



EXPLORERS' MONUMENT

Fremantle, Australia

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Executive Summary

In February 1913, the killing of three settlers by Aboriginal people in 1864 was commemorated with the unveiling of the Explorers' Monument. Yet the history remembered by the memorial was just one side of the story - its plaque failed to mention the deaths of almost 40 Aboriginal people by the three settlers and the punitive recovery expedition. In 1994, a second plaque was added to the monument, recognising the right of Aboriginal people to defend their land and commemorating all Aboriginal people who died in the invasion of Australia.

Introduction

On April 9 1994, a story emblematic of Western Australia's frontier wars was publicly rewritten, in a ceremony which, for the first time, centred the stories of Australia's Aboriginal communities. The deaths of three explorers – Frederick Panter, James Harding, and William Goldwyer – at the hands of Aboriginal people in La Grange, in November 1864, had been perceived by the white settler community as a tragedy, and the actions of Maitland Brown, who led the recovery expedition, were held as heroic. Such was the significance of these events that in February 1913, they were permanently commemorated with the unveiling of the Explorers' Monument (Maitland Brown Memorial) in *Walyalup* (Fremantle). The plaque on the monument speaks of how the 'explorers...of this Terra Incognita' were killed in the nighttime attack by 'treacherous natives', but it fails to mention the 18 *Karajarri* men shot by the explorers earlier that day, or the 20 Yawuru and *Karajarri* men, women and children killed during the course of Brown's punitive recovery expedition. The ceremony in April 1994 - which unveiled a second plaque - was the culmination of a six-year campaign by historians, the La Grange Community, and the *Baldja* Network (a group of Aboriginal peoples in Fremantle), and cooperation with the Fremantle City Council. The counter-monument declared the original memorial 'offensive' and provided a re-interpretation of events at La Grange, as well as commemorating 'all other Aboriginal people who died during the invasion of their country'. Almost 30 years later, the counter-memorial on the Explorers' Monument is held as an example of how recontextualisation can enable divisive statues to become sites of 'reconciliation rather than division'.

Background

British Settlement of Western Australia

On May 2 1829, Captain Charles Fremantle raised the British flag at Swan River and claimed the west coast of Australia for Britain, marking the creation of Australia's first free-settler colony, a colony settled by persons who came of their own volition, as opposed to the convicts and indentured servants who were transported to populate other Australian colonies. Aboriginal people had lived in Western Australia for 47,000 years before the arrival of Europeans. By 1829, between six thousand to ten thousand Noongar people were living in the area.¹ Intense interest in the Swan River Colony in Britain – from those desperate to start new lives in Australia, untainted by the convict colony in New South Wales – resulted in a rush of people trying to emigrate. Twenty-five ships full of settlers arrived within the first six months. However, twenty years later, because it lacked sufficient labour to build public infrastructure, the colony elected to become a penal settlement, and between 1850 and 1868, there were 43 transportations of

¹ National Museum of Australia, "Defining Moments: Founding of Perth", *National Museum of Australia*, May 4, 2023.

convicts to the colony. By 1868, convicts outnumbered free settlers by 9,700 to 7,300.²

Relationships between the Europeans and the *Noongar* people were initially cordial. The *Noongar* people referred to the settlers as *djanga* ('the dead'), in the belief that they were returning Aboriginal people.³ However, the situation quickly deteriorated: settlers mistook the traditional land management of setting fires in early summer as hostility, and the *Noongar* people saw the settlers' livestock as fair game, a replacement for the native animals which the settlers shot indiscriminately. The culmination of increasing tension and violence was the 1834 Pinjarra massacre, where 25 settlers—led by Governor James Stirling—attacked a group of around 70 *Binjareb Noongar* people. Estimates for *Noongar* deaths range between 15 and 80, and eight women and a few children were taken captive. After the massacre, Stirling told survivors: 'If any [European] person should be killed... not one [*Noongar*] would be allowed to remain alive this side of the mountains'.⁴

In 1838, *Wadjemup* (Rottnest Island) began to be used as a prison and forced labour camp, incarcerating Aboriginal people; between 1838 and 1904, over 4,000 Aboriginal men and boys from all over Western Australia were incarcerated on *Wadjemup*, many for minor crimes resulting from increased interaction with the colony as it continued to expand.⁵ Additionally, in August 1840, the Western Australian Native Police was formed, with Aboriginal constables serving under white officers, replacing a regular Mounted Police force which was felt to be increasingly ineffectual at subduing indigenous peoples.

La Grange Expedition

On November 9, 1864, three settlers - Frederick Panter, James Harding, and William Goldwyer - set out south from a small pastoral settlement at Roebuck Bay to explore land around La Grange Bay. On November 12, they arrived at the large *Boola Boola* Lake and set up camp, where they remained throughout November 13. According to the diary entries of all three explorers, published by *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*, a group of 34 Karajarri people approached them in the morning of November 13; Goldwyer wrote of exchanging knives for pearl shells, and Panter claimed that they gave gifts of five cockatoos and five pigeons.⁶ Panter also recounted how, later that day, the group returned with spears, and the explorers scared

² Ibid.

³ George Fletcher Moore, *A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language in Common Use Among the Aborigines of Western Australia*. London: William S. Orr & Co., 1842. p.28

⁴ Chris Owen, "The Pinjarra Massacre: It's Time to Speak the Truth of This Terrible Slaughter", *The Guardian*, November 17, 2019.

⁵ Rottnest Island Authority, "The Quod", *Rottnest Island Authority*, no date.

⁶ Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times, "We are Requested to Announce that in Accordance with the Public Wish, the Funeral of Messrs. Panter, Harding, and Goldwyer, Has Been Postponed Until Wednesday Next, the 17th Instant, at 2 O'Clock", *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*, May 12, 1865.

them off by firing a revolver.⁷ It was subsequently claimed by Maitland Brown that the group of *Karajarri* peoples returned for a third time on the night of November 13 and attacked the three settlers, killing Goldwyer as he stood guard and Panter and Harding as they slept:

the remains of the men were found all in one spot, Mr. Panter's head resting on Mr. Harding's left shoulder, and Goldwyer lying a little apart on his face, with a large portion of one side of the top of the skull broken in'.⁸

The diary entries of the explorers served as proof for the settler community of their 'innocence': 'These extracts are also very precious as they prove that the fate of our friends was not accelerated by any unkind treatment of the natives by them'.⁹ However, other accounts paint the actions of the explorers in a very different light: Maitland Brown himself recounts a claim that 18 *Karajarri* men were shot by the explorers earlier in the day - they were 'mortally wounded' in the process; additionally the *Boola Boola* lake was a *Karajarri* sacred ceremonial site - in a region short of fresh surface water, lakes or wells were: 'always the first sites of conflict between Europeans and *Karajarri*'.¹⁰

The settlers only had a week's worth of supplies, so when they failed to return after three weeks, various searches were conducted - another settler, Lockier Burges, tracked them to a mangrove swamp near La Grange but then lost the trace.¹¹ When news of the missing men reached Perth, the Government of Western Australia organised a search party; Maitland Brown - the 21-year-old son of English settlers - was appointed leader. There was some speculation that Panter, Harding and Goldwyer had been killed by Aboriginal people, leading *The Inquirer and Commercial News* to declare, on February 8 1865: 'They have fallen in the service of their fellow-subjects, and it is our bounden duty to ascertain how and where they have fallen: and if by violence, avenge them'.¹² For this reason, Brown's expedition is considered a punitive expedition.

On February 16 1865, the *Clarence Packet* left *Walyalup*, setting sail for Roebuck Bay - Maitland Brown was accompanied for all or part of the trip by seven other settlers, including Robert Toovey, Lockier Burges, David Fancisco, and Robert Williams.¹³ On March 18, the *Clarence*

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Maitland Brown quoted in Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Maitland Brown, "Confirmation of the Melancholy Fate of the Explorers - Messrs. Panter, Harding, and Goldwyer", *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, April 26, 1865; Peter Veth, Peter Sutton and Margo Neale (eds.), *Strangers on the Shore: Early Coastal Contacts in Australia*. Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2008.

¹¹ *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, "Inquest on the Bodies of Messrs. F. K. Panter, J. R. Harding and W. H. Goldwyer", *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, May 24, 1865.

¹² *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, "The Arrival of the Nile from Roebuck Bay", *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, February 8, 1865.

¹³ Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times, "We are Requested to Announce that in Accordance with the Public Wish, the Funeral of Messrs. Panter, Harding, and Goldwyer, Has Been Postponed Until Wednesday Next, the 17th Instant, at 2 O'Clock", *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*, May 12, 1865.

Packet arrived at Roebuck Bay, having been delayed by light winds. On March 22, the settlers visited a *Yawuru* camp in an area they called Racecourse Plains; Brown captured five *Yawuru* men and chained them to a tree, before interrogating them - they were given names of up to 50 *Yawuru* or *Karajarri* men who had allegedly been involved in the killings.¹⁴

On March 27, the search to recover the bodies finally commenced; Brown was accompanied by four settlers, eight horses, and three *Yawuru* people, who had been taken as prisoners on suspicion of involvement and were supposed to act as guides. According to Brown's account, the prisoners deliberately misled the expedition, and two subsequently attempted to escape; they were shot by 'Tommy', a 'native policeman', one was killed instantly, but the other lived long enough to confess their involvement.¹⁵ On April 3, the three bodies were discovered by *Boola Boola* Lake and recovered.



Figure 1: "Discovery of the Remains of the Explorers Messrs Panter, Harding & Goldwyer, 1864" Image by the *Inquirer and Commercial News*

According to Brown, the expedition was followed and watched by a large number of Aboriginal people over several days. On April 6 1865, what is sometimes referred to as the 'La Grange Massacre' or the 'Injudinah Massacre' occurred. This is Maitland Brown's account, as reported in *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*:

a large number of natives... on the 6th April, while on our return to Cape Latouche Treville, decoyed four of us into an ambush, when once in which prudence compelled us to a fight which providentially ended without any further damage to our side than one horse seriously wounded; on theirs the loss was six killed in the ambush and about twelve others, all seriously, and most mortally, wounded, who escaped during the fight into the adjacent mangroves.¹⁶

The massacre was described in *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times* as an 'encounter,' and Brown and his party were congratulated for their role in it. In the aftermath of the massacre, violence between the settlers and the *Yawuru* people continued to intensify. The few written accounts from 1865 document how settlers shot *Yawuru* and *Karajarri* people

¹⁴ Nyamba Buru *Yawuru*, "Wanggjarli Burugun/We are Coming Home: Gwarinman Project", *Nyamba Buru Yawuru*, 2019.

¹⁵ *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*, "We are Requested to Announce that in Accordance with the Public Wish, the Funeral of Messrs. Panter, Harding, and Goldwyer, Has Been Postponed Until Wednesday Next, the 17th Instant, at 2 O'Clock", *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*, May 12, 1865.

¹⁶ Maitland Brown quoted in *Ibid*.

indiscriminately - remembered in oral histories as 'the killing times'.¹⁷

On April 7, Brown's party returned to Roebuck Bay with the bodies and reboarded the *Clarence Packet*. The boat had ten Aboriginal people on board, who had been arrested by Joseph Logue Junior, the Colonial Secretary, on suspicion of involvement in the killings - although, according to Logue's account: 'only two admitted having been concerned in the murder'.¹⁸ On May 10, the *Clarence Packet* returned to Perth. On May 17, Western Australia's first State funeral was held for Frederick Panter, James Harding, and William Goldwyer; more than half of the population of Perth attended. According to *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*, the funeral was: 'intended not to be one of show and ostentation, but simply a mournful testimonial of the esteem in which the departed were held by the whole community'.¹⁹ The three men were buried together in East Perth Cemeteries, and a monument was erected, built by British convicts housed at Fremantle Prison.²⁰ The monument reads:

In Memory Of / Frederick Kennedy Panter, Aged 28 / James Richard Harding, Aged 25 / William Henry Goldwyer Aged 34 / Who Together Departed This Life On The N.W. Coast Of / Australia / In The Vicinity Of / Roebuck Bay, November 13th 1864 / They Were Murdered, Apparently Whilst Asleep In The Night, By / Aboriginal / Natives With Who, As There Is Every Reason To Suppose, They / Believed / That They Were On Friendly Terms / The Colonial Government, J. S. Hampton Being The Governor, / Took Upon / Itself The Task Of Recovering Their Remains, Interring Them In / This Place and Erecting This Monument / Maitland Brown Was The Leader Of Their Little Band Of Brave / Men Who, Risking Their Own Lives, Found And Brought Back / For Christian Burial The Bodies Of Their Deceased Friends / The Above Maitland Brown, After And Useful Public Career / As A Member Of The Legislative Council, And Latterly For Many / Years As Government Resident At Geraldton, Died On May 9 / 1905. Aged 61 Years And Was Buried At Karrakatta Cemetery / At The Instance Of Some Of His Old Friends And / Contemporaries / And With The Consent Of The Government And Of His Family / His Remains Were Removed From Karrakatta On Feb. 1, 1911 / To Rest In This Vault, Beside The Bodies Of Those He / Had So Bravely Recovered 46 Years Previously.²¹

On May 9 1905, Maitland Brown died in Perth. He was initially buried in Karrakatta Cemetery, but in 1911 his remains were re-interred with those of Panter, Harding, and Goldwyer in East Perth Cemeteries. On February 8 1913, a monument to Brown and the three explorers was erected on the Fremantle Esplanade. The statue, which was a gift from another prominent explorer, George Julius Brockman, was designed by Pietro Porcelli, an Italian-born sculptor responsible for so many statues in Western Australia that, in 1993, his own statue was unveiled in *Walyalup*. The Maitland Brown Memorial - also known as the Explorers' Monument - features

¹⁷ Nyamba Buru Yawuru, "Wanggjarli Burugun/We are Coming Home: Gwarinman Project", *Nyamba Buru Yawuru*, 2019.

¹⁸ Joseph Logue Junior quoted in *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*, "We are Requested to Announce that in Accordance with the Public Wish, the Funeral of Messrs. Panter, Harding, and Goldwyer, Has Been Postponed Until Wednesday Next, the 17th Instant, at 2 O'Clock", *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times*, May 12, 1865.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Monument Australia, "Panter, Harding, Goldwyer & Maitland Brown", *Monument Australia*, 2010.

²¹ East Perth Cemeteries, "PANTER: Frederick Kennedy", *East Perth Cemeteries*, 2018.

a bust of Brown and four bronze plaques which depict: the likenesses of Panter, Harding and Goldwyer; the scene where the men were killed; a portrait of Brockman; and the following inscription:

This monument was erected by G. J. Brockman as a fellow bush wanderer's tribute to the memories of Panter, Harding and Goldwyer, earliest explorers after Grey and Gregory of this Terra Incognita. / Attacked at night by treacherous natives were murdered at Boola Boola near La Grange Bay on the 13 November 1864. / Also an appreciative token of remembrance of Maitland Brown. / One of the pioneer pastoralists and premier politicians of this State. Intrepid leader of the Government search and punitive party. His remains together with the sad relics of the ill fated three recovered with great risk for lone wilds repose under a public monument in the East Perth Cemetery. / Lest We Forget.²²

Speaking at the memorial's unveiling, on February 8, 1913, Sir John Forrest—a former Premier of Western Australia—declared that the statue would 'remind' the people of Western Australia of the 'terrible tragedy of 1865'.²³



Figure 2: "Plaque depicting Frederick Panter, James Harding, and William Goldwyer" Image by Cygnis insignis

History of the Contestation

Well into the mid-twentieth century, the deaths of the explorers were still perceived by the white Australian community as a tragedy, and the actions of Maitland Brown as heroic. In 1935, the Mayor of Fremantle, Frank Gibson, declared that he: 'would like to see this monument in a more prominent position', and the Fremantle Council debated moving the memorial either to outside Fremantle railway station or St John's Church - although ultimately they decided that it

²² Monument Australia, "Maitland Brown Memorial (Explorers' Monument)", *Monument Australia*, 2010.

²³ The West Australian, "Honouring the Dead: Maitland Brown Memorial", *The West Australian*, February 10, 1913.

should stay put.²⁴ Aboriginal communities, however, had 'long held' that the Maitland Brown monument was racist and presented a biased interpretation of the events at La Grange.²⁵ The Aboriginal community at *Bidyadanga* (La Grange) - the largest in Western Australia - had retained memories of the Injudinah Massacre through their strong oral tradition, recalling how old men, women, and children had been murdered by Maitland Brown's punitive expedition party. However, it was not until 1988 - the year Australia celebrated its 'bicentenary' - that criticisms of the Maitland Brown Memorial entered the public sphere.

On March 21 1988, Historian Bruce Scates delivered a lecture titled 'Frontier Violence in Western Australia' to a class at Murdoch University, which used the *Bidyadanga* killings as a case study. After two years of research, Scates was able to demonstrate how:

the popularly held versions of what had happened [at La Grange] were not true, and that interpretations were coloured by the social, cultural and economic atmosphere and necessity of the time.²⁶

This historical research was subsequently published in 1989 as 'A Monument to Murder: Celebrating the Conquest of Aboriginal Australia' in *Studies of Western Australian History*.²⁷ After delivering the lecture, Scates and Raelene Frances - the co-convenor of the course in which the lecture had taken place - approached the City of Fremantle with a submission to have the Aboriginal history of *Bidyadanga* represented with a counter-monument or an added plaque on the Maitland Brown Memorial. According to Scates, the decision to approach the Fremantle City Council meant that: 'what might have remained solitary research in the archives, framed by a single authorial voice, quickly widened out to a major civic campaign'.²⁸ What followed was a 'Public Action Project', where: 'elders of Perth's Indigenous communities, historians and community leaders rallied around, reshaped and refined the submission'.²⁹ Key to the campaign was the involvement of Western Australia's Aboriginal communities, which was facilitated by Rae Minniecon. Now a pastor and revered elder, in 1988, Minniecon was a young Aboriginal theology student at Murdoch University, who travelled to *Bidyadanga* and gathered the *Karajarri* people's stories of the Injudinah Massacre, which they had kept alive for over a century.

The first preference put to Fremantle City Council was for several plaques, which would encircle the Explorers' Monument and engage not only with the original plaque but with the pictorial

²⁴ The West Australian, "Fremantle Affairs: Maitland Brown Memorial", *The West Australian*, October 9, 1935.

²⁵ Monument Australia, "Maitland Brown Memorial (Explorers' Monument)", *Monument Australia*, 2010.

²⁶ The Commonwealth of Australia, *Walking Together: The First Steps*. Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service, 1994, p.200

²⁷ Bruce Scates, "A Monument to Murder: Celebrating the Conquest of Aboriginal Australia," *Studies in Western Australian History* Volume 10, no. 1 (1989)

²⁸ Bruce Scates (2021), "Set in Stone?: Dialogical Memorialisation and the Beginnings of Australia's Statue Wars", *Public History Review*, 28, p.8.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.8.

narrative of the bas-reliefs. In this way, Scates argued: '[the] counter-memorials would speak back - critiquing each of the original monument's claims, holding it accountable to history'.³⁰ Encouraged by the project's initial success, Minniecon and the *Bidyadanga* community then proposed adding a second memorial. Central to events at *Bidyadanga* was control over water - the Boola Boola lake - Minniecon therefore proposed constructing a water fountain, sharing the gift of water with the whole community. The fountain had been designed by Ronny Cameron, an Aboriginal artist and inmate at Fremantle jail, and was to feature the words 'Let us all sit down together in Peace' inscribed on the base.³¹

The Public Action Project's proposals to alter the Maitland Brown Memorial did not meet with universal approval, however. On November 1 1988, the *Fremantle Gazette* called critics of the monument 'emotional and subjective', and accused historians of misusing public funds and 'urging a sense of guilt on the white community'.³² And, despite initial support from the Fremantle City Council, on November 21 1988, the project was put on indefinite hold. Frustration at this lack of progress led, in June 1990, to the beheading of Brown - the bust was removed from the granite pedestal and only reappeared in 1993, although it was quickly replaced with a replica.³³ Additionally, the bas reliefs on the monument were also stolen and replaced.³⁴ Whilst such actions could be interpreted simply as destructive, Scates argued that, because the beheading of Aboriginal peoples was commonplace in the nineteenth century, the removal of Brown's head had: 'enormous symbolic power [as a...] subversion of longstanding historical practice'.³⁵

The submission to add a plaque or counter-monument to the Maitland Brown Memorial lay dormant for half a decade, until it was resurrected during the 1993 Festival of Fremantle. In order to celebrate the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities during the United Nations' International Year for Indigenous Peoples, the City of Fremantle collaborated with the Baldja Network - a group of Aboriginal peoples in *Walyalup* - to incorporate the raising of the Aboriginal flag and a Corroboree into the festival. During this process of collaboration between the City Council and the Aboriginal community, the Baldja Network raised the possibility of reactivating the 1988 proposal to re-contextualise the Explorers' Monument with a plaque. As Ros Porter, Fremantle's Community Arts Officer, explained:

It was when we were planning the Baldja Corroboree that the controversy and subject of the monument came up... We had built up a good relationship through our work with the festival, and

³⁰ Ibid, p.8.

³¹ Ibid, p.8.

³² Ibid, p.7.

³³ Victoria Laurie, "Maitland Brown Bust Bears Scars of When Row Came to a Head", *The Australian*, 2017.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bruce Scates (2021), "Set in Stone?: Dialogical Memorialisation and the Beginnings of Australia's Statue Wars", *Public History Review*, 28, p.7.

so got together and started moves to get the plaque on the monument.³⁶

Decision-Making Processes

On October 17 1988, Fremantle City Council agreed to the initial submission proposed by Scates and Frances, although opinion on the council was divided: whilst a majority supported the proposal for a plaque or counter monument, a minority called for the Maitland Brown Memorial to simply be removed - describing it as: 'an "unfortunate reminder" of Western Australia's past'.³⁷ The former Labour leader, Alderman Bill Latter, was the submission's most vocal supporter. However, at the City Council's next meeting, on November 21, the additional proposal by Minniecon and the La Grange community was raised, which was: 'beyond the original expectations of the council'.³⁸ Fremantle City Council did not have the funding for such a project, and so it went no further.

For the next five years, 'the Explorer's tribute occupied a kind of limbo', as Scates has argued: 'It was discredited but not publicly repudiated, symbolic - perhaps - of white Australia's failure to come to terms with its racist past'.³⁹ However, after the resurrection of the original proposal by the *Baldja* Network, following the 1993 Fremantle Festival, the Fremantle City Council quickly granted it unanimous approval. It was agreed that the estimated \$900 cost of the plaque would be covered by the City of Fremantle, and the Council's Community Services Division recommended that the wording approved in 1988 be accepted, which was as follows:

This plaque was erected by people who found the monument before you offensive / The monument describes the event at La Grange from one perspective only[;] the viewpoint of the white settlers / No mention is made of the right of Aboriginal people to defend their land or of the history of provocation which led to the explorers deaths / The punitive party mentioned here ended in the deaths of somewhere around twenty Aboriginal people[,] the whites were well-armed and equipped and none of their party was killed or wounded / This plaque is in memory of the Aboriginal people killed at La Grange[,] it also commemorates all other Aboriginal people who died during the invasion of their country / Lest We Forget[,] Mapa Jarriya-Nyalaku.⁴⁰

The new plaque was unveiled on April 9 1994, in a ceremony which centred on indigenous voices, as Glad Milroy from the *Baldja* Network explained:

We wanted the interpretation that murderers were justifiably punished amended to show

³⁶ The Commonwealth of Australia, *Walking Together: The First Steps*. Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service, 1994, p.202.

³⁷ Bruce Scates (2021), "Set in Stone?: Dialogical Memorialisation and the Beginnings of Australia's Statue Wars", *Public History Review*, 28, p.12.

³⁸ The Commonwealth of Australia, *Walking Together: The First Steps*. Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service, 1994, p.202.

³⁹ Bruce Scates (2021), "Set in Stone?: Dialogical Memorialisation and the Beginnings of Australia's Statue Wars", *Public History Review*, 28, p.9.

⁴⁰ Monument Australia, "Maitland Brown Memorial (Explorers' Monument)", *Monument Australia*, 2010.

Aborigines died defending their country from white invaders... and it was important that it be done with the support, approval, and involvement from La Grange.⁴¹

Noongar men from *Pinjarra* danced, traditional music was heard, and three Aboriginal activists - Ray Minniecon, John Dodo and Doris Edgar - addressed the crowds. Edgar's grandmother had survived the Injudinah Massacre, and their speeches served as a: 'living testimony [to...] the trauma colonisation visited on [Australia... and] to the triumph of survival'.⁴² The ceremony ended as four elders, who had been flown into *Walyalup* from *Bidyadanga* by the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority, sprinkled dust from the site of the massacre at the base of the memorial, and two white children laid wreaths of flowers in Aboriginal colours.

Whilst the ceremony itself focused on the experiences of Aboriginal peoples, supporters of the counter-monument have continually emphasised the significance of cross-community participation and cooperation. As Ros Porter explained:

part of the reason for its success is that there was a relationship, and trust established between the City of Fremantle and Aboriginal people in the community. Without that I don't think it would have eventuated. We knew each other because we had worked together before. The network people knew they could trust us.⁴³

As the debate around contested histories in public spaces has grown more heated in recent years, the success of the counter-monument on the Maitland Brown Memorial in standing: 'for reconciliation rather than division' is constantly referred to - including by the Australian Heritage Council, in a March 2018 report.⁴⁴ Yet, Scates has argued that whilst the plaque was a: 'necessary corrective', simply correcting history isn't enough; by rejecting initial plans for a series of plaques and a separate second memorial:

What the Fremantle city council ultimately agreed to was a truncated version of that extended counternarrative. Arguably that was a lost opportunity... to treat the Explorers' Memorial for what it is, an artefact in civic space, inviting further, deeper and ongoing interrogation.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Bruce Scates (2021), "Set in Stone?: Dialogical Memorialisation and the Beginnings of Australia's Statue Wars", *Public History Review*, 28, p.9.

⁴² Bruce Scates (2021), "Set in Stone?: Dialogical Memorialisation and the Beginnings of Australia's Statue Wars", *Public History Review*, 28, p.9.

⁴³ The Commonwealth of Australia, *Walking Together: The First Steps*. Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service, 1994, p.203.

⁴⁴ Vanessa Mills and Ben Collins, "The Controversial Statue That was Added to, Not Torn Down or Vandalised", *ABC News*, 2017; Australian Heritage Council, "Protection of Australia's Commemorative Places and Monuments", *Australian Heritage Council*, March 2018.

⁴⁵ Bruce Scates (2021), "Set in Stone?: Dialogical Memorialisation and the Beginnings of Australia's Statue Wars", *Public History Review*, 28, p.8.

Summary and Conclusions

The constructive cooperation between communities in Western Australia, which led to the recognition and correction of the Explorers' Monument's one-sided interpretation of a frontier conflict, is still rightly held up as a success story almost 30 years later. As debates around tearing down statues rage ever more fiercely, the counter-memorial on the Explorers' Monument stands as a testimonial to the power of confronting - rather than simply removing - contested histories in public spaces.

However, Bruce Scates has warned that decolonising the commemorative landscape is an ongoing process - recontextualising a monument should spark new debate, not end it.

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About Contested Histories

Many contestations have been over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces in recent years. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions, whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

Contested Histories is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon. Although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at the European Association for History Educators (EuroClio) in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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