



Manna Matters

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Manna Matters is a publication of Manna Gum. Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation which seeks to help Christians reclaim and practise biblical teaching on material life, and promote understanding of the ways our economic lives impact upon ourselves, others, and the earth.

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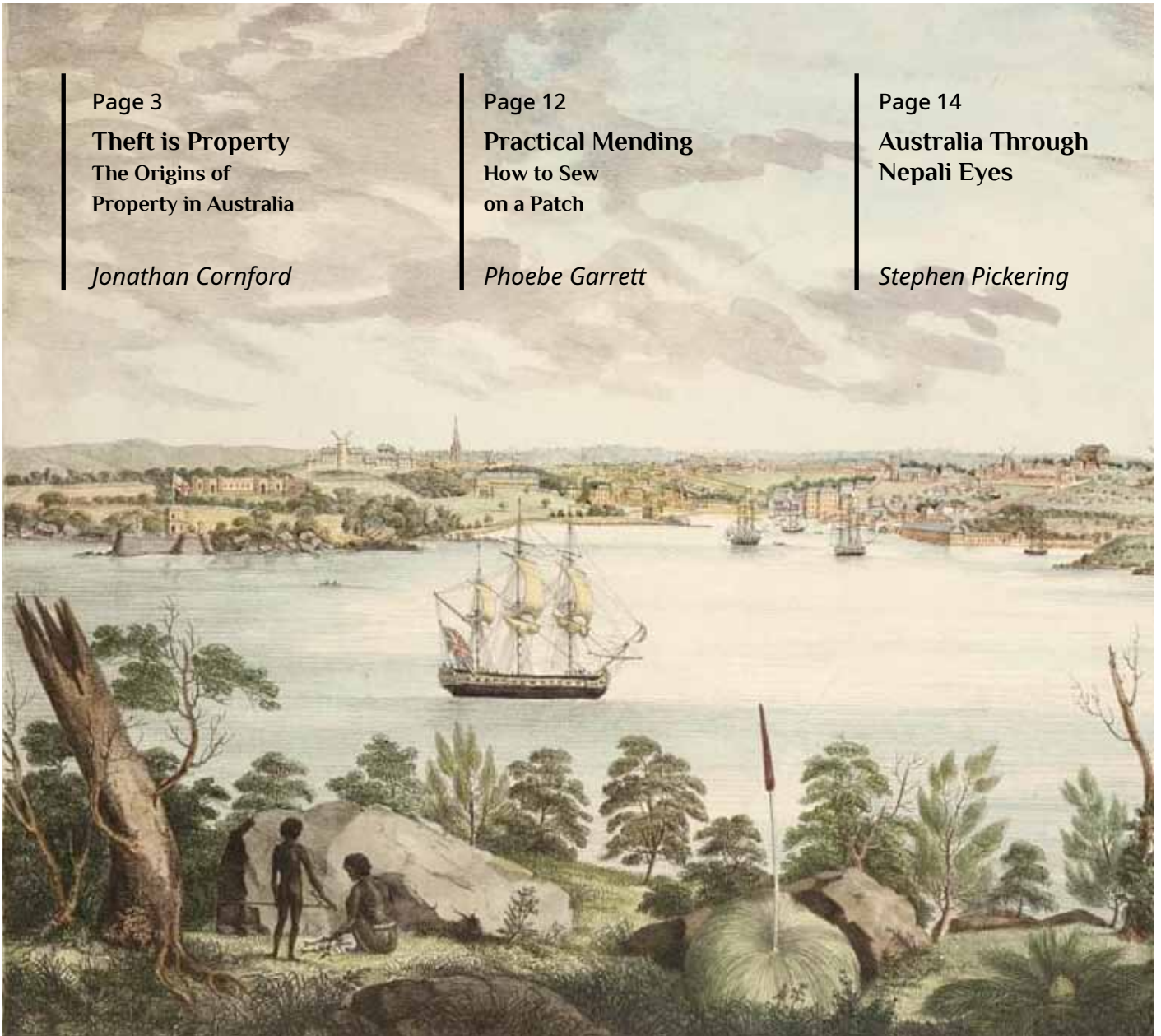
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NEWS FROM LONG GULLY

First, the important news. Last night I used up the last head of garlic from our larder. A moment of panic. Then I went out to the garden and pulled up a stalk of garlic and, lo!, it was ready eat. Cooking with fresh garlic that hasn't been hung and dried for a couple of weeks is a bit different, but still supplies our basic human need for garlic. Actually, it is better than the 12 month-old garlic I just finished.

When we designed our house, we converted the space that most designs have for a walk-in-robe to a small larder instead. Located in the middle of the house, insulated and with no external walls, it keeps the most even and cool temperature in the house. We have discovered that our crop of garlic, if treated right (dried well and kept airy) now lasts the whole twelve months till the next one is available (now!).

Garlic is a great crop to become self-sufficient in: easy to grow, doesn't take up much space, and the stuff from the shop is smaller, full of chemicals and expensive.

If you don't have a larder, or similar space, you can generally store garlic for 7-9 months before it starts going off. At that point, you can separate the cloves and freeze them. They are a little mushy when defrosted, but fine if you are just cooking with it.

Hard copy *Manna Matters*

Last edition I put out a call for feedback on whether *Manna Matters* should finally bite the bullet and go fully electronic, or whether we retain a hard copy and make a radical switch to brown paper—the only actual post-consumer waste paper that we know of. The response was overwhelming: *Manna Matters* readers

were virtually unanimous in supporting the importance of a material product, both for reasons of good reading and deeper reasons as well. Thanks to all those who made contact.

We strongly encourage any who would actually prefer to get the hard copy to take the leap and sign up (go to the website). If you are uncomfortable about adding to the financial cost, you are always free to chip in a little donation.

Reflecting on the world

Once I resolved my garlic crisis, I had a little headspace to reflect on the the world crisis. At our recent Manna Gum AGM, the retiring Chair, Peter Chapman, gave an inspired reflection on the ebbs and flows of American democracy in the post-war period. He suggested that the election of Donald Trump for a second term could not have happened at any previous period of American history, and yet it was the product of all that had gone before. In some respects, Donald Trump might be seen as the incarnation of the spirit that American culture has nurtured: worshipping the will to power, wealth, superior violence, and self-glorification; willing to sacrifice truth, ideals, and human lives to this cult.

I was reminded of W.B. Yeats' imagining of a dark incarnation of the '*Spiritus Mundi*' (the Spirit of the World) in his poem, 'The Second Coming':

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and
everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

(Continued on back page)



THEFT IS PROPERTY

THE ORIGINS OF PROPERTY IN AUSTRALIA

A CHRISTIAN ETHIC OF PROPERTY (PART 4)

by Jonathan Cornford

In 2013, Kim and I purchased a vacant block of land (one third of an acre) in the Bendigo suburb of Long Gully, on which we eventually built a house. After twenty years of renting, we were taking our first steps towards what many see as the great Australian dream: home ownership. By great fortune, the block of land we purchased was the last in the built up area in our bit of Long Gully, and is immediately adjacent to bushland. The bushland abutting us is 'unallocated crown land' that has mining history dating back to the early years of the Bendigo gold rush in the 1850s, and so it will never be built upon.

We love having the bush right next to us, and our language ('our bush') betrays a sense of particular entitlement of enjoyment that is not recognised by the law. If you walk through the bush to the top of the hill, you can see across the valley of Derwent Gully Creek, showing a mix of bush, housing, and mining history.

Looking out across this scene, it is not hard to picture things prior to the coming of Europeans: the surrounding hills forested by large and stately Iron Barks and, in the valley, a grassland or open woodland covered in Wallaby and

Spear grasses, with a shallow, clear-water creek running for much of the year. This was the *djandak* (country) of the Dja Dja Wurrung, one of the Kulin language groups whose *djaara* (people) were distributed in clan groups from the Campaspe River in the east to the Avon River in the west, south from Daylesford up to Boort in the north (see the map on p.7).

In 1836, the first white faces appeared on their land: an exploration party of about 20 men, driving sheep and cattle, under the command of Major Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor General of the New South Wales colony. Within a frighteningly small space of time the clans of the Dja Dja Wurrung were effectively dispossessed of their territory by a flood of sheep and men with guns. Without announcement, negotiation, or treaty, their land was simply taken. There was no compensation. Much of the violence that accompanied this process was due to the fact that, according to the complaints of the colonists, Aboriginal people refused to respect their property.

In the eastern states of the USA, there is a significant amount of land where modern title can be traced back to a direct sale from a Native American owner to an English colonist. In Australia, no such titles exist. All freehold title in Australia has been either granted by, or purchased from, the British Crown, who unilaterally took possession of all the land of this continent in 1788. Or at least it said it did, and it had the guns to answer anyone who said otherwise.

Property is theft

Over three articles in the previous editions of *Manna Matters* I have endeavoured to lay a foundation for a Christian ethic of property. I have been arguing that the biblical vision and Christian tradition offers a constructive vision of property that provides a radical yet constructive challenge to the dominant conceptions of our time. In the previous article (*MM* Aug 2024) I indicated I would conclude the series in this article with a proposal for a contemporary Christian *practice* of property. But that was

Right: The Expedition of Major Thomas Mitchell: a 'harbinger of mighty changes'. Mitchell's expedition passed through Dja Dja Wurrung Country in 1836. Paintings by Eliza Tree, 2010.

Previous page: The Founding of Australia, by Algernon Talmage, 1937. State Library of New South Wales.

foolish. I thought I could address the context of settler colonisation *and* our present context in one article, but the enormity of the facts of our history has overwhelmed me.

What does it mean to think about a Christ-centred practice of property in a nation that owes its very existence to a colossal act of theft? The third-of-an-acre which we bought in Long Gully was stolen land. In point of fact, the very form of property that it represents (a tradable freehold title) *was created by theft.*

In the previous article, I rejected the ideas of socialist anarchism which see all property as, by nature, a form of theft. The Christian tradition offers a much more constructive vision for the role of property. However, the understanding of property that the British brought to Australia in

What does it mean to think about a Christ-centred practice of property in a nation that owes its very existence to a colossal act of theft?



1788 represents *a turning away* from that biblical vision. The result is that all modern forms of property in Australia were indeed created by an original act of theft.

But was it really stolen? Incredibly, this is a question that still remains obscured for many Australians. In a time of culture wars, claims about 'colonisation', 'dispossession', and 'theft' can seem to be merely part of the barrage of moral accusation that each side hurls at the other. Before we can reconstruct a positive and practical Christian ethic of property in Australia, we must confront this terrible question. I hope to do this, not through a series of moral assertions and accusations, but through an account of what actually happened. Somehow we need try and step back from the manic hand-wringing of both sides of the culture wars and come to a clear and sober account of our history and its implications for the present day.

Property before colonisation

Did Indigenous Australians own things? Did they own land? And what do we mean by 'own'? Once again, this is a question that remains doggedly obscured for many Australians.

Rather than attempt to generalise for the whole continent, I will address the question through the specific and concrete example of the Dja Dja Wurrung, where I live.

The primary social unit of Dja Dja Wurrung (and broader Kulin) society was the 'clan': a localised group who were bonded by patrilineal descent (which was unusual amongst Indigenous Australians). There were sixteen clans (that we know of) who shared the Dja Dja Wurrung language/dialect. The names of most of these clan groups are still known, however, the name of the particular clan group that occupied the Bendigo region, where we live, appears lost to memory.

Each clan occupied a clearly defined area of land, to which they had a spiritual/cosmological connection, and over which they had particular rights and responsibilities. However, the *rights of usage* of particular resources within a territory (a river, a lake, a tree) were very complex, and could extend beyond the clan through kinship, marriage, and moiety relations. (Kulin peoples were divided into two moieties—*bunjil* (the eaglehawk) and *waa* (the crow)—that conferred certain religious and ecological responsibilities and determined who you could and could not marry.)

Nevertheless, despite the complexity of access and usage rights, there is no doubt that such rights were clearly, and even rigidly, defined, and the clan was the ultimate determiner and arbiter of such rights. In the terms of European international law (both then and now), the clan maintained 'rightful possession' of the territory and it exercised sovereign legal jurisdiction within that territory. Put simply, the clan was the owner of the land.

More than that, there is strong evidence that individuals or family groups within a clan could own a particular resource (for example, a tree in which wild honey was sourced, or possums could be smoked out) and it was considered a very grave offence to make use of someone else's property. In the case of a possum tree, the ownership of the resource was tied to the significant amount of labour that had been put into developing the tree as a resource. This was a definition of ownership that the seventeenth century philosopher, John Locke, would have recognised (see *MM* Aug 2024). Moreover, just as in Britain, ownership of such property was inherited within the family.

Finally, there is simply no doubt that the products of Aboriginal craft—spears, necklaces, axes, nets, dili bags, coolamons, shields etc.—were considered personal possessions, and Aboriginal folk felt much the same way as Europeans about people pinching their stuff. Moreover, such items were traded in extensive exchange networks that criss-crossed the continent. The Dja Dja Wurrung were particularly keen to trade their cumbungi-shaft spears for the greenstone axes produced to the south. But *land* was never traded or taken. Due to the primary role of ancestral-spiritual connection to land (and the associated ecological



knowledge that went with it), there was little logic to acquiring someone else's land.

The erasure of ownership

Many Australians don't realise how unusual the colonisation of Australia was, because we know that North America, the Caribbean, southern Africa, and many of the Pacific islands, were also subject to colonisation by the British. But how colonisation proceeded, and how it was justified, differed substantially, in ways that still matter today.

The Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Americas proceeded by 'conquest': a well established concept of international law where one political sovereign took over the sovereignty of another political unit by force of arms. They also claimed a right of 'discovery' of non-Christian lands that had been granted to them by the Pope, though no one else found this very convincing.

Dja Dja Wurrung Recognition & Settlement Agreement Map



Left: A possum tree: required cutting a hole in the tree with a stone axe, used to smoke out possums – about three days work! Markings on the tree clearly indicated ownership. Sturt Exhibition, 1833.

Right: The djandak of the Dja Dja Wurrung. In 2013 the Dja Dja Wurrung were the first Aboriginal group to sign a Recognition & Settlement Agreement with the Victorian Government, giving them some cultural heritage, land use and joint management rights on their traditional lands.

When the British first began establishing colonies in North America in the seventeenth century, there were some debates about what it was they were doing. By the eighteenth century, they had reached a verdict: they rejected the idea that they were engaged in conquest like the Spanish, which, in any case, still would not make them owners of the land, only the political rulers. Instead, British land acquisition in North America proceeded by purchase and by treaty. The reality on the ground was far more unjust and dubious than that, however the formal justification mattered, because it recognised both the political status and the rights of ownership of Native Americans. Similar processes were followed in New Zealand and much of the Pacific.

However, when the British came to Australia, they colonised neither by right of conquest nor

by right of purchase or treaty. They explicitly disavowed all of these usual practices. Rather, the British simply claimed that the continent belonged to no one (it was 'desert and uncultivated'), and was thus free for the taking. Why so different?

Many Australians don't realise how unusual the colonisation of Australia was.

There are two foundational elements to what has come to be known as the *terra nullius* argument (although that term generally wasn't used at the time). Firstly, the

British who came to Australia were shaped by Enlightenment ideas of a staged progression of human society from 'the state of nature,' through agricultural society, to urban and commercial society. Property rights were considered to originate with the development of agriculture. The absence of agriculture in Aboriginal societies meant that the British assumed an absence of property rights, especially in land. Bruce Pascoe has argued in *Dark Emu* that Aboriginal people



The Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1840. Painting by Ōriwa Haddon.

did practise agriculture. I will not address the complexities of this claim here; what matters is that the early British colonists were convinced they did not. According to Watkin Tench, one of the most sympathetic and knowledgeable of the early colonists, 'To the cultivation of the ground they are utter strangers.'

Moreover, the complexity of Indigenous property and access rights, described above, was largely invisible to the British. They simply lacked the mental furniture to comprehend them, even in the few cases when people were curious enough to inquire. The British were convinced that the people they found living in *Terra Australis* merely roamed over the face of the land. With their staged conception of human society, the British could tell themselves that they were bringing civilisation and advancement to the Indigenous peoples. As one colonist put it, advancing civilisation was 'a *progressive work*'.

The second factor that led the British to claim Australia as *terra nullius* is more cynical. One reason that led North American colonists to

prefer purchase and treaty over conquest was that they judged it a far easier and cheaper way to acquire land. The various indigenous nations of North America were daunting military opponents. Similarly, in New Zealand the British saw the Māori as formidable opponents. In contrast, following their first visit to Australia in 1770 (coming from New Zealand) James Cook and Joseph Banks reported to a government committee that they considered a settlement would receive little trouble from Indigenous inhabitants. This view was reinforced by their (erroneous) perception of how thinly populated the continent was. Moreover, Banks had concluded (correctly) that land could not be purchased from its inhabitants as they simply would not recognise such a transaction as possible.

On the other hand, as colonial courts were acutely aware, if the British acknowledged that they were conquering Australia, then, according to their own law, they would have to acknowledge the existence of a prior legal

system, and thus the existence of prior rights in property. As one High Court judge later made clear (Coe vs Commonwealth, 1979): 'It is fundamental to our legal system that the Australian colonies became British possessions by *settlement* and *not by conquest*.'

Thus, whereas Cook's orders in 1770 had stipulated that he was not to seize any land that was inhabited, Arthur Phillip's orders in 1778 were to simply take whatever land was necessary to establish the colony. Every increment of colonisation thereafter proceeded on the same understanding. As historian, Stuart Banner, puts it:

British lawyers and colonial officials concluded that Britons were no more bound to respect the property rights of Aborigines than they were to respect the property rights of kangaroos.

Doubts about *terra nullius*

Nevertheless, despite the weight of intellectual and institutional pressure advancing the idea of Australia as *terra nullius*, it was not long before people began to perceive the lie. Arthur Phillip himself quite quickly came to understand that the colony had unjustly appropriated the land of the Eora, and this was a key reason he was so keen to limit the geographic area of the penal settlement. He hoped that Port Jackson could remain an isolated British outpost, perched on the edge of a vast continent.

It was a vain hope. Once there, the pressure towards continual expansion was irresistible, and the primary driver of this was not official policy but settlers themselves. Again and again, settlers defied official decrees and pushed the bounds of colonisation further. This is testified by the strange fact that the closest thing to a colonial aristocracy in Australia were people known as 'squatters': people who illegally occupy some else's land.

But the further and harder they pushed, the more the lie of *terra nullius* became evident as

Aboriginal peoples fought to protect their lands. In 1802, when the French explorer Nicholas Baudin visited New South Wales, he harangued Governor King about the wrongfulness of 'seizing the land which they own and which has given them birth'. King himself urged his replacement, Governor Bligh, not to overreact to Aboriginal crop destruction, 'as I have ever considered them the real Proprietors of the Soil.'

By the 1820s and 1830s such doubts had become widespread, voiced in newspapers in Australia and in Britain, by parliamentarians and officials in the Colonial Office. The doubts about *terra nullius* were sharpened by increasing unease about the violence of the colonial frontier. Here is part of a sermon (later published) given by the Baptist preacher, Rev John Saunders, in Sydney in 1838:

First, we have robbed him without any sanction, that I can find either in natural or revealed law; we descended as invaders upon his territory and took possession of the soil. It is not just to say that the natives had no notion of property, and therefore we could not rob them of that which they did not possess; for accurate information shews that each tribe had its distinct locality, and each superior person in the tribe a portion of this district. From these their hunting grounds, they have been individually and collectively dispossessed. [...]

Thirdly, we have shed their blood. [...] We have not been fighting with a natural enemy, but have been eradicating the possessors of the soil, and why,

forsooth? because they were troublesome, because some few had resented the injuries they had received, and then how were they destroyed? by wholesale, in cold blood; let the Hawkesbury and Emu Plains tell their history, let Bathurst give in her account, and the Hunter render her tale, not to mention the South.

It was such an atmosphere that led to the only attempt in Australia to negotiate a treaty with Indigenous owners, between John Batman and Wurundjeri elders in 1835, in what was to become Melbourne. Although such purchases

'It is not just to say that the natives had no notion of property, and therefore we could not rob them of that which they did not possess.'

- Rev John Saunders, 1838

had been common practice in North America, it was immediately invalidated by Governor Bourke and the Colonial Office. Despite, the many voices being raised in objection both within and without government, once set in motion, the lie of *terra nullius* was considered too difficult to unravel. Indeed, it took 204 years following the arrival of the First Fleet for a court to recognise that the original inhabitants of this continent were in fact its owners.

Coming to terms with history

The High Court's 1992 Mabo Decision is rightfully seen as a landmark moment in Australian history, and Eddie Mabo should be recognised not only as a great Indigenous leader, but as one the heroes in our nation's history. However, amidst all the furore created by the Court's simple recognition of the obvious fact of prior ownership, little attention was given to a more sombre fact that it also recognised: the majority of 'native title' on this continent has since been extinguished by the unilateral action of the British crown. The High Court, itself a product of this unilateral action, did not, and could not, challenge this fact.

There is simply no way to lay out a factual account of Australian history and avoid the conclusion that the British simply took land that belonged to others. In anyone's ordinary moral language, this was an act of theft. (Indeed, the growing scholarly consensus is that even by the

standards of international law in 1788, it must still be judged as theft.) Of course, the reason we have so long denied this very simple and obvious fact is that it places a terrible question mark over our very existence as a nation. It has a rather deflating effect on the 'oi, oi, oi's following a cry of 'Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!'.

What is a Christian response to these facts? In the following article I will discuss some practical responses to property questions in contemporary Australia. Here, I want to address the more foundational question: do the facts of our history invalidate all modern property (i.e. all property derived from the British crown), and do they indeed invalidate our nation as a whole?

To some extent, we all know the answer to this question already: if we were to answer 'yes' to both of these questions, there would be virtually nothing we could do about it. In 2009, Anglican theologian, Peter Adam, suggested that, morally speaking, if Indigenous people asked all non-Indigenous people to now leave, then we should be prepared to do so: 'I am not sure where we would go, but that would be our problem.' I cannot agree. Relocating a nation of 28 million people is frankly impossible (who would accept this flood of emigrants?) and such a thought bubble advances us nowhere.

In my understanding, Christian morality aims to instruct our action within the actual conditions



with which we are faced (see the series of articles on 'moral ecology' in 2020) and does not hold before us unattainable chimeras. We have no choice to but to accept that colonisation, with all its tragic wrongs, has happened, and cannot be undone. The social-economic system that supports 28 million people is woven from a tapestry of post-colonisation property rights—especially freehold and leases—that cannot now simply be erased.

But acknowledging this as our base reality is a very different thing from *justifying* what has happened, or claiming that there is *nothing* that can be done towards righting past wrongs. It seems to me that following Christ—the one whose work is to *reconcile* all things (2 Cor 5:19)—in 21st century Australia demands two things:

Firstly, we must tell the truth. We can do nothing else but acknowledge that Australia was created by a colossal act of theft from the First Nations of this continent, which was accompanied by many other appalling wrongs, not just in the act of dispossession, but a litany of injustices and indignities over two hundred years. Such an acknowledgement is not some woke act of self-flagellating virtue signalling (which, I admit, is becoming a problem) but simply a truthful

Acknowledging that we cannot undo past wrongs does not mean that we cannot begin to act justly now.

statement of what has happened. It is the *real* world we inhabit and must face, and it is right to observe a time of lament.

Neither does such an acknowledgement invalidate *everything* about our history and heritage. There is much in Australia's history and heritage that should be valued and celebrated. This also is the real world we inhabit. In holding these things together we reflect a biblical view of reality: human history, from the life of every individual to the life of every nation and society, is inflected with a tragic brokenness that

replicates damage in the world; and yet the damage of our existence does not wipe out an ineffable created goodness that also remains. Australian history provides ample testimony to both the tragedy and the triumph of the human

condition, and whenever we only acknowledge one of these strands, we misrepresent reality.

Secondly, acknowledging what has happened and how this manifests in the ongoing disadvantage and struggle of Australia's Indigenous peoples, Christ's people can do no other than seek to redress whatever wrongs can be redressed, and tend to the wounds that still linger. Acknowledging that we cannot undo past wrongs does not mean that we cannot begin to act justly *now*. We missed such an opportunity in last year's failed referendum. But that disappointment does not diminish the work of healing and justice that lies before us.

It is beyond the scope of this article, and indeed beyond my competence, to lay out a full program of what such work looks like, suffice to stay that it spans a multitude of possible responses from the personal through to the political. However, in the next article I will (finally) try to bring all of this to a point in terms of a Christian practice of property in 21st century Australia. Such a practice must begin from where we actually find ourselves now, but also offer new ways of viewing property, and its role in our households, churches, and nation.

PRACTICAL MENDING

HOW TO SEW ON A PATCH

by Phoebe Garrett

“

Mending is definitely an art and not a science. Just grab a needle and have a go!

”

Patches are a great way to mend anything cloth or cloth-like. Allow me to encourage you to give it a try next time you get a hole in something. In my time I have patched every type of clothes, shoes, sofas, tents, curtains, bags, umbrellas—you name it. All you need is a needle and thread and some patch material.

No experience required

Mending is definitely an art and not a science. Just grab a needle and have a go! Every attempt will make you better, and there is no ‘right’ way to do it. The stitches you use matter far less than the fact you are doing them, and the neatness has little bearing on the functionality of the patch. Using a sewing machine is also fine, but repairs are often in awkward areas that will be easier to hand-stitch.

If you lack confidence (even after you have read this handy how-to), ask a crafty friend or relative for help, or Uncle YouTube. The internet is also a great place to find inspiration for creative patches: try searching for pictures of ‘visible mending’.

Prepare for surgery

Like a trauma doctor with a new patient, stabilise that damage before you mend it. If moths are the culprit, make sure they are gone with no eggs or larvae left to do further damage. Large ratty holes can be neatened up by giving them a little trim with scissors. Sometimes sewing around a hole can help keep it from getting any larger, especially if you are getting ladders in a knit.

Materials for patches

The best patches are of similar or slightly lighter-weight fabric than the damaged item, and match in construction (knit or woven) and fibre content as well. But it’s okay to be creative! The classic leather elbow patches don’t follow those guidelines and work fine. If you go through a succession of similar garments, you can keep an old one as a donor for patches on its successors. It is also fun to cut a motif out of a patterned fabric for a statement patch.

Thread

I like cotton sewing thread for patching everything except 100% synthetic fabrics. Polyester thread is a bit too strong for natural fibres and can tear another hole more easily. Take your patch material to your local fabric shop with the big rainbow rack of thread and choose the closest colour, going darker if you can’t get an exact match. Choose thicker thread you can buy if you’re mending heavier articles like shoes, upholstery, or leather.

Time to operate

Once your patient is prepped, decide on the size and shape of your patch. It can be any shape you like. Square might seem obvious, but rounder corners will be gentler on worn-out fabric. Make sure your patch is big enough to cover all the damage and reach into not-too-worn fabric. Err on the side of bigger if you are unsure.

If your patch is made of woven material, fold the edges under 0.5-1 cm before sewing it on. Make

sure to allow for this when you size the patch. You can press the folds with an iron to help them stay or even stitch them in place. Leather and tight knits like jersey fabric won't fray so you don't need to turn them under.

Stitch!

Pin the patch in place if you feel like it needs it, then stitch that thing down! The only rule is to sew around the edge of the patch. You can use any stitch with either a handsewing needle or a sewing machine, depending on how you want the patch to look. If you are new to sewing, don't stress! It doesn't have to be pretty. A basic running stitch will work just as well as anything your great-great-grandmother might have done. Keep your stitches small and firm and make sure to secure the ends of the thread.

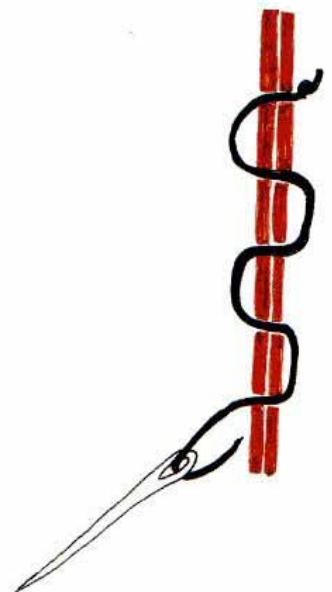
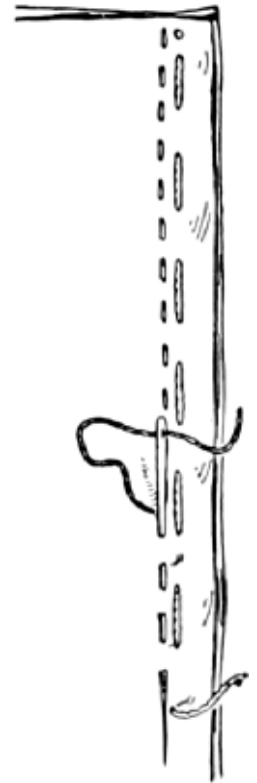
Strengthening

You're done! Seriously, the patch is on. In many cases that is all you will need to do. But if you want to go a little farther you can strengthen the repair for better results. A common approach is to turn the cloth over and sew down the inside (hole) edge as well. On woven fabrics you can really strengthen the patch by darning over it. Darning in this context just means sewing a bunch of lines over the top. Straight, curvy, it doesn't matter much. An X is simplest, but I also like spirals and rows of vertical and horizontal lines. You can either sew only on top of the patch or extend the lines into the fabric around it as well.

This is a great time to let your creativity shine. Why not use a contrasting colour for the darning? A little basic embroidery can decorate a contrast patch or make it into a flower or other design. Have fun!

I hope this quick guide has encouraged you to take up a needle. If you need more reasons to get mending, I set out a 'Mendifesto' in *MM* April 2021 and gave some advice on getting through the mending basket in *MM* April 2023.

Phoebe is a maker, artist, weaver, and experimenter in historical textile craft techniques for a greener future.



No need to get fancy: see above a running stitch from two different perspectives.

AUSTRALIA THROUGH NEPALI EYES

by Stephen Pickering

For three years my wife and I lived in Nepal. Those years included some months studying language and culture, a half year in a rural mission hospital and two years in a large university government teaching hospital. We'd been inspired to work in Nepal by life changing experiences as undergraduate medical students and a brief stint later as volunteers. At the end of three years, we hoped our connection to Nepal was not over. Having accumulated some knowledge of the language, culture, medical diseases and treatments, it seemed wise to continue. But could we emulate the expats who had been our mentors in this journey with their decades of continuous presence in Nepal? Were the only two options 'finish up' and 'settle in for decades'?

**At the end of three years,
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only two options 'finish up'
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The rural mission hospital had been a better fit for us than the large government teaching hospital, especially given the former's ability to care for those that could not pay for their treatment, so we made a plan to return regularly to it, if it suited them, for one year terms.

Fourteen years ago, we started the pattern of alternating from Newcastle, NSW for a year to a rural town in Nepal for a year, moving to 'the other home' after each 12-month term was up. Only Covid put a small dent in this pattern.

"What have you learned from swapping regularly from the two very different contexts? How can you just leave your job in Australia every 12 months? And what about your roles in Nepal; how are you covered when you leave there?" These are questions we have often been asked.



An inpatient baby in a sling.

Seeing with Nepali Eyes

We have new terms in our household lexicon: Nepali Eyes and Australian Eyes. We are especially conscious of their influence on how we see things after each arrival 'somewhere'. After a year in Nepal we return to Australia and see afresh with our Nepali Eyes the wealth, the speed of life, the hyper-individualism, the infrastructure, and the widespread emotional ill-health of depression and anxiety. In the face of so much help, so much wealth, and so much health, how is it that so many Australians are barely coping? With so many ways to connect, why does connection seem to be difficult and loneliness so common? Our fresh-from-Nepal eyes see all this again in focus.

Why are some of my Australian medical colleagues so stressed about money? How did that happen? Sometimes the answer is simply that debts for homes, vehicles, holidays, schools,

and 'good' food mean their books are only just balanced and there is stress to work longer and more lucratively. With Nepali Eyes, this looks like a self-inflicted wound. In Nepal we hear more about the very poor being burdened by debt, paying unjustified interest to the local loan sharks. How did the Australian rich end up so stressed about money?

Seeing with Australian Eyes

And after arriving again in Nepal, our Australian Eyes see afresh the poverty, the broken or missing infrastructure, and the harsh challenges of a life where young death, exotic diseases, long and hard work, and social dislocation are the norm for so many. But we also see the dogged dedication to family members, which for us will be on display daily in the hospital as the family provides food and nursing care to the patients—and sleeps on the concrete floor by the bed of



Above: hospital sheets drying in the rooftop sun.

Right: a local man ploughing a furrow.

their sick relative—day after day, week after week. With Australian Eyes we are confronted anew by the culture where the birth of a girl is tolerated quietly and the mother is judged a failure by some relatives, because it is her role in life to produce a boy. We see some fathers consent to medical care for their sons, but not their (sicker) daughters.

It's not a sight we fully understand, but we know it sits uncomfortably with us.

A village life

Our Nepali town is not small, but it feels like a village. It's not really possible to walk more than a few minutes without stopping for some small talk. Our work, our play and all our routines are in walking distance. We can go a few months without stepping into a car, and it's a year before we will have to drive and look for our own parking places. We relish this.

Some advantages of alternating each year

Our Australian Years allow us to recharge our batteries, and refill our coffers. In Australia, we both work part time and have more spare time to reconnect with family and friends, enjoy a

slower working pace and get ready for the next Nepal Year – where work is full time. The Australian Year also allows us to keep up to date with Australian medical developments and meet the criteria for staying registered as Australian doctors, which

is the basis on which we can re-register each year as Nepali doctors. Our Australian Years also fund our Nepali Years.

We can go a few months without stepping into a car, and it's a year before we will have to drive and look for our own parking places.



Teaching and doing

It is a bit of a sacred cow of development work that the volunteer/western should teach and not do. It occasionally causes knitted brows when we confess we both 'do' and 'teach' in rural Nepal. Medicine is an apprenticeship and cannot be learnt by books, lectures, and online tutorials. Bedside and classroom teaching are enhanced by working with other practitioners. The other reality is we have learned far more than we have taught anyway. This only makes sense when you are in a new place with new diseases and limitations in investigation and treatment options.

Coming and going

How are we able to leave every year? The fact is, in both countries, for both of us, we are part of a pool of workers which grows or contracts all the time due to many factors. Sometimes we arrive in Nepal at just the right time when the staffing has

seen an unanticipated loss. Our departure is not a surprise in either location, being open about our departure plans from the start of each year. Our public hospital jobs in Australia these days are 'zero hour contracts' that neither oblige nor guarantee work. In either place we slot back into the pool after arrival.

Changes over the years

For all the changes we have seen since we first showed up to the mission hospital unexpectedly 17 years ago, the most exciting change has been in the makeup of the hospital's senior doctors. In our first year, there was a single senior Nepali doctor and a large group of very junior doctors. After three years away in the Nepali government hospital and Australia, we returned to find two senior Nepali doctors, and the usual band of expat seniors and Nepali juniors. Now, every department is headed by a Nepali senior, and there are many more departments than there used to be. Expat numbers have been decreasing

and our role is changing. Nepali doctors who were once shy and timid interns are now the leaders and administrators of the hospital. Others who spent time with us are now in charge of district hospitals in remote parts of the country. The new equipment is an improvement, but it is trivial compared to these changes.

Same same but and not so different

Sometimes the gross differences in the two lives do not seem to be great at all. In either place we work, we eat, we sleep, we relax, we answer or ignore our emails, we catch up with friends, we are part of a Christian community and a wider community; but only in one of them do we swim regularly.

Further reflections

Nepal has taught us much about flexibility and unpredictability. Local people have to adapt to unforeseen changes and cannot be 'masters of their destiny' like the western myth we easily swallow. Early death, landslides, floods, earthquakes, harsh climates, road deaths, sickness, and limited financial resources to handle everyday life have appeared to have toughened Nepali people both physically and

mentally in a way that we do not see in our protected western life. When we return from each year in Nepal, we see afresh the wealth, comfort, and greater predictability of life in modern Australia. In contrast to this, the mantra from the politicians and commentators on the Australian airwaves is that 'Australians are doing it tough these days especially...' and the way it is put, we are somehow included in this. This is very hard to hear after a 12 month stint in rural Nepal.

The western obsession with the individual and the individual's 'freedom' is also in our faces on return to Australia each time. In Nepal, it is your family or your society that determines who and when you will marry. All operations, even those performed on doctors, are consented to by the family, not the patient themselves. Where you live after marriage is determined by cultural norms. The sense of financial superiority that is real for westerners spills over into other kinds of feelings of superiority and judgements of inferiority of different cultures in ways that are not real or justified. The commitment to family, the ability to laugh at the smallest provocation, and the ability to adapt to the harsh and unpredictable events of life all tell me there is no justification for our superior feelings in the west.

In Nepal, as I walk home for lunch (I can't do that in Australia) I walk past a bank of walk-in cage-



like structures – this one for gloves, the next for glass, the one after for IV fluid bottles... These are all to be picked up and recycled. Here, in rural Nepal with its low income, its busted roads, its difficult terrain, and its multiple obstacles, this hospital is recycling its waste! Australian hospitals bury tonnes of waste or incinerate it at high temperature and great cost every day; but here, there is enough common sense, responsibility, and energy to figure out a way to recycle. I am ashamed.

We note that Nepali people love to have a laugh, to tease, to giggle, and guffaw and it only takes a tiny prompt to see their faces break into smiles and then bend over in whole-body laughter. I hate the ‘they are poor but happy’ throw-away obligation-relieving appraisal that has been used to describe financially poor people across the world. But somehow the ‘very low threshold to laugh’ is a real thing here in Nepal. In Australia, I see in some groups a low threshold to swear, or argue, or hurl abuse out the car window over bad driving – I wonder how these two different emotions have ended up so close to the surface

of two completely different groups of people. I don’t know how it happened.

I see Australia encouraging the immigration of the wealthy and the well-educated. Let the financially poor countries produce the children, see them through school and university and when they are finally financially productive, at no cost to Australia, get them to immigrate to save us all the expense of raising children and educating people. After all, we’re ‘doing it tough’ and those poor countries should be helping us out through these especially difficult times. I struggle to listen to it with an open mind.

I am not sure there is a point in ‘recommending’ this alternating life to anyone.

It’s hard to imagine that the

circumstances would line up uniquely as they have for us. I doubt I would live this way with children, but I am not a parent and maybe it would be great. I do know that I feel privileged to live such a life: to belong, in some sense, in two vastly different locations and cultures, and to have a sense I am allowed to be part of something that achieves a lot with very little.

The mantra from the politicians and commentators on the Australian airwaves is that ‘Australians are doing it tough these days especially’ [...] is very hard to hear after a 12 month stint in rural Nepal.



Steve and Ana are doctors who studied and trained in Newcastle, NSW. Ana is a general practitioner and Steve an anaesthetist. In the last 17 years, they have spent a little more time in Nepal than they have in Australia.

In Australia we might derive some comfort that we have more social antibodies against 'the Trump disease,' but we should not imagine that we are immune. As the recent Halloween made clear, our receptivity to American influence grows year by year.

Re-thinking politics

Given the heaviness of the times, it is perhaps timely that Jacob Garrett and I are about to begin recording a series of podcasts on Christianity and politics. The fact that 80% of white American evangelicals support Trump is a cautionary reminder that mixing politics with religious zeal can be a potentially destructive force. But rather than abandon the field of politics altogether ('The best lack all conviction'), is there a way in which we might faithfully embody the Way of Christ—the crucified Messiah—into the political sphere? Full disclosure: we don't have a neatly packaged answer (!), but we hope that laying out a bit of the biblical, theological, and historical map might be useful in these disoriented times. Keep your eye out for when the podcasts drop.

Other stuff

Between July and September we ran a 6-part webinar series on Christianity vs. Capitalism: a deep dive into a historical, analytical, and theological description of capitalism, and the challenges it poses for Christian witness. The webinars were recorded and can be found on Manna Gum's YouTube channel, which you can access through the website. If you are not into all the conceptual stuff (sad face emoji), part 6 of the series gives the practical pointy end of it all.

For me, the last six months have been focussed on writing. Beyond *Manna Matters* and other bits and pieces, I currently have two books in production which I hope might see the light of day next year, *inshallah*.

Jonathan Cornford



A year's supply of garlic (see p.2).

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Manna Matters is produced on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples, both members of the Kulin nation. The 'wurun' of the Wurundjeri refers to Eucalyptus viminalis, a sacred tree whose leaves are required for a 'welcome to country'. The early Europeans colloquially named this tree the Manna Gum for the sweet white gum (lerp) it sometimes produces, which reminded them of the biblical story of the manna in the wilderness. In doing so, they unknowingly associated a locally sacred tree with one of the foundational lessons in God's economics: collect what you need; none shall have too little; none shall have too much; don't store it up; there is enough for all!