Silences in Australian Folklore: The 1804 Castle Hill Escape Attempt and the Silence of the Irish

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The events that commenced on the night of Sunday 4th March 1804, at the Castle Hill government farm in the colony of New South Wales (NSW), culminated in the first organised large-scale armed confrontation between convicts and the New South Wales Corps. The events of Castle Hill involved the first declaration of martial law within the colony, the last example of an armed stand by the United Irishmen worldwide, the hanging of captured ringleaders without trial, and the sentencing of thirty three participants who were exiled to Coal River (modern day Newcastle) for hard labour in deplorable conditions.[1] The ensuing battle is often referred to as Australia's 'Vinegar Hill' as the convict leaders were Irish political prisoners who were sentenced to transportation for life to NSW after being convicted of leading the 1798 Irish rebellion at Vinegar Hill near Enniscorthy, County Wexford in 1798.

The March 1804 event is described in various terms including the Castle Hill Uprising, the Irish Uprising or the Castle Hill Rebellion. More accurately, this significant incident should be termed the Castle Hill escape attempt as the primary goal was not to liberate the colony from the British, or avoid intolerably harsh conditions of turmoil and prejudice, but rather to capture a ship and sail home to Ireland to re-join the fight to liberate Ireland from the British. However, this significant event in Irish-Australian history has not been remembered in Australian folklore. So why is Australia's folklore tradition silent on the escape attempt? Was Castle Hill an example of social silences? Has it been neglected due to the fleeting nature of folklore's oral tradition?

The extant historiography varies regarding the root cause of the 1804 Castle Hill event. Historian Dr Patrick O'Farrell argued that the convicts involved were, 'crushed by tyranny' and were 'fleeing from persecution'.[2] There is no evidence of any convict survivors of the battle justifying their participation with reference to ill-treatment or severity of living conditions as motivating factors.[3] The lack of evidence from original court trial sources may have simply been an example of colonial censorship. Lynette Ramsay Silver states that the battle was driven by a 'deep and intense love of their country, by an indescribable heartache

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[1] Tamsin O'Connor, "Charting New Waters with Old Patterns: Smugglers and Pirates at the Penal Station and Port of Newcastle 1804-1823", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 19, (2017): 17.
[2] Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1986), 38.
[3] *Sydney Gazette*, 18th March 1804.

for a soft and gentle homeland, by sentiment, dreams and hope.'[4] Whilst this notion appears to be somewhat romanticised, it does support the desire to return 'home'. Ruan O'Donnell's view is that the Castle Hill battle was, 'the most serious insurrection challenge directed against the Australian state.'[5] Anne-Maree Whitaker claims the events of March 1804 were a desperate escape attempt to sail home and renew the battle against the British on Irish soil with the cry of 'death or liberty and a ship to take us home'.[6]

If these events were so significant in the histories of both Ireland and Australia, noting the majority of the participants in the battle were Irish political prisoners and convicts, then why has this monumental occurrence not been memorialised in song as would be expected following a long-standing Irish oral folkloric tradition? This paper will explore the reasons behind the dearth of contemporary Irish folk songs relating the 1804 Castle Hill escape attempt, employing comparisons with monumental Irish events including the Irish famine, the 1798 uprising in Ireland, as well as the influential 1854 battle at Eureka Stockade in Ballarat, Victoria. These significant historical events all involved large numbers of Irish participants, and all are commemorated in contemporary folk songs. I argue that the lack of contemporary commemorative songs relating to the 1804 Castle Hill escape attempt is a consequence of a combination of factors including; censorship by the colonial authorities; the swift and harsh punishment meted out to the Irish convict leaders; the concept of collective silence in memory; the realisation of opportunities available for Irish convicts to prosper within the colony; the tyranny of distance from Ireland; and the transient nature of the oral folklore tradition itself.

Ireland's colonial history was a particularly important backdrop to the escape attempt at Castle Hill. Ireland had witnessed battles resulting from the fractious coloniser-colonised relationship with the British. The determination of the Irish to oust the British and liberate Ireland reached a crescendo after witnessing the success of the American War of Independence of 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789. One of the central battles for Irish independence culminated in the Battle of Vinegar Hill near Enniscorthy, County Wexford, in June 1798 where an estimated twenty thousand United Irishmen were comprehensively defeated by a much smaller British force.[7] The aftermath of this comprehensive British victory presented the British government with the problem of housing the large numbers of captured Irish political prisoners, particularly after the loss of the American colony in 1776. Most of the captured leaders of the 1798 rebellion were sentenced, without trial, to transportation for life to the new colony of NSW. This was the preferred option for the British government rather than having the dissident leaders martyred if they were hanged.[8]

Transportation was utilised by the British as punishment for all political dissenters in England, Scotland and the British colonies as dissidents were viewed as a threat to British society. From 1799 to 1802, between 400 and 600 Irish political prisoners were transported to NSW, charged with complicity in the 1798 rebellion or seditious crimes linked with the United Irishmen. It is impossible to provide exact numbers as existing documentation cannot confirm

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[4] Lynette Ramsay Silver, *The Battle of Vinegar Hill: Australia's Irish Rebellion, 1804* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1989), 119.
[5] Ruan O'Donnell, *Liberty or Death: The United Irishmen in New South Wales 1800-04*, as quoted in Tony Moore, *Death or Liberty: Rebels and Radicals Transported to Australia 1788-1868* (Millers Point: Pier 9, 2010), 120.
[6] Johnston to Piper: ML A256, pp. 327-8 as quoted in Ann-Maree Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution: United Irishmen in New South Wales 1800-1810* (Sydney: Crossing Press, 1994), 101.
[7] Cameron Riley, "The 1804 Australian Rebellion and Battle of Vinegar Hill", 2017, p. 2, http://hawkesburyhistory.org.au/articles/Battle_of_Vinegar-Hill.html, accessed 21 March, 2019.
[8] *Ibid*.

the numbers of prisoners who were bailed, pardoned or who utilised the opportunity to volunteer to join the British army.[9] Many of the sentences were passed under courts-martial, before such courts were sanctioned by law, bringing into question the legality of such sentences. This position was further exacerbated by the lack of indent papers for those sentenced. Indents papers were the official documentation utilised to record the nature of the crime committed and the term of the sentence handed down.[10] The lack of records resulted in the inability to separate Irish political prisoners from common convicts once they landed in the colony. As such, all Irish convicts not recorded on indent papers were condemned to remain in the colony, never to return home to Ireland.[11]

From 1800, NSW was a tinder box for Irish unrest for numerous reasons. The convict transport ships *Anne* and *Hercules* witnessed unsuccessful mutiny attempts on 29th July 1800 and 29th December 1801 respectively on their voyages from Ireland to NSW, involving the leaders of the United Irishmen who would go on to lead the Castle Hill escape attempt.[12] The arrival of the Irish political prisoners fuelled the feeling for potential unrest within the colony as the Irish were viewed by the predominately British free settlers and military as being religiously regressive, racially inferior and culturally backward. This colonial relationship was compounded by the fact that convicts constituted the majority of the population and that a large proportion of these convicts were Irish.[13] The colony had witnessed several minor uprising attempts prior to the arrival of the *Anne* with racial tension intensifying with the news brought to the colony onboard the *Anne* that England and Ireland had unified.[14] The lack of indent papers for the Irish political prisoners combined with the fact that Protestantism was the only sanctioned religion within the colony to create political conditions conducive to conflict. Furthermore, the proportion of convicted United Irishmen in the colony grew to somewhere between 10 and 25 per cent of the total population, compared with only 5 per cent of the total population in Ireland in 1798.[15] The catalyst for this conflict occurred on Sunday 22nd January 1804 with the arrival of an American whaling ship, the *Ferret.* This ship carried newspapers from London dated August 1803 which brought the first details of a new uprising in Ireland, led by Robert Emmet (brother of 1798 United Irishmen leader Thomas Emmet). This uprising had resulted in the death of Chief Justice Lord Kilwarden on 23rd July 1803 in Dublin.[16]

In 1801, the colony was still dependent upon food provisions being transported from London and other British colonies. To aid in the goal of self-sufficiency, the colonial Governor Phillip Gidley King created a new government farm at Castle Hill to provide food via the growing of crops and the grazing of sheep and cattle.[17] The Castle Hill farm was worked by an estimated 300 convicts, predominantly Irish, including the Irish political prisoners who arrived onboard the *Anne* and *Hercules*. Whilst the colony had been exclusively Protestant, and despite concerns of allowing the Irish political prisoners to congregate at Catholic mass, Governor

[9] Ruan O'Donnell, "Liberty or Death", in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, eds. Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Daire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 609.
[10] Ramsay Silver, *Battle*, 6.
[11] Hobart to King, 29 August 1802, Enclosure 2, 'The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to Lord Pelham', 21 May 1802, *HRA* Series 1, vol. 3, p. 569 as quoted in Lynette Ramsay Silver, *The Battle of Vinegar Hill: Australia's Irish Rebellion, 1804* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1989), 69.
[12] O'Donnell, "Liberty", 611-612.
[13] Anne-Maree Whitaker, "Swords to Ploughshares? The 1798 Irish Rebels in New South Wales", *Labour History*, no. 75 (November 1998), 9.
[14] Riley, "Australian Rebellion", 4.
[15] O'Donnell, "Liberty", 613.
[16] Whitaker, *Unfinished*, 89.
[17] Ramsay Silver, *Battle*, 51.

King authorised Irish political prisoner Father Thomas Dixon to preach the first Catholic service in the colony on May 15th, 1803 at Castle Hill.[18] The rationale behind this decision was to assist in placating the Irish convicts, yet hindsight enables us to question King's judgement, for he provided the perfect opportunity for the Irish to congregate and plan. In the aftermath of Robert Emmet's uprising, Phillip Cunningham, United Irishmen and convict leader, utilised the ability to meet during Catholic mass to plan and lead what was to become the Castle Hill escape attempt. Furthermore he was able to take advantage of the small number of convict wardens who guarded the Castle Hill government farm, most of which joined the escape attempt.[19] The attempt commenced after sunset on the evening of Sunday 4th March, 1804 when convict John Cavenah set fire to his hut in Castle Hill as the signal to rise.[20] The same tactics that were utilised in the 1798 Vinegar Hill rebellion were adopted in the Castle Hill escape attempt. Escapees were split into smaller groups with orders to raid the local settlers in search of weapons and food. Despite instructions from Cunningham to avoid physical altercations, violence did occur when Robert Doogan, the local executioner, was beaten by two English convicts who had also joined the escape attempt.[21] The plan was to set fire to Elizabeth Farm in Parramatta in order to draw away the Parramatta garrison enabling the collection of additional weapons before marching to the Hawkesbury to meet up with supporters.

Like Vinegar Hill, the Castle Hill escape attempt was doomed from the beginning as convict informers had advised the authorities of the intended plans.[22] King declared martial law on Monday 5th March, sending Major George Johnston and the NSW Corps to pursue the rebels.[23] Figures vary as to the casualties resulting from the battle, with an estimated nine convicts killed and many more injured. Major Johnston recorded that 'more than 20' rebels were killed.[24] It is noted that the convicts were armed with '136 muskets, 14 pistols, and a huge pile of swords, bayonets and pitchforks,'.[25] Sources of the battle confirm that no deaths or injuries of the NSW Corps or their civilian supporters were sustained.[26] Given this, it may appear that a degree of censorship may have been evident in the report of the events of 5th March 1804 by the *Sydney Gazette*.

Punishment of the leaders of the Castle Hill escape was swift and harsh. Utilising his authority under martial law, Major Johnston had Phillip Cunningham hanged in the government store in Green Hills (Windsor) sometime after 5th March. There is a lack of specific detail as to the date on which Cunningham was hanged and whether he was already deceased prior to the hanging. Andrew Moore has speculated that Cunningham may already have been deceased and was hanged in chains as a show of political strength.[27] In an attempt to retain order in the colony, Governor King issued a statement on Wednesday 7th March promising a pardon to: 'those involved and still on the loose have until Friday 9th March to hand themselves in or suffer the most extreme example of punishment.'[28] It was claimed that several of the captured convicts were hanged without a trial, but the practice swiftly ceased with the intervention of

[18] Ramsay Silver, *Battle*, 71.
[19] Whitaker, *Unfinished*, 96.
[20] *Sydney Gazette*, 11 March 1804.
[21] Whitaker, *Unfinished*, 96.
[22] Moore, *Death*, 118.
[23] *Sydney Gazette*, 11 March 1804.
[24] Grant Journal: MLMSS Set 480, p. 7 as quoted in Anne-Maree Whitaker, *Unfinished Revolution: United Irishmen in New South Wales 1800-1810* (Sydney: Crossing Press, 1994), 102.
[25] *Sydney Gazette*, 11 March 1804.
[26] Whitaker, "Ploughshares", 13.
[27] *Ibid*.
[28] *Sydney Gazette*, 11 March 1804.

Governor King although these facts appear to have been censored.[29] On Thursday 8th March, a court martial was convened to hear the cases against ten of the convict captives who were charged with being 'riotously, tumultuously and traitorously armed with an intent to overturn his Majesty's Government; and resisting, opposing and attacking his Majesty's forces'.[30] All ten captives were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Two of the sentenced, Jonothan Burke and Bryan McCormack, were granted a reprieve by Governor King due to the evidence used in their conviction proving to be circumstantial.[31] The proclaimed state of martial law was lifted on 10th March 1804.[32]

Including Cunningham, nine participants were hanged with seven sentenced to receive floggings of between 200 and 500 lashes. A further thirty four were sentenced to serve time on the chain-gangs on 12th and 13th March, 'until otherwise disposed of.'[33] These thirty four were exiled to the Coal River penal settlement (Newcastle) at the end of March 1804 under the leadership of a young Lieutenant Charles Menzies. This settlement designated as a location of further punishment for 'desperate characters.'[34] The settlement became synonymous with hard labour and even harsher conditions, with convicts engaged in coal mining, burning lime and cutting cedar for use within the colony. So as not to repeat the mistakes of Castle Hill, King ordered the removal of all Catholic rites at Coal River as an additional level of control over the majority Irish convicts thereby re-establishing Protestantism as the sole faith of the colony.[35] While the estimated numbers of convict participants in the Castle Hill escape attempt vary from between 200 to 300, relatively few of the participants were accused of any crime or were sentenced to any punishment. Evidently, Governor King recognised that the colony still needed human capital if any attempt at self-sufficiency was to be successful. As such, the majority of those who participated in the Castle Hill escape attempt were sent back to the government farm to continue producing food for the colony. It may be considered that these individuals chose to make the most out of the opportunities available within the colony and therefore did not dwell on the failure of the escape attempt.

The level of insurrection amongst Irish convicts diminished post 1804 due to a dearth of experienced leadership among the Irish convicts, particularly the Irish political prisoners. Combined with the tightening of security, this had a significant impact on curtailing any further mass escape attempts. The harsh conditions of the Coal River penal settlement also contributed to the reduction in dissent from the Irish convicts. Even the much-loved rebel songs carried onboard convict transport ships from Ireland had started to disappear and lose their significance other than to measure off another day of repetitive struggle and toil.[36] This strong Irish oral folk tradition arrived in Port Jackson when the convicts disembarked with their songs that could make defeat sound uplifting while memorialising darker, collective memories. Strangely, there is no evidence of any contemporary Irish songs being fashioned to commemorate or memorialise the events of Castle Hill March 1804.

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[29] P. O'Shaughnessy (ed.), *A Rum Story: The Adventures of Joseph Holt*, Sydney, 1988, p. 81 as quoted in Lynette Ramsay Silver, *The Battle of Vinegar Hill: Australia's Irish Rebellion, 1804* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1989), 110.

[30] *HRA* I, iv, 573-7.

[31] *Sydney Gazette*, 11 March 1804.

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] *Sydney Gazette*, 18 March 1804.

[34] King, 2 January 1806, *HRNSW*, vol. 4, 9.

[35] J. E. Gallagher, "The Convict Rising at Castle Hill, 1804", B.A (hons.) unpublished thesis, University of New England, 1970, 123.

[36] David Murray, 'Tiernan, Smith and Desmond: The Men from God Knows Where', https://hunterlivinghistories.com/2014/03/06/true-crime-2/ accessed 1 April, 2019.

Folklore as an historical source can be highly problematic. First and foremost is the problem of an acceptable definition. Folklore is seen to pertain to the 'common people' which makes it distinct from the cultural and artistic forms of the gentry and aristocracy.[37] On this basis the folkloric works are created and distributed largely separate from official, or formal, channels of communication within society, and are utilised as a means of informal education and group identity making.[38] This learning process often displays variation with no 'standard' version evident and often provides an alternative to the official version of events. Further complexity arises from the fact that folklore is present in every culture, relies heavily on the oral tradition to pass on knowledge and can take various forms ranging from songs to narrative storytelling. Of course, folklore changes and evolves over time, and has historically eluded capture. Colonial historians have identified folklore songs of both Irish and British origin, noting the integral role these songs played in the daily lives of the colonial population. However, there appears to be no evidence of folk songs from the early colonial period. Australian folklorist John Meredith describes a folk song as being one composed to describe an event or some aspect of the life of the singer, or of someone near to them, and 'written purely for the purpose of self-expression or commemoration'.[39] The common aspects of what constitutes a folk song requires some form of oral transmission to be involved making the role of the researcher difficult. Is the lack of evidence of folk songs in the early colonial period an example of a communal 'silence' or a possible intentional 'silence in memory'?

The role of 'suffering' and the existence of a 'silent side of history' were recognised as being significant by Swiss philosopher, Max Pickard.[40] These historical 'silences' are often a reflection of the control of power and often knowledge.[41] Leopold von Ranke postulated that the scholarly study of history was confined to written sources excluding oral evidence.[42] For researchers of 'social memory', it is important to explain why particular events were remembered and commemorated, and why others appear to have been forgotten.[43] The apparent loss of memory can either be an unconscious process or an intentional act of censorship and suppression. The sole repository of reported information regarding the events of Castle Hill in 1804 was the government-owned *Sydney Gazette* which censored the information available to the colony. This form of censorship is an example of an enforced silence on a macro level, controlled by the state or its representatives and generally utilised for political purposes. However, we can assume that the participants who survived the escape attempt at Castle Hill discussed their experiences and their memories of the event. Yet there appears to have been silence at this micro level as well.[44] The collective silence concept infers the notion of forgetting the past, which is the antithesis to collective memory, whereas the cornerstone of the Irish oral folk tradition is the recording of memory, often in song.

Our available sources of the Castle Hill event are chiefly derived from official government documentation, and the view of the predominately Irish convict participants is severely lacking. This is largely the result of the Irish political prisoners, whilst comprising a

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[37] Graham Seal, *The Hidden Culture: Folklore in Australian Society*, 2nd edn (Perth: Black Swan Press, 1998), 4.
[38] Seal, *Hidden Culture*, 11.
[39] John Meredith and Hugh Anderson, *Folk Songs of Australia* (Sydney: Ure Smith Pty Ltd, 1967), 8.
[40] Robin E. Sheriff, "Exposing Silence as Cultural Censorship: A Brazilian Case", *American Anthropologist*, vol. 102, no. 1 (2000), 114.
[41] *Ibid*.
[42] Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 18.
[43] *Ibid.*, 32.
[44] *Ibid.*, 117.

large portion of the early colony, being viewed as a ‘silent group’, a politically subaltern collective within the colony whose participation within society was often muted. Furthermore, racial and religious prejudice was directed toward the Irish on a daily basis. Perhaps there was some substance to support O’Farrell’s view of the Irish seeking to ‘flee from persecution’. Evidence of collective silences generally exists in response to disempowerment, but does not necessarily define an absence of political consciousness or knowledge; rather, the silences may be utilised as an ideological defence mechanism.[45] Numerous examples exist where Irish political prisoners within the colony chose to recant their rebellious nature against the British authorities and instead utilised the collective silence as an adaptation to their circumstances. In doing this, they focused on the opportunities available to them. In doing so, their focus was the potential to succeed and the ability to prosper rather than dwell on the defeats of the past. This sentiment recognised that the young colony provided opportunities unavailable in Ireland.

Communication theorist Michael Schudson argues that, ‘memory is a distortion since memory is invariably and inevitably selective. A way of seeing is a way of not seeing, a way of remembering is a way of forgetting, too.’[46] There are different aspects of silences, depending upon the intended purpose. The silence resulting from the censorship of the Castle Hill escape attempt could be understood as the government seeking to monopolise information as a means to curtail the turmoil within the colony. In this regard, the state-controlled silence could be seen as favouring those in power.[47] The silences reflected by the state censorship of the events of Castle Hill confirm a total absence of any reference to the event. This is evident in the lack of commemoration in 1854 of the 50th anniversary of the Castle Hill escape attempt in either of the popular newspapers within the colony as well as a total absence of mention in the NSW parliamentary minutes of 1854.[48] Despite the Irish oral tradition of memory in song, there is no evidence to confirm that Castle Hill was remembered in contemporary song or prose until 1966.

The folkloric process of memorialising significant events thrived in Ireland for thousands of years, predominantly following an oral folkloric tradition, with songs only beginning to be published in the nineteenth century. The Irish oral tradition is problematic in a documentary, empirical sense, for the historian likely will not know who initially created the song, their motivation, and their relationship with the commemorated event. However, this tradition was an ordinary practice embedded within a ritualised framework with a strong connection to the Irish past, but also with the ability to be re-shaped according to needs and uses of present Irish society.[49] Indeed, there is often variance in the tune to which a song is performed and subtle differences in the lyrics, all of which can be determined by whether the singer witnessed the original event, the audience to which they are performing the song and the location in which the song is being performed. These issues demonstrate the difficulty in dealing with Irish folklore songs let alone attempting to define folklore. The Irish term often used is *béaloideas* which literally translates as ‘oral instruction’.[50]

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[45] Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 127.
[46] Michael Schudson, “Dynamic of Distortion in Collective Memory”, in *Memory Distortion*, Daniel L. Schacter (ed.), Boston, 1997, p. 348 as quoted in Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, “Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting”, *Social Forces*, vol. 88, no. 3 (2010), 1107.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/hansard/pages/first-council.aspx# accessed 6 May 2019.
[49] Vito Carrassi, “Between Folk and Lore: Performing, Textualising and (mis)Interpreting the Irish Oral Tradition”, *Estudios Irlandeses*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2017), 35.
[50] Audrey Robitaillié and Marjan Shokouhi, “Introduction: New Perspectives on Irish Folklore”, *Estudios Irlandeses*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2017), 1.

Seán 'O Súilleabháin, archivist with the Irish Folklore Commission from 1935-1971, stated:

> *Folklore is a very comprehensive term to connote the complex of oral traditions of all peoples. It embraces not only their popular beliefs and customs, but also their traditional tales, legends, songs, proverbs, prayers, charms and riddles – in fact, any type of oral literature which has a more or less set form.*[51]

The Irish oral tradition of song sees the combination of music and language evidencing how identity is encoded in this type of cultural narrative.[52] Vito Carrassi takes this notion further by highlighting the importance of folklore being considered as a living tradition among the culture noting the inseparability of the 'lore' from the 'folk' creating it.[53]

Historically, the oral song tradition in Ireland has been acutely linked with the coloniser-colonised relationship between Ireland and Britain recounting the desire for Irish Independence for centuries. How does the Castle Hill silence compare with other historical events in the pyshe of the Irish diaspora? The history of the Irish people is often considered to be one marred by tragedy and invasion, with these events featuring prominently in the Irish oral tradition of song. Examples of this process include the rebellion of 1798 and the famine between 1845-1849, which confirm the Irish tradition of memorialising tragic events in song. The commemoration of these Irish events can be compared with the commemoration of major Australian colonial events such as the 1804 Castle Hill escape attempt and the 1854 battle at Eureka Stockade, both of which involved a majority of Irish participants.

The conflict between the Irish and British and the desire for an independent and united Ireland reached a climax with the battle of Vinegar Hill near Enniscorthy, County Wexford on 21st June 1798 where an estimated twenty thousand United Irishmen and their supporters were soundly defeated by a much smaller British force. Numerous contemporary songs to memorialise the 1798 defeat at Vinegar Hill have been documented including '*Come all you Warriors*' written anonymously shortly after June 1798 and referenced in the *Memoirs of Joseph Holt: General of the Irish Rebels in 1798*.[54] Another famous song written in 1798 was '*The Croppy Boy'*, collected in G. D. Zimmermann's *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, refers to the 'cropped' hairstyle adopted by many of the Irish rebels in emulation of the French Jacobins.[55] This term 'croppy' was originally used by the British to be derogatory but was adopted by the Irish as a mark of distinction and pride. Irish folk singer Frank Harte said that 'those in power write the history, while those who suffer write the songs.'[56] Though not the case with Castle Hill, this creation of folk songs is evident in the case of Vinegar Hill.

The Irish Famine began in 1845 as the result of a potato blight which devastated successive potato crops. It is estimated that one million Irish died as a direct result of the famine while a similar number emigrated. This is a significant proportion of the Irish population which

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[51] Seán 'O Súilleabháin, *Irish Folk Custom and Belief*, Dublin, 1967, p. 8 as quoted in Audrey Robitaillié and Marjan Shokouhi, "Introduction: New Perspectives on Irish Folklore", *Estudios Irlandeses*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2017), 1.

[52] Thérèse Smith, "Singing the Self; Song, Memory and Identity: Three views from Tom Munnelly's Field Diaries for the Department of Irish Folklore", *Folk Lifees*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2018), 21.

[53] Robitaillié and Shokouhi, "Introduction", 5.

[54] T. C. Croker (ed.), *Memoirs of Joseph Holt: General of the Irish Rebels in 1798* (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), 185.

[55] Gering, "To Sing", 157.

[56] *Irish Examiner*, 25 March 2016.

at the time was estimated at 8.5 million.[57] Cormac O'Grada believes that the numbers of deaths directly attributed to the famine would have been significantly higher if large numbers of Irish chose to remain in Ireland rather than emigrate.[58] Memory of this deadly and disastrous event has been perpetuated via the oral tradition of song. Examples of contemporary original songs dealing with the famine exist such as, '*Amhrán na bPrátaí Dubha'* ('The Song of the Black Potatoes') attributed to Máire Ní Dhroma who lived near Dungarvan, County Waterford. Other examples include, '*Na Fataí Bána'* ('The White Potatoes') written in 1846 and attributed to Peatsaí ʼO Callanáin (a tenant farmer from County Galway) and the ever popular, '*Skibbereen'* attributed to Patrick Carpenter and written in 1869. It is this Irish oral tradition of song that provides a human element to major Irish historical events such as the 1798 rebellion and the famine.

The battle of Eureka Stockade occurred on 3rd December 1854 in the goldfields of Victoria, and became a defining moment in Australian political and cultural history.[59] Similar to the events of Castle Hill in 1804, the events of Eureka culminated in a decimation by the troopers when a dawn raid ensued. This resulted in indiscriminate shooting of the protesting miners. Sources vary as to the official death toll, but the Ballarat District Register confirms twenty-seven deaths directly associated with the battle at Eureka Stockade.[60] There are both similarities and differences between the events of 1804 at Castle Hill and 1854 at Eureka. Both events involved a high proportion of Irish participants with the 'rebels' poorly disciplined and lacking organisation resulting in both battles being short and violent defeats. The main difference was that the leaders from Castle Hill were swiftly tried and executed whereas the leaders of Eureka were tried for treason before a jury with all being acquitted. Despite the Eureka defeat, political change was successful and rapid with Eureka leaders Peter Lalor and J. B. Humffray elected to represent Ballarat in the Victorian Legislative Council. Folklorist Keith McKenry, in his analysis of Eureka, located in excess of sixty ballads, poems or songs directly related to, or referring to, Eureka as of 2008. This starkly contrasts with the single ballad (or song) that my research has uncovered that is directly attributed to the 1804 escape attempt from Castle Hill.

The first known ballad or poem relating to Eureka was penned by Ballarat storekeeper and miner Thomas Pierson, who committed '*The Digger's Dirge'* to his diary the day following the battle at Eureka.[61] One of the first songs attributed to Eureka was written by Charles Thatcher in 1854 titled, '*The Private Despatch of Captain Bumble'* which mocked the involvement of the military in the battle.[62] One of the thirteen acquitted miners, Raffaello Carboni, penned the song, '*Victoria's Southern Cross'* in his self-published book *The Eureka Stockade*, in 1855 on the first anniversary on the battle.[63] The spirit of Eureka was then taken up many years later by poet Henry Lawson who penned three famous poems directly inspired by the events of the Eureka Stockade and the impact this event had on the development of the

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[57] Richard Gruber, "Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory", *The European Legacy*, vol. 6, no. 6 (2001), 817.
[58] Cormac ʼO Gráda, "Famine, Trauma and Memory", *The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* (2001), 123.
[59] Keith McKenry, "The Ballads of Eureka", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2008), 51.
[60] Dorothy Wickham, *Deaths at Eureka* (Ballarat: D Wickham, 1996), 21.
[61] Thomas Pierson, 4 December 1854, "Diaries 1852–1864", Mitchell Library, MS 1164/6.
[62] Charles Thatcher, "The Private Despatch of Captain Bumble", as quoted in H. Anderson, *The Colonial Minstrel*, Melbourne, 1960, 17-19 as quoted in Keith McKenry, "The Ballads of Eureka", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2008), 55.
[63] Raffaello Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade*, Melbourne 1963, (Ballarat, 1855), 144-5 as quoted in Keith McKenry, "The Ballads of Eureka", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2008), 56.

Australian cultural identity. '*Flag of the Southern Cross'* was written in 1887 followed by '*Eureka'* in 1889, inspired by the death of Eureka leader Peter Lalor on 9 February 1889, and '*The Fight at Eureka Stockade'* completed in 1890.[64] Lawson then went on to employ the theme of Eureka and the Southern Cross flag to inspire the shearers in the strikes in western Queensland when he completed, '*Freedom on the Wallaby'* in 1891.

Whilst a sizeable list of material exists to memorialise Eureka Stockade in song and poem, I have only located one song, which directly relates to the events of 1804 at Castle Hill.[65] *The Ballad of Castle Hill'* was written by Australian folk artist John Dengate in 1966. The closest evidence of a contemporary song was created by Irish convict Frank 'The Poet' McNamara in 1839 titled, '*Moreton Bay'* which includes references to the harsh treatment of Irish convicts on the government farm of Castle Hill. However, this bears no reference, either direct or incidental, to the escape attempt of March 1804. McNamara's poems and songs written in the colony reflected his rebellious spirit from both his life in Ireland to his rebellion against the excesses of the convict system.[66] If there is evidence of songs produced by the events of Eureka, why is the Irish oral tradition absent when it comes to Castle Hill? Could this be an example of a silence in memory or may this disparity be explained more simply noting the government-owned press in 1804 compared to the freedom of the privately operated press evident in 1854? Not only is there a lack of evidence of contemporary Irish songs commemorating Castle Hill but there is also no evidence of contemporary songs describing the Castle Hill victory from the British perspective. Given the racial intolerance and discrimination evident in the colony towards the Irish, why did the British not use the victory to taunt the Irish? This may be an example of the transient nature of folklore; songs may have been created but have simply disappeared in the aftermath of Castle Hill to be replaced by songs memorialising new significant colonial events such as the Rum Rebellion of 1808.

The lack of commemoration may be explained by the transient nature of the folk song tradition. An examination of the folklore tradition would expect to discover the existence of folk songs as an informal methodology utilised to record, educate and remember the events of 1804 but no records could be located supporting the existence of Irish or British contemporary folk songs. Folk songs may well have been created but unfortunately did not survive in the rapidly changing environment of the early colony. The only documented song discovered which was directly attributed to Castle Hill 1804 was written in 1966 by John Dengate, 'The Ballad of Castle Hill'. Clearly, further research into the folk traditions of the early colony are warranted and contend that the lack of any contemporary folk songs commemorating the 1804 Castle Hill escape attempt reflects a period of silence in the colonial archive exacerbated by the complexities of the folklore tradition and resulting from several inter-connected factors. Firstly, the public reporting of the event was heavily censored and even suppressed via the government-controlled Sydney Gazette which provide a British-biased version of the event. Secondly, the swift and harsh punishment meted out to the Irish leaders of the escape attempt inhibited their capacity to inscribe their experiences on the Irish oral tradition in Australia. This process of swift and harsh punishments effectively dismantled the Irish convict leadership resulting in the remainder of the Irish convict population resigned to their fate. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the remaining Irish passively accepted that the NSW colony provided an opportunity to materially prosper that was less available at home in Ireland. I have contrasted this absence of Irish commemorative song with examples of Irish contemporary

[64] McKenry, "Ballads", 59.
[65] I would like to thank Dr Anne-Maree Whitaker for this lead.
[66] Jeff Brownrigg, "The Legend of Frank the Poet: Convict Heritage Recovered or Created?", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 18 (2016), 3.

songs written about the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen at Vinegar Hill, the famine of 1845-49 and the 1854 Eureka Stockade in the Victorian goldfields. Whilst early colonial folklore requires further investigation, I propose that the lack of memorialisation of the Castle Hill escape attempt in folk song is an example of a silence in collective memory of both the Irish and British brought about by the inter-connected factors outlined above. Ultimately, a confluence of political disempowerment and economic opportunity encouraged the Irish to neglect this episode of Australian colonial history in their oral folklore tradition. For these reasons, the 1804 Castle Hill escape attempt represents a silence in Australian colonial history.

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