

# **Vagabond**

## **The Story of Charles Sanger**

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## **Contents**

1. Sanger: the riddle
2. Beginnings
3. 'A half naked and eccentric man'
4. The forest: a devastated hiding place
5. From dynamite to murder...to a pair of boots
6. The Scarlet Pimpernel?
7. The 'elemental man'
8. Justice or prejudice?
9. 'Total levies of £ 30'
10. 'We're going to meet a bushranger'
11. 'A worthless bark hut, not held under any right'
12. Vagabond
13. Sources

## **Illustrations**

1. Charles Sanger in 1907
2. Wanted for Murder
3. Charles Sanger in 1914
4. Ilma Wallace in the 1920s
5. Sanger's Columbine Creek hut in the 1970s
6. The Columbine Creek hut ruin in 2007

## **Maps**

1. Area in which Sanger's convictions were recorded, 1906-1914
2. Sanger's home country

## **1. Sanger: the riddle**

This is the story of a Fryerstown man, Charles Ernest Sanger, who was born in Castlemaine in 1880 and died there in 1953.

When Sanger was young a journalist described him as ‘graceful as an antelope and physically perfect...a first class shot and a good distance bicycle rider’. A tall, blue eyed, fine looking athletic figure with white even teeth, he ‘ran with the fleetness of a professional runner’.

As a young man he was at odds with the law, and served three prison sentences. His reaction to these setbacks was unusual. In 1907, only a few months out of Pentridge Prison, he appeared in court apparently unperturbed by the prospect of another sentence of hard labour. Having served over three years he was in court again in 1914, arrested after a furious struggle with a police officer in the main street of Taradale. Once again he appeared unconcerned, even nonchalant, joking with officers as he awaited trial.

Such behaviour did not seem logical, and some doubted his sanity. Yet judges and the Pentridge doctor alike saw no evidence that he was mad, the Bendigo police saw him as ‘shrewd’, and an attentive journalist described him as a ‘long headed and calculating individual’. The suggestion of lunacy seemed to be the only thing to distress him: he spoke vigorously in court to refute the suggestion. It obviously disturbed him more than accusations of crime.

Over a period of ten years he achieved a kind of double edged fame.

On the one hand he became an automatic suspect for a range of crimes around Castlemaine and Bendigo. In one case he was arrested in connection with the dynamiting of a house in Kangaroo Flat. In another his photo appeared in the *Police Gazette* under the stark heading, *MURDER*. He was innocent of these crimes, but association with them gave him an undeserved reputation as a desperate and even threatening character. This image was softened by his good looks, mysterious way of life, and ability to make fools of the police. The press for a brief period portrayed him as the ‘Fryers bushranger’, but he was never known to engage in armed robbery, or any crime other than petty theft, mainly of food and basic provisions.

On the other hand his problems with the law inspired a kind of pity in those who saw him as the victim of a sad and difficult background, someone to whom society owed a debt of support. There is no doubt that some in the Fryerstown district helped him to hide from the police, and this community support contributed to the legend which grew up about him. It was a legend, however, that faded when he finally retreated to the forest to live on the margins of a community that accepted him for what he was.

His latter years were lived quietly, in the forests of the Fryers district. In 1953, after a period of illness, he had a stroke and died two days later in the Castlemaine hospital. His death certificate notes that he was suffering from ‘severe malnutrition’.

The following story is an attempt to unravel some of the still intriguing threads of his life. In it we also briefly raise some of the issues such a life presents to us: issues to do with non conforming individuals and the role of the local community in helping

them survive; and issues to do with the bush as a refuge for such individuals, ‘vagabonds’ who simply do not want to live in an urbanised world.

## 2. Beginnings

Charles Ernest was the third of the nine children of Henry and Maria Sanger. The Sangers lived at Fryerstown, 10 kilometres from Castlemaine. Henry was a miner, and his father, George, Charles’ grandfather, was a publican. These were not easy jobs in the days of Fryerstown’s steep decline from its rip roaring days in the 1850s. By the 1880s the town’s population had shrunk, as had its hopes. Gold had brought fortunes to a few, but for most it was tough work which brought modest wages, and for some it was ruin. For all, the result was a spectacularly degraded environment that brought problems in many different ways.

The devastation of the forest brought pervading dust as one of its effects, and most buildings were poor protection against it. The school was a particular case, before, during and after young Charlie’s time there. The district inspector of schools reported in 1881 that in the Fryerstown State School dust covered everything, and the children’s copybooks were so dirty that writing practice was difficult if not impossible. There were holes in the floor, the building had no ceiling, the toilet pans regularly burst, and the school bell frequently fell from its rickety stand, once narrowly missing the bell monitor. It is easy to be amused by the enthusiastic monitor getting the shock of his life when the bell fell at his feet, but as the harrowed head teacher observed to the Education Department, it ‘was only by mere chance’ that he was not badly injured or killed.

The school’s working atmosphere can’t have been improved by the struggle in the early eighties between new head teacher George Dore and the parents over the teacher’s brutality towards his pupils. Mr Dore calmed down in time, but even in the late eighties he was complaining to the Education Department that discipline was hard to maintain, because guardians were trying to stop him from keeping pupils in at break times, and he was unable even to ‘touch’ pupils without getting complaints.

The school had extensive repairs in 1889, but things were still obviously difficult, physically, for both pupils and teachers. In 1884 a Royal Commission had revealed a seriously mismanaged education system in Victoria, and nothing much had been done to improve the lot of teachers and pupils suffering in that system. In 1901, after years of depressed economic conditions and drought, the head teacher at Fryerstown complained to the Department that the school fence was rotten, and that goats were getting in and eating flowers and trees, to the annoyance of young and old. ‘It is no use continuing under such circumstances,’ he wrote with an intensity which seems to refer to more than the destruction of a few plants. In such working conditions it was hard to keep your morale up.

Not everyone responds the same to hardship. Ruth Rowe, who went to the Fryerstown School in the 1890s, paints a generally positive picture of her education. ‘School days were happy days and the teachers were mostly kind,’ she was to recall many years later in her book of reminiscences, *Fryerstown*. Maybe the improvements to the school had made a significant difference, but if so, it was too late for young Charlie Sanger. His career as a truant took off in 1889, and for several years the unfortunate Henry Sanger was in court regularly forking out hefty fines for his son’s

truancy. He made ten appearances up to 1894, when Charlie could legally leave school. In most of these appearances it was noted that Charlie had been absent for periods of up to 40 days.

Porcupine Ridge farmer William MacDonald, who wrote about Sanger in 1972, asserts that though he was bright and intelligent he was dreamy and unsociable, apt to wander off into the bush by himself. It is clear that school offered little to the boy. Much later, in one of his carefree interviews with a *Bendigo Advertiser* journalist in 1907 Sanger was to claim that 'in his boyhood days he was one of the most attentive Sunday school scholars in the Castlemaine district. But he became addicted to reading "Deadwood Dick" tales'. He speculated then that these tales influenced him to become a bit of a wanderer.

This off the cuff remark should be treated with caution: it is unlikely that a diet of pulp novels could have dictated the direction of the young boy's life. The causes of Sanger's problems were no doubt more complicated. It should be noted, however, that those who knew him in later life remarked that he was a keen reader of all kinds of material. Perhaps his time at school was not entirely wasted.

Sanger's older brother and sister, Herbert and Edith, gave no trouble at school, but most of his younger siblings were also significant truants. There is a suggestion here of a collapse of parental control, something confirmed by the sketchy accounts we have of the family at this time. Most local accounts agree that Henry Sanger had an alcohol problem. It was alleged that Charlie, as he grew up, came increasingly in conflict with his father over the latter's violence towards his mother, and eventually fled to the bush to avoid a catastrophic conflict.

It is impossible to be certain about this. If the charge is true, it is strange that it does not seem to be corroborated in the lives of Charlie's siblings, none of whom became alienated from their father. Whatever the cause of his attitude, however, all agree that Charlie became, in the words of local man Gordon Miller, 'neglected and half wild.'

What is also certain is that times became grimmer for the family through the eighties and beyond.

In 1886 Henry's father, Charlie's grandfather George Sanger, 52 years old, died when he fell down a mine shaft. Though the coroner refrained from declaring the death a suicide, the evidence of George Sanger's severe depression is clear in the testimony of witnesses at the inquest. Henry Sanger himself was in trouble with the law by 1898 for stealing timber from crown land, and began to make appearances in court for drunkenness and obscene language. Charlie's younger brother Robert, a well loved local Sunday school teacher, died of typhoid in 1901, aged 19. A downward drift in the family's circumstances is evident.

There are inconclusive stories about Charlie Sanger's life between 1894 and 1905. It is certain that he quarrelled with his father and left home to live as a kind of vagrant in the bush. It seems that he made a living in those early years by working in the local quartz mines. It is also highly likely that when he grew a little older he travelled interstate, perhaps as far as Queensland. The most intriguing story, however, is offered by William MacDonald of Porcupine Ridge. According to MacDonald,

Sanger developed a significant range of survival skills in these years, including that of sharpshooter. More surprisingly, given that he was living in the bush, he developed a friendship with one of the most attractive of the Fryerstown girls, and, at the age of 21, became engaged to marry her. ‘One can imagine the scandal,’ wrote MacDonald, ‘and the wonder of all in this town when on the day before the wedding, our young belle eloped with one of the young beaux.’ This, he argues, was the main motivation for Charles’ flight from society. Humiliation and a broken heart drove him to live on the margins.

MacDonald’s story would be more convincing if we did not already have evidence, in the form of his truancy record, for Sanger’s tendency to slip out of ordinary social obligations. Nevertheless, the story offers an explanation for what would otherwise be an almost inexplicable event in Sanger’s life: his later relationship with Ilma Wallace, formerly Browning.

Ilma Selina Browning was a Fryerstown girl who married John Wallace in 1902—that is, at about the time of the romantic story related by MacDonald. Photos of her later in life show her to be a striking looking woman. When her husband died many years later she went searching for Charlie in the bush. Only a previous strong relationship can explain this contact. We will take up this part of the story in chapter 10.

As far as official documentation goes, however, Sanger disappears for several years, and reappears only in 1905 as a fully fledged eccentric, on the margins of society and the law.

### **3. ‘A half naked and eccentric man’**

On the second of August 1905 the head teacher of the Glenluce School, Catherine Davis, reported to her superiors in Melbourne that the school had been burgled. Several small items had been stolen: a thermometer, the key of the school residence, the key of the press, a tin of sulphur, a small box of coloured chalk, three boxes of matches and two brushwork books. The press had been ransacked, and material strewn around the floor.

The robbery had taken place over the weekend. Davis did not live in the school residence, but travelled to school every day from her home in Tarilta, some kilometres away.

On August 15 the *Mount Alexander Mail* carried the following report in its ‘Items of Interest’ column:

A rather exciting incident took place between Fryerstown and Glenlyon on Monday. Constables Nonmus, of Fryers, and Powell, of Glenlyon, were searching in some rough country for a man supposed to have committed a number of petty larcenies when they were suddenly bailed up by a tall, half nude man, who presented a gun at them and ordered them to hold up their hands. He made the constables walk backwards for some distance, and seizing a favourable opportunity jumped over a cliff and escaped. A shot from a revolver followed him but it had no effect. Constable Nonmus reports that the man’s name is Sanger, and that he came to Fryerstown from Queensland about

8 months ago. He is 27 years of age and over 6ft high, and is said to be mentally affected. In his camp the constables found some articles which had recently been stolen.

This is the first public reference to Sanger as a law breaker. The source of it is evidently Constable Nonmus. This officer had been stationed in Fryerstown since 1896, and it is hard to believe that he was unaware of Charles' family origins in the district: Henry Sanger had made five court appearances at Fryerstown since the constable's arrival, including two earlier in 1905. Further, Nonmus was later to claim that he had 'knocked about' with Sanger, and knew him well. The reference to Queensland should probably be understood as saying that Sanger had recently returned to the district after a period away.

Six weeks later Catherine Davis wrote again to the Education Department, giving her version of the same incident:

Constables Nonmus (Fryerstown) and Power (Glenlyon) discovered a young man named Charles Sanger who is supposed to be of unsound mind, living in a hut in the bush between Glenluce and Glenlyon and, as he was supposed to be the man who had committed several thefts in the district, they approached him. As they did so, he threatened to shoot both men if they advanced a step further. He then managed to make his escape and disappeared behind a steep cliff.

Items stolen from the school were found in his camp, she reported.

No charges were ever laid against Sanger over this incident, but it obviously stayed in the minds of local police, and was partly the cause of his eventual arrest on other charges nearly twelve months later.

In September 1906, two sensational but incompetent attacks using explosives were made against neighbouring houses in Kangaroo Flat, near Bendigo. In one case a hole three feet square was blown through the floor; in the second an explosion failed to detonate five plugs of gelignite placed nearby, and little damage was done. No one was injured.

In the course of their investigations into this matter, said the *Bendigo Advertiser*, police were informed of a 'mysterious individual dodging here and there through the bush'. Searching the bush for this individual, on September 11 two officers came upon a 'tall, athletic figure' talking to an old fossicker. This man claimed, unconvincingly, to be George Arnst, an artist. On being further questioned, he bolted into the bush but was chased down and overpowered. At the Kangaroo Flat police station he admitted to being the person who had defied Nonmus and Power with a gun the previous year, and that his name was Charles Sanger. He added, 'I suppose it's all up. I am the man wanted. But I did not rob Hunt's place.'

The Kangaroo Flat officers immediately recalled that in July the previous year William Hunt, a Glenlyon resident, 'had reported that his house had been broken into and £1 of goods stolen'. This was one of the 'petty larcenies' which had provoked the police searches in the Glenlyon area. They recalled that when constables Nonmus of

Fryerstown and Power of Glenlyon went to the camp of a man suspected of the robbery, they ‘were suddenly confronted by a half naked and eccentric man, who defied them with a loaded gun’; that this man escaped by jumping over a cliff; and that the stolen property was found at his camp. This story is, of course, similar to the one told to Catherine Davis, and to the report twelve months earlier in the *Mount Alexander Mail*.

Sanger was kept in custody and charged with a crime completely unrelated to any of the above : the crime of sacrilege. For this he appeared in the Bendigo Supreme Court on October 31 1906. The crime, it was alleged, had taken place in July or August 1905, and consisted of the theft of several articles from the Drummond Christ Church: bottles containing wine, a screwdriver, a lamp, a hymn book and other articles. Sanger admitted having the articles at his camp, but pleaded not guilty, saying they were given to him by strangers. Here is the testimony of Constable Power in court, as reported in the *Mount Alexander Mail*:

Constable J J Power, of Glenlyon, stated that in company with Constable Nonmus he went to a place where the accused was camped about six miles from Glenlyon, and about 150 yards from the creek. Prisoner’s camp was pitched on a fallen tree. Witness opened the tent and looked in, and saw Sanger lying reading a book. Witness commenced to search and accused sprang up and presented a gun at Constable Nonmus, who was outside the tent. Accused then held both constables under cover with the gun. The accused disappeared. Afterwards witness and Constable Nonmus found the property produced. They were both in plain clothes.

The ‘property produced’ included bottles of wine and a hymn book.

It is striking how similar this account is to the versions noted above—and how different. Powers makes no reference to the degree of undress of the accused—and indeed, since he was lying inside his own tent, why should it matter how he was dressed? Further, Sanger is described as lying down peacefully reading a book. His aggressive reaction when a stranger, not in police uniform, bursts into his tent and makes free with its contents, is quite understandable.

We are a long way from the violent semi naked madman of the earlier press reports: and it is interesting that Sanger was never charged with resisting arrest, or threatening the officers with a gun.

Sanger had clearly been concerned by the reports we have noted. When he was arrested by the police at Kangaroo Flat, he asked the officers, ‘Are you fellows arresting me on a charge of lunacy?’ The answer was no, but the matter played an important part in the trial. Sanger made a lengthy statement from the dock. He reviewed his life in the bush in the time since he had left home after a quarrel with his father. He also dwelt on the fear he experienced of being arrested for lunacy, and ‘condemned the highly extravagant stories that had been told by the police about their being “confronted by a half-naked, eccentric lunatic in the bush”’.

Sanger was quite right to be concerned about the lunacy rumours: he clearly understood that to be certified insane carried the risk of confinement for a very long time. It was more serious than conviction for petty crime.

Questioned by Mr S M Cornish, Sanger's lawyer, about these stories, Constable Nonmus gave a comically contradictory answer: 'He had never written one word or circulated a report about Sanger's sanity. He was of the opinion that accused was not right in his mind when he lived in the bush.' Nonmus then turned to the jury, and said: 'The accused never had a mate with him and never would as long as he had known him.'

This muddled set of answers creates the suspicion that the source of the story that Sanger was of 'unsound mind' was indeed Constable Nonmus. He claimed in court to know Sanger, that he 'used to "knock about"' with him. This, combined with the incoherence of his answers to the lawyer, creates suspicions about his credibility. It also offers an insight into his prejudice that anyone who lives by himself in the bush must be 'not right in his mind'.

Nonmus was then 43 years old, and had been stationed in Fryerstown since December 1896. He had joined the force in 1887 and received good reports from his superiors until about 1900. At that point comments such as 'steady and efficient' had become 'steady and fairly efficient'. His career was in decline. In 1909 he was to be found 'under the influence of liquor to such an extent as to be unfit for duty at Fryerstown.' Transferred to Whittlesea, he was found guilty of 'misconduct in being under the influence of liquor' when attending the police court. He was found to require close supervision. He was dishonourably discharged from the force in 1915.

The point of these observations about the constable is not to blame him for Sanger's misfortunes or misdemeanours. It is to note the way a person can acquire a poor reputation in the eyes of careless, unreliable or unsympathetic witnesses. In Sanger's case, an unfortunate family experience saw him acquire a reputation in some minds as an eccentric, or worse. He subsequently became the object of numerous allegations which were not followed up. As we shall see, this led to widespread scepticism about the charges laid against him in later years.

Mr Cornish argued that Sanger was not strictly guilty of sacrilege, since what he had taken was not 'practically' associated with divine worship. The jury found him guilty, however, presumably associating the very act of theft from a church with sacrilege. The judge, on the basis of the prisoner's conduct in court, dismissed any idea of insanity, but commented on his 'lonely and eccentric life'. Throughout his interrogation and trial Sanger had refused to discuss the location of his bush camp.

He was sentenced to six months with hard labour.

The judge noted that the sacrilege conviction was Sanger's first offence. Nothing more was heard of the sensational dynamite attacks in Kangaroo Flat. No mention was made in court of the thefts at Glenluce and Glenlyon. Sanger was never charged with these offences, or others mentioned in the press and linked to him. Yet these reports contributed to the creation of an image of him as a compulsive thief. Suspicion and rumour surrounded him.

#### **4. The forest: a devastated hiding place**

Where had Sanger been in the time between his escape from the constables in August 1905 and his arrest in September 1906? Where had he lived from the time he left home?

It is easy to accept the idea that he had spent some time wandering, and that he had gone as far as Queensland.

It was then not uncommon for people, especially young men, to move from place to place. Geoffrey Blainey says of the time: ‘The typical young man longed to be on the move. Whereas Americans in the last fifty years have been moving easily from state to state, Australians in 1900 were probably more migratory. The succession of gold rushes spurred them to pack bags and swags and to travel... The depression of the 1890s, worse in Australia than in the United States, also forced people to move...’

When the Glenluce school building was replaced in 1888, the District Inspector considered the idea that the old building be retained on the site and used as a shelter shed. He rejected it: ‘As the land is not fenced in, it would only be a rendezvous for swagmen and all sorts of indifferent characters.’ The *Mount Alexander Mail*, in the years leading up to the First World War, regularly carried reports of swagmen, usually drunk or in other ways a nuisance, being arrested in public places in the town of Castlemaine. It was a restless time, and many people were on the move.

Yet Sanger’s main base was clearly in the forested areas to the south of Fryerstown, in what are now the Fryers Forest and the southern end of the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park. The constables’ location of his camp ‘about six miles from Glenlyon and about 150 yards from the creek’ suggests strongly that the camp was near Middleton Creek. Local knowledge has indicated that, in the 1930s and after, Sanger had camps in this area near Brown’s Gully, and a little to the north of this, near Sebastopol Creek. We know also that he had another quite substantial camp on the other side of the Loddon in the Fryers Forest, near Columbine Creek, then known as Stony Creek.

What were these tracts of bushland like?

At the turn of the century most of the forests around the goldfields were unreserved crown land, much turned over in the gold rush that lasted from the 1850s till the 1880s. By 1876 the forests at Mount Alexander, Strangeways (sic), Sandon and Campbelltown and Yandoit had been rated as 100% denuded of trees, and the Fryers and Elphinstone forests as 64.4% denuded. The bush had begun to regenerate, as is its way, as thick scrub. The reasonably open bushland which present day travellers can see, with its comparative lack of head high understorey, would then have been thick with regenerating wattles, cassinia and eucalypts.

In 1897 a Royal Commission had expressed concern that the forest estate be preserved against clearance for settlement. It was realised that the forest was an asset needing to be preserved for ongoing use, and that once it was gone, it would be hard to get it back. There was also awareness of the need for watershed protection.

The idea of protection of forests from further damage became stronger in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Fryers Forest was gazetted as reserved forest in 1907. In 1914 the Conservator of Forests began the long process of getting the Porcupine Ridge area similarly reserved. Numerous memos passed from the Conservator's office to that of the Minister for lands, and foresters and other officers examined the area to assess the case for reservation. The Conservator was keen to protect the forest from clearing for agriculture because of its importance as part of the upper Loddon catchment.

In 1914 the chief forest officer in Bendigo referred to the generally low grade timber, in the area, but noted that 'in the past these areas have carried valuable timber, and there is no reason why, with proper supervision and attention, they should not again'.

In 1915 Surveyor G S Pinnayer reported that the soil in the area was thin, and that there was dense growth, not of great quality.

In 1921 Forester E J Davey noted: 'To traverse through these crown lands is most difficult, and can only be done on foot. In certain parts, near "Porcupine Ridge", numbers of the old "original" timber growth can be found, the trees being chiefly "yellow box" up to a diameter of 5 feet'. Pests and fires had, however, reduced the trees to a poor state. The box timber was being attacked by dodder and mistletoe and 'wood borers'. Scrub wattles grew in the gullies, native heath and wild 'boronia' on ridges. The only road in the area was that which now links Glenluce and Glenlyon, a road which is still unsealed in 2007.

When Catherine Davis was appointed head teacher at Glenluce School, parents had protested that she lived too far away at Tarilta, five kilometres distant, to be able to guarantee her punctual attendance in all weathers. The parents requested a teacher who would be prepared to live in the residence next to the school.

To travel from her home in Tarilta to the Glenluce school, Davis would either have had to negotiate the thick scrub on Porcupine Ridge, crossing a couple of intermittent streams; or she would have had to drive her buggy to Vaughan, cross the Loddon there, then travel around to the Glenluce road, crossing the river again. It was for this reason that parents were unenthusiastic about her not living in the school residence. They knew that in flood times the teacher could be cut off from the school: and indeed she was cut off in June 1895 when floods brought down two bridges.

The foresters' reports give a picture of a landscape seriously damaged but recovering: and therefore covered mainly by thick scrub, traversed only by foot tracks. It is, in any case, a landscape of many minor gullies, confusingly spilling down from higher levels like Porcupine and Fryers Ridges. In local historian Ray Bradfield's words, it is 'a confusing tangle of gullies'. Much of the ridge country was like this: it would be easy to hide in for someone who knew it.

The bush described in the foresters' reports of 1914 to 1921 would not have been too different from the bush in which Sanger lived in 1905. This explains how he was able to elude pursuing police with ease; moreover, it explains how he was able to keep the location of his camps a secret.

In spite of Nonmus's comment that Sanger 'never had a mate with him' when he lived in the bush, in choosing to live there Sanger was not choosing the life of a hermit. Rather, he was choosing an alternative kind of sociability—albeit one with much solitary time. The forest then was, if not a busy place, certainly one in which many people passed, not as tourists or nature lovers, but as workers or transients taking short cuts. Prospectors were busy in the region right through to the depression of the 1930s, when men cycled from Fryerstown to spend the day working over old diggings, and made enough out of it to live. Timber getters, legal and illegal, criss crossed the bush. The workings around Sailors, Stones and Sebastopol Gullies were almost certainly active at least until the 1930s. Sanger was not alone in the bush.

## **5. From dynamite to murder...to a pair of boots**

Sanger was released from Pentridge on February 27 1907, having had two weeks of his sentence remitted.

By September his picture was featured in the *Police Gazette* under the heading: MURDER.

The murder in question was that of pensioner Joseph Wendell, shot four times in his hut at Break O' Day, Sunrise Gully, near Kangaroo Flat. The reason for associating Sanger with this crime is that he was alleged by a fellow prisoner at Pentridge to have sworn to 'do' for Wendell, who, he believed, had turned him over to the police in 1906.

On October 24 Sanger was arrested in melodramatic circumstances. According to the *Bendigo Advertiser*, mounted Constable Earnshaw rode out along the Campaspe 'in search of strange tramps.' Though the police had been searching for 'Charles Edward (sic) Sanger, the bush vagrant' for nearly a month, in this case he was investigating a break-in near Axedale. Seeing a person, 'sunburnt and clad in old clothes', sitting on a log, Earnshaw dismounted, approached him, and recognised Sanger, the man proclaimed in the *Gazette* as a murder suspect. With some sense of occasion the constable addressed him thus: 'In the King's name, I command you to stand!' Sanger immediately bolted: 'He jumped over snags, and raced along the ground with the fleetness of a professional runner.' Earnshaw followed on his horse, drawing his pistol. He fired three shots at the fugitive, who wisely came to a standstill and was arrested.

His swag and bicycle were later found hidden among the rocks, as was a bag of stolen money he had thrown away during the chase.

Handcuffed and taken to the Kangaroo Flat police station, Sanger spoke with casual cheerfulness to a reporter from the *Bendigo Advertiser*. The journalist noted that he was 'a man of fine physique, with sunburnt features and an even row of white teeth which he shows plainly when he smiles'. His shoes and clothes were in tatters, but he dismissed this as his 'bush rigout'. He had, he said, been 'leading a gipsy life' along the Campaspe, knowing there was a warrant out for his arrest for murder, but unconcerned. 'Why didn't I surrender myself? What for? There was nothing against me.'

He was partly right. Suspicion of his involvement in the Break O' Day murder was quickly dropped after further investigations. A coroner later returned an open verdict on that death. Sanger was, however, charged with carrying stolen property. He claimed that it was given to him by 'a man', but acknowledged that he knew it was stolen. For this he was sentenced on October 31 1907 to twelve months jail.

Sanger stoutly defended himself against any idea that he was connected with murder, but he was remarkably free with his conversation on other matters, and seemed to enjoy his notoriety. He played a mouth organ for company when he was alone in the bush, he said. He 'openly confessed that he had looted so many places that he had lost count of the actual number,' reported the *Advertiser*. He made cryptic reference to a liaison with a woman, and boasted of his strength, saying he could 'easily lift 2 cwt with his teeth'.

It was in these interviews, seemingly attended by the *Advertiser* journalist, that he referred to his boyhood addiction to Deadwood Dick tales, and there is more than a suggestion in his behaviour that he rather enjoyed the idea of being a notorious outlaw.

It is worth noting here that, in the time we are speaking of, pulp novels were regarded as just as dangerous to the morals as some of the Internet is today. For example, on November 10 1914 the Melbourne *Argus* reported the case of a boy who burned down the Garlick's Lead State School near Trentham. The lad was described in court as being of good character, but the victim of 'hunger for sensations' as a result of 'his extensive studying of Deadwood Dick novels'.

Sanger's statements at this time were not to do him any good. Already there seemed to be a tendency to blame him for every petty theft in the region, and a number of much more serious crimes. He did not help himself by boasting of his exploits, as will be clear later.

The following week he was sentenced to two years and six months for breaking into the house of Patrick Killeen at Kimbolton. The *Advertiser* noted: 'Accused, who was undefended, appeared quite unconcerned.' In court Sanger, defending himself, questioned Killeen in a particular way: the gist of his questions was to establish that the man had in fact left his house open. Was this a defence against the possible charge of housebreaking, or a naïve attempt to show that the house was fair game? It would seem from later developments that Sanger did in fact think along these latter lines. If so, he would learn the hard way how mistaken he was.

Much of the material in Sanger's possession was found to be stolen, and a succession of trials for his thefts quickly followed.

From the court records it is possible to trace his movements after his release from jail on February 27.

On March 23 'he did feloniously steal and ride away one bicycle of the value of 16 pounds and goods and chattels of one John Stubbings' at Malmsbury.

On August 29 ‘he stole one razor, one ham, 20lbs flour and other articles to value of four pounds, the property of Thomas Gurr’ at Tarilta.

On September 14, also at Malmsbury ‘he did feloniously steal take and carry away two pairs of boots to the value of about one pound’.

On September 26 ‘he did... steal 20lbs flour, 1 pr boots and other articles to the value of two pounds, the property of Ah Hoy’ at Glenluce.

On October 23 he stole from Patrick Killeen’s house in Kimbolton.

For the Tarilta and Glenluce offences he was sentenced at Fryerstown, on November 23, to a total of twelve months hard labour. For the Malmsbury offences he was sentenced on November 26 to nine months hard labour.

He had pleaded guilty to all charges, and received a cumulative jail sentence of four years and nine months hard labour—a heavy punishment for what was a succession of petty crimes.

Sanger, said the *Mount Alexander Mail*, ‘persists in leading the life of a bush vagrant’. He had boasted to the reporter from the *Advertiser* that he could move freely around without being noticed by the police, and it is clear that part of his freedom was his ability to interpret the phrase ‘living off the land’ quite loosely: it included a tendency to help himself to what he needed when he needed it. An example of this is the boots of the unfortunate Ah Hoy. When these were produced in court Ah Hoy was unable to identify them: ‘His were new boots.’

The boots produced in court were worn almost to the uppers.

## **6. The ‘Scarlet Pimpernel’?**

Sanger was released by remission from Pentridge on February 24 1911.

By late August he was again of interest to police in connection with a number of petty robberies, almost all of them relating to theft of provisions.

As in previous years, information given out to the public about him was coloured by menacing suggestions. In 1906 he had been arrested in connection with the dynamiting of a house. In 1907 he was suspected of murder. Now, reporting on August 28 that mounted police were ‘scouring the ranges near Harcourt’ for Sanger in connection with petty thefts, the *Mail* went on:

A tree was found riddled with bullets on Mt Alexander, where Sanger had evidently been practising. He is possessed with a bicycle and four Winchester rifles, and travels about from place to place. He is well known to the police in the Castlemaine district. Sanger has threatened to shoot the first constable that goes near him.

Such a report created the impression that police were dealing with a dangerous man, but a week later the paper had toned down its coverage, and changed the focus of the

search to Fryerstown. ‘In such a populous district,’ its reporter noted a week later, ‘it is surprising that he cannot be apprehended.’

Given that Sanger was well known in the district, and that troopers and foot police were on the job, it *was* surprising—until we remember how easy the bush was to hide in, and unless we acknowledge that the fugitive had plenty of support from local residents. On October 25 the *Mail* reported that ‘the general opinion is that (the police) are likely to search for a long while before they get sight of him’.

On the first of December the paper imputed further robberies to Sanger, and suggested that he was being helped by local people when it commented that ‘such a condition of things as has existed in the Fryers district for many months is far from crediting the district’. The reports, however, were always in the manner of police-inspired rumours. Nothing was ever proven against Sanger.

These two elements—the local support Sanger could call on, and the fact that many of the charges against him were never tested in court, are illustrated in a story told to us in 2007 by Alex Archer, a former resident of the district. This story had in turn been told to him by an older relative, Noel Williams.

When a butcher’s shop in the district was robbed around this time, according to Williams, ‘The finger pointed at Charlie. He heard about it and did a runner. The locals would leave some food out for Charlie when he was on the run; they left it under the bridge at Vaughan cemetery’.

Williams, then a small boy, was given the job of leaving some food for Sanger. He was approached by a police officer who asked him if he had seen any ‘strange men’. Knowing the request was about Sanger, he replied ‘no’. He relayed the event later to his mother, saying that Sanger was not a ‘strange man’. According to Williams, the robbery was later discovered to have been perpetrated by the brother of the shop owner. The community suspicion that Sanger was unfairly suspected was confirmed.

The search and its sensational elements of guns and threats of violence had no sequel. When next Sanger was brought to trial, three years later, no mention was made of these events. You would think that threatening to shoot a policeman would be considered a serious offence—if in fact such a threat was made. Such reports, however, begin to seem like the splashing of Sanger’s photo tagged with the word ‘Murder’ in the *Police Gazette* four years earlier. It became widely believed in the district that Sanger was the convenient suspect in any crime, and the credibility of allegations against him was severely dented.

What was enhanced, on the other hand, was the popular image of Sanger as a dashing young blade taunting the lumbering police. On October 23 the *Mail* put aside its disapproval both of the suspect and the district to register a kind of tribute to him: ‘He is here, there and everywhere, but when the police get to any given place, Sanger has gone smilingly on his way, or is taking it easy on the limb of a tree watching his pursuers. The Scarlet Pimpernel was a slow, dull-witted gentleman when compared to the elusive Sanger.’

The *Mail* journalist was getting a bit over heated: the comparison of a small time thief eluding a few police to the fictional aristocrat who defied the entire police and army of Revolutionary France is stretching the point. And this kind of talk, while amusing for Sanger's supporters, seems to have been irritating reading for those who disapproved of his activities

At the end of 1911 Sanger disappeared from the district.

He later said that on finding he was sought in connection with petty crime he travelled to NSW and Queensland, travelling on foot and by bicycle, and 'doing mining and other work'.

While he was away his mother, Maria Sanger, died.

He had left behind him a group of people who were much annoyed by his alleged depredations, and would not forget them. The evidence for this is a letter sent by the Kyneton Clerk of Courts to the Crown Law Department on July 8 1914, a letter we will discuss in chapter 9.

## **7. The 'elemental man'**

Sanger returned to the Fryers district in the first half of 1914.

On Sunday June 21 of that year there occurred an incident which provoked one of the *Mail's* biggest headlines until the outbreak of war—headlines that catapulted Sanger, briefly, into the company of Ned Kelly and Captain Starlight:

**THE FRYERS BUSHRANGER—THE ELUSIVE SANGER—CAPTURED AT TARADALE—A SENSATIONAL STRUGGLE—EARLY MORNING EPIC—CONSTABLE HESFORD BAGS HIS MAN—BOTH BADLY BATTERED—INJURIES ATTENDED AT HOSPITAL**

Constable Alexander Hesford had decided to keep a watch on the Taradale bakery after a series of night time robberies there. He began his watch at midnight on Saturday, and at about 4 am intercepted a person coming out of the building. When he tried to arrest him the man resisted, vigorously. The *Mail* journalist, attempting the day after to recreate rather than report the event, poured his heart and soul into the job:

At half-past four o'clock yesterday morning, two strong, well-trained and courageous men were locked in practically a life and death struggle in the street in front of Mr E Dorman's bakery at Taradale. One was Constable Hesford and the other Charles Sanger. Like two gladiators they fought and struggled—one to escape, the other to restrain him—blow after blow, wrestle after wrestle, with panting breath and straining muscles, still they fought. Blood was pouring from both of them, bodies were bruised and sore, and still the fight went on. One had a revolver, but could not get hold of it to make use of it, the other had a gun. Up, then down again, kicking, hitting, biting, wrenching; silent, but grimly earnest, and still the struggle between two strong, merciless and determined men continued. The gun was used as a club, first by one, then it was wrenched from him and the other used it. At last,

when both were approaching the last stages of exhaustion, one was temporarily stunned, and the other held him down, and called for help. The elusive Sanger was captured...

The *Mail's* account, as we will soon see, owed as much to the journalist's imagination as it did to the facts. In this, as in many other accounts of Sanger's activities, we can detect a note of glamorisation. The undoubted charm and strange eccentricity of the man is inevitably translated in these accounts into a kind of heroic grandeur: the petty thief and bush vagrant becomes a Scarlet Pimpernel, a bushranger; threatened with capture, he fights like a gladiator. On more than one occasion the reader gets the impression that Sanger was not the only fan of Deadwood Dick tales; the local journalists' reports had a touch of the pulp novel style themselves.

The captured Sanger was as light-hearted and careless as ever, and apparently bore no ill will to Hesford. 'When on the way to the Taradale lock-up he laughed,' said the *Mail*, 'and said, "I'd d----- near had you beat." At the hospital he was chatting in a friendly way with the constable, but was not garrulous or assertive—the elemental man is what Charles Sanger is.'

Sanger appeared in the Taradale court on the following Wednesday.

He continued to charm journalists, police and, it seems, most of the public. 'He is in perfect health, but is very poorly dressed. He wore no boots, and when asked why...his face lighted with that fascinating smile which has long been remarked on by those who know him, and he said, "I was born without boots, and can live without them."' When he appeared in court 'his fine black beard had been neatly trimmed, and altogether he did not look like a criminal, especially as he stood erect and surveyed the court with a frank and open expression.'

This general impression of carefree openness did not prevent observers from noting that the prisoner's life had been a hard one. He himself confirmed this in a reflective moment; when asked why he did not give up his 'gipsy mode of existence' he answered soberly, 'It is hard to get up once you are down'. There was a dimension of sadness to the man.

Sanger, the journalist said, 'is known as the Fryers Bushranger...and prefers a nomadic mode of existence, living alone in the ranges...His open air life has made him as graceful as an antelope, and he is physically perfect. He is a first class shot, and a good long distance bicycle rider.' The journalist suggested Sanger was innocent of many of the crimes of which he was suspected.

When the prisoner was brought into court Inspector Middleditch invited him to warm himself in front of the fire: 'Come over here and get a warm, Charlie, you must be cold.' Sanger accepted and commented, 'It was warm enough on Sunday morning.' The policemen smiled. As a sergeant, Middleditch had led the unsuccessful manhunt for Sanger in 1911, and must have had some small satisfaction in at last seeing his quarry caught.

The small courtroom was packed with spectators. Taradale, then as now one of the prettiest towns in Victoria, was a quiet place. As the Kyneton *Guardian* put it, it was

a 'quiet, dreamy, reposeful spot into which nothing of the world's cares, frets, whirl and rush ever seems to enter'. When something did happen, the people paid attention.

The atmosphere during the trial was not always to the liking of those running it. Inspector Middleditch, questioning the bruised and battered Hesford, asked his officer solemnly, 'Did he strike you?' The audience burst out laughing, and the humourless Middleditch threatened to 'have some of you up'. Upon which he pompously directed Constable Fowles to 'see that there's no more of that laughter.' Fortunately he did not ask any more such ridiculous questions, or the unfortunate Fowles might have seen his ability to enforce a solemn atmosphere sorely tested.

As the trial proceeded it was evident that the *Mail's* attempt to surround the event with an atmosphere of epic grandeur was a bit misplaced.

Of course, a vigorous struggle certainly had taken place. That was evident to spectators in the courtroom: the constable's black eye and the abrasions on the faces and hands of both men were eloquent. The glamour of the encounter was increased by the fact that both participants were striking looking men. Sanger's appearance we have already noted. His opponent, Alexander Hesford, a respected policeman who was to end his career as an inspector, was as impressive as his prisoner, with his fair hair, blue eyes and fresh complexion.

The *Mail's* account was a distortion on two counts, however.

First, Sanger's gun was not used as a club by either man. (The *Kyneton Guardian* had gone further and claimed it had been used 'as a battering ram'). Sanger explicitly asked Hesford in court: 'Did I strike or attempt to strike you with the gun or revolver?' Hesford answered, 'No, you did not. You struck me with your fists.' That is, the struggle was not a vicious life and death encounter. Though Hesford admitted striking Sanger with his gun, no effort was made by either party to seriously hurt the other. Escape was the aim of one, arrest the other.

There is a quite striking quality in Alexander Hesford's testimony in court. It portrays a criminal who seemed to be trying to reassure the policeman that he meant no harm. According to Hesford, the following exchange took place when Sanger came out of the Bakery:

Hesford: 'You'd better put your hands up, or I'll put a bullet through you. I've got a revolver.'

Sanger: 'It's all right, I can see it.'

Then when the policeman looked at the gun Sanger was carrying, Sanger said, 'It won't go off'.

Sanger claimed in court: 'I made no attempt to strike him with the gun. I could have done so if I wished. My only object was to escape.' Although this claim could serve as a canny defence against a charge of assault, there is an element of naivety about it which it is impossible to ignore. Did Sanger believe that as long as no serious bodily harm was involved, what he was doing was acceptable? The question recalls one we noted earlier, put to Patrick Killeen in 1907, the point of which was to suggest that Killeen had left his house open: that question, with similar naivety, seemed to be

suggesting that an open house, to Sanger, was fair game. In the present trial Sanger made a similar point: he asked the baker's father whether the door of the bakery was left open. This question seems designed to head off a charge of breaking and entering: yet, as we will see in Chapter 9, Sanger did appear to believe that an open house was an invitation.

The second problem with the epic view of the event was the matter of trousers. Hesford testified in court that the decisive moment in the struggle came when Sanger's started to fall down: 'His trousers were falling, and he was hobbled in that way.' It is possible that without this misfortune Sanger might have got away.

This detail is even more damaging to the *Mail's* epic theme. Not only was the fight less brutal than the paper had claimed, it was also slightly ridiculous.

This episode of the trousers has entered local legend, in numerous forms. Most have Sanger trying to escape through a window and falling flat on his face with his trousers around his feet. There was clearly an element of farce in the event, little epic grandeur, and not much real menace. The gun which Sanger carried, for example, was found to be 'an old one, [which] could not possibly be fired'.

Even impeded by his trousers Sanger might have got away: Hesford was only able to subdue Sanger with the help of a local man, John McLure. McLure went out of his house on hearing a call for assistance. The constable said to him: 'I am having a bad time; come here.' The two were able to subdue Sanger.

So: in the course of the trial the image of the menacing giant striding the ranges with an armoury of guns shrank to one of an amiable, charming incompetent, wandering about with a rusty blunderbuss, souveniring other people's property.

Sanger had made no attempt to plead innocence, though he claimed that this was the first occasion he had been in the bakery. 'I only ask for a chance,' he said. 'Deal as leniently as you can with me.'

They were sad words, and wasted ones.

The honorary justices were not inclined to look for extenuating circumstances in this case. Nor were they charmed by Sanger's easy manner or romantic way of life. The six justices, local dignitaries all, were severe. Addressing the prisoner the chairman, Mr Mitchell, said, 'You asked us to be lenient, and give you a chance, but this is not your first case, you have had every opportunity. You seem determined to lead the life you have been leading. You have been in other parts recently, where nothing is known of you, and so have had a chance of altering. You are quite young and vigorous yet, and should do work, and not go around preying on other people who do work. The bench has decided to put you somewhere as long as we possibly can.'

The justice's summing up was a mixture of understandable exasperation and that kind of thickheadedness which does not realise that the advice to 'get a job' is never as easily acted on as it is given.

But he was serious. Sanger was sentenced to two years for being a ‘vagabond’ in that he was ‘found without lawful excuse upon an enclosed space’; and three in that ‘being a rogue and a vagabond’ and having resisted arrest he ‘is deemed an incorrigible rogue’. The first of these was a vagrancy offence: Sanger was convicted, primarily, not of robbing anyone, but of being very likely to do so. In view of the chairman’s comments, however, it is very hard to resist the idea that Sanger was being punished as much for what the magistrates believed he had been doing in the previous three years as for what he had just done.

The two sentences were imposed cumulatively, making a total sentence of five years.

He was transferred to Bendigo Gaol on June 24, 1914. On June 30 he was taken to Pentridge.

## 8. Justice or prejudice?

The five year sentence provoked an uproar.

The *Mount Alexander Mail*’s regular columnist ‘Zekle’—probably the editor, Frank McKillop— was quick to notice that Sanger’s sentence seemed grossly disproportionate to his crimes: it was more like the expression of prejudice than the sober application of the law. He showed no lack of enthusiasm in getting down to the task of redressing the wrong, starting his column of July 4 with a poem, part of which read:

...his crime’s no blacker than stealing bread, when the pangs of hunger gnaw,  
And resisting arrest, when hardly pressed, by the sleuth hounds of the law.

These themes were taken up by another poet, ‘J O’C’, in the Kyneton *Guardian* on July 2, under the romantic heading, ‘The Outlaw Sanger’:

Cold and starving they entrapped me, and policeman Hesford snapped me;  
Was it strange that I should fight to get away?

Both writers were stretching the point: if Sanger was starving, what are we to make of his splendid physical condition, and his ability to put up an epic struggle? And it is disconcerting to see the honest Hesford, a man trying to do his job—who, it appears, treated his prisoner with dignity and respect—demonised as an agent of injustice. The real targets should have been the justices of the bench.

It seemed for a while that an avalanche of unfortunate poetry might distract from the real issue. Fortunately, Zekle’s prose was sharper than his verse. ‘It is unfortunately true,’ he wrote, ‘with very few exceptions, that the honorary justice stands in the same relation to the skilled PM (Police Magistrate) as the casual quack does to the expert medical man.’ In an age abounding in quack cures for everything from cancer to falling hair, these were harsh words. The *Mail* followed them up with the publication of a view from Mr G L Carter, JP, and a considered opinion from Mr S M Cornish, the lawyer who had defended Sanger against the charge of sacrilege in 1906.

Mr G L Carter JP was one of the earliest white residents of Fryerstown. He had known Sanger and his family 'since the latter's childhood'. Carter made a point of visiting the offices of the *Mount Alexander Mail* to express support for its campaign on Sanger's behalf. 'He expressed intense surprise and indignation at the sentence imposed on Sanger, adding that he was voicing the almost unanimous opinion of the people in the Fryers district. "No one out there would see Sanger go hungry, and no one looks upon him as a criminal, or a danger to society. Sanger is not a rogue. He is a good fellow and the victim of circumstances...[he] is no more a criminal than I am, so keep on doing the best you can for the poor fellow."' Carter would have known the Sanger family well. He had fined Henry Sanger several times for young Charlie's truancy in the 1890s.

Mr Cornish expressed the view, carefully backed by references to the relevant legislation, that the justices had exceeded their authority in that in this case they had no power to impose cumulative sentences of more than two years. The Editor sent this opinion to the Attorney General, with other material from the paper's columns, urging him to 'take immediate action' on the matter. 'There is a strong feeling of indignation among every class of this community,' he stated. 'Any action you may take will be awaited with keen interest.'

To judge from the columns of the *Mail*, there was indeed strong community feeling. The paper's Chewton correspondent reported that the sentence was 'denounced on all sides'. Two clergymen publicly pronounced their concern. In Christ Church the Reverend F Vanston delivered a sermon in which he asserted that Sanger 'could hardly be called a criminal as generally understood,' and that 'he was sure he was expressing the thoughts of the great majority of all interested in the case' in calling for a reduction in the sentence. The Presbyterian Minister F A Hagenauer wrote a long letter to the Attorney General offering extenuating details about Sanger's life. We will discuss this letter in the next chapter.

The correspondence columns were also active. Only one letter attacked Sanger, and perhaps significantly it was the only one which was anonymous. It was sent from Chewton, and started with a couple of rhetorical questions, the second of which was, 'One is tempted to ask who is the Mr Cornish and the Mr Carter who are ventilating their opinions on the matter?' Both of these gentlemen were in fact widely known, but heedlessly sweeping aside their opinions, the anonymous writer offered his own solution to the Sanger problem, a solution which probably still has plenty of adherents:

In my opinion if Sanger had been treated to a dose of the "cat o' nine tails" in the early part of his career his after behaviour would have perhaps been more up to the mark.

This opinion is not as prehistoric as it seems at first sight. It is sobering to recall that the 'cat' was last used in Victoria as recently 1957, on Pentridge prisoner William John O'Meally.

Other writers were more thoughtful and moderate than the anonymous citizen from Chewton. For all their passion and the variety of positions they espoused, they all showed a willingness to grapple with what is, after all, still an unsolved problem:

how should a society deal with someone who, in one way or another, does not seem to accept the ordinary rules of that society?

## 9. 'Total levies of £30'

Sanger's vagabond life was not, it seemed, one that posed a threat to all his fellow citizens.

Mr Carter's expression of support was particularly impressive, coming as it did from a leading member of the respectable establishment. His somewhat condescending attitude, however—expressed in the words 'victim...poor fellow'—tends to present Sanger as in some way not entirely responsible for his actions. A variation on this approach was developed by the Reverend Mr Hagenauer, in his letter to the Attorney General.

Hagenauer's long letter was provoked, he said, by the 'strangeness of sympathy' in the community for a character presented by the police as a dangerous criminal. This 'universal' sympathy caused him to enquire of 'certain old residents' as to the origins of Sanger's problem. Hagenauer commented that some believed that Sanger had been turned out of home by his father long ago 'because he would not work and was a bad boy.' He went on:

I learn that he was not turned out of his home by his father, but ran away under the following pathetic circumstances. His father was a man who consistently ill treated his delicate wife often beating her, and the boy Charles felt keenly for his mother, and often said that when he grew up he would protect her from his father. At last growing into a big lad, he resisted his father when ill-treating his mother, & defended her stoutly, but unfortunately for himself threatened to shoot him if he again beat her. The father at once sent for the police asserting his life was in danger. On the approach of the police, the mother trembling for her son begged him to run away and hide. Charles did run and hid himself in the bush. In the bush he stayed & has lived there ever since, being pursued in the early years by the terrors of the police & always afraid to show himself, until the bush became his home.

Hagenauer continued:

From the outset the wandering boy had the sympathy of the district surrounding his home. Knowing he was afraid to show himself and that he had no means of obtaining food and clothing, the residents were accustomed to leave their kitchen doors open at night, with food and occasionally clothing handy so that he could help himself. It is quite unthinkable that they would have done this if they regarded him as being either a criminal or dangerous. Naturally he thought he was doing no wrong after this if he took food & clothing when doors were not unlocked [sic] and for years the residents winked at his petty thefts, and willingly submitted to them.

Sanger, said the clergyman, was simply 'short of that intellectual development which would under normal conditions have made him weary of vagabondage.' He tried to

underplay the seriousness of Sanger's misdemeanours by noting that 'the residents of Fryerstown affirm that his total "levies" upon them during many years do not amount to £30.'

This argument itself shows some naivety. Sanger had stolen over £30 worth of goods in only eight months in 1907, from various places away from Fryerstown. It is hard to imagine Malmsbury resident John Stubbings being impressed by the clergyman's pleading: Sanger had pilfered Stubbings' £16 bicycle that year. To put the value of this bicycle into perspective, it is worth recalling that in 1907 the basic wage was established in Australia for the first time, by Justice Higgins in the famous Harvester Judgment. It was two pounds two shillings a week. On this measurement Stubbings' bicycle was worth more than seven weeks' wages; and, at the time of Justice Higgins' judgment, many people did not earn as much as the basic wage. Sanger was certainly no arch criminal, but special pleading by his supporters would have been looked at coldly by the law.

A striking feature of the controversy over Sanger's sentence in 1914 was the silence of his family, many of whom lived in the district. It is particularly noticeable that the damaging remarks made by Mr Hagenauer about Henry Sanger were made about a living man. If Hagenauer's judgments on Henry reflected the opinion of the wider Fryerstown community, there is no evidence that they reflected the views of Sanger's immediate family. Arthur Sanger, when he enlisted in the AIF in 1915, named his father as next of kin. Albert's statement to the inquest after his father's death in 1915 shows that he was on good terms with his father.

These facts sit uneasily with the common story that Henry's beatings caused his wife's premature death, and that it was in remorse that he shot himself on her grave. He did in fact shoot himself near the graves of his wife and son, but his suicide note tells a less dramatic, more depressing story: that of a man weighed down, as his own father had been, by financial problems and alcohol related depression. Charged, yet again, with using obscene language in public, he killed himself rather than face prison over a fine he could not pay: 'I am to [sic] proud to borrow, to honest to steal I am in poverty, the alternative is gaol I have never been there in (sixty) 60 years and can't bear it—God bless you all.'

Did Hagenauer make an attempt to talk to anyone in the Sanger family? We don't know, but it seems unlikely. In the absence of any information, perhaps the best way of interpreting the family's silence is to see it as a kind of solidarity.

The other Sanger children made their way in the world, in the words of a letter writer to the *Mail* in 1914, as 'highly respected and industrious people'. His two soldier brothers were victims of the war: Albert, who enlisted in 1916, died of wounds a few months after arriving on the battlefield, and Arthur, having survived three years, was killed in action in October 1918, a little over a month before the Armistice. Edith was a respectable married woman. Herbert, the eldest in the family, acquired land in the Fryerstown district. When he died in 1939 he was important and respected enough to merit an obituary in the *Mount Alexander Mail*. Only Charles found it hard to live a conventional life.

There is, finally, something at once touching and unconvincing about all the arguments raised in defence of Sanger. While it is true that his demeanour, his questions in court and the frank openness of his manner are all consistent with the kind of personality development described by Hagenauer and Carter, the arguments in his favour in the end have an unpleasantly condescending flavour. They all insist that Sanger, a 34 year old man with two prison sentences behind him, is still bound by the habits of his early youth; that is, that he is morally undeveloped, or a kind of child-like figure.

Hagenauer concluded his letter with a remarkable statement: 'I have learned that the secretary of the Rechabite Tent at Harcourt guarantees that if Sanger is liberated he will never lack for food even if his gipsy life has by now unfitted him for regular employment.'

The Attorney General replied to Hagenauer's letter on July 13:

While all you say may be true about his earlier condition, the general repute in which he was held, and the leniency of those from whom he obtained nourishment in various ways, he has at the same time got quite a number of convictions, and it seems to me to be one of those cases in which it would have been very much better if the tendency towards vagabondage had been arrested by some organisation before it developed into the present unsatisfactory condition.

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On June 27 the *Mail* editor had written to the Attorney General claiming a 'strong feeling of indignation among every class of the community' and attaching Mr Cornish's opinion on the legality of the sentence. The secretary of the Crown Law department was immediately instructed to enquire of the local court authorities as to the facts of the matter. The Kyneton clerk of courts sent the material requested, but added a separate letter which seemed to offer the real reasons for the heavy sentence, reasons we touched on in the last chapter. The magistrates had punished Sanger, he seemed to suggest, for all the crimes of which he had been suspected over the past few years:

I have the honour to state the following with reference to C E Sanger. As it does not refer to the charges that were before the Court, I have not put it in the statement of facts in connection therewith, but submit it for the Secretary to use his discretion as to whether it should be brought under the notice of the Minister or not.

Sanger has been suspected of a number of petty thefts which have been committed in Taradale District during the last three years or so. During that time the neighbourhood has been scoured on many occasions by Constables from Taradale and adjacent police stations in their endeavour to trace Sanger. It is common knowledge that during that time Sanger has not been known to work for his living.

This strange letter seems to be a blatant effort by the clerk to suggest to the Crown Law department that it should quietly acquiesce in the sentence handed down because

it was fair punishment for crimes everyone knew Sanger had committed. The problem was that Sanger had not even been charged for these crimes, let alone convicted of them. The authorities, not surprisingly, disregarded the clerk's special pleading.

The Attorney General sought advice on Sanger's 'mental condition', obviously puzzled by his unusual behaviour. The Pentridge doctor reported that he 'did not find any signs of insanity. He has been a heavy drinker of cheap Colonial wine (pinkey).'

That last cryptic sentence is puzzling. At no other time has such an opinion about Sanger been expressed, and the mention of heavy drinking is inconsistent with reports from many quarters of the prisoner's good health and physical condition.

In the event the Attorney General paid less attention to humanitarian (and vindictive) arguments than to legal ones. On August 1 1914 he obtained an opinion on the case virtually the same as that put forward by Mr Cornish. The sentence was reduced from five years to two. The incompetence imputed by 'Zekle' to the Taradale magistrates was confirmed.

The prisoner was told of this change a few days later, as were the clergyman and the editor. The chairman of the Taradale magistrates, Mr Robert Mitchell, was not informed till October 30.

## **10. 'We're going to meet a bushranger'**

Sanger was released from Pentridge on November 1 1916. He was 36 years old. While he was in gaol Henry Sanger had committed suicide near the grave of his wife Maria.

Charles Sanger's life of notoriety was now over. He would make no more appearances before the court, and be of no more interest to the police. He retreated to the Fryerstown bush to live the life of a prospector.

The common testimony of those who knew him is that Sanger lived a subsistence life in the bush. He kept a series of huts in the bush. He prospected for gold, ransacked trees for their honey, and shot kangaroos. He maintained several vegetable gardens at different locations chosen for their better than average soil and access to water.

William MacDonald suggests that he stole fruit from local orchards, but if he did, he carefully chose those owners who would look tolerantly on his activities. MacDonald himself, who was in a position to have known Sanger and many of his acquaintances, paints a positive picture of him, a picture consistent with accounts given earlier by journalists in the local press:

He had an insatiable appetite for reading, could speak on practically every subject, and was a fascinating personality in himself.

He was very clean personally, clothes clean, shoes polished and clean shaven. One just could not imagine him as a recluse, or someone who sought complete isolation in preference to integration with his fellow man.

It was this quiet, civilised character who was about to embark on a different kind of adventure.

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Jack Willoughby, a 90 year old retired policeman in Castlemaine, has a childhood memory which still baffles him. The memory is of a meeting with Charles Sanger. Willoughby must have been ten or twelve at the time, the late 1920s. His aunt was Ilma Wallace, nee Browning, born in Fryerstown in 1883, and a contemporary of Sanger's at the Fryerstown school. This is Willoughby's account of the meeting:

When I was a kid I used to go over to Daylesford and stay with my Aunt Ilma. One night—I don't know how we got there—Ilma and I were walking through the bush looking for Sanger the bushranger. She'd said to me, 'Come on, we're going to meet a bushranger.' I was scared, I don't know what I expected but I was really scared at the idea of a bushranger, I can't tell you how scared I was.

It was late afternoon, getting dark.

Then Ilma says, 'Here comes Charlie.'

'How do you know?'

'Listen,' she says. It was his mouth organ. He was walking along, playing his mouth organ.

Well, he was far from being a bushranger.

How in the hell she arranged to meet him, I'm blown if I know.

Ilma Browning had been married at the age of nineteen in 1903 to John Wallace, and had borne him ten children, three of whom died young. In 1927 John Wallace died. According to William MacDonald, Ilma immediately set out from her home in Daylesford to find Charles Sanger in the Fryerstown bush. As we have already noted, MacDonald's narrative asserts that Sanger originally fled to the bush as a result of his humiliation in being virtually abandoned at the altar by his fiancé. We should be cautious about this story, but one way of explaining the event described by Jack Willoughby is to assume that the fiancé in question was Ilma Browning. Why else would she search for Sanger in the bush, if she did not want to resume a strong attachment?

The late Budge Lee, who lived in Green Gully, south of Middleton's Creek, has recalled that Ilma Wallace came to his house in the late 1920s looking for Sanger. She had spent two weeks searching for him since her husband's death. Lee cut wood in the forest east of Porcupine Ridge, and frequently came across Sanger, who prospected for gold in that area. Sanger sometimes asked him to buy supplies in his visits, and told him where he could drop them off. Budge would have been as good a guide to his whereabouts as anyone.

MacDonald's account has the look of a romance, and it cannot be verified. Yet though we cannot be certain of the background to the story, it is a fact that on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1929 Ilma Wallace married Charles Sanger in Ballarat.

## **11. 'A worthless bark hut, not held under any right'**

According to MacDonald, Sanger was too set in his bush hermit ways to be able to tolerate domestic life with his new wife in Daylesford. He soon returned to his old haunts, and his routines of gold prospecting, collecting bush food and running his vegetable gardens at various locations near his various huts. Budge Lee has said that Ilma came looking for Charlie after they separated, wanting financial support from him: but he, living as he did a subsistence life, was unable to be of any help to her.

Ilma Sanger died in January 1945 after a long illness. No mention is made in reports of her funeral of the presence of her husband. In her will, Ilma left modest gifts to four of her surviving children, and the bulk of her small estate to William Roy Lee, 'for his kindness.' She had been living with Lee in Daylesford. Ilma's obituary in the *Daylesford Advocate* talks of her community spirit, but does not mention her second husband. The report of her funeral likewise carries no reference to him.

Though Sanger could not sustain his relationship with Ilma, he remained on good terms with at least two of her adult children, the two who were not mentioned in her will. Her two youngest sons, Fred and Arthur Wallace, regularly travelled from their homes in Daylesford to cut wood in the Upper Loddon Forest, near one of Sanger's huts. They often took their children with them on these occasions. Fred's daughter Elaine Murray, nee Wallace, recalls these excursions with affection:

Dad cut wood in the bush down that way, and often came across Charlie. My sister and I liked going with Dad. We'd go down this path and find Charlie's hut. He had a tin, and he'd get a sixpence out for each of us. We loved that.

And John Wallace, Arthur's son, often went prospecting in the same forest with his uncle Fred. He recalls of Sanger that

He would come along tapping the trees with his little axe. He was healthy, and would walk into Fryerstown once a month to get his stuff. He used to rob the honey trees—always had plenty of honeycomb. He used to tell me not to eat too much of it at once.

He'd talk mainly about gold and where it could be found. And honey, and bush stuff. He always had a half a Vaseline jar full of gold—it never got any bigger or any smaller. Maybe he spent what he found. Old Fred was sure he had a store of it somewhere. He went looking for it after Charlie died, but didn't find any.

Neither of the children had any inkling that Sanger had a criminal past, or that he had spent time in jail.

Twenty years after he met Sanger for the first time Jack Willoughby was serving in the Police Force in Footscray. He was an experienced officer. On leave in about 1947 he had his second meeting with Sanger. Here is his account:

I was driving down the road to Glenluce, just past where it joins the Vaughan road. I saw a man walking on the road, wearing a cap, a sugar bag over his shoulder. You know, I'd heard stories about Sanger over the years. I thought, 'Jees, could that be Sanger?' I'd driven past him, and I stopped. I could see in the rear vision mirror, he was walking towards me real slowly, cautiously.

I got out, and saw he was eyeing me off. I think he was apprehensive about meeting me.

I put my hand out. 'Charlie Sanger!'

'Boy Willoughby,' he says, slowly. 'So...You're a policeman now.' And we shook hands.

He was clean shaven, neatly dressed—casual. He lived in the bush, but neat. He had a fine physique, straight as a gun barrel. Raw boned, no fat on him. And tall: I'm five ten, five ten and a half, and he was taller than me.

We talked, maybe a half an hour. I can't remember what about. The weather probably. Then I said,

'Can I give you a ride somewhere?'

'No, no, Boy,' he says, 'The walk'll do me good.'

In those days he walked everywhere—no bike, horse, anything.

By the time Jack Willoughby saw him Sanger would have been the recipient of the old age pension, a benefit he was able to access through the kindness and assistance of local people, including Castlemaine policeman Geoff Hookey. It is clear, however, that he was not desperately in need of this money, because when he died in 1953 he had a bank account with £254/15/9 in it, an amount which, in those days, would have bought a modest house in the district. Budge Lee, who probably knew Sanger as an old man as well as anyone, has recalled hearing him say that he felt so healthy he believed he would 'live till he was 100'.

Sanger clearly survived in his subsistence manner, living off the land and maintaining himself well enough for it to be a matter of comment locally. He walked everywhere, worked hard and lived in quiet contentment, liked by all who came in contact with him. In her unpublished manuscript *Manana*, Vaughan resident Marjorie Horner, who knew Sanger, writes:

He was many miles from the Guildford store, but he would walk almost in a straight line from the bush to the store to buy provisions once a month. The storekeeper, Wilfred Mein, had a licence to buy gold. Charlie was a good fossicker. Our eldest girls rode their bikes to the 'finger post corner', where

the Glenluce, Vaughan and Fryers' roads met. Sometimes Charlie would be passing through that area where our girls would be waiting to meet the Glenluce children. They would then ride to Fryers School. Charlie gave our girls a few lessons in bush lore such as how to tell north from south...He explained that the south sides of trees always had a heavier bark or moss on them, as our worst weather came from the south...

The Horners would put aside the local newspapers when they had finished them, and Mr Horner would leave them in one of Sanger's huts for him.

William MacDonald is clear that Sanger lived partly by souveniring the odd item from local farms and orchards. He would, says MacDonald, calm farm dogs by 'patting them down.' His passing was identified by local farmers with the boobook owl, whose call he could imitate with eerie accuracy. To this day MacDonald's son Darryl cannot hear this sound without remembering the story of the lonely bushman, and thinking of him passing unseen on a moonlit night.

In 1953 Sanger fell ill. He was able to spend some time at his nephew Len Sanger's house in Fryerstown between hospital visits, and was planning to go to board at Fred Wallace's place in Daylesford. As Elaine Murray puts it:

Charlie must have been sick, because he stayed with us for the last six weeks or so of his life. Dad was fixing up a spare room for him. He had a stomach problem, I think. He was taking pills. Dad was driving him to Fryerstown to get his pension and he had an attack and they went to the hospital in Castlemaine. He never came out.

Charles Sanger died on October 19, 1953. He was 74. The death certificate gives the causes of death as cerebral haemorrhage and severe malnutrition. The latter seems to verify Elaine Murray's reference to a stomach problem: a man with such a problem would be unable or unwilling to eat.

Sanger left no will, but probate documents made out by his brother George gave an inventory of his estate. It included his State Bank account and 'a worthless bark hut in bush, not held under any right'. It is not clear to which hut this refers, but 'worthless' is a sad comment on Sanger's status.

Bob Sanger, son of Len, remembers his father coming home after clearing out Charlie's hut of all his belongings. He remembers that everything fitted into one sugar bag.

Legend has it that anyone who spends a lot of time prospecting in the bush must have a stash of gold, and the legend appears to have applied here. We have been told stories of people, hearing of Sanger's death, going to his hut and digging the place over in search of this stash. One rumour had it that the secret spot could be found by observing where the shadow of a certain tree fell at midday. Many holes were dug, but there is no evidence that anything was found. Of course, anyone who did find such a stash would be unlikely to boast about it.

Sanger's death was marked by a single notice in the *Castlemaine Mail*. There was no mention in the paper of the days when he was big news. In the week of his death several significant obituaries appeared of citizens more notable for their conventional achievements than their colourful past: but the chief preoccupation of the *Mail* in that week was the question of whether Queen Elizabeth II would visit the town during her royal tour of Australia. It was hoped that flower boxes placed in the streets would lure her to the town.

Charles Sanger's grave in the Fryerstown cemetery is a substantial but simple one, and the gravestone reads: 'In Memory of Charles E Sanger 1879-1953'. The graves of his brother Herbert and nephew Leonard and their wives are nearby. On the other side of the cemetery is a larger memorial to his mother and father, his two soldier brothers, and his younger brother Robert.

A few kilometres away, Hunters Track is a pleasant dirt road marking the boundary of the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park and the Fryers State Forest. It winds its way along Salters Creek through bush that can be spectacular with wildflowers in a good season. As it approaches Columbine Creek a flat near the track marks the site of one of Charlie Sanger's vegetable gardens, once a palisaded affair which, according to Ray Bradfield, Sanger took over from a person called 'The Frenchman', of whom nothing else is known. A few hundred metres along Hunters Track a diversion to the right takes you to a clearing where a mud and stone chimney is all that remains of the hut where Sanger lived for much of his later life. A dam is on the downhill side, and numerous races and mining works testify to thousands of hours of hard work.

On the other side of the Loddon River, in the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, the Great Dividing Trail passes two ruins of huts said by locals to have been regularly maintained and used by Sanger. One is just south of Sebastopol Creek. The other, in Brown's Gully, is called Hunt's hut, after the goldfields entrepreneur who originally occupied it.

All of this is perhaps a more eloquent testament than a gravestone to the life of the 'elusive Sanger.'

## **12. Vagabond**

What are we to make today of the *Mount Alexander Mail's* assertion in 1913 that Sanger was known as 'the Fryer's bushranger', and its prominent 1914 headline 'THE FRYERS BUSHRANGER—THE ELUSIVE SANGER'? The tag has clearly stuck. We have seen the claim that Sanger was 'the last declared bushranger' in Australia, and have been startled to hear one off the cuff remark that he had run away to Tasmania, where he had been hanged.

It is clear that the bushranger tag is inappropriate. Sanger never used a gun to attack anyone. There is a widespread belief in the district that he was suspected of the murder of the Taradale baker, but this seems to be a confusion of the 1907 Break of Day matter with the 1914 events. The confusion did, however, add a certain mystery to the man.

To further detract from the ‘bushranger’ idea, Sanger’s confrontations with police were always touched with an element of farce, something he managed to carry off without becoming ridiculous himself. His light manner made his predicaments light. He never pretended to any heroic status, and accepted his setbacks not with tragic desperation but with a kind of relaxed humour that made some people think he must have been mad, or mentally defective.

There was nothing of the Ned Kelly about him, but it is also clear that he was far from a common thief. The support he had not only from significant numbers of people around Fryerstown, but also from the wider Castlemaine community, suggests that he represented something beyond mere vagrant irresponsibility. There were two main reasons for this. One was his personality: he was obviously a very appealing character. The second was the apparent local belief that he was a victim of injustice: first at the hands of his father, and then at the hands of a justice system seemingly determined to make him the suspect in every crime.

These two factors sometimes made local newspapers—and poets—introduce exaggerated colour into Sanger’s story. But if the tag ‘bushranger’ doesn’t fit, how are we to understand the two parts of his life—his ‘outlaw’ years, and his quiet retirement to the bush?

It is interesting to compare Sanger to New Zealand writer and political figure John A Lee. Lee was born into a poor family in Dunedin in 1891. He took to petty crime as a young man and served time in reform school and in jail between 1906 and 1913, living in between incarcerations as a swagman. Up to this point there are obvious parallels between his life and that of Charles Sanger. After his release from gaol in 1913, however, Lee went on to become a soldier, prominent radical member of parliament and writer.

Among Lee’s better known works are his descriptions of life on the road: the life of the ‘swagger’, or swagman. He distinguishes this person from the hordes of men who tramped the country in search of work during the Depression: these latter were men who took to the road by necessity, not inclination. The ‘swagger’ was more of a misfit in a society receding from the frontier, a man who ‘failed to become adapted because of circumstances.’

Lee describes the swagger in Henry Lawson’s words: ‘*A rover and a rebel, / Conceived and born to roam.*’ Like Lawson, he wants to see such a man as a kind of impetus to change in a society, and therefore as a person of political significance: ‘Today these restless ones are found on the social frontiers, trying to turn the old seditions into new forms of law and order.’ Yet the person he actually portrays in his stories about ‘swaggers’ is not at all a politically or socially aware individual. In fact, he’s a bit of a no-hoper. Here’s his account of one such, a person he calls the ‘Shiner’:

Most swaggers were ashamed to be swaggers and were looking for work. Not Shiner. He glorified in his vagabond profession and boasted how he had dodged work. Work? What was work? Any fool could work! Sure, he could fork potatoes, make fences, and dig ditches with the best of them – for fifteen minutes. When he was expected to make a habit of it, that was too much. It

took health and strength to get up to go to work. But it took moral courage to be in bed when the sun was shining on the tent. Any fool could get sunburnt at work. To get sunburnt in bed was different.

This is a less romantic angle on the swagman, more in line with the subject of John Shaw Neilson's poem, *Sundowner*:

Seldom he worked: he was, I fear,  
Unreasonably slow and dear:  
Little he earned, and that he spent  
Deliberately drinking beer.

Neilson had spent the decades up to the 1920s working as an itinerant labourer in north western Victoria, and must have come across plenty of swagmen.

But although they were reprobates, Lee portrays his swagmen as having a certain 'vagabond distinction.' At a time when New Zealand was settling down from its rip roaring days, they were 'the cageless, the unadaptable...who...could not allow themselves to be walled in to developing New Zealand society.'

Lee seems unable to make up his mind whether his swagger is a con man or a revolutionary, a layabout or a hardworking desperado. Sanger was none of these, yet at one time or another there seemed to be people who wanted to invest him with some of their qualities. So the poems of 1914 made him a symbol of the unjust treatment of the poor, and the extravagant newspaper tags—'Scarlet Pimpernel', 'Fryerstown desperado', 'Fryers bushranger' seemed to be a combination of media beat up, Deadwood Dick extravagance and a need for some kind of colourful hero to brighten the dullness of the times.

In his book *Bandits*, English historian Eric Hobsbawm, tried to show that there are outlaw types who, whatever the reality of their stories, acquire reputations which give an insight into the society in which they are active. A common example is Robin Hood, a person who may never even have existed: and in Australia, debate still sputters about whether Ned Kelly himself was a fighter for justice or a horse thief and murderer. Hobsbawm has conceded that there is always a difference between the raw facts of such people's lives and the myths which seem to sprout around them. The idea of a socially significant outlaw 'rests not so much on the actual deeds of the bandits as on what people thought them to be, or, more precariously, on how they were reported by balladeers and other popular storytellers even generations later.'

Lee and Hobsbawm show a determination to make outsiders protagonists in history and society rather than wanderers on the margins. Sanger, on the other hand, having had his conflicts with conventional society, retreated to those margins, and showed no interest in 'new forms of law and order.' He was able to do this because of precious assets available to him which are less available to people in a more mobile society with a much larger population: a lonely forest, and a stable, sympathetic country community.

On his retreat to the bush in 1916, Sanger became part of a phenomenon not uncommon in the first half of the twentieth century: men who lived quietly on the

edge of farming communities, benefiting from the kindness of farmers and rural shopkeepers who offered them tolerance and sometimes in-kind support, and accepted them as part of normal society. This is the spirit in which William MacDonald wrote his brief account of Sanger's life.

Such marginal men were not confined to Australia. We find descriptions of similar types in the writings of rural hermits by journalist and poet Edward Thomas, who chronicled the backblocks of England in the years before the First World War.

Thomas wrote of itinerant labourers, men who wandered their limited country doing odd jobs and living in camps they set up alone in the woods. He recorded their foibles and small tragedies, and above all their resignation to their particular place in nature and society. Of one such hermit like character, John Clark, the Hampshire Umbrella Man, he says: 'All the time [he spoke] his face was moved with free and broad expressions as he thought and remembered. . . Living alone and not having to fit into human society, he had not learned to fit his face into a vice.' This is the picture of a man who has found his own kind of freedom, and perhaps that is what Sanger found too.

Thomas was killed at the battle of Passchendaele, and his rural England was swept away by the twin forces of industrialisation and war. His descriptions now read like those of a lost civilisation, one which he saw as having roots in the Middle Ages. In a more limited way, Sanger also represents a lost world. It is a world we get a glimpse of when we actually think about the situation of the swagman of Banjo Paterson's *Waltzing Matilda*. It is a world written about by Roland Robinson, who wandered the back blocks of South Eastern Australia as a young man before the Second World War. Robinson's poem *Sundowner* is dramatically different from the cynical portrait offered by Shaw Neilson: he pictures a harmless old man, not so different from ourselves, and worthy of help from those able to offer it.

Throughout the twentieth century it was common for country communities to have hermit like members living on the bush fringes. We are not talking of those who camp for a few days, or who take to the bush to drink, or hoon around making donuts with their car tracks, but of people who want to escape into some more isolated world. Even in the twenty first century National Park rangers have had to deal with drifters who try to set up semi permanent camps in the bush on the edge of the town of Castlemaine. Such people are treated well by rangers, who try hard to find them accommodation elsewhere: but there is no question of their being allowed to live in the bush in the way Sanger could. From the point of view of the bush itself, this is probably a good thing: yet it could be argued that the lack of this escape route for people who in some way or other find it hard to live in ordinary society is a loss.

Perhaps Sanger as a young man was of the vagabond type, who was in the end able to find peace and a warm connection with his community by his retreat to the bush. Vagabond types, unsettling symptoms of something not working in society, presumably will be with us forever. It seems that they are increasingly to be found, not in the relatively healthy environment of the bush, surrounded by stable rural communities of known people, but in the wilderness of city streets.

### 13. Sources

This project began with our fascination with a brief account of Sanger's life written by Porcupine Ridge farmer William MacDonald (1911-1989) in 1972. MacDonald's document is inaccurate on dates, and seems as much a compilation of local folklore as a history; but his story is consistent with the verifiable facts in most important matters, and since he was much closer to the events and people of the story than we are, we have been inclined to treat his account with respect. Passages from this document are quoted by kind permission of Darryl MacDonald.

The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) is the source of documentation relating to Henry Sanger's and Charles Sanger's court appearances (VPRS 2370/P/1-3; VPRS 2453/P/4). It also provided inquest reports on the deaths of Henry and George Sanger (VPRS 24/P/506 file 1886/1459; VPRS 24/P/927 file 1915/767), and detailed files on the Glenluce and Fryerstown schools (VPRS 640/P/325 and 424; VPRS 640/P/139 and 141). Importantly, the Attorney General's file on the 1914 Taradale bakery matter (including Hagenauer's letter) is to be found at the PROV (VPRS 266/P/724 File 14/6550).

The Pentridge file on Charles Sanger is held at the PROV, and the photos from it are reprinted by kind permission of the Office (VPRS 515/P/59 Page 138).

The Victoria Police Museum was generously helpful on the careers of Constables Nonmus and Hesford, and in providing material from the *Police Gazette* on Sanger. The *Gazette* graphic on page 20 is reprinted by kind permission of the Museum.

Ruth A Rowe's *Fryerstown* provided a good account of the district seen through relatively untroubled eyes. Ray Bradfield's various unpublished walking notes give a valuable sense of the lived history of Sanger's corner of the Fryer's Forest. The excerpts from Marjorie Horner's *Manana* were kindly provided by Jeannie Lister. Gordon Miller's reminiscences of Sanger were told to Diane Linton in 1991. Miller had been a woodcutter in the Upper Loddon forest, and knew Sanger. Budge Lee's memories of Sanger were told to Doug Ralph.

David Bannear's *Historic Mining Sites in the Castlemaine/Fryers Creek Divisions* (NRE 1993) is packed with useful information about mining and landscape history. It locates one of Sanger's huts near the Great Dividing Trail south of Sebastopol Creek. The tag 'last declared bushranger' is recorded in Bannear's field notes. Details on the state of forests in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century are taken from Ray Wright's *The Bureaucrat's Domain* (OUP 1989). Foresters' reports on the state of forests in the Upper Loddon area 1914-21 are found at the PROV (VPRS 11563/P/0001/Unit 4).

The contemporary press was a valuable source of information, particularly the *Mount Alexander Mail* and the *Bendigo Advertiser*.

For general background on the social scene we have cited Geoffrey Blainey's *Black Kettle and Full Moon*. We have found Eric Hobsbawm's book *Bandits* a useful though contentious guide to public attitudes to the 'Robin Hood' thing. The quotes from John Lee are from the introduction to his book *Shining with the Shiner*. A selection of Edward Thomas's extensive journalism on pre-1914 England is found in his *Selected Poems and Prose* (Penguin 1981). Roland Robinson's writings on life on

the road in the thirties and forties can be found in *The Jindyworobak Anthology* (ed. Brian Elliott), and in his autobiography *The Drift of Things* (MacMillan 1973). The *Diary of a Welsh Swagman 1869-1894* is published by Sun Books (1975).

Finally, our interviewees were remarkable in the way that their accounts tallied with the documented facts: they were a good recommendation for the reliability of oral history.