

19 Nov. 2021

The Mayor and Councillors
City of Moreland

Letter of Request to Council

There are some uncomfortable facts ingrained in the City of Moreland's current identity.

Recognising Council's strong support for respect and reconciliation, we wish to assist the City to use addressing this regrettable inheritance as an opportunity to enhance awareness, acknowledgement and healing.

The name 'Moreland' contains disrespectful insensitivity through direct association with both slavery and dispossession. It was introduced locally in 1839 by speculator Farquhar McCrae who participated in the catastrophic early land privatisation that swept the Indigenous occupants of millennia from most the present municipal area in less than two years. McCrae then named this tract 'Moreland' to commemorate the large Jamaican slave plantation that his family had helped operate.

In June 1994 the state government amalgamated the former Cities of Coburg and Brunswick to form a new municipality under appointed commissioners. The name 'Moreland' was decreed for the new entity, despite its racist associations being raised at the time. The municipal area then expanded in December 1994.

Robust evidence now readily available clearly confirms the details and magnitude of these connections with brutal enslavement globally and mass dispossession locally. Retention of this name for the principal civic body for a diverse community of 200,000 citizens is untenable.

The undersigned, representing the traditional owners of the land - the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, and citizens of the municipality, offer support and encouragement to Council to utilise re-naming of the Council as an opportunity to complement the current spirit of truth-telling and reconciliation, embracing this change as a timely platform for awareness-raising, acknowledgement and healing.

No changes to established place names or features are being proposed, solely the name used to identify our municipal Council. An alternative name is not being suggested, enabling its selection to be part of a respectful process devised in partnership with all stakeholders.

We request Council to make the following commitments at its next meeting:

- Partner with stakeholders in a respectful process to select a suitable new name during 2022*.
- Initiate and implement actions that acknowledge the impacts and consequences of dispossession, encourage respectful understanding through truth-telling, redress injustice, and heal racist hurt.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Gardiner	Deputy Chair, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
Julianne Axford	Board member, WWCHAC
Gail Smith	Naming Researcher, WWCHAC
Tony Garvey	Cultural Values Representative, WWCHAC
Dr. Klara Hansen	Acting Manager Research Unit, WWCHAC
Rev. Alistair Macrae	past National President, Uniting Church in Australia; former Moderator, Uniting Church Vic. & Tas.
Phil Cleary	former MHR for Wills, 1992-96
Jo Connellan	former Councillor 2004-12
Rod Duncan	research coordinator
Beci Orpin	Freelance designer, illustrator and maker
Rafael Rashid	Brunswick entrepreneur, founder Beatbox Kitchen

Other citizens are also being invited to add their names to this letter of request.

** The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation has indicated its expertise and capacity to advise Council in designing a process for identifying options for a suitable name that reflect local Indigenous place names and language.*

BRIEF BACKGROUND FACTS

The **Moreland estate plantation** in southern Jamaica is well-documented in historic records now assembled by University College London, showing that it was active from at least 1783 to 1887. Moreland's business was recorded as "*sugar, rum and hire of enslaved people*" (slave trading). Over many decades it held between 500 and 700 slaves in any year, the majority being female. In November 1835 Moreland's slave-owners received £11,437 3s 3d 'compensation' from the British government for 585 slaves (about \$A2.65 million current value). But these abducted workers were then required to endure a mandatory unpaid 'apprenticeship' for four years, so would still have been in bondage when the name 'Moreland' was first used near Melbourne by McCrae.

Source: University College London 'Legacies of British Slave-ownership' project www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/2145

Mass dispossession, 1838-40

From 1838 to 1841 (soon after John Batman's unlawful arrival in 1835) the colonial government allocated 210,000 acres (850 square kilometres) of land surrounding Melbourne for private occupation - although there were only 1,264 non-Indigenous people in Victoria at the start of 1838. This process 'granted' exclusive private ownership rights to the highest bidders at auctions, making Indigenous occupants trespassers on their homelands of millennia, liable to removal by official force. In four tranches over 20 months, most of the land now in the Moreland municipal area was converted to personal property of just 29 men by mid-1840 (occupying 86% of the current Council area, and rising to 97% by 1850). In 1839 there were official reports of malnutrition and begging "*in the absence of traditional food*". The catastrophic impact of the rapid pace and extent of this dispossession could reasonably be described as genocide.

The accompanying map shows how early land privatisation rapidly swept across the current municipal area.

Sources: Crown Land records & maps; Victorian Year Book 1882-3; **Moreland Thematic History**, Historica for M.C.C., 2010

Farquhar McCrae arrived in the newly named Melbourne in June 1839 at the height of this land frenzy, and with borrowed funds promptly started acquiring 'grants' of large parcels of open land. Adding to other properties, in October 1839 he acquired a square mile extending from Moonee Ponds Creek to Sydney Road, and named it 'Moreland' to commemorate the Jamaican estate his father and grandfather had helped operate, where workers were still in bondage at the time. In late 1839 he became a Director of the Port Phillip Bank, described as "*simply a 'mutual accommodation' pie*" for Directors, who "*kept their own fingers in it*". In 1841 he acquired adjacent land, and built a house named 'La Rose' on an elevated outlook. In 1843, McCrae was in debt, the bank had collapsed, and being pursued by those claiming he'd swindled them. He moved to Sydney, where he encountered other disputes about his reputation before dying there in 1850, aged 43.

Sources: *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 March, 1846 (Trove); A. Marsden, Melbourne Athenaeum, 'First Committee, 1839', August 2011 http://www.mahistory.org.au/images/Website/pdf/earlyyears/firstcommittee_mccrae.pdf; and more.]

A further **close link between slavery in the Caribbean and the occupation of Victoria** in the 1830s was the shift of investment from the sugar/slave trade to the newest 'easy money' from wool growing and brokering. Reduced profitability with the cessation of slavery from 1834 and the huge flood of capital from the 'compensation' payments to former slave owners both fuelled a frenzied quest for alternative investment opportunities across the Empire. The initial invasion of what is now Victoria and the ensuing 'grassland grab' funded by private consortia (including public officials undermining official policies), which has been described as "*state-sanctioned private conquest*". [James Boyce, '1835: the founding of Melbourne and the conquest of Australia' (2011).]

The rush to establish pastoral runs - commonly referred to as 'squatting' - largely occurred beyond the 'limits of settlement', and differed significantly from the systematic alienation of Crown (public) land that occurred surrounding Melbourne in 1838-41. Squatters did not have any ownership of the land initially (only a 'depasturing' licence), and in theory they were supposed to co-exist with Indigenous occupants. But the 210,000 acres privatised around Melbourne in just four years gave exclusive private ownership, with the right to re-sell, subdivide and speculate. This immediately (in law) dispossessed the Indigenous occupants through the exclusive occupancy of others, who could call on authorities to enforce their right to exclude 'trespassers'.

Further details, sources and links are available at [\[website not yet activated\]](#)

KEY POINTS

Moreland estate, Jamaica

- Moreland Estate was located in southern Jamaica, operating from at least 1783 to 1887.
- University College London has assembled historic records of *'Legacies of British Slave-ownership'* in an easily accessible format, with detailed records of 'Moreland'. www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/2145
- These show Moreland's business was sugar and rum production and "*hire of enslaved persons*" (slave trading), holding between 500 and 700 slaves (half or more female) in any year.
- In November 1835 Moreland's slave-owners received £11,437 3s 3d "compensation" from the British government for 585 slaves (\$A2.65 million current value - about \$4,500 per person).
- But abducted workers continued in bondage as mandatory unpaid "apprentices" for four years, so would not have gained their liberty when McCrae chose to use the name 'Moreland' locally.

Farquhar McCrae

- Born 1807 into a Scottish family with colonial and military links across the British Empire, Farquhar trained in medicine, joined the Army, but left in 1835 ill with "*a dissecting injury*".
 - Grandfather Alexander Macrae was a 'planter' (administrator) at Moreland Estate 1770 to 1796.
 - Farquhar's father William Gordon Macrae (who later changed spelling to 'McCrae') was born in Scotland in 1768, living at Moreland estate Jamaica from babyhood until he was almost 30.
 - Five of William's children including brothers Alexander, Andrew and Farquhar each moved to 'Port Phillip' with their families from 1839, just four years after Batman's unauthorised arrival.
 - In just 3½ months, as colonial authorities began to survey and auction off large rural parcels, Farquhar speculated over £3,000 (\$A600,000+), including borrowed funds, at land auctions.
 - On 3 October 1839 he secured a square mile stretching from Moonee Ponds Creek to Sydney Road which he named 'Moreland', soon adding adjacent land to build a house ('La Rose').
 - Helped establish institutions; gained public appointments; co-founded a bank (that failed).
 - In 1843, facing debts and duels he moved to Sydney, where he died in April 1850, aged 43.
- [Georgiana McCrae, wife of Farquhar's brother Andrew, kept diaries and letters from which much of the above detail derives: supplemented by Crown Land records and other sources listed with accompanying material.]

The mass dispossession (particularly within the **current City of Moreland** municipal area)

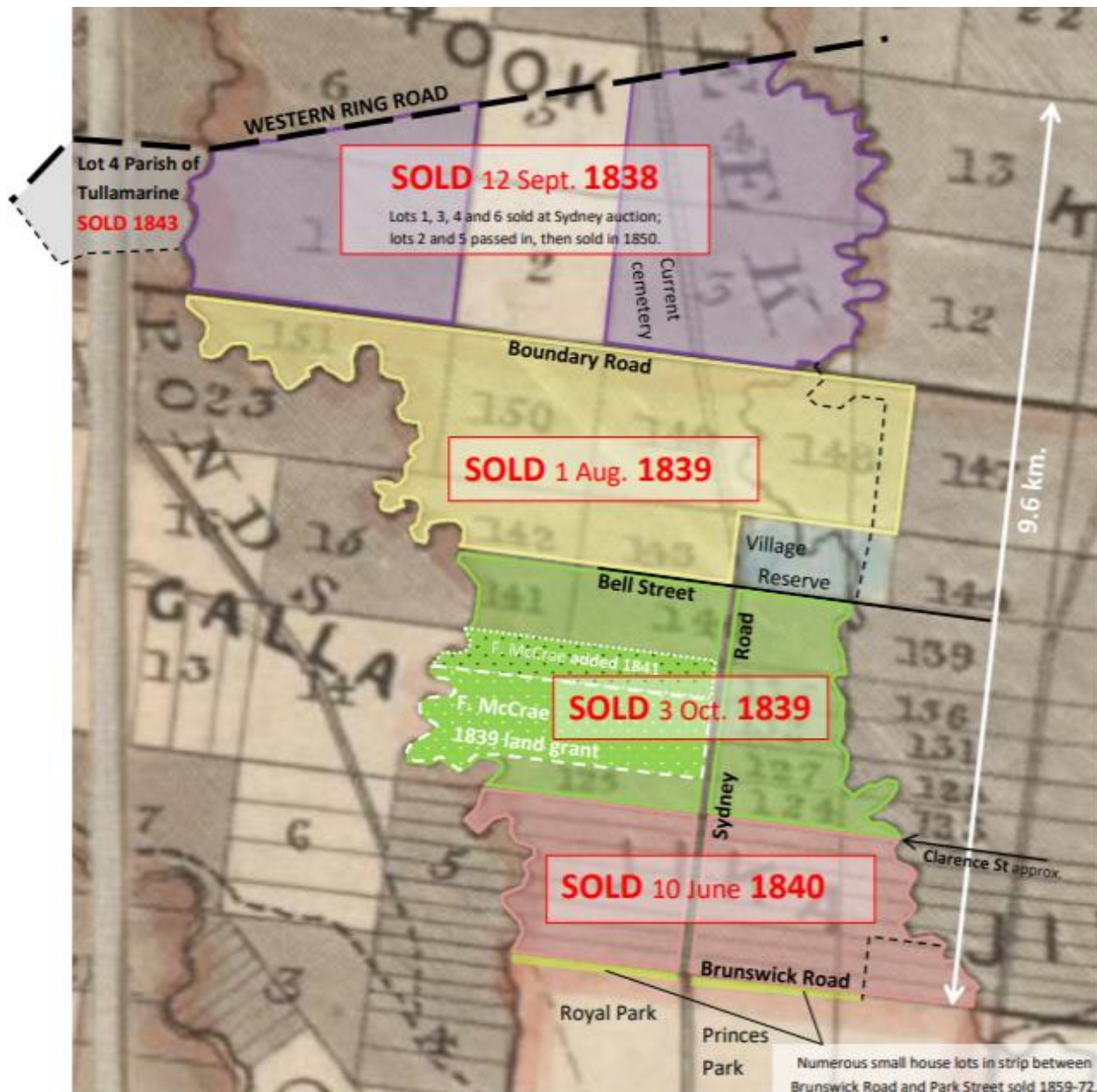
- Mid-1830s flood of slave "compensation" capital and declining profitability of Caribbean sugar trade helps stimulate imperial speculation to access wool-grazing lands of 'Port Phillip District'.
- April 1835: Batman (agent for land speculators) uses a "treaty" to attempt private settlement.
- Aug. 1835: Gov. Bourke issues a stern proclamation they would be "*dealt with ... as intruders*".
- But no enforcement; stalling until political shift in London enabled support for settlement.
- 1836: colonial authorities survey Hoddle grid and begin auctions of small town lots.
- 210,000 acres (850 sq. km.) of rural land privatised 1838-41: mass dispossession of Indigenous.
- Grants give 'freehold' right to exclusive occupancy (and obligation upon authorities to enforce), so formalise the dispossession of Indigenous custodians from their homelands of millennia.

Within the current **Moreland municipal area**:

- Sept. 1838: large rural lots (north of Boundary Road) surveyed, with 'grants' to highest bidders.
- Three auctions (August & October 1839, June 1840) alienate most land from Boundary Road to Brunswick Road. [see map] By 1840, 86% of current municipal area alienated (43.8 of 50.9 km²).
- Farquhar McCrae buys Lots 126 & 133 (638 acres), naming this 'Moreland' after slave estate.
- McCrae acquires adjacent Lot 134 (~300 acres) in 1841; builds house on prominent hilltop.
- Catastrophic displacement of Indigenous population; reports of begging for food & malnutrition.
- Across current municipal area, all lots allocated by 1840 were controlled by just 29 men.

The following map shows the extent and rapid pace of privatisation/dispossession across the current municipal area.

Land granted into exclusive private ownerships, displacing Indigenous occupants during 1838-40, within the current municipal area of the City of Moreland.



At just four auctions over 20 months, by 1840 most of the land in the current municipal area was alienated to become the private property of just 29 men, primarily speculators. (Land shaded purple, yellow, green & pink.)

This saw 43 km² (86% of present municipal area) allocated as 'grants' for exclusive private ownership (rising to over 97% by 1850), rendering Indigenous occupants to be trespassers in their homelands of millennia. The extensive scale and rapid pace of this dispossession was catastrophic. By 1839 there were official reports of begging & malnutrition "*in the absence of traditional food*".

Sources: Crown Land records, Public Records Office Victoria; *Moreland Thematic History* (Historica for M.C.C. 2010).

Base map: Thomas Ham 1849, State Library of Vic. (pale grey: private land by 1849; blue: reserve for future village).