As soon as the kangaroo is started, he bounds away for some minutes at as fast a rate as the fleetest dogs, but the latter soon gain upon him, especially if he ascends the steep slope of a range, which is peculiarly disadvantageous to his manner of progression. However, if the country is very brushy and rocky, he frequently escapes from his facility of clearing all impediments in his way, by amazing leaps. Whilst the chase lasts the horses must keep up at a very fast pace; and in the densely wooded coast country, there is ample scope for proving the mettle of one’s horses, in leaping across water-courses, and rocky brooks, clearing fallen trees, and thorny bushes, and galloping down steep ranges.

Clement Hodgkinson, 1845.

Like many short-term visitors to the colonies of Australia in the mid-nineteenth century, Clement Hodgkinson returned to England after his two-year visit and published a descriptive account of the people and places encountered. Publications such as Hodgkinson’s Australia, from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay, in which this account of the kangaroo-hunt appeared, provided vivid descriptions of life in the colonies for those contemplating the journey southwards. In a similar manner, the watercolours of ST Gill provided visual documentation of the landscape and activities in the colonies. In their printed form — as lithographs and illustrated letter-paper — Gill’s works reached a wide audience in Australia and ‘at home’ in Britain.

Born in England in 1819, Samuel Thomas Gill immigrated with his family to South Australia in 1839. Having trained and practised as a draftsman and watercolour artist in England, Gill established a studio soon after his arrival in Adelaide and advertised for artistic commissions. In March 1840 he placed an advertisement in the South Australian Register seeking ‘the attendance of such individuals as are desirous of obtaining correct likenesses of themselves, families or friends… Correct resemblances of horses, dogs, etc., with local scenery etc., executed to order.’ Gill remained in South Australia for approximately thirteen years and completed numerous watercolours of city streets and pastoral scenes. In 1846 he joined the exploration party of John Horrocks as field-artist, travelling to country north of the Flinders Ranges. After declaring himself bankrupt in 1851, Gill left South Australia for the Victorian gold-fields to dig for riches. Shortly after arriving at the Mount Alexander fields in July 1852, Gill abandoned his mining career, choosing instead to visually record life at the diggings. He visited the Bendigo and Eaglehawk fields and produced numerous sketches and watercolours of mining life and its associated activities: from the newly-arrived digger and labour-intensive mining techniques to the bushrangers that lined the routes to and from the gold-fields. Gill’s works provide an extraordinary account of daily life during this period of great activity and growth.
Within only months on the Victorian fields, Gill travelled to Melbourne where he established a lithographic studio in Collins Street. His intimate studies of life on the goldfields were widely reproduced as lithographic volumes and illustrated letter-paper. ST Gill enjoyed considerable success, particularly during the 1850s, which can be attributed in part to his ability to identify a market for his work, produce images that catered to this audience and reproduce these images in affordable formats.

Gill travelled extensively throughout Victoria during the height of the gold rush period, and recorded scenes of life in rural and city locations. The portability and immediacy of the watercolour medium in which he generally worked, resulted in works that are characterised by their spontaneity, realism and humour.

In Kangarooing, Gill captures the speed and danger of the kangaroo hunt: the rider ducks under a low-hanging branch, his steed is captured in full flight as it strains to keep up with the dogs that chase the kangaroo as it bounds up the hill’s incline. According to the published account by Hodgkinson, this is when the fleeing kangaroo is least in his element, which brings an added sense of danger to Gill’s work. Gill was well practised in the depiction of horses and dogs — having advertised for commissions in the genre as early as 1840. He also completed several works depicting the sport of kangaroo-hunting, three of which were reproduced as lithographs.

ST Gill’s Kangarooing is one of two works in the University of Melbourne’s Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest depicting this colonial activity. The second is an 1852 lithograph Hunting the kangaroo, after a drawing by Godfrey Charles Mundy. In its published format, in Mundy’s Our Antipodes, or Residence and Rambles in the Australian Colonies, with a Glimpse of the Gold Fields, London, 1852, the image also reached a wide audience and informed potential visitors of colonial pursuits.

Hunting the kangaroo and the three volumes of Mundy’s account of life in Australia were acquired by Russell Grimwade — a keen collector of Australianana who bequeathed his home ‘Miegunyah’ and collections of artworks, books and archival material to the University of Melbourne.

An additional work was purchased in 1994 through the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund, established through the proceeds of the sale of ‘Miegunyah’ by the University in 1982. The fund has made possible the purchase of artworks which augment the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest and are in keeping with the collecting interests of the donors. James Alfred Turner’s Kangaroo hunt, 1873, depicts a speared kangaroo surrounded by dogs, with a group of Aboriginal hunters in the distance. Turner’s oil painting contrasts markedly with Gill’s earlier watercolour; it depicts a barren landscape and the hunting of the kangaroo by Indigenous inhabitants as a means of survival rather than the recreational pursuits of the European settlers as depicted by ST Gill.

Selected works by ST Gill from the University of Melbourne Art Collection:

- Untitled (Morning), c. 1855, watercolour and pencil on paper
- Untitled (Noon), c. 1855, watercolour and pencil on paper
- Untitled (Night), c. 1855, watercolour and pencil on paper
- Swagman at fault, c. 1864, watercolour
- A rush, c. 1865, pencil on paper
- Sunday on the diggings, c. 1865, pencil on paper

Additional information available at www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au

Lisa Sullivan The Ian Potter Museum of Art, 2002


2 In 1856 Melbourne publisher JU Bundell advertised the availability of forty-six varieties of letter-paper, each illustrated with a lithographic view of Victoria. The illustrated writing paper was popular since it was affordable and provided visual impressions of life in the new colony that might otherwise require extensive written descriptions.


5 ST Gill, Kangaroo hunting, No. 1 The meet; Kangaroo hunting, No. 2 The Chase; and Kangaroo hunting, No. 3 The death, c. 1860, colour lithographs. Lithographed by Allen & Wigeley of George Street, Sydney, and published by F Mader. State Library of Victoria Picture Collection, accession numbers: H32890, H32891, H32892
