

## Blog update – July 2017

### **THE POWER OF A STORY: NARRAWONG HISTORY & LOCAL AUTHOR FORUM**

There was not a spare seat in the house by the end of the Narrawong History & Local Author Forum on Sunday 25 June 2017.

Close to 100 people packed out the Narrawong Mechanics Institute Hall for a day of inspiring and challenging story-telling from local authors, historians and Indigenous elders.

The day started with a local history panel, featuring Lead Artist of the Mount Clay aspect of the Narrawong Kang-o-meerteek Small Town Transformation, Wal Saunders, and local historian Bernard Wallace. The panel was chaired by Susie Lyons, Arts and Culture Manager for Glenelg Shire Council.



First session of the day and the hall is packed listening to Wal Saunders, Bernard Wallace and Susie Lyons discuss the Indigenous heritage of the region and the arrival of the whalers and sealers. Photo: Damian Goodman



From left, forum facilitator Susie Lyons, lead artist Wal Saunders and historian Bernard Wallace starting conversations about Narrawong's past at the Narrawong History & Local Author Forum on Sunday 25 June 2017. Photo: Damian Goodman.



Lead artist on the Kang-o-meerteek Mt Clay project, Wal Saunders, shares his vision for the sculpture to be installed at Mt Clay. Photo: Damian Goodman.

Mr Saunders elaborated on the story and rationale behind his proposed Mount Clay sculpture, a tribute to the Cart Gunditj who lit fires on the mountain as a signal to other clans that a whale had been beached. During first contact with the white whalers, this tradition was used by the Cart Gunditj to alert the newcomers of whale pods in the bay.

This explanation opened up into a wider discussion about injustices visited upon the Indigenous community by the newcomers, including the tragic and deadly confrontation known in Victorian history accounts as the Convincing Ground Massacre. The powerful conversations sparked by this discussion continued among audience members over tea and scones.

You can download a full copy of Mr Saunders' speech [here](#).

The second part of the day featured a local authors' panel with writers Ben Langdon, Annie Lanyon and Tony Wright, chaired by Jeremy Lee from ABC Local Radio.



Local authors share their perspectives on the Portland region and how it has informed their writing at the Narrawong History & Local Authors Forum. From left, session chair Jeremy Lee of ABC Local Radio, local author Ben Langdon, Fairfax journalist Tony Wright and researcher Annie Lanyon. Photo: Damian Goodman.

Mr Langdon, who has lived in Portland and Narrawong for fifteen years, spoke about representing regional Victoria in his writing for young adults. He discussed being influenced by distilled elements of experience such as the emotions or sense of place, and how he fictionalises community and landscape to make the specific more universal.



Local author Annie Lanyon sharing the story of Kalunggu, an Aboriginal woman enslaved by William Dutton, at the Narrawong History & Local Author Forum. Photo: Damian Goodman.

Ms Lanyon shared her research on Kalunggu, one of several young Aboriginal women enslaved by William Dutton during his time at Portland Bay. The talk traced what we know of her life, from her abduction as a child in South Australia, to her enslavement by Dutton, and what happened to her after he abandoned her. This moving talk, based on detailed historical research, moved one of the audience members to tears.

Mr Wright, a senior journalist with The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald, brought a personal perspective to the stories of the region's troubled past. Mr Wright's great, great grandfather arrived in Portland Bay as a whaler with William Dutton. In his talk, he shared how he has tried to gain more of an understanding of the unimaginably long history of the region's Indigenous people, and to acknowledge the violence of the past in an area that he, too, calls home.

The day was a powerful exercise in opening conversations and expanding knowledge about the history of the region. 'Incredible', 'unbelievable', 'moving', 'confronting' and 'challenging' were just some of the words used to describe the event by audience members, and there was a hunger in the room to talk and do more.



A day of incredibly moving and challenging conversations comes to an end with questions for the authors at the Narrawong History & Local Author Forum. Photo: Damian Goodman.

For those keen to learn more about Wal Saunders' planned installation on Mount Clay, a maquette (scale model) of the sculpture will be on display at the Narrawong Mechanics Institute Hall from 3-12 July 2017, as part of the Winter Arts exhibition.

You can also [download a copy](#) of Mr Saunders' speech at the forum.

If you would like to provide feedback on the event or become involved in the Kang-o-meerteek project, please email.

The Narrawong History & Local Author Forum was hosted by the Kang-o-meerteek project in partnership with Glenelg Libraries.

Thanks to Yvette and Tanya from Glenelg Libraries, Glenelg Shire Mayor Anita Rank, the facilitators Susie Lyons from Glenelg Shire Council and Jeremy Lee from ABC Local Radio, Damian Goodman and Powerhouse Productions for photography and filming, and of course, the amazing speakers for a day of compelling story-telling.

The Narrawong Kang-o-meerteek Small Town Transformation acknowledges the Kart Gunditj and Gilgar Gunditj who are the original custodians of the land on which this project takes place, and pays its respect to all past and present members of the Dhauwurrd Wurrung Language Group and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

*Kang-o-meerteek logo was designed by Kellie Frankland Kilcarer and Gilgar Gunditj Copyright © 2016.*

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“Small Town Transformations is a Victorian Government Initiative delivered by Regional Arts Victoria”



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