



History researcher David Perkins at work transferring information from old records on to a computer.

From **ROBIN SCHNEIDER,**  
in **Muswellbrook**

TWO valuable historical Crown documents dated 1838, including one detailing the slaughter of 30 Aborigines for which seven men were finally hung, have come to light in the Upper Hunter in the course of a bicentennial research project.

Mystery surrounds how and when the archival strays slipped into the files of the Muswellbrook Historical Society when their appropriate place is with the NSW State Archives.

The more important of the documents is a letter providing a vital link in Australia's early legal history and bearing directly on relations between Aborigines and the white settlers.

The brief and neatly penned letter dated July 3, 1838, was written by Henry Dangar's overseer, William Hobbs, to report a massacre of 30 blacks near his hut on a Gwydir River outstation.

It was addressed to E.D. Day, Esq., police magistrate, Invermien (Scone) and reads:

'Sir, I beg to acquaint you that about a month since I had occasion to leave Mr Dangar's station on the big river for a few days. On my return I saw near the hut the

remains of about thirty Blacks principally women and children. I recognise them as part of a tribe that had been at the station for some time and who had since they first came conducted themselves in a quiet and proper manner. On my enquiry I was informed that a party of white men had come to the station who after securing them had taken them a short distance from my hut and destroyed nearly the whole of them.

'I should have given information earlier but circumstances having prevented my sooner coming down the country.

'I am Sir, your obedient servant, W. Hobbs.'

Mr Hobbs's report led to a magisterial inquiry followed by a trial and then a retrial of 11 white accused.

The hanging of seven of the men in Sydney five months later after being convicted of murdering the blacks was unprecedented in the fledgling colony and further inflamed anti-black sentiment among the whites.

On the eve of the first trial the then *Sydney Herald*, hysterically defending the outbreak vigilantes, said that there was only one way to deal with 'the filthy, brutal cannibal of New Holland — shoot them dead, if you can'.

The second document, like Mr Hobbs's

letter, reflects the tough lot of the disadvantaged, this time an assigned convict.

It is a petition expressed in the grossly flattering style of the day and addressed to the Chief Justice of the colony, James Dowling Esq, on behalf of a convict seeking his liberty or at the very least a change of master.

The convict, who had been obliged to give evidence which went against his master in a civil lawsuit, was rewarded with 25 lashes when he returned home to Segenhoe, near Scone.

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# Man's dogged paperchase unearths historical treasures

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World wars  
material

There was additional retribution according to the convict when his master, the wealthy and well connected Scottish MP Thomas Potter Macqueen 'having his own way with the Country Bench (of magistrates) had me put back two years for spite'.

The petition was prepared by an unknown scribe on November 20, 1838, on behalf of an as yet to be identified Scottish convict.

The document is incomplete with at least one more page, possibly two, missing.

The incident may have had a happy ending because a note in the margin of the petition in an assured hand reads: 'Mr Fisher can you obtain for me the history of this man's case?' and is signed James Dowling C.J.

The stray archives surfaced early in a three-month paperchase from Murrurundi to Morpeth by an avid amateur researcher, Mr David Perkins.

He is a Bayswater power station operator and a computer buff who was thrilled in January to be selected as the Australia Bicentennial Authority's Upper Hunter field officer in a historical records search.

Similar quests all round Australia officially ended on April 30 and the results, under the guidance of the National Archives in Canberra, are to be published as a National Biographical Register.

Mr Perkins said that while the aim of the search was to uncover privately held material, it was recognised that there was a good chance of turning up material known to archivers as 'strays'.

The two 1838 documents were just that. They were by far the most important items to come to light in the course of his hundreds of contacts with groups and individuals.

The more usual material uncovered included diaries, journals of recollections, station records, theatre tickets, photographs by the million and postcards.

Most of the material related to the Hunter Valley and in more recent history the periods best covered were the two world wars when families and friends exchanged letters regularly with kith and kin in the armed forces.

Mr Perkins said the field officers were required to return to Canberra their diaries and reports and these notations would in turn become historical research material.

His own private research priority now the bicentennial paperchase is over is to attempt to trace the identity of the Segenhoe convict relying on law reports and other records of 1838.

Newcastle Herald  
Thursday 5th May 1988

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