

# KELLEHERS AUSTRALIA

TODAY WE HONOR

## ***KITTY AND BALLANDELLA***<sup>1</sup>

Kitty was a Wiradjuri woman. The Wiradjuri are the people of three rivers – the Macquarie (*Wambool*), the Lachlan (*Calare*) and the Murrumbidgee. Wiradjuri country is shown in Table 1.



**Table 1:** Map showing Wiradjuri country<sup>2</sup>.

Kitty came to the expedition as a wife. She joined the expedition at Lake Cargelligo after the lead Aboriginal man, Piper, temporarily left to ‘marry’ her. This important cultural matter almost certainly influenced the route he selected for Mitchell’s expedition.

Mitchell described Kitty’s arrival:

*‘A good strong woman marched behind him into our camp, loaded with a new opossum-skin cloak, and various presents that had been given to Piper with her.’<sup>3</sup>*

She was tall and strong, but had a blind eye (opaque and white), likely from surviving smallpox. This image, not of Kitty, shows how she may have looked wrapped in her possum cloak.



**Image 1:** National Library of Australia, Portrait of unidentified Aboriginal woman wearing a possum skin cloak, carrying a child on her back, South Australia, ca.1870s<sup>4</sup>

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Kitty proved a wonderful guide, both on her own and also with Piper. She knew where to locate water and negotiated with the People they met on their way. It was she who she was tall and strong, but had a blind eye (opaque and white), likely from surviving smallpox. Kitty proved a wonderful guide, both on her own and also with Piper. She knew where to locate water and negotiated with the People they met on their way. It was she who led them to Turandurey's camp and she was actively involved in the negotiations to have Turandurey join the expedition<sup>5</sup>.

Kitty and Turandurey showed Mitchell where Oxley's earlier survey and exploration party reached the Lachlan River and pointed out that they rescued one of Oxley's men who nearly drowned there. They also mentioned three early white men on horseback and their boats on the Murrumbidgee. This advice by Kitty and Turandurey reminded the white explorers how keenly 'strangers' were observed on country. It also asserted their knowledge and ownership of place. Both Kitty and Turandurey frequently went ahead to negotiate. They answered Mitchell's questions, providing cultural explanations: for example, as to graves and birthplaces. Kitty became an important scout for gossip and intelligence, faithfully reporting back to Mitchell. A local group at one point shadowed the expedition and Kitty, watching, explained the group's tactics. Mitchell obviously trusted that Kitty was not tipping off the local groups.

Women were knowledgeable about places and cues from the environment.

*'... The females kept nearer the party, and often gave us notice of obstacles, in time to enable me to avoid them. My question on such occasions was, Dago nyollong yannagary? (Which way shall we go?) to which one would reply, pointing in the proper direction, Yalyai nyolloong-yannari (Go that way)'<sup>6</sup>.*

Kitty almost certainly led Mitchell in particular ways, managing the route taken so as to avoid sacred places. Kitty could steer craft across rivers and assisted with getting expedition specimens and papers across. Through the diplomatic and language skills of Kitty, and the other Aboriginals, Mitchell acquired the names for his maps<sup>7</sup>. Kitty designed the expedition route, along with the other Aboriginals, and kept the party supplied with water and food available locally.

Kitty and Ballandella, along with Turandurey and the other Aboriginals, given their sheer presence and family relationships, were a constant reminder to the white expeditioners that they were travelling through country peopled by families, women and children<sup>8</sup>. One writer refers to Kitty and other Aboriginals as 'Camp Followers'. Descriptions of Kitty's role (along with that of Turandurey and even little Ballandella) as a 'Camp Follower' is not only inaccurate, but minimalises their role within this important early trans-continental expedition and renders their work invisible.

Like Turandurey, there were times when Kitty wanted to leave. On 1 July 1836, Kitty aided Turandurey and Ballandella to leave camp and left with them. The following morning Piper tracked them and returned with Kitty and the child. Assistant surveyor Stapylton's journal records his suspicion that Kitty urged Turandurey to leave as a device to secure herself more food supplies. Stapylton expressed concerns as to Kitty's trustworthiness. Two days later, when Turandurey prepared to leave again with Kitty, Piper urged Mitchell to allow Kitty to remain.

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Regardless of relationships at this time, Kitty, Ballandella and Turandurey ultimately continued on through to the southern end of the Grampian Mountains, where the expedition established a depot to await Mitchell's final journey to the south coast of Australia.

On the return journey north, Kitty joins the main forward party with Mitchell, Piper and Ballandella. From this point, her story goes silent. Whilst Piper's portrait is made and he receives some accolades for his role, Kitty's massive role in Australia's history remains virtually unknown and uncelebrated for just short of 200 years. She has no memorial. No public statues record or recognise her expeditionary role. The expedition 'hero' is Mitchell. Its heroines, such as the formidable Kitty, have no glory. Yet, truly, *'Because of Her, We Can!'*

### **BALLANDELLA**



**Image 2:** Turandurey and Ballandella (Scenery of the Lachlan), Mitchell<sup>9</sup>

On the return journey with Mitchell's group to Sydney, Kitty cared for Ballandella. A journal records she *'feasted with milk'* and Mitchell records that Ballandella *'seemed quite happy'*<sup>10</sup>. The last stages of the journey travelled through Yass, the Goulburn Plains, Berrima, Campbelltown and Liverpool.

Ballandella was, according to Mitchell's journal, *'a welcome stranger'* to his children while the family resided in Sydney. She *'seemed to adopt the habit of domestic life...'*<sup>11</sup>

However, not long after Mitchell returned to Sydney, he and his family left for England, on 9 May 1837, for eighteen months leave. Ballandella was not included in this trip, apparently due to the expense. Having been so sadly separated from her mother, and the mourning ceremony they endured<sup>12</sup>, Mitchell less than a year later left her in the care of Dr Charles Nicholson, later Sir Charles Nicholson.<sup>13</sup> There appears to be no intention of returning her to her mother. In the end, Mitchell did not return to Australia until four years later in 1841.

During Mitchell's absence, Dr Nicholson was apparently responsible for overseeing Ballandella's education. We have no details of that education. Presbyterian Church records show she was baptised on 17 December 1839 in the Parish of Wiseman's Ferry, in the County of Lower Hawkesbury. This records her as 8 years old and *'an Aboriginal girl brought from the interior'*. Her

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sponsor was a Mrs Ascough. Ballandella seems to have shared little of the genteel life enjoyed by Mitchell's children.

Records of her life from this time forward are scant. It seems that from ~ 12 years of age she was sent from Sir Charles to his cousin's wife as nurse to their little daughter and the wife's sister. This family, the Ascoughs 'loved her'<sup>14</sup> according to the response of a family descendant, in 1952, to a public call for information about Ballandella.

Sometime between 1847 and 1850, she married a Mr John Luke Barber, an Aboriginal man born north of the Hawkesbury, near Wiseman's Ferry. Many of her descendants remained in this area. It was a marriage of Wiradjuri and Darkinjung. Their first child, born ~1850, was called Andrew (Andy)<sup>15</sup> and there was a second son, Henry (Harry). Ballandella already had a daughter, Mary, born on 22 December 1846 when Ballandella was no more than 15<sup>16</sup>. That father was Joseph Howard, a labourer. Mary's birth certificate showed Ballandella as an '*Aboriginal Black from the Murrumbidgee*'.

Images 3<sup>17</sup> and 4<sup>18</sup> are photographs of Ballandella's two sons as men. They both left extended families, many of whom had strong sporting achievements, a talent for music and involvement in Aboriginal affairs.

Details of Ballandella's death are unknown but she is believed to have died a relatively young woman, no older than her late 30s.



**Image 3: Andrew Barber**



**Image 4: Henry Barber**

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**Kellehers celebrates these two amazing Australian Aboriginal woman expeditioners.**

**One made the long journey as a little girl who suffered a serious leg injury en route. She was then taken by the expedition leader, who subsequently effectively abandoned her. She lived with the colonial elite, cared for them and eventually raised a family of her own.**

**The other woman, the feisty wife of the expeditions official Aboriginal guide, proved herself to be a superb adventurer, leader, guide and negotiator throughout the expeditions. She was also called in to be the carer of the little girl during the expedition.**

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The massive involvement of Kitty, and little Ballandella, over the thousands of miles of this huge journey of exploration is virtually invisible. Yet the knowledge they passed of the land, culture and traditions, as well as the trails and sense of Aboriginal family life, formed no small part in the formation of Australia as we know it today.

## **BECAUSE OF THEM, WE CAN!**

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<sup>1</sup> Today's story draws on the journals required to be kept by the surveyors during the exploration, as well as Jack Brook's 1988 paper, *The Widow and the Child*, *Aboriginal History 1988*, 12:1, 71-77.

<sup>2</sup> Museums & Galleries of NSW website <https://mgns.w.org.au/sector/aboriginal/aboriginal-language-map/>.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, 1939, 15 April 1836, 37.

<sup>4</sup> [National Library of Australia, Portrait of unidentified Aboriginal woman wearing a possum skin cloak, carrying a child on her back, South Australia, ca. 1870s](https://www.nla.gov.au/aboriginal/portrait-unidentified-aboriginal-woman-wearing-possum-skin-cloak-carrying-child-her-back-south-australia-ca-1870s)  
[https://www.google.com.au/search?q=possum+skin+cloak+image&rlz=1C1GGRV\\_enAU755AU755&tbm=isch&source=iu&ctx=1&fir=izJXXD6Pp-tECM%253A%252CMeghT8z8DrBT4M%252C\\_&usq=keh2sXbxgZdx5dUEoQFHW84zko%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwisj31u5bbAhWlrJQKHVRhCKIQ9QEILTAC#imgrc=izJXXD6Pp-tECM](https://www.google.com.au/search?q=possum+skin+cloak+image&rlz=1C1GGRV_enAU755AU755&tbm=isch&source=iu&ctx=1&fir=izJXXD6Pp-tECM%253A%252CMeghT8z8DrBT4M%252C_&usq=keh2sXbxgZdx5dUEoQFHW84zko%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwisj31u5bbAhWlrJQKHVRhCKIQ9QEILTAC#imgrc=izJXXD6Pp-tECM): (accessed 27 May 2018)

<sup>5</sup> This description draws on Cadzow, Allison, *Brokers and Boundaries*, ANU Press, 5., 1-11.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, 1839, 19 June 1836, 135.

<sup>7</sup> Surveyors' regulations required the use of local names and mandated that surveyors take active steps to ascertain the local words for key survey features such as rivers, creeks, mountains and places. It is wrong to suggest from his use of Indigenous names, that Mitchell had particular sympathies (or lacked sympathy) with Aboriginal people. Their use is neutral in that respect given the regulations the surveyors were required to follow.

<sup>8</sup> Baker, D.W.A., *Exploring with Aborigines: Thomas Mitchell and his Aboriginal guides*, *Aboriginal History 1998*, Vol 22, 36-50 at 42-44.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchells Journal, op cit., 33; showing on National Museum of Australia website, [http://www.nma.gov.au/encounters\\_education/community/inland\\_nsw](http://www.nma.gov.au/encounters_education/community/inland_nsw) (accessed 11 July 2018)

<sup>10</sup> Brook, Jack, *The Widow and the Child*, *Aboriginal History 1988*, 12:1, 71-77, citing Mitchell, 1839, 311.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell, 1839, II, 336.

<sup>12</sup> New South Wales, Births Deaths and Marriages, 1839, Baptism 8180, vol. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Details of Ballandella's life from this point in time are drawn from Jack Brook, *The Widow and the Child*, *Aboriginal History 1988*, 12:1, 71-77.

<sup>14</sup> Letters from Mrs Kathleen Stella Dansay to Edith Elene Grainger, 1952. ML Document 2345.

<sup>15</sup> *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, 31 October 1924.

<sup>16</sup> New South Wales, Births Deaths and Marriages, Baptism 1420, vol. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ebenezer Church Newsletter, No 20: June 2016 <http://www.ebenezerchurch.org.au/documents/newsletter20.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Pinterest.co.uk <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/421227371380137157/>