

On 6 March 1854, Urquhart reported that 'every exertion on my part has been all along directed to the grand object of settling the Diggings population in certain localities, suitable for agriculture'.⁴⁶ Agricultural lands were laid out by him or under his direction in 47 government parishes. There was a sense of urgency to the laying out of settlements as can be seen in relation to Bendigo Creek when Urquhart was instructed by Hoddle to 'cause every exertion to be made in completing the measurement of town and cultivation allotments at Sandhurst, Bendigo Creek which are most urgently required for sale' and to forward 'rough plans of both the township and suburban allotments from which the requisite descriptions can be prepared in order that as little delay as possible may take place in proclaiming the lots for sale'.⁴⁷

In November 1854, Urquhart forwarded to Hoddle the boundary specifications for the townships of Castlemaine, Carisbrook, Daylesford, Elphinstone, Guildford, Maldon and Malmsbury and the villages of Taradale and Harcourt.⁴⁸ With respect to naming settlements Hoddle informed Urquhart on 12 May 1853 that the names of townships were given by the Lieutenant-Governor when township plans were laid before the Executive Council.⁴⁹ Over the next years the townships of Daylesford, Franklinford, Newstead, Guildford, Fryerstown, Maldon, Harcourt, Lockwood, Newbridge, Maryborough, Amherst, Back Creek, Dunolly, Bet Bet, Tarnagulla and Inglewood were marked out by under Urquhart's instructions by his assistant surveyors.

Report for the period July 1853 to June 1854

Urquhart's report for the year from 1 July 1853 to 30 June 1854 demonstrated the immense range of tasks he and his assistant surveyors had undertaken in one twelve-month period, and gives an indication of the nature of the work carried out over the next decade. In this twelve-month period (1853-4), Urquhart travelled about 5,000 miles (8,050 km) establishing the sites for towns and villages and identifying lands to be laid out for agricultural purposes. About 60 miles (97 km) of main roads were marked out as well as about 300 miles (483 km) of occupation roads which provided access to land marked off for gardens and other cultivation purposes. Over the year, 48,272 acres (19,550 hectares) were examined, surveyed and marked off for sale in 17 parishes on or near the goldfields. For example, in Elphinstone parish, 4000 acres of country lots, 400 acres of suburban lots as well as urban allotments in Elphinstone township and the village of Taradale were surveyed. In Maldon parish, 250 acres of township and suburban lots were surveyed. In the parish of Wombat, 3870 acres of suburban and country land were surveyed as well as 50 acres in the township of Apsley/Daylesford.⁵⁰

Over his time as district surveyor, Urquhart directed his assistants to undertake a wide variety of tasks. For example, in July 1854 his assistant surveyors were given the following instructions: Henry Grimes was to mark off lands for agricultural purposes at Bullock Creek with Suburban lots in 5-20 acre lots and Country lands in 40 to 320 acre lots⁵¹; Richard Larritt was to mark out 25 acres which were then to be subdivided into quarter acre lots in the most suitable locality around or near the Commissioners Camp, Eaglehawk, in order that the storekeepers and others in the neighbourhood might have the opportunity of purchasing building sites;⁵² C Russell was to lay out a village reserve on the Seventh White Hills on the main line of road to the racecourse at Sandhurst⁵³; John Turner at Tarrangower was to mark off Donald Campbell's section of 640 acres under the pre-emptive right Act⁵⁴; Hugh Fraser was to mark out a reserve of 640 acres applied for by the Aborigines at Mt Franklin⁵⁵; and J Willington was to lay out suburban and country lots as well as a township reserve at Sheep Wash Creek, Bendigo. Urquhart's

outward correspondence to his assistant surveyors for the period 1853-1856 provides a wonderful insight into the process by which farm lands, reserves and towns were laid out in the goldfields in this period. ⁵⁶ Unfortunately correspondence for the subsequent years has not survived the ravages of time.

Retirement

William Swan Urquhart retired in 1864 and, in making application to retire on half pay, noted that he was the oldest surveyor in the service by three years, was the only one left of those engaged in the preliminary surveys of the remote parts of the colony, and was the first surveyor of the goldfields. He indicated he wanted to retire as

the state of my health will no longer permit me to perform the duties required of a district surveyor. ... the frequent exposure to wet, heat & cold has rendered me very unfit for the duties required of me as a field officer; at the same time, that the life that I led for upwards of ten (10 years) under canvas in the bush has unfitted me constitutionally for the close confinement and duties of an office life. I find it absolutely necessary that I should retire before my system is broken up altogether. ⁵⁷

Surveyor-General Perry supported Urquhart's request, writing on the cover of the file containing his letter,

Mr Urquhart during the early period of his career, and especially during the first great rush to the Goldfields of Victoria displayed extraordinary energy and self denial in discharging the duties assigned to him - which however could not be held to be of a specific nature entitled to recognition under the 49th section of the Civil Service Act. I believe that Mr Urquhart's health has suffered from the hardship and exposure encountered by him during the period alluded to, and think that he might be allowed to retire on the basis provided in the 44th section which would give him an annual allowance of about £160. ⁵⁸

In retirement William lived off his pension, dividends from bank shares, interest on money loaned to the Taradale Municipal Council, interest on mortgage loans and income from his land holdings. These included an allotment in Hawthorn, twelve allotments in the parish of Elphinstone including three in Taradale, one allotment in the parish of Metcalfe and nine in the parish of Muckleford, all purchased between 1850 and 1854. ⁵⁹ His probate papers show his real estate was valued at £19,395. His personal estate of £10,049 was mainly in shares. In his will, his wife Margaret was provided with an annuity of £500 a year. ⁶⁰

Urquhart's Hawthorn allotment of 31 acres (12.5ha) fronted both Glenferrie and Auburn roads and contained five brick villa residences, each consisting of six rooms and a kitchen. ⁶¹ He purchased his Hawthorn allotment in 1850 but never lived there. ⁶² In 1885 a street, appropriately named Urquhart Street, was constructed through the allotment. However, the spelling of Urquhart caused a policeman such difficulty that when a horse died in the street, the policeman who attended the matter dragged it to Auburn Road, because it was easier to spell Auburn than Urquhart in his report. ⁶³

In 1880 William and his wife moved from Taradale to East Melbourne where he died in 1881.

Endnotes

1. KL Chappel, *Surveying for land settlement in Victoria 1836-1960*, 1966, p.33.
2. Eric Bird, *Place names on the Coast of Victoria*, 2006, available at <http://anps.org.au/documents/VIC_coastal.pdf>, accessed 8 October 2009.
3. PROV, [VPRS 15899](#), microfiche copy of the original manuscript plan collection [VPRS 8168](#).
4. PROV, VA 2921 Surveyor-General's Department, [VPRS 6/PO](#) Outward Letter Books, Unit 4, Item A54/180, submitting Mr Urquhart's application for increased pay, signed A. C., 20 April 1854.
5. *Victoria Government Gazette*, 1861, pp. 26, 1699.
6. *Victoria Government Gazette*, 1859, 1860.
7. PROV, [VPRS 6/PO](#), Unit 2, Item 45/79, Huddle to Urquhart, 24 October 1845.
8. PROV, [VPRS 6/PO](#), Unit 2, Item 45/90, Huddle to Urquhart, 14 November 1845.

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10. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 2, Item 45/96, Hoddle to Urquhart, 1 December 1845.
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12. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 3, Item 50/73, Hoddle to Urquhart.
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17. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 5, Item 52/115, Hoddle to Urquhart, 12 March 1854.
18. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 5, Item 52/121, Hoddle to Urquhart, 15 March 1852.
19. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 5, Item 52/131, Hoddle to Urquhart, 26 March 1852.
20. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 5, Item 52/153, Hoddle to Urquhart, 3 April 1852.
21. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 5, Item 52/165, Hoddle to Urquhart, 10 April 1852.
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23. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 5, Item 52/338, Hoddle to Urquhart, 27 August 1852.
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29. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 4, Item A53/13, Forwarding plan of the township of Castlemaine for Approval, Robert Hoddle.
30. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 5, Item 53/520, A.C. to Urquhart, 6 July 1853.
31. WS Urquhart with additions by CR Read, *Trigonometrical survey of the gold bearing region near Mount Alexander in the Province of Victoria, Australia*, Published July 4th 1853 by John Arrowsmith, 10 Soho Square, London. Urquhart is wrongly described here as the Deputy Surveyor-General rather than Assistant Surveyor.
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33. PROV, [VPRS 6/P0](#), Unit 5, Item 53/772, W.H.B. to Urquhart, 8 September 1853.
34. PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1, Item 54/94, Urquhart to the Surveyor-General, 8 May 1854.
35. *Mount Alexander Mail*, 2 November 1855.
36. PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1, Item 56/5, Urquhart to Captain Bull, Resident Warden Castlemaine, 6 January 1856.
37. *Mount Alexander Mail*, 29 January 1855.
38. PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1, Item 56/18, Urquhart to Captain Bull, Resident Warden Castlemaine, 18 January 1856.
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51. PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1, Item 39/154, Urquhart to Assistant Surveyor Grimes, 12 July 1854.
52. PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1, Item 51/64, Urquhart to Assistant Surveyor Larritt, 12 July 1854.
53. PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1, Item 0/64, Urquhart to Assistant Surveyor Russell, 11 July 1854.

- [54.](#) PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1, Item 54/162, Urquhart to Assistant Surveyor Turner, 1 August 1854.
- [55.](#) PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1, Item 54/164, Urquhart to Assistant Surveyor Fraser, 1 August 1854.
- [56.](#) Taradale Survey Office Outward Correspondence Register 1854-1856 in PROV, [VPRS 1330/P0](#), Unit 1.
- [57.](#) PROV, [VPRS 44/P0](#), Unit 560, Item 62/11,082, correspondence from Urquhart, 4 December 1862.
- [58.](#) *ibid.*
- [59.](#) PROV, VA Master in Equity, Supreme Court, [VPRS 28/P2](#) Probate and Administration Files, Unit 115, Item 21/857; [VPRS 28/P0](#), Unit 252, Item 21/857; *NSW Government Gazette*, 1851, p. 336.
- [60.](#) PROV, [VPRS 7591/P0](#) Wills, Unit 62, Item 21/857.
- [61.](#) PROV [VPRS 28/P2](#), Unit 115, Item 21/857.
- [62.](#) Gwen McWilliam, *Hawthorn peppercorns*, Melbourne, Brian Atkins, 1978, p. 4.
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