

Unit 2 Investigating the 1852 Gundagai Flood

Student Resource 1:

Working with sources



Using Trove

There are many sources available on Trove that provide information about the 1852 Gundagai flood. To find them, simply enter *Gundagai flood 1852* in the search bar, tick 'Available online' and then hit Search. You need to work out which sources will be most useful for your inquiry.

Selecting sources for your research

- The 'bare facts' (when, where and what happened) will be found in newspaper reports from the time of the flood. There may be some contradictions between accounts, for example about the number drowned, possibly because more bodies were found after an article was written. In such cases it is wise to go to a later source when the body count may be more accurate. Even then, if there is room for doubt, it's OK to refer to the 'estimated' number of deaths.
- For information about the human experiences of the flood (the 'who' of your research) you may find 'eye-witness accounts', which can be first person written accounts, published at the time of the flood or soon after, or quotations from interviews used in articles, reports or books written many years later.
- Information about the cause of the flood (the 'why' of your research) may be mentioned in newspaper reports from the time, or you may need to consult later sources which try to provide the wider context. Commemorative articles about disasters are often published on anniversaries of the event, in particular the 10th, 50th, 100th (centenary) and 150th (sesquicentenary).
- For information about commemoration of the flood over time (Part B of your research) you need to find different types of memorials. The Monument Australia website has relevant images and information. The Gundagai Historical Museum also displays items related to the flood.

Analysing sources

Written sources

Once you have located the sources you think will be useful for your research, you need to check if they are reliable or trustworthy. The following questions will help you to analyse written sources.

1. When was it written in relation to the flood, at the time or years later?
2. Who wrote it, e.g. a victim or participant, a journalist, a historian?
3. Why was it written, e.g. to inform, to entertain, to commemorate?
4. Who was the intended audience, e.g. newspaper readers, the general public?
5. Is the information in the source corroborated or contradicted by other sources?
6. What does it tell us about the flood?

The answers to these questions should help you understand if a source is going to be credible and useful for your research. Even if a source does not seem trustworthy, it may still be useful. For example, David Mackenzie's description of the people of Gundagai swimming from room to room in their houses is not meant to be taken seriously. It is written to amuse the readers of his book *The Emigrant's Guide*. However,

on pages 28 and 29 he provides useful information about flooding in Gundagai in 1844—well before the flood you are researching.

Physical sources

Physical sources such as monuments and statues usually include an inscription, so some of the questions for analysing written sources can be used or adapted. Other questions relate to the structure itself.

1. What is it and what materials is it made from?
2. Who or what does it represent or record?
3. Where is it located, in a prominent place? Is it in its original location?
4. Who erected and paid for the monument or statue, an individual or a group?
5. When and why was it erected? Does the date provide a clue?
6. What does it tell us about the flood?