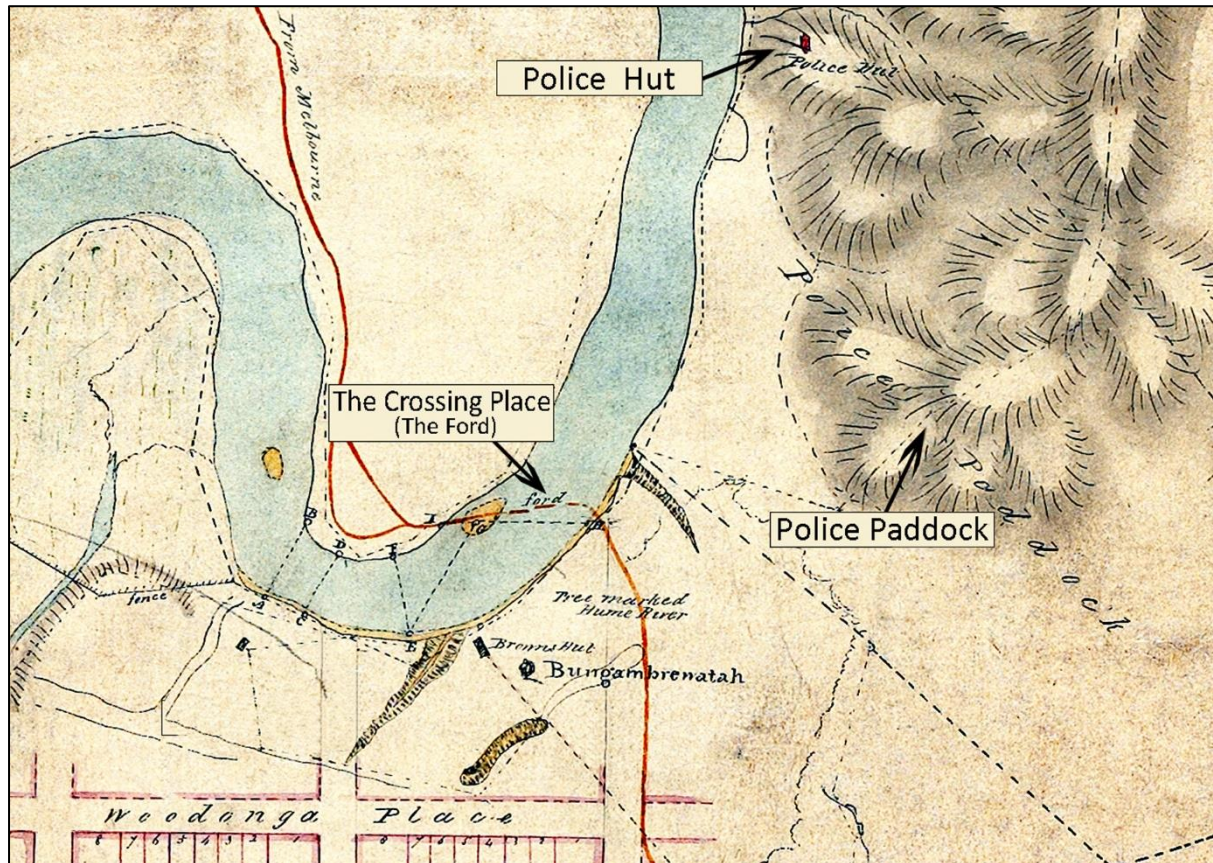


# The Police Hut, 1838

*Bruce Pennay*

A worn, old, archived survey map of the officially designated Murray River Crossing Place located a police hut on a hill downstream of the present-day Albury Swim Centre. The hut overlooked a carefully measured ford, just upstream from Bungambrawatha Creek and a new township to be called 'Albury.'



A section of Thomas Townsend's survey map of Albury, then a frontier township on the Port Phillip Road, showing the location of the police hut and paddock.

In an incident called the Faithfull Massacre, Aboriginal people killed seven overlanders at Broken River in April 1838. As a result, the Governor of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps, decided to establish several mounted police posts along the route from Yass to Port Phillip to provide 'for the protection of colonists frequenting the route and to provide for the apprehension of [convict] runaways.'

Gipps endorsed a proposal to establish towns near all the police posts as 'regular halting places or posts of protection' with 'post houses and houses of public entertainment.' Police huts and their adjacent towns would be at the principal crossing places – the Murrumbidgee, Murray, Ovens, Broken and Goulburn Rivers and Violet Creek.

A survey in July-August 1838 located a ford and fixed the sites for a police hut and a town at a place called Bungambrawatha on the Murray River. The police hut was built in seventeen days in October 1838. The survey was approved, and the town was called 'Albury' in early 1839. Town sales were slow, but the crossing grew busy quickly.

The police hut, its huge 20-25-acre police paddock for grazing horses, and the crossing became the prime elements in 'a contact zone,' where people geographically and

historically separated, encountered each other, and where they began to establish ongoing relations. Settlers and Aboriginal people were finding ways to live together and separately. Some were starting to form an integrated economy.

Nowadays the crossing place precinct has been altered with a new boardwalk and jetty to help visitors enjoy a satisfying river experience.

The signage ignores the site of the long-vanished police hut. This, in effect, deletes the story of Albury's grim beginnings as a place specially fortified to stop the spread of frontier violence.

The old survey map and the government records stubbornly remain as uncomfortable fact checkers. Albury was founded as part of a military strategy to take possession of the land by securing a principal line of communication.

The establishment of an official Murray River Crossing Place changed this place forever. It had profound consequences for Aboriginal communities and their way of life.