

David R. Marshall

Eugene von Guérard's Views of the Daylesford Region for William E. Stanbridge

THE AUSTRIAN PAINTER Eugene von Guérard (1811–1901) trained in Vienna, Rome and Düsseldorf before moving to Australia in 1852.¹ On arriving in Australia he tried his luck on the Victorian goldfields before establishing himself as a highly productive topographical landscape painter based in Melbourne, choosing subjects across the breadth of Victoria and southern New South Wales and Tasmania, as well as in New Zealand. In 1870 he became master of the school of painting at the National Gallery of Victoria, and on his retirement he returned to Europe in 1882, dying in London in 1901, where he had lived with his daughter after the failure of his investments in the Australian bank crashes of 1893.

In Düsseldorf he had become interested in the 'geognostic landscape'. That is the idea that 'ancient geological subjects could invest landscape painting with the weight of history painting'. It had been developed by Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869),² who was prompted by calls from Goethe and Humboldt for a landscape painting that would 'restore the lost unity between scientific knowledge of nature and the artistic rendering of nature'.³ In Australia von Guérard put this background to good use. By viewing the landscape with a geologist's eye, he discovered a range of subjects inaccessible to painters trained in the British picturesque tradition, subjects that often strikingly paralleled those painted by artists of the Düsseldorf school.⁴ The volcanic plains of the Western district of Victoria that had been opened up for grazing in the 1840s were punctuated with the cones of long extinct volcanoes and they provided von Guérard's most characteristic subjects, culminating in his now iconic image of Tower Hill, near Warrnambool.⁵

His usual routine was to make regular journeys from Melbourne on horseback, making notations of suitable subjects in small sketchbooks (as was the practice of Düsseldorf school artists), together with more elaborate drawings of finished subjects, made on site (or at his base near the site) or in the studio.⁶ These drawings were worked up in Melbourne into finished paintings, sometimes directly from the small sketch but more often from the more detailed study. Although he was aware, from the time spent sketching with his father in Italy, of the plein-air colour studies being made by artists in Rome like Corot and which contributed to the pleinairism of Impressionism, he rejected the possibilities of this new approach.⁷ Instead, he followed the practice of the Düsseldorf school, which continued the eighteenth-century practice of the painter's view for relying on the accurate graphical notations of the forms of things – in von Guérard's case, geological forms rather than buildings or streets – supported by occasional written colour notations. While he often worked a foreground *repoussoir* into his compositions,



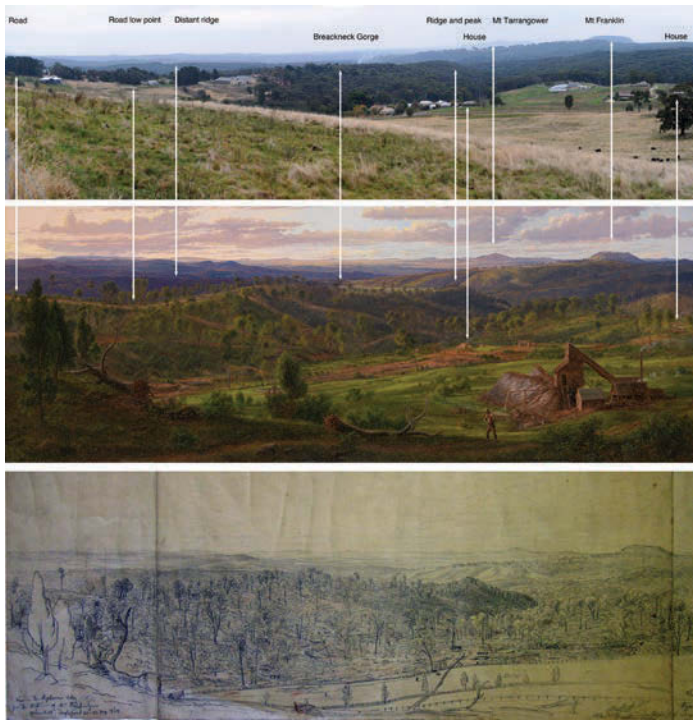
Eugene von Guérard, *North View From Daylesford*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 65 x 126 cm. Private Collection. Provenance: W. E. Stanbridge; by descent; Sale, Christie's Australia. *Australian and European Pictures*, April 1994, lot 165.

All following paintings and sketches are by Eugene von Guérard.

he rarely strayed far from the facts and never inserted the exaggerated *repoussoir* trees of the Claudian picturesque.

His compositions relied instead on a carefully controlled panoramic horizontality, combined with masterful transitions from the foreground to remote distances that stimulated the imagination. This technique, combined with the geognostic focus on geology, permitted him to discover subjects where others without his artistic training could not. But while his technique had the advantage of providing a quick and accurate method for recording the facts of a site, the length of time, however, between the visit to the site and the execution of the painting, and the limitations on the amount of data recorded on site, meant that his paintings ran the danger of slipping into a formulaic rendering of light and colour. But taken together, his views of Western Victoria remain to this day the most impressive visual accounts of the landscape of what the first explorers and settlers called 'Australia Felix', a grazier's paradise.⁸

One such sketching trip from 23 March until 25 May 1864 was to the Central Highlands, north-west of Melbourne, and is recorded in a notebook in the Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales.⁹ From 21 April until after 2 May he was at the mining town of Daylesford, midway between Ballarat and Castlemaine, having apparently equipped himself with introductions to the local Church of England minister, Laurence Rostron Jr., and to the landowner William. E. Stanbridge (1821-94), with whom he stayed.¹⁰ A drawing in the sketchbook, probably made on Friday 22 or Saturday 23 April, inscribed 'Mr. Rostron' and 'Church of England Daylesford', shows a seated



The site of the North View today (© David R. Marshall 2014) aligned with the painting and with the preparatory study. Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DG XV2B/4, inscribed 'View in the Hepburn Valley from the station of Mr. Stanbridge Wombat, Daylesford 24–25 April 1864'.

bearded man, probably a clergyman, with his hand raised in speech, and another bearded man beyond.¹¹ Rostron's father, Laurence Rostron Sr., had established the Holcombe (or Holecombe) pastoral run in the headwaters of the Loddon River between Daylesford and Glenlyon, which then passed to the brothers Robert and Henry Clowes.¹² When the Clowes brothers dissolved their partnership in 1852 the Holcombe run was divided in two, the south-western part, called the Wombat run, being acquired by Stanbridge.¹³

Stanbridge was the son of a ribbon manufacturer from the village of Astley near Coventry, and had arrived in Australia as a young man in 1841, taking up various pastoral leases before acquiring the Wombat run.¹⁴ He would prove to be a useful contact for von Guérard, and he acquired three of von Guérard's paintings based on drawings made during his stay: *View North from Daylesford*,¹⁵ *View from Mt Franklin*,¹⁶ and *Breakneck Gorge*.¹⁷ But did he commission them?

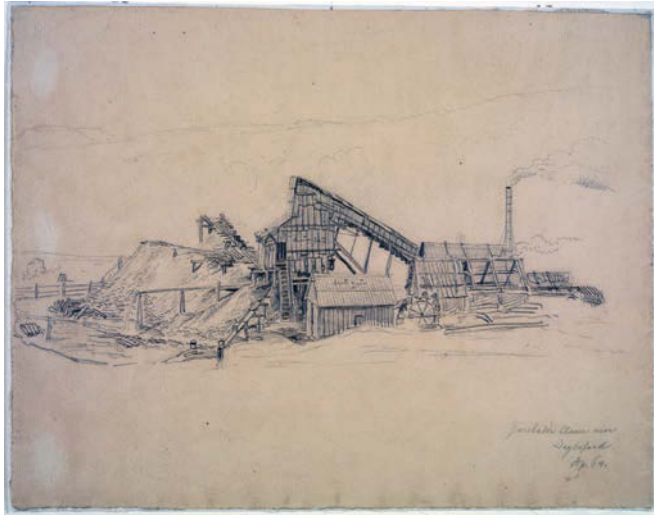
Von Guérard arrived at Stanbridge's house on Thursday 21 April 1864 and immediately made a drawing of it.¹⁸ The drawing shows a modest house with a central chimney and a verandah that is continuous with the main roof but at a slightly lower pitch. The house is surrounded by tall gums with a paling fence in front that runs across the bottom of the page. Von Guérard's first idea for a Daylesford picture may have been inspired by what met his eyes when he awoke the next morning, since the next drawing in the sketchbook seems to show the tall gum trees that are visible around the house in

the drawing made the previous day. There is extensive shading that may be an attempt to render mist, since the drawing is inscribed with the poetical phrase 'only the pride of the morning'.¹⁹ This phrase, of uncertain origin, was then in common currency, and refers to a misty morning that will give way to a sunny day.²⁰ A finished drawing made the following week is probably a worked-up version of this idea, intended for a painting that was never executed.²¹

One might have expected that von Guérard would have attempted a view of Stanbridge's house to specifically record the homestead and landholdings of a pastoralist, like the view commissioned on the same trip by John Ware of his station Yalla-y-Poora, near Beaufort (National Gallery of Victoria).²² Possibly the unpretentious nature of Stanbridge's house, which, unusually for pastoral properties, was surrounded by bush, was reason enough for von Guérard not to record the view. But it indicates that although Stanbridge offered him hospitality, he was not primarily interested in commissioning such records of possession. In fact Stanbridge's landholdings were relatively small. The big pastoral runs would be broken up and sold to selectors during the 1860s, but in the Daylesford area this process had been accelerated by the discovery of gold. In August 1851 it was discovered at Wombat Flat, on the other side of Wombat Hill from Stanbridge's house (and probably within his run),²³ and in December at Spring Creek (Breakneck Gorge), quickly followed by other sites in the vicinity of the future towns of Daylesford and Hepburn Springs.²⁴

Squatters like Stanbridge had the 'pre-emptive' right to purchase a lot of one square mile (640 acres) from their pastoral leases around their homesteads, as an acknowledgement of their improvements.²⁵ This right, unlike normal freehold, included mineral rights. When Stanbridge applied for his pre-emptive right in September 1852 he was only awarded 320 acres. This was because the Colonial Secretary, not fully recognising the separation of the Wombat run from the Holcombe run, had argued that the pre-emptive right for the run belonged to the area around the Holcombe homestead at Glenlyon, which had already been granted to E. S. Parker, the former administrator of the Loddon Aboriginal Protectorate around Mt Franklin, who had taken up the eastern half of the Holcombe run. In 1854 the town of Daylesford was laid out with Stanbridge's encouragement, and in October blocks of land surrounding Stanbridge's pre-emptive right were sold as freehold, and he acquired as many as he could.²⁶

Stanbridge's pre-emptive right proved to be well situated. The surface workings at Daylesford around Wombat Flat were soon exhausted, and miners switched to tunneling into the deep leads. One of these extended under Wombat Hill and beneath Stanbridge's pre-emptive right block and, because he owned the mineral rights, he was soon a rich man. In 1864 the *Daylesford Express* considered his returns on the mines on this property (the Defiance, Concordia, Exchequer, Astley, White Star and Cosmopolitan) to be 'little short of princely'.²⁷ For the rest of his life Stanbridge was heavily involved with mining and business interests in Daylesford as well as pastoral investments, and grazing at Wombat Park was only a small part of his activity.²⁸



Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DG*D 17, vol. 1, f. 1. Inscribed 'Garibaldi Claim near / Daylesford / Ap. 64.'

The *View North from Daylesford* is an accurate topographical view from a ridge on the north side of Daylesford beside the modern Secondary College, looking over Kidd's Gully, where some of the houses correspond to those there today. The track running along the ridge at the left is, today, the road from Daylesford to Hepburn Springs (Main Road, Hepburn Springs), with a cluster of buildings around Lucini's Roma Hotel (now known as the Old Macaroni Factory) at the central part of the Hepburn Springs township then known as Spring Creek township.²⁹ In the distance at the right is Mt Franklin, with Mt Tarrangower near Maldon further to the left, and other hills in the direction of Maryborough and the Pyrenees. The green plain in the middle distance with a cluster of buildings is the stretch of Hepburn Springs then known as Golden Point, near Breakneck Gorge, with the Elevated Plains above. The view continues northwest in the direction of Maryborough and the Pyrenees.

The painting is based on a careful preparatory study made on Sunday 24 and Monday 25 April 1864.³⁰ On the previous Thursday, immediately upon his arrival in Daylesford, and before making the drawing of Stanbridge's house, von Guérard had sketched the view from the same spot but looking more to the west, towards Smeaton Hill, another volcanic cone to the west of Daylesford.³¹ In the developed study he chose to omit Smeaton Hill from the composition in favour of the area to the right, where the Garibaldi mine was located, although it is not shown on the drawing. Instead, he made an additional study of the mine from a better viewpoint further to the right, probably on the same day.³² The site of the Garibaldi mine, and the two diverging ridges of spoil carefully depicted by von Guérard, are still visible today.



Panoramic view of site shown in *North View* from Daylesford today. (© David R. Marshall 2014).

At first sight von Guérard's choice of viewpoint may seem to be an odd one, given that a higher viewpoint, and a more obvious one was available nearby on Wombat Hill, immediately above the town of Daylesford. On 1 May he evidently contemplated painting a picture of the town and Wombat Hill seen from Sailor's Hill to the south, as there is a fairly detailed independent study of this subject, but this was apparently never turned into a painting. His choice of viewpoint was probably the consequence of the proximity of the lower viewpoint to von Guérard's base at Stanbridge's house, and of the picturesque appearance of the Garibaldi mine buildings that signalled more economically the nature of the town's economy than the chaotic, muddy mining town at the foot of Wombat Hill would have done.³³ Besides, the viewer on Wombat Hill is torn between the view west over the town towards Smeaton Hill, which is interrupted by a heavily treed ridge and so reduces the composition to three principal planes, and the more spacious 'Australia Felix' view to the north and northwest. It was this 'glorious Australian view'³⁴ that evidently attracted von Guérard, and is arguably more coherently viewed from the lower ridge. But the view from Wombat Hill was described in a contemporary newspaper account in terms that probably correspond to the way von Guérard expected his audience to respond to the distances in the *View North*.

[A] giant rift to the right opens a wide and varied prospect. Mount Franklin, a few miles distant, stands out an island in a sea of forest . . . the eye runs over swelling undulations – over the Carisbrook plains, which, by a curious optical effect glisten white and clear – over distant hill and dale and forest, to where the declining sun lights up a bold background, the lofty hills of [Mt] Korong, some forty miles away. It is a splendid prospect . . .³⁵

It was a view that could be perceived a familiar one to a British expatriate,³⁶ and it contained the promise of 'Australia Felix':

A well-known land it is indeed, for swelling hills and undulating plans, sombre eucalyptus and water-torn ravines, declare Australia, and park-like tracts and fertile acres, proclaim Australia Felix.

The author's prospect being disturbed by a wintry squall, he imagines what the



Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DGB16, vol. 14, f. 15r. Inscribed 'M.^r Stanbridge's Haus / 21 Ap. 64 Daylesford'.



Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DGB16, vol. 14, f. 16r. Inscribed 'M.^r Rostron', 'Only the pride of the Morning' and 'Church of England Daylesford'.

view would be like in summer, and invokes the name of von Guérard to help his reader visualise it:

Summer is the time to visit the district . . . It is easy indeed to imagine how beautiful the view is in the soft sunshine of early morning, when hills and valleys are draped with that dreamy haze of blue which Von Guerard so well depicts, and uninitiated critics but half believe in. Jim Crow [as the diggings were then known],³⁷ in short, needs warmth and sunshine to be seen at its best.

This allusion is not necessarily a consequence of the author's familiarity with the paintings under consideration. Rather, it is evidence of how far von Guérard's art had come to shape colonial perceptions.

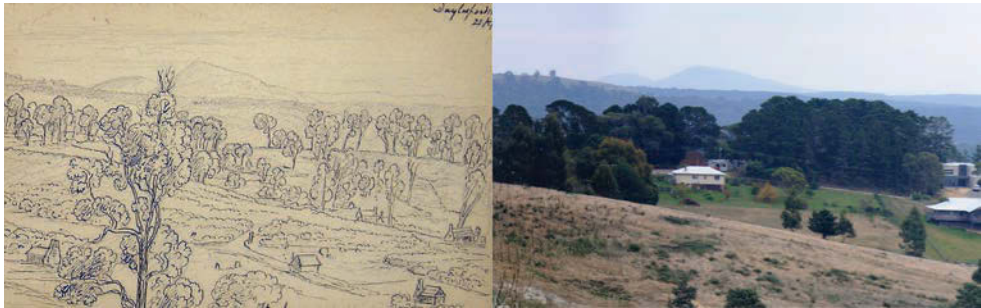
Significantly, the Garibaldi mine, which is shown prominently in the foreground of the *View North from Daylesford*, lay not on Stanbridge's pre-emptive right block, but a few hundred metres to the west, on a block of land that had not been acquired by Stanbridge in the 1854 land sale and which had been acquired in 1860 by two Italians named Giacomo Bonetti and Angelo Cassinelli. The mine flourished briefly in 1864 and 1865.³⁸ There is no evidence that Stanbridge had a financial interest in it, but in a



Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DG*D 17, vol. 2, f. 18. Inscribed 'Wombat. 27 Ap. 64, near Daylesford'.



Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DG*D 17, vol. 1, f. 10. Inscribed 'Daylesford. Sunday 1 May 1864' and 'Wombat Hill' and another ending in 'May 1865'.



Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DGB I6, vol. 14, f. 14r: Inscribed 'Daylesford 1864. / 21 Ap / Near Hepburne' compared to the site today.

10. Stanbridge, 9 acres
LFO 3340/1850
Crown Allotment 4, section 3,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £2 10 per acre;
Int C2, paid £11 5-0

11. Stanbridge
Daylesford Township
Regen Street Through to Hill Street
9 acres (Droods 9 parishes)
LFO 1044/1850
Crown Allotment 6, section 13,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve £9 per acre; paid £4

12. Stanbridge
Daylesford Township
Violet Street Through to Duke Street
9 acres (Droods 9 parishes)
LFO 1044/1850
Crown Allotment 6, section 13,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve £9 per acre; paid £22 10-0

1. Stanbridge 112 acres
LFO 3260/1850
Crown Allotment 1, section 3,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £1 per acre;
Int C1, paid £15 10-0

2. Stanbridge 112 acres
LFO 3260/1850
Crown Allotment 1, section 3,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £1 per acre;
Int C1, paid £15 10-0

3. Stanbridge 105 acres
LFO 3200/1851
Crown Allotment 2, section 3,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £1 per acre;
Int C1 & C2, paid £19 6-0

4. Stanbridge 113 acres
LFO 3200/1851
Crown Allotment 5, section 6,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £1 per acre;
Int C2, paid £22

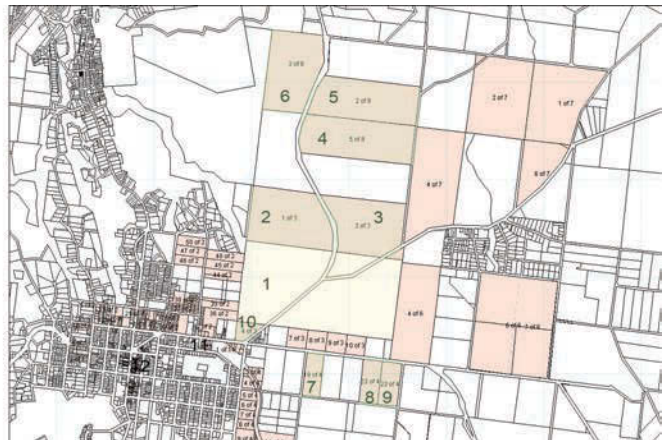
5. Stanbridge 105 acres
LFO 3340/1850
Crown Allotment 2, section 9,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £1 per acre;
Int C1 & C2, paid £21 8-4

6. Stanbridge 107 acres
LFO 3330/1850
Crown Allotment 3, section 9,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £1 per acre;
Int C1, paid £10 9-2

7. Stanbridge 19 acres
LFO 3340/1850
Crown Allotment 19, section 4,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £2 per acre;
Int C2, paid £9 12-0

8. Freeholder per Stanbridge 22 acres
LFO 3207/1850
Crown Allotment 22, section 4,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £2 per acre;
Int C2, paid £48 0-0

9. Stanbridge 22 acres
LFO 3347/1850
Crown Allotment 23, section 4,
Parish of Woomat.
Usual reserve, £2 per acre;
Int C2, paid £48 0-0 (proportion owner in 1850)



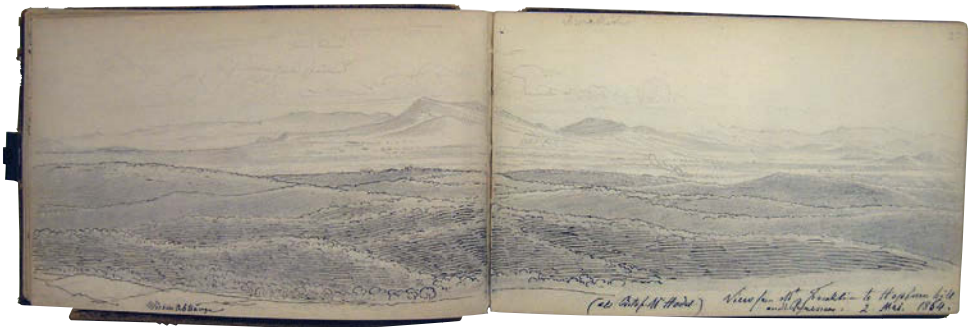
Blocks of land in the Daylesford township for sale in 1854. (John Lewis, Daylesford Historical Society).

neighbourly way, he helped the miners out with firewood.³⁹ Nor did he have interests in other mining activities in Kidd's Gully which occupies the middle ground of the *View North*. It seems likely, therefore, that the conception of the subject owed little or nothing to Stanbridge, and was the result of von Guérard's desire to choose a subject that best characterised the district.

Similarly, the *View from Mt Franklin* does not show land either leased or owned by Stanbridge. It is a view from Mt Franklin, another volcanic cone a few kilometres north of Daylesford, looking across the high ground known as Elevated Plains west to the Pyrenees, Smeaton Hill, Mount Moorookyle, Powlett Hill, and Green Hill.⁴⁰ The composition is centred on Smeaton Hill, which he had earlier chosen to omit from the



Detail from Eugene von Guérard, *A view from Mt Franklin towards Mount Kooroocheang and the Pyrenees*, c. 1864. Oil on canvas, 35.5 x 63.8cm. Purchased 2008 with funds from Philip Bacon, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation. Collection: Queensland Art Gallery. Image courtesy: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. See back cover for the full image.



Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DGB16, vol. 14, f. 22v.–23 r. '(als ...) View from Mt Franklin to Hepburn Hill 2 Mai 64'; the sketch continues onto the next sheet.

View North. Von Guérard called it Hepburn Hill, after Captain John Hepburn, the owner of the Smeaton Hill run which had abutted the Wombat run on the northwest.

Much of the nearer land had formed part of the Loddon Aboriginal Protectorate around Franklinford, which had been directed by E. S. Parker but which had been wound up in 1848. The painting was based on a sketch made on 2 May, just before von Guérard left the Daylesford district and moved to Ercildoune.⁴¹ He had apparently ridden from Stanbridge's house about 10 kilometres north-west to Loddon Falls, where he made a number of drawings clearly with a painting in mind (waterfalls were a favourite subject of von Guérard), and then a further 10 kilometres west to Mt Franklin. No worked-up drawing of the composition survives, and there may never have been one, since of all the three Stanbridge paintings it is the one that has the weakest sense of place and local lighting, even if it is meticulously accurate in its recordings of the profiles and relative positions of the hills.



Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DGB16, vol. 14, f. 18v.–19r. Inscribed 'Loddon Falls'.



Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DGB16, vol. 14, f. 19v.–20r. Inscribed 'Loddon Falls'.



Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DGB16, vol. 14, f. 20v.–21r. Inscribed 'Loddon Falls 2^o Mai 64'.

The third Stanbridge painting, *Breakneck Gorge*, although depicting land that once formed part of the Wombat run, had been alienated from the run by mining even before Stanbridge took up his pastoral lease.⁴² It shows the area today known as Breakneck Gorge, and earlier as Break Neck, a narrow valley through which flowed Spring Creek before it joined Jim Crow Creek at the northwestern corner of the Wombat run. Alluvial gold was discovered here by F. Kawerau and his party in December 1851,⁴³ shortly after the discovery of gold at Wombat Flat, and a gold rush followed. By February 1852 there were over two thousand miners at work, creating a devastation still visible in a photograph in 1858 and in von Guérard's painting.⁴⁴ The most notable feature is the bridge visible in the middle ground, across which ran the road from Daylesford and Hepburn Springs to



Eugene von Guérard, *Breakneck Gorge*, 1864. Oil on canvas. Private Collection, on loan to the Geelong Gallery. Provenance: W. E. Stanbridge; and thence by descent.



Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DG*D 17, vol. 1, f. 15. Inscribed 'Break Neck Bridge / Castlemaine Road from Daylesford 2. M. / Wednesday 27. Ap. 64.'



Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, DG*D 17, vol. 1, f. 13. Inscribed 'Hepburn / near Daylesford / 29. Ap. 64 / Chinese Village.' Maddicks, p. 39 (see endnote 29).

Franklinford, Newstead and Castlemaine. This had been erected to much fanfare in 1861 and was subsequently replaced by a causeway.⁴⁵ It forms the principal feature of interest and, consequently, von Guérard titled his preparatory drawing 'Break Neck Bridge'. At the far right the opening of one of the deep lead mine tunnels coming from Elevated Plains is visible.

Von Guérard made two detailed studies of the area while staying with Stanbridge. One study made on Wednesday 27 April 1864 formed the basis of the painting,⁴⁶ and contains detailed colour notes. The second, made two days later is a view looking the other way, and shows the village of Chinese miners on the ridge who were mining the alluvial gold in the valley and who were also the victims of an anti-Chinese riot in

1857.⁴⁷ By the 1860s the area was considered to be one of the picturesque sites of the region, contemporaries being largely impervious to the devastation caused by mining, and it was described in the *Daylesford Express* as being ‘exceedingly romantic’ and eliciting ‘admiration from every stranger entering Daylesford from that direction’.⁴⁸ It was probably the topographical interest of the site, together with its associations with mining, that prompted von Guérard to choose the subject.

By 3 September 1864, four months after von Guérard’s visit, *Breakneck Gorge* had been ‘entrusted’ to Stanbridge and two other local businessmen, Messrs Daly and Hart, who proposed to dispose of it through an ‘art union’, for which purpose it was displayed on the premises of a local store, Millar and Anderson, on 3 September 1864, valued at 55–60 guineas.⁴⁹ It was also exhibited in Melbourne.⁵⁰ An art union was a device often resorted to by artists to generate a sale, and was essentially a raffle with the painting as the prize. Stanbridge and his companions may therefore have been acting on von Guérard’s behalf in order to help him dispose of his picture.

As newspaper reports of the time emphasise, there was little awareness of the ‘geognostic’ basis of Guérard’s views, and their subjects were thought of as picturesque sublime sites that served to define the region culturally. In 1863, the year before von Guérard’s visit, a writer, after waxing lyrical over prospects that were ‘savagely grand’, hoped for a visit from von Guérard to the district in order to ‘transfer to canvas some of the “beauty spots” in and about Daylesford’.⁵¹

Stanbridge’s acquisition of the works is therefore probably the result of the conjunctions of particular circumstances. He was suddenly wealthy from mining royalties, and was looking for something to spend his new found wealth. He seems not to have been interested in spending it on his house, which remained unpretentious – the present house at Wombat Park, designed in an Arts and Crafts style by the Melbourne architect Rodney Alsop, was built by his daughter and son-in-law in c. 1910-12⁵². Instead he put it towards good works, paying £500 to build a girls’ schoolroom at Rostron’s Anglican Church and, presumably, towards acquiring paintings by von Guérard.⁵³ Stanbridge also owned a view of *Stevenson’s Falls* now in the National Gallery of Australia, dated 1863, and although it is unclear whether he acquired it before or after the Daylesford pictures, the fact that he acquired so many indicates that if he were not an enthusiast for von Guérard at the time of his visit, he soon became one, and that he responded to von Guérard’s efforts to discover sites of artistic interest in the region.⁵⁴ Stanbridge had a lively intelligence. He was interested in anthropology and he also wrote a pioneering article recording the astronomical beliefs of the Aborigines of the Mallee and Daylesford districts, and it may well be that he shared intellectual interests with the painter.⁵⁵