

# The Colourful Life of Gilbert Robertson

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Gilbert Robertson is one of most fascinating and mercurial figures in colonial Australia. When I was writing my first book *Community of Thieves* I came across him as the Chief District Constable at Richmond during the time of the Black Wars. At that time he had a farm of 1,500 acres on the Coal River, was president of the local Agricultural Society and the instigator of the Richmond Market Association. Twenty years ago I didn't pay him much attention, but more recently I have had occasion to look at him more closely. I find Lady Jane Franklin's description of him in a letter to her sister is especially intriguing. She describes him as 'a perfect miscreant equally devoid of principle and feeling, of great corporeal size and strength and of the most brutal countenance'. This gothic description put me in mind of another mercurial character familiar to us all, the brooding antihero of Emily Bronte's great novel *Wuthering Heights*. Having now spent a good deal of time tracking this particular colonial gentleman I have come to view him as an antipodean Heathcliff, for reasons that will later become apparent, and as such a particularly rich subject for teasing out the complications of colonial society in early Australia.

Gilbert Robertson Esquire arrived in the colony of Van Diemen's Land in 1822, with wife Agnes and one child, carrying a letter from the Secretary of State, Lord Bathurst, instructing the Governor of New South Wales to provide him with a land grant. Gilbert Robertson came from one of the best families in Scotland, having grown up in the household of his grandfather Harry Robertson, a well-placed minister in the Church of Scotland, who was a younger son of the chief of the Clan Robertson of Kindeace. One of his uncles was the rich merchant Samuel Sandbach who had big mercantile interests in Glasgow, Liverpool and the Caribbean, while another uncle was Doctor Thomas Traill who became a famous professor at Edinburgh University. Among his distant cousins was the future prime minister, William Gladstone.

En route to New South Wales, Gilbert Robertson landed first in Van Diemen's Land where Lieutenant Governor Sorell persuaded him to stay, and provided him with a land grant of 400 acres at the Coal River, even though he possessed no money and so did not have the requisite financial standing. Characteristically, Gilbert complained that he should have 1,000 acres, despite his being penniless; and another source of complaint was that he had two assigned servants only. To increase his holding he rented an adjoining farm of Thomas Birch, but was soon enough thrown off this farm because he didn't pay his rent. His next move was to go into partnership with a Captain Welsh, to whom he transferred his assigned convicts. Here a lifetime of trouble began.

August 1823 saw the first of the court appearances which would become a fixture in Gilbert's life in Van Diemen's Land. Lurid and possibly trumped up charges against him were made from assigned men, accusing him of depriving them of rations and forcing them to subsist in near starvation conditions. The complaint was heard by Magistrate George Weston Gunning, a neighbouring landholder. Gunning found the complaints proved and issued a severe reprimand, but the men were not removed from Gilbert because they were nominally the assigned men of his business partner Welsh. By September the same year, Gilbert accused the assigned convicts of stealing sugar from him. This time his charges were dismissed by Gunning. In high dudgeon Gilbert wrote to the Colonial Secretary to complain about the way the magistrate went about

his business. Gunning's response to this was studded with outrage: 'With what impertinence and swaggering Gilbert Robertson conducts himself', he wrote, attributing the complaint solely to the 'vindictive litigious disposition' of the man. Two months later, Gilbert was in court again, this time taking action against his business partner, whom he claimed had destroyed evidence of the partnership and tried to eject him from the house. Welsh then counter-sued by having Gilbert brought before Gunning on the charge of killing a pig that Welsh said belonged to him. Unsurprisingly, Gunning saw the matter as Welsh did and committed the case to the Criminal Court. The resolution of this issue saw Gilbert's land sold for the debt and him thrown into debtor's prison. From the abjection of a prison cell, he switched from aggression to his other mode of operation: grovelling. He wrote the first of many wheedling memorials to the newly arrived George Arthur, to which the Governor did not respond. By the time Gilbert was released in April 1825 he was in dire straits and understood that some serious back-peddling was in order.

He wrote again to Arthur, rescinding his complaint against Magistrate Gunning. Henceforth his subsequent memorials to Arthur seeking a job carried letters of support from Gunning, which emphasized the distress of his neighbour's genteel wife and family. Arthur relented, if for no other reason than to get the man off his back. In July 1825, Gilbert was appointed superintendent of the government farm in the Engineer's Department on a salary of £50. That was short-lived. Five months later he found himself embroiled in scandal around the removal of the Attorney-General which saw him named unfavourably in the *Colonial Times*. His headstrong response was to submit a three-column letter to the editor 'about the insolent manner in which you introduce my name and describe my situation ... but do not flatter yourself that your insults can annoy me I despise you too much for them to have any effect.' and further warning of the editor 'I feel it my duty to prosecute for libel'. He did not sue for libel but neither did he stop complaining.

By 1826 Gilbert had gained the ill will of his boss in the Engineer's Office by complaining about insufficient forage for the horses and other matters. All this came to a head in July 1827 when Gilbert sent a long, hastily written letter to the Governor explaining that he could not guarantee the supply of firewood for the government house until he got forage, which he could not because his boss was pocketing half the allowance for forage. His letter was intended to bring the matter to issue by submitting his resignation, which he did not expect to be to be accepted. The letter was forwarded to the Governor from the Engineer's Department with a note scribbled on the bottom saying 'another impertinent letter from the most troublesome Gilbert Robertson ... his disrespect and insolence to myself personally and total disregard of and disobedience to the orders of his superiors warrant his immediate dismissal'. For his part the Governor noted that 'I personally find his communication of a very offensive nature quite unbecoming to his situation'. The hasty resignation was accepted with three months' notice.

For the next several months Gilbert managed to hang on at the government farm writing endless memorials to Arthur and by December Arthur felt sorry for him and gave the man his original land plus a further 600 acres and two assigned convicts. He was also appointed Chief District Constable at Richmond. A year later his lot had not improved. In June 1828 he sent another wheedling missive to explain that because his house burned down he had to borrow wheat on credit and purchase another farm with a house in Richmond on long credit. Things got worse in October when he arrested a small landholder named Allender. On the advice of Magistrate Gunning, Allender sued for assault.

Gilbert insisted that he be defended by the Solicitor General, Alfred Stephen. After trying to worm out of this distasteful duty, Stephen threw in the towel in the case in July 1829, which meant that Gilbert had to pay £40 plus Allender's costs. Then there were the matter of Stephen's costs which were the subject of a court case on 12 November 1829, which awarded for £200 debt and £3 costs in favour of Alfred Stephen. By December the government was also pressing for repayment for loans of wheat.

It was at this time, when Gilbert was caught up in several legal battles and beset with debt, that Governor Arthur declared martial law in order put an end to the attacks on settlers by Aboriginal bands. Here Gilbert saw his chance. In November the *Hobart Town Courier* reported that the chief district constable at the Coal River, 'proceeds very shortly with a well selected band in order to secure the savages, and we confidently trust that by such measures a stop will be put to the aggression of the blacks ...' On 22 November 1828 Robertson captured five Big River people, including the guerilla chief Umarrah, who was implicated in a series of attacks on settlers across the midlands. In reporting the capture of the group, Gilbert wrote that 'they consider every injury they can afflict upon white men as an act of duty and patriotic ... having ideas of their natural rights which would astonish most other European statesmen'. A story in the *Hobart Town Courier*, which was probably the work of Gilbert himself, reinforced these opinions, describing Umarrah as a warrior chief who had declared it his purpose 'to destroy all the whites he possibly can, which he considers a patriotic duty'. Using this logic, he persuaded Governor Arthur not only to commute the execution of Umarrah, but also to treat him honourably as a prisoner of war. Although officially consigned to Richmond Gaol, where Gilbert had secured an assigned convict to provide assistance to the Chief, Umarrah and his group were regular visitors to Robertson's house. Sometime in 1829, he arranged for the boy Cowerterminna, whom he renamed Jack Woodburn, to live at his house.

Even though he saw the establishment of martial law as an economic boost for his own beleaguered circumstances, Gilbert held a curiously sympathetic view of the indigenous people against whom it was aimed. His awareness of Aboriginal concern about the loss of their land was probably influenced by his association with Kickerterpoller, known as Black Tom, a young man from Oyster Bay who had been stolen from his people when he was about nine and given to Gilbert's neighbour Thomas Birch as a farm hand. When Gilbert rented the Birch property, Kickerterpoller appears to have come with it. Gilbert and Kickertepoller appear to have had a mutually supportive relationship which Robertson held up to Governor Arthur as an example of what could be achieved. He had in mind that Umarrah and his compatriots be trained as guides for future roving parties, where the various tribes might be conciliated and persuaded to put themselves under government protection. Gilbert proposed his roving party could round up the rest of the Aborigines of the south-eastern district, and for his services he requested a salary of £200 (in addition to his salary as District Chief Constable of £75), a land grant of 2,000 acres on his return and a grant of 100 acres for each of his six children. Unhappily for this ambitious business plan, his initial success was not repeated as he and his roving party scoured the area between Pittwater and the East Coast, conciliating only one young man who was sent to join Umarrah and the others in Richmond. Nor was Gilbert the only man in the Aboriginal hunting business. Another roving party had been approved under the ex-convict Jorgen Jorgenson and both put under the control of Police Magistrate Thomas Anstey, who was infuriated by Gilbert's refusal to provide him with proper reports. Anstey formed the opinion that Gilbert Robertson was just having a jolly old time wandering about in the bush, liberally provisioned at government expense. To add further insult, Governor Arthur had employed the Hobart bricklayer George Augustus Robinson to set up an Aboriginal establishment on Bruny Island. Like Gilbert Robertson, George Augustus

Robinson had big ideas about missions to conciliate the natives using Aboriginal guides.

By October 1829 Arthur had tired of complaints from and about Gilbert Robertson and decided that George Augustus Robinson was cheaper and considerably less troublesome and he ordered that the five Aboriginals now living with Gilbert Robertson be transferred to work as guides for George Robinson. In December, Gilbert reluctantly yielded the services of both Kickerterpoller and Umarrah for Robinson's mission to Port Davey. He resisted sending the lad he called Jack Woodburn, insisting that he was 'a mere boy ... ill qualified for the service'. George Augustus Robinson was having none of this, and he went to Police Magistrate Thomas Lascelles, a bitter enemy of Gilbert, demanding that he get the boy, whom he forcibly detained to prevent his return. Gilbert was incensed. He despatched a letter humming with haughty outrage:

You will have the goodness to explain under what pretext or under what authority you have already deprived the lad of his liberty ... Under the circumstances in which that lad stands I conceive that any person taking it upon themselves to remove or detain him from me without both his consent and mine having first been obtained might with right and justice come into my house and forcibly take away one or all of my children as suited their pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

To no avail. Robinson promptly had Jack Woodburn shipped off to Swan Island in Bass Strait where he was among the first to succumb to the unhealthy conditions.

Henceforth it would be George Augustus Robinson who would be known as the great conciliator, while Gilbert returned to being the Chief District Constable at Richmond, with nothing to show for his troubles. His evidence to the Aboriginal Committee failed to inspire their confidence. Gilbert's intimacy with the Aborigines, and his view that they were patriot warriors rather than debased, murderous savages, did not endear him to his fellow settlers. The Aboriginal Committee concluded that his mission had been a complete failure and declined to meet any of his demands for compensation. By 1831 his life had turned into a complete disaster.

Gilbert Robertson's mentor was a fellow Scot, James Gordon, the Police Magistrate at Richmond. In February 1831, Gordon was incapacitated in a fall from his horse and replaced by the zealous Thomas Mason. During the first half of April 1831 Mason fined Gilbert first for being drunk, then for being in breach of the Impounding Act, and again for failing to produce a book, each heard by his nemesis, Magistrate Gunning. Finally, he was fined for breach of conduct for having snapped his fingers in Mason's face shouting that he didn't care that much for the magistrate's rules. He was dismissed on 25 April. Immediately he took action in the Supreme Court for criminal conspiracy against Gunning, Mason and the Superintendent of Police. In his twenty-five page memorial to Arthur, Gilbert complained that 'their action is so contrary to law and the privilege of every British subject that my duty to myself, to my family and society renders it imperative upon me, even at the cost of considerable sacrifice ... to appeal to the laws of my country for protection and redress and for the punishment of individuals who in the face of a British community could conspire together to accomplish the ruin of any of His Majesty's subjects.' Since he retained the support of the incapacitated Senior Magistrate, James Gordon, he felt confident to do this. However, Mason had instigated an inquiry into Gordon's accounts which indicated that there had been irregularities and showed that Gilbert Robertson was implicated in the misuse of monies meant to be paid into government revenue. Then the Richmond chaplain weighed in with a complaint of misdemeanor against Gilbert for marching his assigned convicts out of church in protest. On Christmas Eve that year some of his assigned

convicts were arrested for drinking, which caused more trouble with Gunning; and in June the following year there was a Supreme Court case involving the death of a convict in a fight with one of Gilbert's assigned men. Even though Gilbert's servant was acquitted of murder, the Attorney-General recommended that he be denied any convict labour for his farm.

By now Gilbert Robertson had alienated every man in authority in the colony, but he had his supporters among other free settlers, who objected to the high-handed and close-knit clique who ran the colony. Thomas Gregson and George Meredith set up a political newspaper called *The Colonist* to agitate for reform, and in June 1832 Gilbert Robertson became the editor. It was only months before he was hit by the first libel case which saw the newspaper fined £80, causing Gregson to withdraw. Soon enough Gilbert was in dispute with Meredith over proprietorship of the newspaper. He quit in pique and in 1834 he had started the *True Colonist* as the editor and sole proprietor. In next to no time he was in court for libel against the Governor and in January 1835 was sentenced to a £200 fine and thirteen months in gaol. From his gaol cell he continued to produce the newspaper, leading to a further fine and conviction for libel against the Colonial Secretary. Again his gaol sentence was extended with a new sentence for libel in November. During this time he wrote several lengthy memorials to the Governor, and to British parliamentarians, protesting the violation of his rights as a British subject in not being tried in front of a civil jury and being forced to endure the treatment of a common felon. After many such memorials he was released from gaol by Governor's order on Christmas Day 1835 on the grounds of a concern for the welfare of his wife and five daughters. By this time half his land had been sold for debt. Within the year he was back in gaol again for libel.

In April 1837, while still incarcerated at His Majesty's pleasure in Hobart Gaol, Gilbert saw a chance to improve his fortunes. Seeing that his old rival George Augustus Robinson was being richly rewarded for clearing Tasmania of Aborigines, Gilbert petitioned the Legislative Council for compensation, claiming that he had the idea of conciliation of the Aborigines. From his cell, he also sent a petition to the House of Commons protesting that, among the many irregularities of Arthur's regime, the Governor had deliberately obstructed his attempts to conciliate the Aborigines and forcibly removed his self-taught guides, while 'another person ... was employed to carry into effect the plan which [I] had first devised and suggested and which has succeeded to the satisfaction of the whole colony.' He believed that in the light of the very generous payment to this other person, and the official vindictiveness that had reduced him to near penury, some compensation was now due to him. A huge public spat erupted between the two men that was played out in competing newspapers. George Augustus Robinson was apoplectic when he heard the suggestion that the concept of conciliation might belong to another man. His private journal entries become barely coherent for rage: 'Mr Robertson indeed! It is monstrous', he expostulated on 25 September 1836. Other influential people thought differently. Henry Melville's *History of Van Diemen's Land for the Years 1824 to 1835* gave a long and glowing account of Gilbert's conciliation activities. Likewise in the *Colonial Times* on 14 April 1837 Gilbert's claims were repeated and given credence by further statements made by Alexander McGeary.

Robertson was liberated from gaol at the time Arthur was recalled, and he was so delighted to see the back of George Arthur that he threw his own personal celebration by letting off fireworks, which saw him arrested and confined to the watch-house, leading to another civil action violating his rights as a British subject. For all his joy at getting rid of Arthur, he fared no better with Sir John Franklin. George Augustus Robinson, having ingratiated himself with Franklin and his ever-curious wife by

procuring for them an Aboriginal skull for their scientific collection, had no trouble seeing off Gilbert's claims for compensation.

During the next five years Gilbert was intermittently gaoled for libel against the Governor, the Colonial Secretary, the Solicitor-General and the Attorney-General. It was during Franklin's tenure that Gilbert became prominent in the Anti-Transportation League, and was a key speaker at public meetings. He was firing off endless complaints about Franklin to the British Secretary of State and prominent members of British Parliament, such as Joseph Hulme. Curiously he does not seem to have addressed memorials to his relative William Gladstone. His political agitation and resulting libel suits continued until he had lost all his property and was finally forced to give up the *True Colonist* in 1844.

When Franklin was recalled and replaced by John Eardley-Wilmot, Gilbert penned a series of grovelling memorials asking for a government position. His change of stance did not escape the editor of the *Hobart Town Courier* who acidly observed that Robertson's previous history of 'imputation of bad motives and bad practices to those in authority & insinuating corruption against the judicial bench ... [was] in striking contrast to his newly assumed obsequiousness.' Grovelling to the new Governor paid off, however.

At the beginning of 1845 Gilbert was appointed Superintendent of Agriculture at Norfolk Island, where he was soon embroiled in a dispute with the commandant, Major Childs. His point of contention was the newly arrived magistrate, Samuel Barrow, of whom he later wrote:

Barrow's arrival on Norfolk was a most unfortunate event for Major Childs as well as the wretched convicts. Every effort was used to swell the record of crimes alleged to have been committed, new offences created, men of the worst character selected as constables to provoke convicts to commit crimes .... In 11 months he attended no religious services ... and he sent prisoners in chains to work on Saturday afternoons free time as part of punishment.

Gilbert was especially appalled at the withdrawal of the right for convicts to have gardens. He could see that hunger, constant punishments, everlasting toil and rotten food, meant the men were ripe for mutiny. Flashpoint came in June 1846, when an arbitrary order was issued to the overseers to remove all cooking pots and kettles from the convicts. These were made by the men for their own use to prepare their uncooked rations and Barrow decided that this custom led to the favouring of a few old hands. He ordered all food be cooked and served in the cookhouse in future. Following the confiscation of 1 July 1846, the ex-bushranger 'Jackey Jackey' Westwood led a mutiny and killed an overseer and three constables. It was Gilbert's understanding that the mutiny was incited by arbitrary and cruel treatment, but this viewpoint was not tolerated. He was summarily dismissed, but given that Childs himself was recalled, Gilbert stayed on at Norfolk, hoping for a change. His demise was sealed by the replacement John Price, who was married to the ward of the much maligned John Franklin. After Gilbert's ailing daughter Elizabeth died on 11 January 1847, he returned to Hobart, where he set about writing a pamphlet and a petition to the British Parliament about conditions on Norfolk Island and the nature of his arbitrary dismissal.

It was indelibly clear that by 1847 Robertson was *persona non grata* in Van Diemen's Land, where he was now penniless, jobless and landless. This time his bacon was saved by an old associate, William Robertson, who was now a wealthy squatter at Port Phillip. William Robertson was a far lesser member of the Clan Robertson, but he had fared much better than Gilbert in the Antipodes, so organised for his old friend to move

to Victoria as overseer at his property at Colac with a salary of £100. In Port Phillip Gilbert became editor of the *Victoria Colonist* which was a mouthpiece of squatters' rights and anti-transportation. He was also secretary to the Constitutional Committee at Port Phillip and began to set himself up as a political candidate. His attempt to be elected to Geelong Town Council was defeated, the Opposition newspaper noting that 'any honest man would be preferable to Mr Robertson'.

Gilbert roused a very heated response during a heated campaign prior to the election for the new Victorian Legislative Council. Several public meetings were thrown into chaos at his appearance and he was shouted down whenever he attempted to speak. While riding to Colac to nominate a candidate for the Legislative Council on 5 September 1851, he died when a massive heart attack caused him to fall from his horse. In death Gilbert Robertson found the status he could never acquire in life. According to a Melbourne newspaper 'the awful suddenness of his call to another world has induced those who were his bitterest political enemies in life to join the universal expressions of sorrow.' The newspaper recorded that 'His funeral was attended by the most numerous and respectable assemblage ever witnessed in Geelong.' That respectable assemblage raised money to buy a nice house for his genteel wife and they erected a very grand monument which still can be seen towering over the headstones in the Geelong graveyard which reads 'Struck down in the midst of life of great usefulness, this man will live in the memory of Australian colonists as of a man of singular talents truthfully applied in the promotion of religious liberty and morality.'

Here then in brief outline is a biography of someone who was almost pathologically inclined to get into trouble. Still, it is hard to see why, in a colony of chancers and rogues, this particular gentleman fared especially badly. To understand why this might be, it will be necessary to go back to his early appearance in the colony and reconsider the letter of complaint Gilbert Robertson sent to the Colonial Secretary about his neighbour George Weston Gunning. It is Gunning's response to this complaint that is very telling. Gunning had arrived in the colony in 1812 as a lieutenant in the 73rd regiment and six years later he was imprisoned for debt. By 1824 he was prosperous, but scarcely one to look down his nose at a man like Gilbert Robertson. Yet in his letter to the Colonial Secretary, Gunning took exception to Gilbert's assumption of intimacy between them, despite the fact that they were both gentlemen landholders. As he expostulated to the Colonial Secretary, 'You have seen this man'. To find out what Gunning meant by this remark, we need to go behind any official correspondence, to private journals and letters.

In his journals the Hobart bricklayer George Augustus Robinson refers contemptuously to his competitor as 'Black Robertson', in a way that suggests that this appellation was in common use. George Arthur described him in one of his letters, dripping with contempt, as 'an American mulatto'. As mentioned before, Lady Jane Franklin, in a letter to her sister described him in a very un-gentlemanly way as 'equally devoid of principle and feeling, of great corporeal size and strength and of the most brutal countenance'. This Gilbert Robertson, Lady Jane explained, was 'a half-caste of the West Indies'. What is never said in public is that the haughty Gilbert Robertson, Esquire, was not a white man.

Certainly, Gilbert was raised and educated within an illustrious family in Scotland, but he was born in Trinidad, probably to a slave mother. I have not been able to find any documentary evidence of his birth, dated by himself as 10 November 1794, nor have I been able to determine who his mother was. I assume she was an African slave whose records cannot be located in the archives. Records of his father, however, can be located in the archives. According to the obituary from the Edinburgh newspapers, Gilbert Robertson Senior was a planter in Demerara and the *Demerara Gazette* has

numerous references to him between 1800 and 1836 as a prominent planter and agent for the company Robertson, Parker and Sandbach. The National Archives of Scotland helped me to identify Gilbert Robertson Senior as the son of Reverend Harry Robertson, who was the younger son of the chief of the Clan Robertson of Kindeace. Harry Robertson's brother John Robertson was a merchant in Tobago, while the other brother, George Robertson, had a trading company called Robertson, Parker and Sandbach, first in Grenada, and then in Demerara. I have established that Gilbert Robertson Senior had been working for his uncles since 1794 when he was about sixteen. Given that his uncles were trading in Trinidad, I presumed that they employed their young nephew, Gilbert, as their agent. I also knew that by 1799 Gilbert Robertson was living in Demerara, acting as an agent for his uncle and managing a plantation for Charles Parker. So, Gilbert Robertson Junior must have been born before his father left Trinidad. It seems that the child was about five years old when his father sent him to live with his own father, in Scotland. In doing this he was following the Scottish tradition in the West Indies. Both his uncles sent their mulatto children home to Britain. George Robertson had a son – referred to as 'Black George' – who was educated in London. The journal of a Glasgow merchant in the National Archives of Scotland lists payments of John Robertson over several years, for his two mulatto sons Charles and Daniel Robertson to be privately educated in Glasgow. Charles Parker sired two sons he had sent home to Scotland and I believe that Gilbert Robertson sent his own son home to Scotland with Charles Parker when Parker travelled to Scotland to marry Gilbert's cousin, Elizabeth Rainey in 1799.

Born at the end eighteenth century, Gilbert Robertson Junior entered a world where money and lineage, not race, were pre-eminent; where mixed race children were included in the family, given a good education, found an honourable profession and sent out into the world carrying the family name. We are more familiar with this in the case of children from India; however there are plenty of prominent examples from the West Indies. Gilbert Robertson Senior had a neighbour on Demerara (also a Scot) whose mixed race son went on to become the first Governor of British Columbia. There are plenty of examples to be found in England if you look for them. They can be found in the novels of the day, which brings me to the literary character with whom I began, Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*. I don't imagine that it has ever occurred to you that Heathcliff might also be a mulatto from the West Indies, but most of the evidence in the book points that way.

Like Heathcliff, Gilbert is fractious, proud and deeply wounded by the slights to his character and person. You only have to read his endless memorials to see how he harps on about his rights and privileges as a freeborn British subject. In Van Diemen's Land, at the very edge of empire, a place beset with racial anxiety, he is despised, despite the fact that he has better family connections and better education than most of the colonial elite. However much he may have played the role of gentleman, Gilbert Robertson was seen as harbouring the 'other' under his skin; the dark outsider who can never be allowed full partnership in the colonialist enterprise. George Weston Gunning perfectly summed up his colonial status soon after Gilbert Robertson arrived in Van Diemen's Land when he writes privately to the colonial secretary: 'you have seen this man'.

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<sup>1</sup> See Robinson to Burnett, 14 December 1829, AOT CSO1/888/18829. For the detail of the dispute between Robinson and Robertson over Jack Woodburn see NJB Plomley, (ed.), *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement*, Hobart, Blubberhead Press, 1987, pp. 448-9.