

# **“Sons of Science”: Remembering John Gould’s Martyred Collectors**

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The Victorian era has been described as “The Heyday of Natural History” (Barber 2). It was a period of intense popular and academic enthusiasm for natural history that spanned the otherwise rigid divides of class and gender. Victorian natural history combined aesthetic, romantic and literary elements with a strong empirical focus on the collection and categorisation of specimens. For the elites and aspiring elites of Victorian Britain, the accumulation of vast collections of plant, animal and geological specimens from the far flung corners of empire also served as symbols of social legitimation, respectability and self-improvement. This emerging demand also created new markets and commercial opportunities for astute businessmen like the taxidermist, publisher and ornithologist, John Gould, who prospered by providing both physical specimens and published information to an extensive and growing list of collectors and subscribers.

To supply these expanding domestic markets, Gould (like other natural history entrepreneurs) relied upon an extensive global network of collectors, correspondents and contributors. Bruno Strasser has observed that collecting was essentially “a collective practice,” with natural history specimens “travelling as gifts along social networks [as well as] . . . commodities that were purchased and distributed through commercial networks” (313). Being located at the centre of these networks, Gould and the other patrons and interpreters of Imperial science unquestioningly assumed a critical role as the definers, arbiters and namers of new species within their particular fields of expertise.

The grand ambition of Victorian natural historians was nothing less than to document and classify “the entirety of nature” (Farber 51), and this bold task required a ceaseless supply of new and exotic species. These discoveries were mostly to be found at the expanding edges of Empire and as a result of exploration into uncharted new lands. Consequently, many of Gould’s army of colonial collectors became closely associated or intimately involved with Australian exploration, acquiring in the process its aura of patriotic, heroic masculinity due to exposure to the dangers of a hostile and remote environment. Henry Reynolds has noted the “special heroic status” of explorers in the Australian context where “in a society that lacked substantial military traditions until 1914, explorers bulked out the otherwise thin ranks of national heroes” (213). The mythologies of empire, science and exploration therefore became intertwined in the Australian setting and this is fundamental to understanding how the lives and achievements of John Gould’s three ‘martyred’ collectors (John Gilbert, Frederick Strange and Johnston Drummond) were perceived and celebrated in the immediate aftermaths of their deaths. Using an historical and contextual interpretation of “heroic” status and its commemoration, this paper describes and explores the factors and dynamics associated with both the Victorian and post-Victorian recognition and remembrance of these three men.

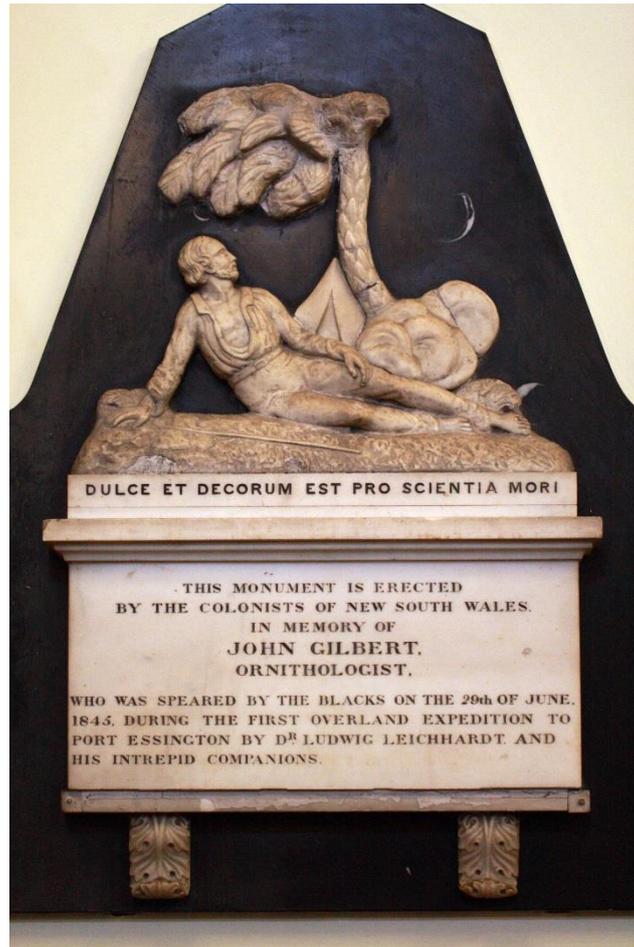


Figure 1: Memorial to John Gilbert on the wall of St James's Church, Sydney  
(Toby Hudson, Wikipedia Commons)

The mural tablet memorial to the naturalist-explorer-collector John Gilbert in Saint James's Church, Sydney, bears the Latin inscription *Dulce et decorum est pro scientia mori* ("it is sweet and fitting to die for science"). A variation on the lines of the Roman poet Horace in *The Odes* (Book 111), the inscription substitutes *scientia* for *patria* (country) reinforcing the perceived link between scientific and imperial progress.<sup>1</sup> Gilbert was killed in June 1845 during a retaliatory night attack on members of the first Leichhardt Expedition by a party of *Kokopera* (Gugu-bera) Aboriginal people at a remote campsite in Western Cape York Peninsula. He was Gould's principal and only salaried collector in the Australian colonies. Two weeks later in July 1845, Gilbert's friend and fellow Gouldian collector, Johnston Drummond, the son of Government botanist and Western Australian settler James

<sup>1</sup> The inertia around the erection of Gilbert's memorial tablet in St. James's Church provides evidence of the rapid falling away of his presence in the public memory. In 1846, following Leichhardt's advocacy to the Chairman, (Leichhardt to Graham, undated) the Leichhardt Testimonial Fund allocated £40 from the public donations component of the Fund for a memorial tablet to Gilbert in 1846. There were plans to locate the tablet in Sydney's Botanic Gardens but these never eventuated and it "reposed" in the office of the Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* for seven years until it was offered for placement in the Australian Museum in 1853 (Etheridge 372). The Museum Trustees responded unanimously that "the Australian Museum was not a suitable place for the erection of a tablet . . . in memory of the late Mr Gilbert" (Etheridge 372). In 1854 James Calvert, another victim of the same attack that killed Gilbert, offered to erect the tablet in Saint James's Church and the memorial finally went on display eight years after its creation (Etheridge 372).

Drummond, was killed by a single *Nyungar* (Noongar) man as he lay sleeping in his camp on the Moore River in Western Australia. Almost a decade later, in October 1854, Frederick Strange, unsuccessful aspirant to Gilbert's role as Gould's official collector in Australia, was killed along with three other Europeans by a small group of *Darumbal* (Dharambal) men while on a collecting expedition to Middle Percy Island off the Central Queensland coast ("Return of the Ketch Vision" 2).

Gilbert's memorial was funded by donations from the grateful public of the colony to the Leichhardt Memorial Fund. Created by the colonial sculptor Charles Abraham, it is now situated with similar memorials to other significant figures of Australian science and exploration such as the explorer Edmund Kennedy and colonial scientists Alexander and William Sharp Macleay. The marble bas relief and images of the palm tree above a fallen Gilbert are a mixture of the classical and exotic that echoes the epic sentiment of the Latin inscription.

By contrast, there are no public monuments to the memory of Johnston Drummond and Frederick Strange. However, in a poem published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1855 to raise funds for Strange's widow and children, left destitute by the refusal of the insurance company to pay out on a policy that he had purchased, George French Angus, then Secretary of the Australian Museum, offered similar heroic and lyrical praise to the life and work of Frederick Strange.<sup>2</sup> Linking Strange with great explorers and naturalists such as Ludwig Leichhardt, Edmund Kennedy and Richard Cunningham, French waxed lyrical on the "immortals . . . who have for science died" (1). He portrayed them as "martyred" heroes and "Sons of Science" who fell "willingly" on Nature's shrine and now wore "an ageless wreath of fame" (1).

Nevertheless, for Strange and Drummond there was to be no historical immortality nor "wreaths" of lasting fame, no permanent place in the pantheon of science, and little presently remains to honour or remember the contributions of these two men to Australian science. Despite recording and collecting the type specimens of many new species in Australasia (Fisher "Strange") there are no bird or mammal names that honour Strange's work. There is however, one genus (*Strangea*) and one species of plant named after Strange and, as a result of his prolific shell collecting and dealing, there are also seventeen species of molluscs that bear the name *Strangei*. Apart from brief entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and the Australian National Herbarium website, and minor dispersed references in some recent monographs (Russell 167, Macinnis 167, Olsen 14, 26, 29-36), an early biographical article by the amateur ornithologist Hubert Whittell in 1947 is still the only substantial account of Strange's life and works. Gilbert Whitley (141-67) in a 1938 article on John Gould's network of collectors and associates did provide a brief description of Strange's life and work (159-60) and also a more comprehensive coverage of Gilbert (143-51) that still, however, reaffirmed Gilbert's relative obscurity at that time. Strange's body was reportedly thrown into the sea ("Report to the Legislative Council of New South Wales" 17) and

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<sup>2</sup> The principal cause of Rosa Strange's destitution was the continued refusal of the Trafalgar Life Assurance Association in London to pay the £1,000 benefit that Strange had taken out prior to his departure for the Percy Islands. It wasn't until five years later in 1859, after a landmark decision on the law of agency by the British Court of Chancery (*Rossiter v. The Trafalgar Life Assurance Association*), that his widow received the full payout plus interest (Beavan 385). This judgement established the mutual rights and obligations of principal and agent that now underpins all modern insurance law. Ironically, this was perhaps Strange's most enduring, though unintended and unrecognised, legacy.

consequently there was no grave and there is currently no historical marker at the site of his death on Middle Percy island.

Johnston Drummond's body was recovered and buried by his family but again there are no public monuments to his death, no published accounts of his life and no recognition in species nomenclature. There is a monument to his father, James Drummond, at Toodyay, Western Australia, and another (shared with John Gilbert) at Drakes Brook, Western Australia that commemorates their joint discovery of the Noisy Scrub Bird.

In contrast to Strange and Drummond, the tributes to and memorialisation of John Gilbert have been prolific. In his classic study of the making of the Burke and Wills legend, Tim Bonyhady employed eight implicit dimensions of commemorative activity (231-311). Max Jones's analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British "heroes" uses a similar range of "indicators" to determine the level of "collective emotional investment in an individual, both during their lifetime and after" (441).<sup>3</sup> When some of these measures, such as published biographies or scholarly articles, media coverage, references in art and literature, public monuments, markers and memorial services and the naming of geographical places, plant and animal species, are applied to the memory of these three collectors, the comparative differences in their posthumous profiles becomes apparent.



Figure 2: Memorial to John Gilbert, Gilbert's Lookout, Taroom, 2014.  
(Kerry Raymond Wikipedia Commons)

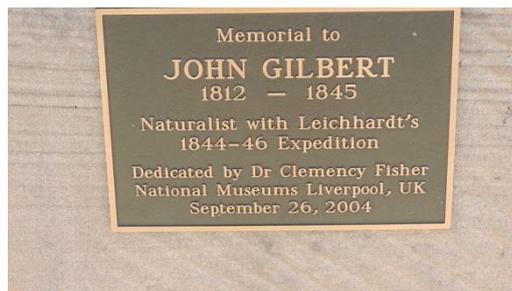


Figure 3: Memorial to John Gilbert, Gilbert's Lookout, Taroom, 2014, with detail of plaque  
(Kerry Raymond Wikipedia Commons)

<sup>3</sup> Bonyhady's commemorative dimensions include: memorials, monuments and markers, press coverage, species nomenclature, art and literature, academic works, public commemorative grants, coverage in school curricula and public ceremonies. Jones's 'indicators' of heroism include: biographies, media representations, references in personal testimonies, funeral and memorial ceremonies, memorial funds and public monuments.

Four geographical features were named after John Gilbert as a result of his participation in the First Leichhardt Expedition.<sup>4</sup> There are also five monuments to Gilbert across Australia (one being shared with James Drummond at Drakes Brook, Western Australia). The earliest was erected in 1854 and the most recent unveiled at Taroom in 2004.<sup>5</sup> Gilbert's name is also preserved in the names of thirty-two animal and twelve plant species, including at least one species of reptile, three species of fish, two molluscs, two marsupials, one mammal, and four bird forms (Fisher, "Importance" 470; Fisher, "Re: Gilbert" *Atlas*).

Gilbert's life, death and achievements have been the subject of more than twenty published articles in scientific journals,<sup>6</sup> commemorative articles in two Queensland and one Western Australian regional daily newspapers, a monograph on Leichhardt and Gilbert (Chisholm), a biographical booklet (Chisholm, "An Explorer"), a chapter in a book on the history of ornithology (Fisher, "A Man"), and a doctoral thesis (Fisher, "Importance"). In November 2014, a website on John Gilbert by Clemency Fisher was also launched as part of the homepage of the National Museums Liverpool.

Within literature, Patrick White, in his 1957 novel, *Voss*, modelled the characters of Voss and Palfreyman on Leichhardt and Gilbert respectively, although the saintly, sensitive and self-sacrificing Palfreyman bears little resemblance to the feisty and hypercritical John Gilbert who bickered and squabbled with Leichhardt across half of the Australian continent (Webster 381-400). Gilbert also appears in *Too Young for Ghosts*, the first of Janis Balodis's dramatic *Ghosts Trilogy*, where his spirit debates with Leichhardt the nature of fame, memory and belonging and begs Leichhardt to return and "find his bones" (73, 241). Tilley also links Gilbert's lost grave (and Leichhardt's own disappearance) with a form of "memorialisation" associated with the "white-vanishing" discourse in Australian literature and its fascination with enduring mystery (199). This discrepancy between the current prominence of Gilbert and the relative obscurity of his two former colleagues invites consideration as to why all of Gould's three fallen "sons of science" did not attain or maintain a similar posthumous status as true Victorian exemplary heroes of science.

Johnston Drummond's death on 12 July 1845 attracted virtually no press attention. The *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal* simply reported a fortnight later that "a white person named Johnson [*sic*] Drummond" was speared and killed by a native after being "found with a native woman, the wife of the man who speared him" ("Local – Murder of a White by a Native" 3). The Drummonds were atypical settlers in their sympathies for, and close association with, Aboriginal people and in their fluency with Aboriginal languages, which they relied upon for much of their success in natural history collecting (Clarke 83). Unfortunately, this close relationship also extended to the "renting" or "borrowing" of Aboriginal women as

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<sup>4</sup> The four geographical features named after Gilbert are: Gilbert's Range in the Dawson Valley (1844); Gilbert's Dome in the Peak Range, Central Queensland (1844); Gilbert's Range in the Lynd Valley, Cape York (1845), and; the Gilbert River, Gulf of Carpentaria (1845).

<sup>5</sup> The five monuments to Gilbert are: the memorial tablet erected in Saint James Church, Sydney (1854); the shared memorial and plaque to the discovery of the Noisy Scrub Bird erected at Drakes Brook, Western Australia (1948); the welded plaque and wooden marker left by the James Cook University and Australian Army expedition at the claimed site of Gilbert's grave on Rutland Plains Station, Western Cape York (1985); the marble and brass grave marker erected on the same site of Gilbert's grave by members of the Eacham Historical Society (1999); the memorial monument to Gilbert unveiled by Clemency Fisher at Taroom (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Details of many more publications on Gilbert by Fisher than have been directly cited in this paper may be found on the Liverpool Museums website:

<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml/collections/zoology/john-gilbert/references.aspx>.

travelling companions and sexual partners. This was a common practice for both Johnston and his brother John (an Inspector of Police) but it scandalised colonial society in Western Australia and was the source of much tension between the brothers and their father (Erickson 39–40). John Drummond eventually tracked down and shot his brother's killer and was immediately suspended by Governor Hutt for abusing his position and unlawful killing (Green 95). Johnston Drummond's lack of substantial posthumous profile can be largely explained by the sordid and personal nature of the circumstances of his death, his youth and novice status as a collector, the subsequent controversy over his brother's suspension and later reinstatement, and his father's overshadowing reputation in colonial and metropolitan natural history circles.

In life, Frederick Strange was comparatively a much more prudent, respectable and prominent figure as well as a more accomplished naturalist, dealer and collector. The tragic but apparently pointless deaths of Strange and three of his companions was also a better fit with the Victorian heroic trope. It prompted outrage in the press, an official enquiry and the despatch of the New South Wales Steam Vessel *HMSS Torch* to apprehend and arrest the perpetrators. In early 1855, its Commanding Officer, Lieutenant William Chimmo RN, returned to Sydney with three Aboriginal men accompanied by three women and four children ("Report to the Legislative Council of New South Wales" 14). Despite extensive newspaper coverage, the trial of these three men at the Sydney Water Court was an anti-climax and, after numerous remands and reappearances, all of the prisoners were eventually discharged for lack of evidence ("Water Police Court – Tuesday" 5).

The previously referred to relief fund established by then Curator of the Australian Museum, William Sheridan Wall, was intended primarily as a charity measure for Strange's wife and children made necessary by the refusal of the British insurance company to honour the terms of Strange's life insurance policy. However, it also provided an opportunity, in the Victorian tradition, for prominent citizens and businesses of New South Wales to publicly acknowledge Strange's personal standing and regard in the colony. The 124 subscribers, whose names included identities such as the journalist and politician Henry Parkes, Reverend John Dunmore Lang, landscape artist Conrad Martens, pastoralist-explorer George MacLeay, former Australian Museum Curator George Bennet and former Secretary of the Linnaean Society of London, William Sharp MacLeay, raised well over £100, equivalent to Gilbert's full annual salary ("List of Subscribers to the Fund for the Relief of the Widows and Orphans of the Late Frederick Strange").

"Men of science" was a phrase used by the Victorian scientific community to describe its more respected members, whether amateur or professional. Ruth Barton has argued that this contextual label best reflects the prevailing identity of this community in early and mid-Victorian Britain and the longevity of a more inclusive British amateur tradition within the natural sciences. Barton also maintains that, despite this seemingly encompassing definition, there were clear boundary markers that distinguished true scientific men from others who were dabblers and dealers in natural history. Above all, "men of science" were regarded as hard working and productive, with high ideals and a demonstrated intellect, who sought truth for its own sake and to "add to the sum of human knowledge" (88). Generally, this excluded those who were inhibited in their intellectual pursuits by religious dogmatism and dealers like Strange whose primary motivation in their scientific endeavours was profit. The practical yardsticks used to measure the character and define the status of such scientific men were the quality and quantity of their contributions to science usually in the form of publications, the thoroughness and impartiality of their judgements and their membership of learned societies.

John Gould was able to meet all of these criteria despite his obvious commercial interests in natural history, but this was not the case for Strange. Could Strange's limited recognition in death be therefore primarily a reflection of his constrained status in life?

In a detailed comparison between Strange and another of Gould's collectors, John MacGillivray, Anne Coote provides an explanation for Strange's lack of acceptance in the colonial scientific community despite his life-long craving for such recognition and his ceaseless self-promotion to achieve it. Coote considered a range of contemporary obstacles to Strange's ambition to be "taken seriously as a 'man of science'" (93). These included his humble origins, (as a fisherman and ship's crew member), lack of formal education, status as a commercial dealer, lack of social connections and patrons, difficulties with written communication, and unfamiliarity with classificatory systems and species-naming conventions (93-98). However, she ultimately concludes that it was his lack of publications and therefore paucity of "proven disciplinary knowledge" (99) that precluded Strange's entry to the elite scientific community of New South Wales. While Coote's argument is persuasive and consistent with Barton's approach, it does not provide an adequate explanation for Gilbert's greater acceptance within the colonial scientific community and his more enduring recognition.

Like Gould himself, Gilbert was also from a working-class background (his father was a carpenter and he had worked as a gardener) with a limited formal education. He was clearly making money from his work in natural history and at times experienced difficulty in written communication, particularly punctuation (Chisholm, "Story" 169) and spelling (Fisher "A Man" 80), which he often acknowledged and apologised for. Many of his letters also lacked paragraphs and contained extremely long and long and meandering sentences (Chisholm, "Letters" 195-97). Although his observational skills and classificatory experience were superior to Strange's, Gilbert also never published any of his discoveries and appears to have never been a member of any learned society. Despite these impediments, Gilbert's close association with his employer and patron, John Gould, resulted in his being offered in 1842 the prestigious position of inaugural Curator at Tasmania's new Franklin Museum (Chisholm, "Story" 156). Gilbert declined the offer, wishing to continue his explorations in Australia, but it was a form of honour that always remained beyond the reach of Strange.

Ironically, the immediate public reactions to John Gilbert's death were more subdued than those for Strange. He was killed on the night of 28 June 1845, but news of his death did not reach the outside world until Leichhardt and his party stumbled into the military settlement at Port Essington some six months later. The overwhelming sentiment expressed in reactions of the colonial press was one of grief and regret but this was often subsumed in the simultaneous coverage of Leichhardt's exciting new discoveries. The long time lapse and the very remote and inaccessible location of the murder prevented further retribution being visited on the perpetrators. News of the arrival of Leichhardt's party and Gilbert's death first reached Gould through a letter from Edward Stanley, the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby, who had been told by New South Wales Governor Gipps in late March 1846 (Tree 141). It was only three months after Gould had received the news of Drummond's passing. Gilbert's death was confirmed in May 1846, together with the full circumstances that surrounded it, in a letter to Gould from fellow Leichhardt expedition member John Roper that Gould later read to a meeting of the Zoological Society of London. Leichhardt had managed to salvage some of Gilbert's collection of bird skins and his bound folio journal (with added loose pages), which were forwarded to Gould via Strange and George Bennet in Sydney (Olsen 30). Gould appears to have extracted the bird records, glanced through the journal, and then "left it undisturbed in a drawer"

(Chisholm, *Strange* 19) where it remained until his death in 1881. Gould's apparent lack of interest, even indifference, to the uncertain circumstances and the lack of precautions surrounding the Aboriginal attack and the death of his former employee and trusted primary collector has been interpreted in several, widely divergent ways.

For author, journalist and amateur ornithologist Alec Chisholm, this seeming lack of interest was simply an oversight typical of the very busy and "always in a hurry" Gould (*Explorer* 3-4) while historian Elsie Webster maintains that Gould regarded the journal, unlike the bird notes, as Gilbert's private property which he was not entitled to read (413). Isabella Tree is more judgemental, seeing this as further evidence of Gould's disregard for those who were of no further use to him, his need not to alienate Leichhardt as a potential future supplier of specimens and even his envy of Gilbert's growing recognition by fellow naturalists (145-46). Significantly, in 1846 Gould wrote to Gilbert's father William Gilbert in Windsor expressing his condolences, but chose not to forward his son's personal journal (Chisholm, "Story" 159-60). Regardless of Gould's motives, the net effect of this abandonment in death by his patron in life was to cast Gilbert's legacy for another ninety years into the same oblivion shared by *Strange* and Drummond.

Gilbert's diminishment was such that, Chisholm later lamented, there was in early 1938 insufficient material to write "anything approaching an adequate biographical article, much less a book or booklet" on the collector. For Chisholm, John Gilbert had become one of the "most neglected and least-known of the distinctive figures in Australian history" ("Story" 156). Moreover, he was constantly confused with a later bushranger of the same name. Echoing a version of the "white vanishing" theme of Tilley's study of "lost in the bush" mythology, Chisholm further observed that nothing personal of Gilbert's seemed to have survived, not even a specimen of his signature, as though "soon after John Gilbert . . . slipped into an unmarked grave in North Queensland, everything personal relating to him vanished from the earth" ("Story" 157). It was a situation that Chisholm was determined to research and rectify.

The year 1938 marked 150 years of European settlement on the Australian continent, and was also the centenary of John and Elizabeth Gould's only visit to the Australian colonies in 1838, on which they had been accompanied by the young John Gilbert (Webster 375-76). This latter anniversary sparked a renewed interest in Gould and all aspects of Gouldiana that culminated in a commemorative 1938 issue of the ornithological journal *The Emu*. Amongst its twenty Gouldian articles were three that dealt with various aspects of Gilbert's collecting activities. In May 1938, Chisholm travelled to England to search for more material on Gould and possibly locate some of his descendants. He was successful in making contact in Hampshire with Mrs Helen Edelsten, Gould's only living granddaughter, whose son Dr Geoffrey Edelsten was the custodian of the family papers. Amongst these papers were letters to Gould in Gilbert's own handwriting and a frayed "Old Journal" in two volumes, which was thought to have been Gould's during his Australian visit (Chisholm, "Story" 158), but was actually Gilbert's missing journal. Chisholm announced his discovery in a BBC broadcast in September 1938 and later donated the journal to the Mitchell Library. In August of the same year, seven skeletons were reportedly discovered on the edge of the Simpson Desert in South Australia and the possibility that at last the mystery of Leichhardt's last expedition was solved only served to increase interest in Chisholm's discoveries. A South Australian Government expedition later found that the bones were merely "calcified wood" (Bailey 340).

Three years later in 1941, Chisholm published *Strange New World: The Adventures of John Gilbert and Ludwig Leichhardt*, the first biographical account of John Gilbert and his travels

in Australia. It was largely based on two sources, the contents of Gilbert's journal with all of the reports of quarrels, criticisms, tensions and resentments in his relationship with Leichhardt, and the writings of John Mann, another disgruntled Leichhardt detractor from Leichhardt's failed Second Expedition. Criticism of and outright contempt for Ludwig Leichhardt has a long history in both Australian historiography and popular texts.<sup>7</sup> Such negative characterisations began to appear soon after Leichhardt's disappearance in 1848 but Chisholm was the first to create an antithesis to Leichhardt in his hagiographic portrayal of the character of John Gilbert. In Chisholm's "mouth foaming denunciation" of Leichhardt (Bailey 353) in *Strange New World*, Gilbert is everything that Leichhardt is not. Leichhardt is an incompetent, scatter-brained blunderer, an autocratic Prussian (xix) and a deranged German psychopath (270), an amoral sponger (63), and someone who for most of his journey did not seem to know where he was. Alternatively, Gilbert displays the values and character of a true Englishman to which have been added the qualities of the Australian bushman. He is honest, heroic, dedicated, practical and loyal to his mates, an experienced and intrepid bushman who was "the brains of the enterprise" (Webster 397) and the "kind of hero Australians should have" (Webster 381). Clearly, Chisholm was creating a new Gilbert to achieve his own purpose of finally destroying what remained of Leichhardt's reputation rather than simply commemorating the explorer-naturalist who had died on Cape York 96 years previously.

Later accounts have questioned the accuracy of many of Chisholm's claims and rehabilitated Leichhardt's historical standing, with one describing Chisholm as "the chorus leader of a xenophobic cloud-cuckoo-land construction of ornithology in Australia" (Althofer 395). An appraisal of Chisholm's version of events is beyond the scope of this paper; its significance here is that Chisholm's discoveries and his passionate advocacy of Gilbert began the first phase of a resurrection of interest and increase in the public memorialisation of John Gilbert. Chisholm's *Strange New World* was followed by the first of a comprehensive four-part series of articles by Hubert Whittell, published in *The Emu* from 1941 to 1951, that reviewed and documented, in a more orthodox manner, the ornithological work of John Gilbert in Western Australia.

World War Two and the post-war period saw a renewed enthusiasm for subjects and characters drawn from earlier colonial history (Bonyhady 297) and the late 1940s and 1950s were fertile ground for Chisholm's post-Victorian but similarly epic and character-driven view of Australian exploration and scientific discovery. These lines on the death of Gilbert from William Beard, the popular writer of marathon Australian historical poems in the 1950s, express similar heroic and romantic sentiments to those that George French Angus had written for *Strange*, another fallen "son of science," a century earlier:

Alas! Poor Gilbert, pledged to service true,  
Gave up his life where ancient ghost-gums grew,  
His ashes were uplifted to the sky:  
Upon his bones no black must ever spy. (25)

In 1945, the centenary of the First Leichhardt Expedition, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* published two articles commemorating Gilbert's life and death ("Centenary of John Gilbert,

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<sup>7</sup> A concise overview of the history of Leichhardt's vilification and rehabilitation is provided by Bailey (352-54) starting with the first published criticisms by Daniel Bunce in 1857 and covering later criticisms by John Mann and Ernest Favenc in 1888, Robert Logan Jack in 1921 and Alec Chisholm in 1941.

Explorer,” and “Leichhardt’s Deputy Leader, John Gilbert”). As part of its coverage of the 1948 opening of the monument to commemorate the discovery of the Noisy Scrub Bird by Gilbert and James Drummond in 1842, Perth’s *South Western Advertiser* published an account of Gilbert’s work and travels in Western Australia (“In the Steps of John Gilbert”). Three years later, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* published another article on the search for Gilbert’s then undiscovered grave (“Leichhardt’s Expedition, 1845 – Gilbert’s Burial Place”).

More recently in 1992, Clemency Fisher, now Senior Curator of Vertebrate Zoology at the National Museums Liverpool, completed her doctoral thesis on the significance of Gilbert’s discoveries in the identification and interpretation of Australian fauna. Since then she has published widely on Gilbert and his contemporaries, including a webpage at the Liverpool Museums site. She was fortunate in that the then Liverpool Museum inherited the extensive zoological collections of Gould’s own patron, Edward Stanley, the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby. This internationally important collection included the original type specimens that Gilbert had collected on Leichhardt’s expedition, that Gould later sold to Stanley for £25. Focusing on his scientific abilities and achievements rather than his character, Fisher ascertained that Gilbert had been responsible for the discovery of around eighty forms of birds and thirty marsupials, thus establishing his name as “one of the most important collectors of higher vertebrates in the history of Australia” (“A Man” 82).

Fisher also established close links with historians, enthusiasts and scientists in Australia and was active in the commemorative activities for the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Leichhardt’s expedition in 2004, including the dedication of a new monument at Taroom, a town on the Leichhardt Highway in Southern Queensland. As part of these celebrations a 4WD vehicle trip retracing part of the route of Leichhardt’s expedition was conducted. One of the key stops now for adventure travellers on this route is the site claimed to be where John Gilbert was buried in 1845.<sup>8</sup>

In 1946, Burdekin area cane farmer, Jim Bessell, became determined to find the exact location of Gilbert’s death. In 1979, after more than three decades of personal research, he approached Professor Brian Dalton, then head of the History Department at James Cook University in 1979, seeking assistance to confirm the location where he believed that Gilbert had been buried in June 1845. Professor Dalton was impressed by Bessell’s passion and the thoroughness of his research. Using his contacts at Lavarack Barracks and the Geophysics Department at the University of New England, he arranged for aerial surveys of the general area to be conducted, and charcoal samples and geophysical readings to be taken at a number of potential sites (Ray and Tranter 1).

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<sup>8</sup> As described in the relevant entry in Leichhardt’s journal, the small lagoon near the grave was circled by stunted tea-trees (*Melaleuca sp.*) rather than exotic palm trees (as in the marble memorial in St James’s Church) or “ancient ghost-gums” (as William Beard’s poem would have it).



Figure 4: Claimed site of John Gilbert's grave, 2010, Rutland Plains Station, Western Cape York, image reproduced with kind permission of Ian and Sue Flinders.

In 1985, a ground team from James Cook University and the Australian Army visited the site identified by Bessell and, using evidence from the dating of a very thick charcoal layer with a grave shaped depression in its centre, the site of Gilbert's Grave and Leichhardt's Camp Number 175 was tentatively confirmed. A welded metal plaque attached to a hardwood log secured by four steel pickets was left behind by the army and it remained the only monument on the site for a further fourteen years. In 1999, the members of the Eacham Historical Society erected a second monument/marker consisting of a block of white Chillagoe marble with a fastened brass plaque. Despite being located on private property and in a very remote location, the grave has continued to receive intermittent visits and in 2010 a post fitted with a box was left to house a visitor's book.

What conclusions can be drawn from this examination of the posthumous commemoration of the lives of these three men? As previously mentioned, the improper circumstances of Johnston Drummond's death and his novice status as a collector largely ensured that his memory would predominantly remain within the confines of his family. With regard to the two other collectors, John Gilbert in life seemed to enjoy specific advantages over Frederick Strange that may have contributed to a more lasting legacy. Gilbert was a better observer and collector and, having worked under Gould as a taxidermist at the Zoological Society of London and (on Gould's recommendation) as the curator of a natural history museum at Shrewsbury in Shropshire (Torrens 212), was more familiar and proficient with the intricacies of the prevailing classification system as well as the practical skills of taxidermy. He was also privileged to have been part of one of the great journeys of Australian exploration, with all the opportunities to discover new and novel species that it presented.

However, all these benefits derived from a single source: the continued patronage of his employer John Gould who supported Gilbert through access to his network of influential connections in Britain and the colonies and in financing his travels. As Chisholm discovered, Gilbert's fame and even any recollection of the details of his existence quickly faded once his patron in life was not able or inclined to support his memory in death. Gilbert was nevertheless fortunate in having several posthumous advocates who each contributed to the evolution and transformation of his memory from the intrepid Victorian hero through to the archetypal independent Australian bushman, then as the skilful pioneering ornithologist and ultimately as a national heritage figure. Strange lacked such patronage in both life and in death (to date) and his achievements are still relatively unknown. This would have been the case for Gilbert were it not for Chisholm and others, who for their own various purposes continuously resurrected and reshaped his memory and set it on a more lasting path. The "wreath of immortality" promised to its martyrs by the narrative of Victorian science was in reality only a temporary garland that, as in life, required constant posthumous patronage to remain securely in place.

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