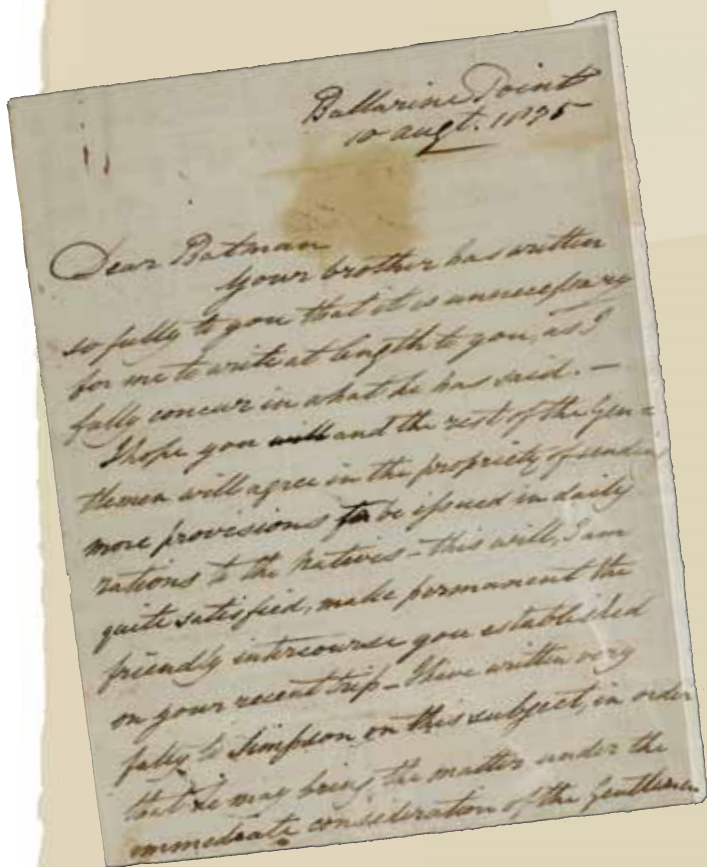


Dear Batman  
your

## REMARKABLE PURCHASES FROM A CABINET COLLECTION...



Original letter from John Helder Wedge to John Batman, dated Bellarine Point (Port Phillip) 10 August 1835 – one of the first letters sent by Wedge from Port Phillip.

In February, at the auction of the collection of Dr John Chapman, the National Museum of Australia purchased two highly significant letters relating to the early European settlement of Port Phillip. One of Melbourne's most highly respected collectors of Australiana, Chapman had been collecting for nearly fifty years and had acquired some spectacular items. These included the original Deed of Settlement of the South Australian Company and two significant letters recording aspects of the foundation of Victoria.

The letters were written in June and August 1835. Together with the National Museum's copy of the Batman Land Deed they provide rare and immediate insights into the circumstances surrounding the only 'treaty' to have been negotiated between Australian Aboriginal people and Europeans. Taken together, this

select group of documents will allow the Museum to further explore many facets of the evolving process of the formation of Australian nationhood between the foundations of New South Wales and Victoria:

The earliest letter, dated Hobart Town 27 June 1835, is a manuscript memorial to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and is signed by John Batman, John Helder Wedge, and all but one of the fifteen other members of the incipient Port Phillip Association. It was the syndicate's own copy of the cover letter sent to Lord Glenelg enclosing Batman's report to Lieutenant-Governor Colonel Arthur, describing the results of his voyage to Port Phillip and including copies of each of the two resultant land deeds.

The letter's intent is to assure Glenelg that they have established friendly and beneficial relations with the local Aboriginal people. It urges him to overrule the rejection of the Association's claims to land, based on Batman's treaties with the Port Phillip Aborigines. The letter discusses the importance of the treaty's obligation to provide an annual tribute of food and goods to the value of 200 pounds in perpetuity to the Chiefs of the Tribe. This was seen as necessary to compensate the Aborigines for the economic loss of their lands, acknowledging that they are in fact the owners of the soil.

The idea of a treaty between settlers seeking new lands for their sheep and cattle and the local Aboriginal population was not a mere self-serving and cynical gesture. Both Batman and particularly John Helder Wedge have been acknowledged as demonstrating a real concern that the conflict experienced between settlers and Tasmanian Aborigines should not be repeated over Bass Strait. Both men had seen the futility of Governor Arthur's Black Line, and Batman's 'roving parties', using Sydney Aborigines as intermediaries with the Tasmanians, had been an attempt at conciliation. Wedge's prolific letters to the colonial government regarding the position and treatment of Aborigines at Port Phillip attest his engagement with ideas on how to better the situation of Aborigines, given the reality of increasing pastoral activity on their lands.

In Wedge's letter written to Batman from the Indented Head camp on the Bellarine Point 10 August 1835, he is specifically concerned with the urgent need for more supplies of food to be sent for those Aborigines who had gathered at the settlement. This group included 'wild white man' William Buckley, a convict who had escaped from the aborted Sorrento settlement under Colonel Collins in 1803, and who subsequently lived with the local Aboriginal people.

Nearly thirty-two years later, on 7 July 1835, Buckley had walked into the camp maintained by Batman's men, and was befriended by Wedge when he arrived a month later to survey the settlement. Wedge quickly realised how useful Buckley could be to the Port Phillip Association in terms of being able to communicate with the Aborigines, and he immediately started campaigning for Buckley to be given a free pardon, preparing a petition which he forwarded to the Colonial Secretary.


In Wedge's letter to Batman, one of the very first written from Port Phillip back to Tasmania, Wedge stresses both the possible advantage for the Association and the humanitarian aspect to freeing Buckley.



Port Phillip Association letter  
Front page of the manuscript memorial to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Glenelg, dated Hobart Town 27 June 1835. The letter still retains the original pink ribbon tie.

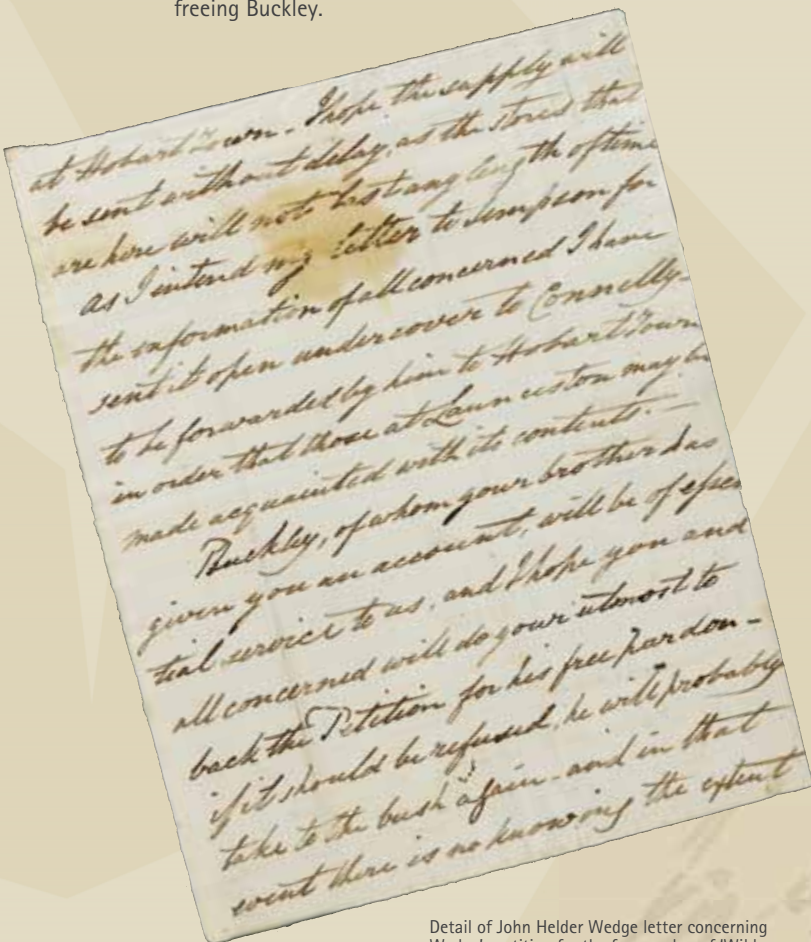
Buckley...will be of essential service to us, and I hope you and all concerned will do our utmost to back the petition for his pardon – if it should be refused, he will probably take to the bush again – and in that event there is no knowing the extent of bloodshed that might follow. As an act of humanity towards those who may reside here his free pardon ought to be granted ...

Wedge's letter is also highly significant in that it evidences his opinion that the Indented Head area is not suitable for a major settlement and that he intends to move the camp to the Fresh Water or Yarra River (which Wedge named) at the head of the port. This has led to speculation that it was Wedge rather than Batman (let alone Fawkner) who decided on the place for a village that was to become Melbourne.

Much of the complexity and subtle nuance of history is conveyed by these manuscript letters, the text of which will shortly be fully available on the National Museum of Australia website. 

Carol Cooper, Manager Registration

A fully referenced version of this article is available from the Editor, email [r.russell@nma.gov.au](mailto:r.russell@nma.gov.au)



Detail of John Helder Wedge letter concerning Wedge's petition for the free pardon of 'Wild White Man' William Buckley.