

The Monster Meeting Book

*How Eureka began with the
1851 Forest Creek Monster Meeting of Diggers*



**Written by
Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky**

**Edited by
Patricia Healy**

**Published by
Chewton Domain Society
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Sponsored & published by

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Front cover painting 'The Great Meeting of Diggers, 1851' by D. Tulloch, based on Thomas Ham's 1852 engravings titled 'Five Views of the Goldfields of Mount Alexander'. (Collection, Allport Library & Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart, Tasmania)

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THE MONSTER MEETING BOOK

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Preface & Acknowledgements

This book is a work in progress. It began as a collection of documents – primary and secondary sources – relating to the 1851 Forest Creek Monster Meeting of diggers. But it grew.

In compiling these documents – and in particular the items from the Victorian Government Gazette, Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe's despatches and from The Argus – I found that I needed to make notes and comments to understand it all and keep myself on track with what was happening. This grew into the narration and commentary herein.

The principal matters I was trying to comprehend were about what was going on in Melbourne: how was La Trobe reacting to the gold rush; why was he making so many poor decisions; what power did the squattocracy have over government decisions; what were the middle class interests in favour of the diggers; and what was the wider Australian context of Chartism and the movements for democracy across the world. But very soon the main question became: What is the legacy of the Monster Meeting? What role did it play in the train of events that lead to Eureka and in the development of our Australian democracy?

In this book some of these questions are partly answered and many others are left hanging. The reason for this is simply that time's up as the project deadline has been reached. There is still much more research and work to do to write this into a definitive history of the events leading up to the Monster Meeting and its aftermath, but this will now have to wait till another day.

However, notwithstanding this limitation, this book gives a reasonably clear narrative of events between 1 July 1851 and early 1852, and a sketch of the period through to the Eureka tragedy on 3 December 1854. I hope that this will help the reader come to understand that Eureka began on the Forest Creek diggings, with the Monster Meeting of 1851.

As a companion to this book, there is an online series of filmed interviews with historians, writers and local activists. They are both entertaining and informative, and I suggest that you view them in conjunction with reading these pages. (Go to www.monstermeeting.net)

* * *

There are people to thank:

First of all, the Editor Pat Healy who came to work on this book once the first draft was completed. Without Pat it simply would not be in this form today. She's sharp, quick, incisive, forthright, persuasive and always a pleasure to work with and Pat's enthusiasm for the topic was just the energy needed to see this work through.

Pat and I are in turn extremely grateful to historian Dr. Marjorie Theobald, who not only gave us advice on the near-completed manuscript, but in the early stages of the book very generously provided me with open access to her research, particularly her library of primary documents. Not only did this open up the topic to a much wider interpretation, it also saved many weeks of work. This book has also benefited from Marjorie's deep understanding of this story, as well as her humorous and compassionate views about poor old Charles La Trobe, who never wanted to run a colony let alone a gold rush.

We are also in debt to research sleuth Doug Ralph - Castlemaine born-and-bred and a walking-talking authority on local history. Time and again an email would arrive from Doug with another link to a piece of information, often sourced from the most obscure places and all of it valuable.

The actual starting point of this book was unsolicited manna from heaven in the form of Margaret Rich and her companions from the Ballarat Reform League. In 2010 they contacted the Chewton Domain Society – the organisation that runs the annual Monster Meeting celebrations - and offered funding for innovative ideas we might have. Without that inspiring offer this book would never have been started, and so Margaret Rich is truly the god-mother of this publication. Also, I thank her and the Ballarat Reform League for their patience, as this project has taken much, much longer than originally planned.

The Ballarat Reform League also funded The Monster Meeting Interviews mentioned above, and for both these projects we in turn offer our gratitude to the philanthropic organisation, the Vera Moore Foundation, which provided funding to the Ballarat Reform League.

Our many thanks are also due to various funding bodies that assisted with this book as well as other aspects of the overall Monster Meeting Project: the Shire of Mount Alexander, Parks Victoria, Friends of the Mount Alexander Diggings, Castlemaine Goldfields Limited, Maldon Community Bank and especially the Federal Government's Department of Sustainability, Water, Population and Communities 'Your Community Heritage' program which directly financed this book. Without the latter it would not have been finished.

Many locals at various times offered the imprimatur of their names with letters of support, and for this we are grateful to Weston Bate, David Bannear, Robyn Annear, Noel Muller of Parks Victoria, Marion Littlejohn, the Education Officer at Sovereign Hill, David Leathem from the Shire of Mount Alexander, Janet Cropley, former Mayor Shire of Mount Alexander, our past and current local members of Federal Parliament Steve Gibbons and Lisa Chesters, local state members of parliament Marie Teehan and Damien Drum, the Director of the Castlemaine State Festival Martin Paten, Dawn Angliss of the Newstead and District Historical Society and Gary Buchanan of the Taradale Historical Society, former owners of Castlemaine's Theatre Royal David Stretch and Sarah Burdiken and Jonathan Ridnell at ABC Central Victoria.

In the general context of the Monster Meeting Project we have been blessed by consistently classy graphics courtesy of author Geoff Hocking, who has given generously of his time, skill and resources. The flyers and posters are contained within this book, and we thank Geoff for making it all look so good.

Over a long period of time all the business and administrative needs of the Monster Meeting project have been undertaken by the Monster Meeting Sub-Committee of the Chewton Domain Society, and for this a big hurrah of appreciation goes to Phil Hall, Debbie Hall, Glen Harrison, Allan Dry, Helen McGeachin (with special thanks for transcribing), Noel Muller, Gloria Meltzer, Kate Daly, Betty Exxon and especially to Marie Jones and John Ellis. John was the lynchpin in this operation. He made it a community project.

Our sincere apologies and thanks to anyone who contributed and has been omitted.

Personally, my involvement with this project has put a story on the land where I live. It's not the full story or the only story, but I'm a believer in the idea that stories of where we live enable us to make that place a home.

In that regard, I feel that this is a story not only for us, the people who live in and around the gold rush area of central Victoria. It's not ours to own, control or hoard. Rather it's our responsibility to be custodians for this story and to pass it on to the world. It's a part of the universal story of the struggle of people around the globe - now, in the past and in the future - to fight for our freedom and democratic rights against the tyrants, the avaricious and people of mediocrity who would deny us those basic rights.

Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky
Castlemaine, August 2014

Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky

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Introduction

In 1851 the printing press was outlawed on the Forest Creek gold fields. But, despite this, in early December illicit posters went up on trees along the creek, calling on the gold seekers to attend a meeting.

Fellow Diggers!

The intelligence has just arrived of the resolution of the Government to Double the Licence Fee. Will you tamely submit to the imposition or assert your rights as men?

You are called upon to pay a tax originated and concocted by the most heartless selfishness, a tax imposed by Legislators for the purpose of detaining you in their workshops, in their stable yards, and by their flocks and herds.

They would increase this seven-fold but they are afraid! Fie upon such pusillanimity!¹ And shame upon the men, who, to save a few paltry pounds for their own pockets, would tax the poor man's hands!

It will be in vain for one or two individuals to tell the Commissioner, or his emissaries, that they have been unsuccessful, and that they cannot pay the licence fee.

But remember, that union is strength, that though a single twig may be bent or broken, a bundle tied together yields not nor breaks.

Ye are Britons! Will you submit to oppression or injustice?

Meet – Agitate – Be unanimous – and if there is justice in the land, they will, they must abolish the imposition.

We meet at the shepherd's Hut at four. Fie upon pusillanimity!

Argus Friday December 12 1851 p 2

This 'Licence Fee' was the Victorian Government's Gold Licence: a tax of thirty shillings² per gold digger per month, to be paid up-front before commencing to look for gold – and payable whether you found any gold or not.

The primary purpose of the Gold Licence was two-fold and somewhat

¹ Pusillanimity means lacking courage, faint-heartedness or cowardice

² In the Australian colonies in the 1850s the monetary unit was British pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d). £1 = 20s, 1s = 12d

contradictory: to raise revenue but most importantly to deter people leaving their employment for the gold rush - because the Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria, Charles Joseph La Trobe, did not want the structure of society radically altered by poor people suddenly becoming rich.

However the Gold Licence failed in both its aims. The gold rush at Forest Creek began in September 1851 and by late November there were 25,000 gold seekers under canvas along the creek, and few of them were taking out a licence. Apart from anything else, La Trobe did not have the police to enforce this law.

In response, on 1 December Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe, announced that from 1 January 1852 the Gold Licence would double to £3³ a month. Instantly voices were raised against doubling the cost of the Gold Licence - from businessmen, democrats and ordinary people - but La Trobe insisted and persisted.

So on 15 December 1851 15,000 gold diggers responded to the posters along Forest Creek and attended the meeting we now know as the Monster Meeting to protest the proposed doubling of the Licence fee. They defied the Victorian Government, who backed down and left the Gold Licence at thirty shillings.

But this was only the first big event in the next three years of conflict between the gold diggers and the Victorian Government. Protests continued, including the 1853 Red Ribbon Agitation in Bendigo where 25,000 diggers signed a petition calling for an end to police brutality and for a vote for all men.

Then in 1854 - three years after the Monster Meeting - the diggers' defiance culminated in bloodshed at the Eureka Stockade on the Ballarat diggings. There, in a short battle at dawn on Sunday 3 December, over 30 diggers and a handful of troopers lost their lives.

The thesis of this book is that:

1. The December 1851 Forest Creek Monster Meeting was the event that first united the individual gold seekers into the political force that was the 'Diggers'.
2. The Monster Meeting set in motion a democratic movement which culminated in the bloodshed of Eureka in December 1854 and the establishment of parliamentary democracy a year later.
3. In essence, Eureka had its beginnings in the 1851 Monster Meeting at the Forest Creek Gold rush.

³In 2014 that £3 would equal about \$310 but in terms of the relative buying power it would be much more given the relativity of wages and costs. For example in 1850s Victoria a farm property could be rented for £60 pa, the base yearly wage of an ordinary trooper was just £50 and squatters paid £10 pa to lease large tracts of grazing land.

Chapter 1

Forest Creek, Dja Dja Wurrung Country, Gold Rush Country

There's a story about the beginning of the gold rush in 1851, possibly apocryphal but containing a truth that makes it worth repeating. It's told by Brien Nelson and his son Ricky, two elders of the Dja Dja Wurrung people, who are the traditional owners of the gold country in central Victoria.

Before the gold rush, one day a white shepherd lad was out in the bush with a Dja Dja Wurrung kid and the Dja Dja Wurrung kid said, "See those crows fighting each other there, watch, I'll hit 'em," and he picked up a rock to throw at the birds.

The shepherd saw that the rock was a lump of gold.

The shepherd said, "That's gold! Don't throw that away."

But the Dja Dja Wurrung kid threw the gold at the crows and said, "It's too soft for spear point and tomahawk, and too heavy to carry around."

"Can I have it?" said the white kid.

"Sure," said the other, "that kara kara just rubbish."

The Dja Dja Wurrung name for gold was *kara kara* and to them it was useless. So for many thousands of years they left it lying in the ground. Strange is it not that so many other people all around the world would die and kill for the very same mineral?

And in Dja Dja Wurrung country where Forest Creek flows north-west through the hills by the present day township of Chewton and on into Castlemaine, there was more gold on the surface of the earth than anywhere else on the planet.

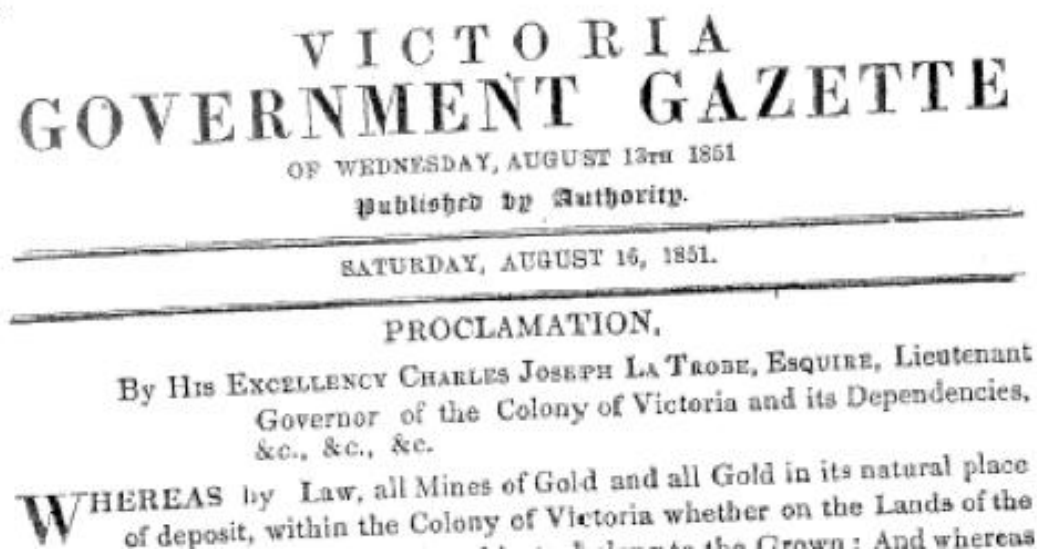
And as distinct from the other places in the world where there was a gold rush, the archaeology of the 1851-2 gold rush to Forest Creek is still visible on the ground, including the site of the Monster Meeting. It is now a grassy, wooded hill and there, on 15 December each year, locals and others from afar meet to commemorate and celebrate this event.

Chapter 2

A Perfect Storm

In early August 1851 it became open public knowledge that gold had been discovered in the new colony of Victoria – near a town 150 kilometres north-west of Melbourne called Clunes, and at Buninyong, 50 kilometres south of Clunes.

In response, on Wednesday 13 August 1851 His Excellency Charles Joseph La Trobe, Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Victoria, issued a proclamation. Published in the Victorian Government Gazette, it stated in part:



"...all persons who shall take from any lands within the said Colony, any Gold Metal, or Ore containing Gold, or who...shall dig for and disturb the soil in search of such Gold Metal without having been duly authorised in that behalf, by her Majesty's Colonial Government, will be prosecuted both Criminally and Civilly, as the Law allows..."⁴

Given under my Hand and Seal, at the Government Office, Melbourne, this fifteenth day of August, in the Year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty-one, and in the fifteenth year of Her Majesty's Reign.

(L. S.) C. J. LA TROBE.

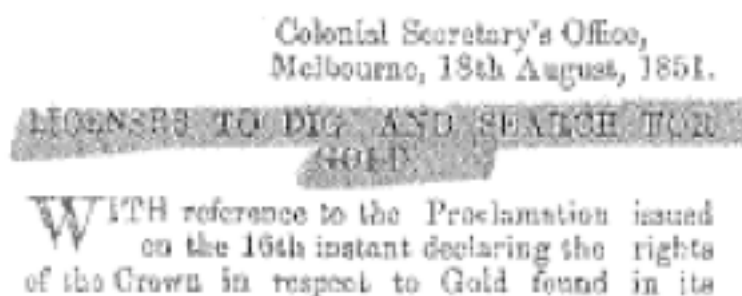
By His Excellency's Command
W. LONSDALE.

W. Lonsdale

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!

⁴ Supplement to the Victorian Government Gazette, 16 August, 1851

Five days later on Monday 18 August – after what one imagines was some hasty legal work over the weekend - La Trobe enunciated the new regulations that would allow people to search for gold and enable prosecution of those who did so illegally. It was called the Gold Licence:



"1. From and after the first day of September next, no person will be permitted to dig, search for, or remove Gold on or from any land, whether public or private, without first taking out and paying for a Licence...

2. The Licence Fee has been fixed at one pound ten shillings per month, to be paid in advance; but it is to be understood that the rate is subject to future adjustments, as circumstances may render expedient...

4. No person will be eligible to obtain a Licence...unless he shall produce a certificate of discharge from his last service, or prove...that he is not a person improperly absent from hired service.⁵

The law that enabled this last regulation was the Masters & Servants Act of 1823. Imagine if you will what this law, repugnant to us today, meant:

If you were a labourer or a housemaid and your employer to whom you were contracted was an abusive bully, or if you simply didn't like the job and wanted to seek other employment and left, you could subsequently be hunted down, taken to court and fined or put in gaol.

Such were the penalties that applied under the Masters and Servants Act to those who left employment without the employer's permission. In other words, the bosses, be it private employers or the government, had considerable control over the workers' lives and La Trobe's administration wanted it to stay that way.

* * *

The Colony of Victoria had been declared on 1 July 1851. Before then Victoria was the Port Phillip District of New South Wales and operated within the political sphere of the Governor in Sydney.

Charles Joseph La Trobe - a sophisticated, cultured, artistic and religious man with very little administrative experience - had since 1 October 1839 been the Superintendent of Port Phillip. Then, when Victoria gained independence, La Trobe, against his wishes, became Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Victoria. He would have preferred to remain as second fiddle to the Governor in Sydney, but there he was in charge of a colony.

⁵ Victorian Government Gazette, August 27, 1851

Then in early August 1851, when La Trobe had been Lieutenant Governor for a mere six weeks, he had a gold rush to deal with - and it threatened to create major social change. After all, if the poor could suddenly get rich then everything in society would change. So to '*maintain order*' and to raise revenue he instituted the Gold Licence.

But Buninyong and Ballarat were minor rushes compared with what was to follow in Forest Creek, which was to become the most lucrative alluvial gold field in world history. For Governor La Trobe, who was looking forward to a creative time planning Melbourne's public gardens, it was the perfect storm.

Chapter 3

Whose Land?

Melbourne, the capital of Victoria, was established on the banks of the Yarra River in 1835, by a group of entrepreneurs, businessmen and land speculators from Tasmania.

Initially known by the weird name of *Bearbrass* (thought to be a corruption of a Woiwurrung word)⁶, the settlement was deemed “*illegal*” by Governor Bourke, the then head of the colonial administration in Australia. Firstly, he could not allow a bunch of land developers to control more land than the government and, more importantly, the establishment of the settlement on Port Phillip was based partly on a supposed deed of sale executed by the land entrepreneur John Batman with the local Aborigines (who did not understand what they were signing). To allow this transaction to stand would have been an admission that the Australian Aborigines were the prior owners of the land – an admission that was anathema to the colonial project.

But Bearbrass continued to grow despite Bourke’s proclamation that the settlers were “*trespassers*”. So in 1837 Bourke sent Captain Lonsdale from Sydney, with the King’s Own Regiment of Foot, to administer the colony and Bearbrass was re-named Melbourne after Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister of Great Britain.

Within a decade, spreading out from Melbourne, most of the land that is now the State of Victoria had been occupied by white ‘*settlers*’ - which was very unsettling for the Aboriginal people who had occupied the land for approximately 40 millennia. A more appropriate name for the farmers and graziers who took the land would be ‘*invaders*’, for the takeover of Victoria was one of the swiftest occupations of land in world colonial history. The indigenous people were brutally dispossessed of their land - run off by the gun, restricted from access to water and traditional foods they died from introduced white man’s diseases and were forced to become refugees in government controlled mission stations.

And a reflection: We always hear that Indigenous people ‘died from introduced diseases’ – such as influenza, small pox and syphilis - as if it was an unfortunate accident, as if the ‘settlers’ had no idea that their bacteria and viruses would harm the native people. But the deaths of indigenous people from ‘introduced diseases’ had been happening for all of the colonial period, all around the world, so surely the intruders knew that once they arrived many of the unprotected locals would die? Did the invaders know and choose to forget? Was this an early example of germ warfare?

After the initial onslaught by the white invaders in central Victoria, many Aborigines were forced to relinquish their country to take refuge on government mission stations, such as Franklinford, 30 kilometres south of the soon-to-be-gold-field at Forest Creek.

The people who took over the land were known as *squatters*. For £10 per year they leased large tracts of land to graze their flocks of sheep. However the problem for

⁶ The Woiwurrung belonged to the larger Wurundjeri grouping, the traditional owners of the country.

the squatters was that gold miners had equal rights to mine the Crown land that they leased to run their sheep.

In 1847 the British government had issued an Order-in-Council which gave the squatters the right to leases of up to 14 years in the unsettled districts and up to 7 years in the intermediate districts, with pre-emptive right to purchase 640 acres around the homestead. In 1848 La Trobe invited the squatters to tender for their existing runs under the Order-in-Council.

However, implementation of the squatters' applications was held up by problems of surveying their claims and then by the gold rushes as well. Clause 9 of the Order-in-Council gave the Governor the right to reserve lands within the leases for townships, roads, etc – which La Trobe did.

The squatters wanted greater security of their leases, through acceptance of their applications, including purchase of a 640 acre block surrounding their homesteads from which miners could be excluded. However further progress awaited the election of the first Victorian Legislative Council, with elections due on 11 September 1851. Men who owned a house worth over £10 – which the squatters did - were eligible to vote. But this property qualification excluded the poor and ordinary working people from the vote. So it was to be a gerrymander, with most power vested in the squatters, who anticipated the making of laws that suited their interests.

It had been an open secret amongst the squatters in central Victoria - around the current towns of Clunes, Ballarat, Castlemaine and Bendigo - that there was gold on the land. One imagines their growing anxiety as the news of gold became general knowledge. They were concerned that a swarm of gold diggers would come and dig up their paddocks – in much the same fashion as the squatters themselves had overtaken the Aborigines' land - except without the killings.

Chapter 4

Instant Response to the Gold Licence

The Gold Licence was to come into force on Monday 1 September 1851. By that time there were gold diggers mining by the Yarra River at Anderson's Creek – now Warrandyte – and at Clunes and Buninyong.

It seems the Gold Licence had a two-fold purpose:

1. Raising revenue, without which a government will fail and fall, and
2. Controlling the labour force - keeping people in their jobs, particularly at shearing and harvest time.

Paradoxically, had the provisions of the Masters & Servants Act succeeded in keeping the working classes in their jobs then there would have been no revenue from gold diggers. The Gazette also printed the actual wording for the Gold Licence:

No. 1851.
The bearer having
paid to me the sum of one pound ten shillings
on account of the Territorial Revenue, I hereby
Licence him to dig, search for, and remove Gold
on and from any such Crown Land within the
as I shall
assign to him for that purpose, during the
month of 1851 .
This License must be produced whenever
demanded by me or any other person acting
under the authority of the Government
(Signed) A. B.
Commissioner.
No. 8 ; August 27, 1851.—10.

Victorian Government Gazette, August 27, 1851

The same Gazette also named Nicholas Alexander Fenwick Esquire as the first Gold Commissioner. He was already the Land Commissioner – who amongst other tasks, handed out leases to squatters – and now was suddenly converted into the Gold Commissioner for the area covered by the “*settled districts around Melbourne*”. Six weeks later La Trobe appointed more Gold Commissioners for particular districts. Again they were the existing Land Commissioners converted into Gold Commissioners.

On the Saturday before the Gold Licence came into force the Melbourne Argus newspaper - which was to emerge as a major opponent to La Trobe and his administration – came out against the new regulations:

GOLD REGULATIONS

Our readers will do well to recollect that a public meeting is convened for to-day at three o'clock, to take into consideration the lately promulgated regulations on the subject of gold discovery.

These regulations, utterly absurd and mischievous as they are in the present position of mineral discovery in the colony, have been formally announced to come into force on Monday. On that day, the Government either places itself in the ridiculous position of having issued proclamations which amount to nothing, or through their staff of newly appointed Commissioners, they will have to drive off the poor diggers in a mob, and restore Anderson's Creek, the Clunes diggings and the Buninyong country to their original seclusion.

As to any number of licences being taken out by men not averaging their expenses already, the thing is too preposterous for anything but a Victorian Government to expect.

That gold exists throughout this Colony, possibly in profusion, there is little doubt. There is just as little doubt that the people, left alone, would find it.

It would appear to require some ingenuity of folly and impracticability, upon the part of the Government, to check the spirit of discovery, which might have placed our diggings on a level with those of Turon; but which once deadened again may leave our treasures unfound for half a century, and direct all our more energetic spirits in an exhausting stream towards Bathurst.

When the fine weather sets in, and men begin to move off in reality, our householders, farmers, settlers, and other employers of labour may, perhaps, learn another bitter lesson of the benign influences, which a faithless and incapable ruler is capable of shedding upon the people whose bread he eats, and whose interests he is sworn to foster.

Argus, Saturday 30 August, 1851, p2

In other words, the Argus could see (as La Trobe probably also did) that the lust for gold and prosperity would be, like a force of nature, unstoppable.

In Geelong, on this same Saturday 30 August, a new organisation called the Geelong People's Association held its second meeting. The immediate purpose of the People's Association was to run candidates for the election of the first Legislative Council. Its more long term purpose was to "*endeavour to promote the interests of the people, socially and morally, by establishing such agencies as shall secure to all, an equitable administration of justice in all local affairs.*"⁷

One speaker railed against the "*evils of class legislation*", and asked his audience to: "*Look again....*"

... Look again to the relative position of the rich squatter and the poor gold-seeker (*hear, hear*). The former enjoys his claim to many thousands of acres of fine land, for the nominal sum of £10 per year; the latter, because he is a poor hard working man, must be forced to pay the enormous sum of £18 per year to be allowed to dig a few inches deep, on waste lands, to find the precious metal; and this is demanded before any one knows whether he could afford to pay anything (*hear, hear*). Is this just? (*no, no*).
Are the squatters then, not a privileged class?

Argus, Saturday August 30 1851, p4

And so we have an immediate articulation of what was felt to be unjust about the Gold Licence: that it was all about maintaining the respective status of the rich and the poor.

Another speaker in Geelong that day was Robert Booley, who had been a Chartist in Suffolk, England – and who was later to be a speaker at the Forest Creek Monster Meeting. The Argus reported Booley's speech as follows:

... He called the attention of the meeting particularly to the coming elections, and the necessity of securing to themselves proper representatives. He was anxious to show the meeting that they had privileged classes here as well as at home, and that if they did not remedy the evil, what those classes now claimed as a privilege, they would shortly claim as a right.

After referring to some of the antiquated laws of the time of Henry the 8th and comparing them with the privileges held here under the squatting regulations of the present day - he expressed a hope that every man in Australia would soon stand on an equal footing.

⁷ Argus, Saturday August 30 1851, Page 4

The grand object of the Association will be to prevent evils of any kind creeping into the laws by which we are to be governed and to root out all such as may at present exist. We all know that in England all good measures have been wrung from the Legislature; the Government knows that when the people make up their minds and unite to obtain any measure, they must grant it; they begin to know the power of the people, and fear it, and are thus induced to grant from compunction, that which they should have done in justice.

We should take great care in whose hands we place power, for most men are very prone to abuse their privileges when once obtained, and become tyrants. We, as an Association, ask for no privileges, and won't have them if offered; but we want, and we will have our right. We do not wish to have the notions of the old fashioned burgesses of England introduced here, we wish to have a political creed of our own.

Argus, Saturday Aug 30 1851, p4

Booley continued by lauding the Irish patriot Daniel O'Connell⁸ and urging the need to elect representatives to the first Victorian Legislative Council who would be *"anxious for what we desire ourselves"*.⁹

What was said at this meeting of the Geelong People's Association reflected the issues and concerns of the day that were reverberating around Europe and Britain (see Appendix for an outline of these ideas).

⁸ See Appendix re Daniel O'Connell and monster meetings in Ireland

⁹ Argus, Saturday August 30 1851, P4

Chapter 5

The Influence of Chartism & European Revolutions in Australia

Chartism, a working class political movement in England, was born on 4 February 1839, when 53 Chartist delegates met in London. The purpose of the meeting was to address the lack of general franchise in the Electoral Reform Act of 1832. At this first National Convention the delegates adopted the motto: *Peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must*. Years later this sentiment was also expressed by some of the speakers at the 1851 Monster Meeting at Forest Creek - on the other side of the world.

In 1839 the Chartists presented a petition containing 1.23 million signatures to the British House of Commons. This petition, known as The People's Charter, demanded:

- A vote for every man over 21¹⁰
- The secret ballot
- No property qualifications for members of Parliament
- Payment for members of Parliament (enabling poor people to stand for election)
- Equal constituencies (with equal numbers in each constituency)
- Annual parliaments (so as to restrict bribery and corruption).

The petition was rejected, 235 to 46, by the House of Commons, as was a similar one in 1842 signed by 3,000,000.¹¹ Although the Chartists' National Convention was dissolved in 1848, the Charter provided a rallying point for the many dissatisfied working people's groups and there were sporadic outbreaks of violence, with arrests and trials resulting in some men sentenced to transportation to Australia.¹²

Dr Paul A. Pickering, who has written extensively on Chartism, notes that mass migration from Britain to Australia coincided with a period when many Chartists were becoming disillusioned with the democracy on offer in the United States of America. For some Australia, like America, would have been seen as a place of safety, well away from the threat of arrest. Others would have seen it as a fresh start when it became clear that Chartism was making no headway at home.¹³

¹⁰ The first draft of the Charter prepared by the London Working Men's Association advocated franchise for women. This was removed because some members feared such a radical proposal '*might retard the suffrage of men*'.

¹¹ By 1872 all the demands of the Chartist agenda were enacted except for one year parliamentary terms,

¹² Of the 162,000 convicts transported to Australia between 1788-1868, 100 were Chartists. See Appendix and go to www.chartists.net (*Chartists in Australia*).

¹³ Dr. Pickering contributed a chapter to *Elections: Full, Free and Fair* (Edited by Marian Sawyer, 1991) in which he identifies a number of Chartists active in Australia.

Many must have taken the opportunity of a fresh start in Australia to leave radical politics behind them in favour of a quiet life. But others brought their Chartism and class consciousness with them. Robert Booley, one of the speakers at the Monster Meeting, was one of them. Booley had been an active Chartist in Suffolk. He arrived in Australia in the late 1840s and in 1851 “helped to found the Geelong People's Association, which called for the “moral, social and political advancement of the people”¹⁴

In reference to the general influence of Chartists on the Victorian goldfields, contemporary historian, Dr Kier Reeves has written:

Chartism had an influence on the political life of goldfields society, including amongst those involved in the Eureka Stockade, and it did so within a diverse political climate. H.C. Harris observed that the Chartist tradition in Victoria in the 1850s is best assessed as “an indirect undercurrent promoting faith in democratic methods and objectives, particularly concerning electoral reform”.

It is important to consider the aims of European miners in terms of the Eight Hour Day movement, Liberalism, and Trade Unionism. After all it was in Melbourne, Victoria, that the Eight Hour Day was first proclaimed, in 1856. Similarly, it was not by accident that electoral and labour reform occurred in the aftermath of the uprising at Eureka.

Helen Hughes made this observation when commenting succinctly that “the success of the shorter hours movement cannot be accounted for without consideration of the atmosphere of social and political radicalism in Victoria during this period”.

In the tradition of the treatment of British democratic dissenters of the 1790s, a number of Chartists were transported to Australia for their political beliefs. Others, not as overtly political, were immigrants attracted to Australia by its offer of the political autonomy not available to them in Britain. Invariably, some found their way to the Victorian goldfields, and it was through them that echoes of Chartism could be found in the egalitarian attitudes and the social transformation of the goldfields, particularly in the theme of the world turned upside down – an inversion of the social order that is readily associated with the gold rush era. Ernest Scott has argued that the Ballarat Reform League agenda was essentially a variant of Chartism modified for a Victorian context.¹⁵

In light of Reeves’ analysis, it is worth comparing the demands of the British Chartist 1839 People’s Charter with the demands adopted by the miners at Ballarat in November 1853 under the leadership of the Ballarat Reform League. There are clearly strong similarities between them:

¹⁴ Robert Booley’s speeches to this organisation and to the Forest Creek Monster Meeting will appear later in this document.

¹⁵ Dr Keir Reeves, from www.egold.net.au. Also go to the website for the Ballarat Reform League: <http://www.ballaratreformleague.org.au>

The People's Charter 1839:

- 1 A vote for every man over 21
- 2 The Secret ballot
- 3 No property qualifications for members of Parliament
- 4 Payment for members of Parliament
- 5 Equal constituencies – with equal numbers in each constituency
- 6 Annual parliaments – so as to restrict bribery and corruption.

Ballarat Reform League demands 1853

- 1 A full and fair representation
- 2 Manhood suffrage
- 3 No property qualifications for members of the Legislative Council
- 4 Payment of members
- 5 Short duration of parliaments

Along with English Chartism, other radical movements in continental Europe were also feeding the sentiments of Victorians who were lining up to oppose La Trobe's Gold Licence.

By 1848 the idea that every man should be entitled to vote was powerful and widespread throughout Europe. In France in 1848 revolution overthrew the monarchy and established a Republican government with a manifesto calling for universal male suffrage and a reduction in the hours of working day.

And in other parts of Europe too people pressed the case for liberalisation or radical reform in their own cities and states. In Austria radicalised students, supported by the National Guard and tens of thousands of Viennese workers, sought enhanced wages together with shorter working hours. In Italy the movement sought the freedom of the press and the convening of a national assembly. In Berlin King Frederick was forced to stand bareheaded whilst the earthly remains of those Berliners killed in street fighting were paraded with their wounds exposed.

Doubtless very few of the people who experienced these events in Europe were in Australia for the beginning of the gold rush in 1851 – and we can assume that probably none were at the Forest Creek Monster Meeting. However ideas travelled, and the ideas of radical change from Europe, Ireland and England were undoubtedly circulating in Australia and on the goldfields in 1851.

Certainly the news of gold in Australia did reach Europe in time for people who had taken part in these uprisings to make it to the goldfields at Bendigo and Ballarat – the Italian, Raffaello Carboni being the most famous of them.

Chapter 6

Resistance at Buninyong

In the *Argus* of 30 August 1851 – the same edition that reported on Booley in Geelong – there was a report from the gold field at Buninyong, recounting two meetings held in response to the Gold Licence. These were the first gatherings of gold diggers in response to the government's action and forerunners of the Forest Creek Monster Meeting. It is a beautiful, lucid report, full of atmosphere, where the journalism morphs into partisan editorial, and it's worth reading in full:

GOLD

(From the Geelong Advertiser)

Buninyong, 26th August

I was at the "Diggings" listening to the many complaints as I went around from cradle to cradle. The *Intelligencer* had furnished the diggers with the Government Proclamation No. 2, imposing the Licence Fees. The subject had been warmly discussed, and it was resolved to hold a public meeting that very night.

It was a novel and exciting scene. At the entrance of every tent was a blazing fire, which every now and then shot up a lurid flame, disclosing for a moment the dark figures hovering round it; then sinking, it would leave the bush in darker obscurity than ever.

About eight o'clock there was an unusual stillness, when from one of the central tents came a voice convening all the gold diggers together. From tent to tent the cry was taken up, until it went the whole round of the encampment. A gun was then fired, and within minutes from forty to fifty as picturesque-looking individuals as ever ornamented canvas, assembled round a large watch-fire kindled beneath the gloomy stringy bark trees.

The Proclamation of His Excellency the Governor was then read from the *Intelligencer* by fire-light and was listened to with the profoundest attention. One by one it was commented upon, calmly and dispassionately, but with strong earnestness; under the canopy of heaven, in the dead silence of the bush, with the pale stars looking down upon them, did these men weigh and ponder upon the act of the Government.

One man said that he was a free man, and a hard-working man, willing to pay his fair share to the Government, but he could not and would not pay thirty shillings a month for a Licence to get an honest livelihood from his labour. He was

much applauded, and several said that he spoke their feelings, and they would act in the same way.

Another said that he worked very hard, and he could not get his rations by gold digging, "and how" said he "can it be expected that I can pay a shilling a day to the Commissioner? It's a burning shame to expect it."

"It's more than the squatter pays for twenty square miles," said a third, "But you are a poor man," retorted a fourth, "They'll drive us to Bathurst," said another, "and then let Port Phillip look out for labourers. I spent every halfpenny I had in fitting myself out for the diggings and now I am to be taxed before I have even been here a week, or had an opportunity of getting any of it back again."

"You should have gone to California, Jim; the Yankees don't do it in this here fashion." "This is Port Phillip d y'see?" rejoined another. "What's the use of Separation!" said another. "Here is a specimen of independent Government! I should like to know what right the Government has to tax us £18 a year before the Council sits! What's the use of voting in members if the government can do as they like, they'll make it six-and-thirty pounds next; of course they will if they sees their advantage in it; there's no two way about that; I'll ding my cradle first." "That'll only be serving yourself out," replied another.

"I propose we get up a memorial to Mr La Trobe, and that we all sign it." "That's my opinion," said a stout man, pushing forward "a gentleman advised us to do that today, and to get some respectable inhabitants to put their names to it, and a magistrate to sanction it."

"That's no use at all," said another; "we meet here tonight round our own fire; we are honest men, and we want our rights and nothing more. Let us act for ourselves, and pass resolutions, and not waste our time in sending memorials that'll just be laid aside, and there's no end of 'em. I propose first, that we elect a chairman, and then let any man propose his resolution, and put it to the meeting; that's the way to do business (Bravo! That's the way to do business and no mistake.) We don't want to fly in the face of Government, but if the Government don't act honestly, let us show them up through the Press to the people, who, he was sure, would see them righted."

And so one after another they delivered their sentiments. I was never more struck with a scene in my life, and something whispers to me that it will be an important one. It is a solemn protest of labour against oppression – an

outburst of light, reason, and right, against the infliction of an effete objectionable royal claim, brought forward to crush a new branch of industry, whose birth was heralded by large rewards, and whose death will be laid at the door of the Government.

The first effect of the manifesto has been to disperse the diggers from the Buninyong gold-field. They were willing to work at a present loss for a prospective gain; but they have expressed a unanimous resolution not to persevere with works requiring a great outlay of labour to make them profitable for a government, before the worker and toiler could receive one farthing of compensation for his time and trouble.

Let the "blue-shirts" and "cabbage-trees" have fair play. They are "pioneers" of the day – the advanced guards of enterprise, working in the damp and chill, and exposed to every hardship; they have sacrificed their "household goods," and given up all for a life of toil in the wilderness: their mission is for the development of the mineral resources of the colony, to which they were instigated by the Press and the people; they interfere with no rights, clash with no interests, impede no progress, injure none, great or small; - but, on the contrary, they stand out in bold relief in the front of society, and proclaim abroad that they won a harvest from barrenness, and riches from poverty!

That they wrenched gold, by labour, from rocks – a wealth but which for them would never have been heard of; for it is to hard working, not to scientific men, that the gold discovery is attributable; and their reward is "prohibition" and "proscription. And a trampling underfoot of the rights of labour.

It is "taxation" without representation" – an imperial edict to raise an indefinite sum, by an absolute and unexplained levy, to be applied Heaven only knows how or where! What is a five per cent taxed burgess compared to one of these men paying £18 per annum? In this edict is a gross innovation: a principle is involved here, and the sooner it is nipped in the bud the better will it be for all classes.

Another meeting of the diggers was held last night, when the following resolutions were submitted and carried *nem con.*: -

1. That it is the opinion of this meeting that the determination on the part of the Executive Council to impose a fee of 30s per month per man, for a licence to search or dig for gold, at the present time, is both impolitic

and illiberal, and is calculated to check, if not altogether stop the research that is now being made to open up the mineral resources of the colony.

That the individuals composing this meeting, have been led, by highly coloured representations, to expend a considerable sum of money, in order to furnish a proper outfit to enable them to pursue their researches for gold in the neighbourhood of Buninyong: that they have prosecuted for several consecutive days such research, but that though gold has been discovered in the locality, it is found to be distributed in minute particles that it will not pay for the labour in working.

2. That it is the opinion of this meeting, under the circumstances of the case, that an indulgence of some little time should be granted by the Executive Council to the searchers for gold in and around Buninyong, before they be called upon to pay so exorbitant a fee.

A desire was then expressed that the resolutions should be inserted in the Geelong papers; three tremendous cheers were given for the Press which were echoed from the surrounding forest; the men retired to their tents, and I mounted horse, and rode slowly through the deep gloom to Buninyong, pondering on the way, the strange scene I had witnessed, and the stronger vicissitudes to which human life is subjected.

Here, a month ago, was but bush and forest, and tonight for the first time since Australia rose from the bosom of the ocean, were men strong in their sense of right, lifting up a protest against an impending wrong, and protesting against the Government.

Human progress in Port Phillip – like her vegetation – is rapid: let the Government beware, lest like her timber, it prove rotten at the core, whilst it carries a healthy exterior. Buninyong, 27th August.

Argus, Saturday 30 August, 1851

In addition to the ideas of rights and freedoms expressed at the meeting of the Geelong People's Association, the gold diggers at Buninyong articulated the unfairness of the licence, given how difficult it was to make wages digging for gold. They heralded the coming movement for democracy with their call for "*no taxation without representation*", and themselves conducted their meetings in democratic fashion. This was a long way from where the conflict finished up – a bloody battle at Ballarat.

On 30 August, two days before the Gold Licence came into force, La Trobe would certainly have read this Argus article. One wonders, what, if any, effect it had on his views and plans.

Chapter 7

Protests in Melbourne

In Melbourne, over the weekend before the Gold Licence came into force, La Trobe's new regulation was also opposed by a group of middle class burghers who met in the Mechanics Institute. First to speak was a Mr De Carle, who moved:

That as it appears to this meeting that no gold field, or mine, has as yet been profitably worked, or gold found in such quantity as to render the profit probable, it is highly inexpedient to impose any tax or monthly licence, and that such a charge will only tend to check further discovery

Argus, Monday 1 September, 1851 p2

His fear was that the Gold Licence would stall "*further discovery*" and his use of the words "*render a profit*" gives the hint that he was talking about business - different to working people trying their luck with a pick and shovel.

Dr Webb Richmond, who was later to chair the Forest Creek Monster Meeting, spoke next. He too seems to have been talking about economic prosperity and development, as distinct from ordinary people standing for their rights (although the two are not necessarily incompatible).

... the Proclamation had been productive of much mischief, as it had prevented many men from continuing their search for gold; it had had the effect of frightening people away, and many within his own personal knowledge had, in consequence, left the province, and gone off to the Turon. The accounts received from the diggings near Sydney were very favourable. Whether they were true or not, he could not say, but at any rate they were believed, and many men thought that if they went to the Turon that they would better their condition.

By and by the employers of labour would be looking out for men, but they would have difficulty in finding them. It was the duty of Government to prevent such a contingency, and not to take such a step as it had done, and to aid by all means in its power the discovery not only of gold, but all other minerals which he was sure existed in Victoria to a vast extent.

But, on the contrary, no prospect had been held out by Government to induce any man to devote his time and his talents to such discoveries, and there was nothing in the Government regulations to secure to the finder of mineral wealth any claim upon it.

Argus, Monday 1 Sept. 1851, p2

Richmond saw the Gold Licence as counter-productive to Victoria's interests, with employers likely to suffer a loss of labour to competing gold rushes, such as at the Turon River in New South Wales

The popular image of the gold digger and of those who stood up to the government was (and still is) a picture of the poor-working-man-digger with his pick and shovel, trying to elevate himself out of poverty – like those gathered around the campfire at Buninyong. So it's a surprise to hear from these men who were concerned with the prosperity of business in the colony.

Next, Alderman Johnston spoke of the danger of the Victorian population draining to the Bathurst goldfield in New South Wales, and stood in support of the bearded diggers at Buninyong (he had read the Buninyong report in the Geelong Advertiser, from which the Argus took its copy):

.. there was an apparent fear on the part of our own Government that we should go ahead too fast, and so they had put on the "conservative drag," which only showed the necessity of a little of the "democratic impulse."

At the meeting at Buninyong, a report of which had appeared in the *Geelong Advertiser*, a reference had been made to the unequal tax of £10 imposed on the squatters, and the case could not have been put more strongly: instead of the thirty shilling damper, the men should have been taken under the fostering care of the Government, and treated better than they had been.

He hoped Government would not attempt to carry out the measure, and was glad that the matter had been taken up by the people, who might rest assured that the more readily they evinced their interest in all such affairs, the more likely they were to obtain redress.

Argus, Monday 1 Sept. 1851, p2

The men speaking at this meeting were almost certainly city men - although it's worth remembering that the towns and the country were not as distinct then as they are now. None of them sound like squatters, especially given their words against the unfairness of the Gold Licence at £18 per year for a 12' x 12' plot of earth compared to the government's regulations for squatters, whose vast runs cost them a meagre £10 per year.

As Martin McKenna says in his song *Thirty Shillings a Month*, written in 2010:

*Thirty shillings a month to dig for gold
In the heat and the dust and the rain and the cold
While the squatter he pays, I understand,
About the same for a swag of land.¹⁶*

¹⁶ Martin McKenna, *Thirty Shillings a Month*, winner of the 2010 Monster Meeting Song Award. Details of all songs at www.monstermeeting.net/2012/12/437/

The Melbourne burghers' meeting of 31 August passed all motions proposed including a second from Mr De Carle:

That the Sydney Government having appointed two officers whose special duties were to develop the mineral resources of that province – this meeting is of the opinion that similar officers should be appointed for Victoria, and that as early as possible a fixed rate of working copper, tin, lead, gold, and all other minerals, including coal, should be published by the Government, and that such rate should have reference to a convenient shipping place.

Argus, Monday 1 Sept. 1851, p2

These men seem to have been concerned mainly about progress, commerce, industry and the growth of the new colony of Victoria. They feared that La Trobe's new Proclamation would stifle this progress. And this progress was tied in with what Alderman Johnston called the "*democratic impulse*".

And so La Trobe, reading the Monday paper on the day the Gold Licence came into force, should have begun to realise that both workers and middle class business people opposed his regulation, and that he consequently had a fight on his hands.

Chapter 8

September 1851

The day after the Gold Licence came into effect, the Argus carried a report that *"Men with tin dishes, and swags on their back, are traversing the tiers in different directions, scattered by the proclamation of his Excellency."*¹⁷ But were the gold diggers fleeing in fear – different to what they said they'd do at the Buninyong meeting - or was this something cleverer? This dispersal could of course lead them to find more hitherto undiscovered gold in other places.

The Geelong Advertiser fleshed out its picture of Buninyong's response to the Gold Licence - in portage mixed with the same sort of editorial as that in the Argus:

LATEST FROM BUNINYONG.

From the Geelong Advertiser. Monday morning.

The tents are struck - the tribes of cradle-men, and the tin dish helotry, have dispersed to the neighbouring tiers - bark huts look desolate, and the gunyas are deserted. The diggers have retired to the mountain recesses, and it requires no ordinary skill to discover them. "They have adopted a Parthian warfare, and retire before the advancing Commissioner and the Imperial edicts, to the gullies of the interior, and the remote water-courses, where they hope to pursue their honest avocations uninterrupted by tyrannical task-masters. The old scene is nearly tenantless; but as an exposition of the tendency of "our Government," it displays a telling lesson that will not soon be forgotten. If the Government be powerless to create, it is powerful and prompt enough in destroying, and if birds could speak, as they are reputed in Eastern apologue, there is not a laughing jackass in the bush, but would cachinnate a peal in honour of his Excellency....

...The diggers have flitted, and ... wherever found they are animated by the same feelings, and earnest in the expression of their indignation at the attempt of the Government to suspend operations here.

...And how much more it would have rebounded to the credit of a Government to... have thrown a protection around those whose intellects were in advance of those who governed them, than to have come down upon them like a "wolf on the fold." His Excellency has bruised his government.

...the eagerness with which every report of discovery was hailed by the public, was a warranty of the deep interest taken by them in the

¹⁷ The Argus, Tuesday 2 Sept. 1851, p2

question, and naturally so, for the gold question is a national question, and to the nation it must be referred, to be adjudicated upon, and not be mercilessly extinguished by Government Janissaries.

Straws show which way the wind blows, and the genius of the Government is displayed in the Hun-like onslaught it has made on the industry of her children.

The Argus, Wed. 3 September, 1851, p2

So far no one was publicly speaking in support of the Gold Licence, and it's worth pausing here to reflect on the meaning of the meetings at Buninyong in relation to the coming Forest Creek Monster Meeting:

In the Monster Meeting Interviews¹⁸ archeologist David Bannear asserts that it was the Forest Creek Monster Meeting that galvanised the gold seekers into the political force called the Diggers - that they became the 'Diggers' at the Forest Creek Monster Meeting.

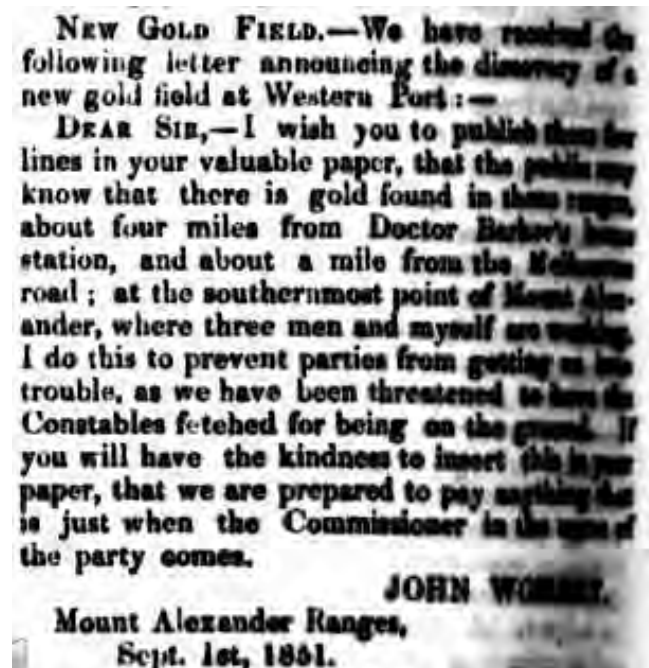
So it's worth noting that the meetings at Buninyong in late August, whilst expressing similar thoughts and ideas to the later Forest Creek Monster Meeting in December, could not bring the diggers together as a united force. There were far fewer on the Buninyong field than the 25,000 who later gathered at Forest Creek, so there were not yet the numbers at Buninyong to mount a serious stand against the government.

¹⁸ www.monstermeeting.net/the-monster-meeting-interviews/

Chapter 9

Worley's letter

On Monday 8 September the letter that was to start the Forest Creek gold rush appeared in the Argus, squeezed between a notice of a new Victorian newspaper and an obituary:



NEW GOLD FIELD.—We have received the following letter announcing the discovery of a new gold field at Western Port:—

DEAR SIR,—I wish you to publish these few lines in your valuable paper, that the public may know that there is gold found in these ranges, about four miles from Doctor Barker's home station, and about a mile from the Melbourne road; at the southernmost point of Mount Alexander, where three men and myself are working. I do this to prevent parties from getting us into trouble, as we have been threatened to have the Constables fetched for being on the ground. If you will have the kindness to insert this in your paper, that we are prepared to pay anything that is just when the Commissioner in the name of the party comes.

JOHN WORLEY.
Mount Alexander Ranges,
Sept. 1st, 1851.

THE ARGUS

We have received the following letter announcing the discovery of a new gold field at Western Port: -

Dear Sir, - I wish you to publish these few lines in your valuable paper, that the public may know that there is gold found in these ranges, about four miles from Doctor Barker's home station, and about a mile from the Melbourne road; at the southernmost point of Mount Alexander, where three men and myself are working. I do this to prevent parties from getting us into trouble, as we have been threatened to have the constable fetched for being on the ground. If you will have the kindness to insert this in your paper, that we are prepared to pay anything that is just when the Commissioner in the name of the party comes.

John Worley [sic]
Mt Alexander Ranges
Sept 1st, 1851

Argus, Mon. 8 September, 1851, p2

The writer was John Worley, a shepherd employed by Dr. William Barker, a squatter whose run was between the present town of Castlemaine and Mount Alexander. The locale, near Harcourt, is now called Barker's Creek and Castlemaine's main

street is also named after him. Here is Barker's application for a lease of 30,000 acres (12,000 hectares):

No. 21.

William Barker
 Name of run—Mount Alexander
 Estimated area—30,000 acres
 Estimated grazing capabilities—7,000 sheep

Commencing from the W side of Hawkings' Inn, following Messrs Heape & Grice's marked trees to a range where they join Mr Bryant's boundary, following Mr Bryant's blazed trees as Mr Cameron's boundary, then SE about a mile to a burnt hut, then E by S about 2½ miles to a high stoney range, then following a range down to a creek running about E & W from that creek a line bearing E by S to Mr Orr's boundary, thence a line across the ranges to a blazed tree marked No. 7, from that tree in a straight line to the lowest and most eastern dip of Mount Alexander, from thence following the principal range of Mount Alexander to the commencement of Messrs Heape & Grice's boundary with all the falls of water to this side, from thence by Messrs Heape & Grice's blazed trees as far as Hawkings' run.

Victorian Government Gazette, 4 October 1848

Local story has it that Worley and his mates discovered the gold in a place now called Specimen Gully, near the present Midland Highway. When Worley showed Dr Barker the gold they'd found, Barker threatened dismissal if they continued fossicking but Worley and his mates persisted in their search for gold. They found more and were subsequently sacked. Worley then wrote to the Argus, giving specific directions to the gold on Barker's run.¹⁹ It's worth noting that Worley's letter doesn't seem to be primarily aimed at starting a gold rush, although this possibility could not have been lost on the shepherd, especially as he gave specific directions. Rather,

¹⁹ About place names: This book refers to the Forest Creek gold rush, but it is often called the Mount Alexander gold rush. Official sanction for the occupation of "Mount Alexander and its vicinity" was given on 8 October 1851, providing the most likely reason for the generic use of its name. Also the main point of reference in Worley's directions was Mount Alexander to the north of Castlemaine and Barker's run – named by explorer Major Mitchell after Alexander the Great. The general rush to the area was called the Mount Alexander gold rush and the path the diggers took out of Melbourne is still called Mount Alexander Road, even though the gold was nowhere near Mount Alexander. The name stuck and became known around the world. However when the diggers came looking for the gold on Barker's run they first came across Forest Creek, three kilometres south, and there they found gold beyond imagining. So this rush took on a name of its own – Forest Creek – which is what it will be called within this document. Historical references such as newspapers call it by both names – Forest Creek and Mount Alexander.

the central thrust of the letter appears to be that Worley is attempting to ensure immunity from some prosecution - even though Barker's threat of calling the constables was a hollow one given that it was not illegal for anyone to fossick for gold on Barker's run. Maybe Worley was afraid that Barker would use his power to get them fined for not having a Gold Licence – though the closest place to then obtain a licence was at Buninyong, 100 kilometres to the south of Barker's run. Worley's letter was certainly expressing both his own, and his mates', willingness to abide by the law.

As outlined earlier Barker did not as yet *own* the land, his lease only gave him the right to graze sheep on the land specified in his application. There was as yet no certainty about his leasehold nor did he yet have the right to purchase acreage around his homestead. So with Worley publicising that there was gold on his run, Barker's exclusive occupancy was in danger from an influx of gold seekers who had the right to prospect and dig on the Crown land where he ran his sheep.

However Worley's letter did not start an immediate rush. The original Argus report gave confusing directions and this was probably complicated by the government's division of districts in Victoria - in which 'the mount' was situated within the 'Westernport District' of Victoria and Westernport Bay was located to the east of Melbourne.

So through September the gold on Forest Creek - which was to become the richest alluvial gold field in world history - lay undisturbed. There was no further notice of the Mount Alexander gold fields in the newspapers. The gold diggers' compasses were yet to point north-west out of Melbourne.

Meanwhile one anonymous contributor to the Argus predicted, roughly, the history of the gold rush to come and idealized the social situation that would result:

Our flocks are fed over pastures which yield gold in extraordinary profusion: our herds ramble over a country rich in every mineral production: all we want is energy in ourselves, and patience and discrimination in our rulers to prove that the land of our adoption is one of the richest on the face of the earth, where every man may find food and employment, and where every individual may, with a small share of industry, shortly enjoy a large share of affluence.

Argus, Friday September 12, 1851, p 4

Chapter 10

Meanwhile in Ballarat and Geelong

Forest Creek field, the richest alluvial gold field in world history, was five kilometres south of Specimen Gully, the area to which Worley had given directions. When the diggers eventually came looking for Worley's spot they would stumble across Forest Creek and for a while go no further. But immediately after the publication of Worley's letter the gold seekers' focus continued to be on Buninyong and nearby Ballarat.

With those gold rushes gathering pace and the government scrambling to catch up there was a lack of law enforcement - and so the diggers organized order for themselves:

BALLARAT DIGGINGS.
(From the Correspondent of the Geelong Advertiser.)
Buninyong, Thursday morning 11th September.

Henceforth "Ballarat Diggings" will be the designation by which our gold field will be known. A few brief days has peopled the locality with a hundred and twenty diggers – a number increasing every day. Tents and huts now stretch along the margin of the Buninyong Gully, in numbers sufficient to constitute small town.

The change in the whole aspect of things here is astounding, and more resembles a dream than an actuality. It is a free community, all legislation coming from the commonwealth and all disputes, (of which, happily, there are but few and those few of the most trivial character) are referred to the body in public meeting assembled to be decided upon.

Argus, September 13, 1851, p 2

This report makes one wonder why, given his concern about how to manage the diggings and its attendant 'evils' (which La Trobe outlines in his Despatch of October 10, 1851), the Governor did not take notice of this orderly, democratic form of diggers' self-organisation. The report also gives the lie to the common furphy that the diggings were populated by a chaotic rabble from the 'inferior' classes - as La Trobe also described them in the same Despatch.

However in the same edition of the Argus, the paper's own correspondent paints a picture that would have fed La Trobe's concerns of chaos. It offered him some support in terms of his Gold Licence but also cautioned against the excessive amount of the fee, as well as alerting him to the security needs of the diggers:

GEELONG
[FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT]

Thursday, 11th September

The news from Buninyong continues to be of a most exciting nature, each succeeding day reveals some new and startling account of good fortune, on the part of the diggers, many of which reports however must be looked upon with extreme suspicion, or should rather say, acted upon with extreme caution; the result of the late intelligence from that quarter has driven many almost to madness.

No sacrifice is spared to secure an outfit for the diggings, families are left unprotected, and in some cases left on but scanty means, while the head and protector plunges without the least foresight into the exciting but fickle game.

Such a reckless thirst for gain cannot be too severely censured, or such a revolution of feeling too much deplored; ... if the present general rush be not checked a fearful scene of confusion and disappointment must follow.

Considering that at the time the present discovery was made, many parties had laid out a considerable sum of money, one shilling of which they had not recovered by gold digging; and also that very many have not been so fortunate as the few, it would hardly be fair to immediately exact the 30s licence.

But it must be evident to everyone that it is now high time for the Government to interfere, and so long as it acts judiciously, it is necessary that we should support it.

I am informed on what I consider unquestionable authority, that the majority of the respectable class of diggers, are crying out for police protection, and not only expressing a desire to obtain that protection, but expressing also their willingness to pay for it; but they do not think that after the loss they have sustained and the hardships they have endured, they should immediately be called on to pay the full amount.

The only protection at present afforded to the whole district consists of the Chief Constable of Chepstowe, and three constables. But, as the district is a very large one, only one can be spared for the diggings, and as we may reasonably suppose, that at least one-third of the diggers are not saints, we may be able to guess what would become of the constable in the event of any disturbance.

It is therefore apparent to every one, that immediate measures must be adopted by the Government, and if not too severe, supported by the people, to preserve order, and to make the colony what there is every prospect of its becoming, the finest and richest country in the world.

A mounted patrol between the diggings and Melbourne, and Geelong, and some half dozen troopers, a constable at the mines, with at least three in the township of Buninyong, will be immediately required for the protection of the mails, as well as of the travellers to and from the mines, for the quantity of gold that may now be expected to arrive regularly, will be a great temptation to some of the prowlers that are always found travelling the country.

The Argus, September 13, 1851, p 2

So as usual with gold rushes, with leads going in all directions, all yielding different results to the next, with order and madness co-existing, the above newspaper reports are similarly varied: the Argus correspondent rings an alarm bell saying that “...if the present general rush be not checked...” and also that the diggers, contrary to some claims of them relishing lawlessness, want police protection.

The desire for order reported here, aligned with the writer’s vision of the colony with “...every prospect of its becoming, the finest and richest country in the world”, indicates that, in this early stage of the gold rush, the movement against the Gold Licence was championed by orderly citizens who were happy to co-operate with Government (as was also said by the speakers at the later Monster Meeting). Apart from anything else, if you’re going to make it rich, as they all hoped, then protection was necessary. But behind this desire for order was what was called ‘yellow fever’ - the emotional mania that drove the gold rush.

Geelong is mad, stark, staring, gold-mad. If all who are now going to the diggings make their fortunes they will be lucky fellows indeed; the host of disconsolate wives, or as they are here called “grass widows”, and their families, is astonishing. In Moorabool street, today, I saw two bullock drays being loaded for the diggings, and I should think there were not less than 120 people about them, although not all going with them at that time; there were five or six cradles, two or three wheelbarrows, a couple of dozen tin dishes, and about the same number of beds and boxes on each: besides ropes, frying pans, ovens, stretchers, tarpaulins, quart and pint pots, buckets, guns, sieves, picks, crowbars, spades, &c., &c., &c., but while looking at them and admiring the anxiety each displayed to get the drays loaded, the wind came swooping round the corner, enough to cut one in two, and I left them, thanking my stars that I was not so foolish as to face the roads to the mines

during the present weather. I verily believe it will be the death of some of them.

Argus, September 19, 1851, p 2

The same edition of The Argus also reported on another meeting of the People's Association in Geelong, attended by Booley and Captain John Harrison, who was later to be the most popular speaker at the Forest Creek Monster Meeting. Harrison spoke about the necessity to end transportation to the colonies, and he also "*... declared himself a democrat...*".

.... He declared himself a democrat, and gloried in the name. He had now said all he had to say in connection with the League,²⁰ and as there were other speakers to follow him, he would just briefly revert to the coming crisis, occasioned by the recent gold discoveries.

He begged of them all to be prepared to meet the emergency, and to call a public meeting immediately, to consider the best steps to be taken for the general good. Such things had been attempted in Sydney and Melbourne, but they either failed, or were not taken in time, and so his friends should look out for their own welfare before it be too late.

He said he recollected when he, about seven or eight years ago, unfurled a flag on Batman's Hill:²¹ some people called it a traitor flag but, said the speaker, turning and pointing to a League banner, no one can call that a traitor flag; there is the emblem of Union in the corner; the four stars represent the constellation of the Southern Cross, or the four colonies if you choose; and I unhesitatingly maintain, that it will be the fault of the British Government alone, if ever the stripes are added to the stars. The Captain resumed his seat amidst much applause.

Argus, September 13, 1851, p 2

Whilst Harrison appears to be a loyal Briton, he could see that the changes a gold rush could bring if the Government did not act with wisdom, could lead to Britain losing Australia as it did America. Since we have no idea of the tone of his speech we can't say for sure if he was threatening, hinting or just flying a kite at a republic.

²⁰ Harrison was a member and sometime organiser for the Victorian Branch of the Australasian Anti-Transportation League, which campaigned in support of anti-transportation candidates.

²¹ Harrison had campaigned against increased taxation and in April 1844 attended the first meeting of the Separation Society. In June, on Batman's Hill, under a flag designed by him, with a white star centre on a crimson ground, militant squatters met to demand a clear policy on land tenure. Harrison urged stockholders to form a pastoralists' society to fight against taxation and for separation.

Chapter 11

Gold Fever Rising

Worley's letter with directions to find gold near Mount Alexander appeared in The Argus on 8 September, but it was another 16 days before the Argus mentioned Mount Alexander again:

There is another gold field opened...near Mount Alexander; about £200 sterling was collected by a party of four men during the last week; there can be no doubt as to the truth of this, the gold having been seen on the spot; it is principally collected from quarts (sic); nuggets of a large size are also found on removal of the soil; there is nothing now thought of here but gold, and should the veins continue to yield the same quality, we may expect to see all Melbourne here.

Argus, Wednesday September 24, 1851, p 2

This would have caused great excitement, and there was more the next day:

GOLD CIRCULAR

It is a remarkable fact that every week brings new treasures to light in connexion (sic) with the extraordinary discovery that now so much engages the attention of our colonists—the first specimen of Australian gold was in the City of London yesterday, and when we consider the suspicion manifested in this City for several weeks after the secret was made known, it will not be surprising that John Bull, in our native land, should treat the first specimen exhibited to him as a strong attempt at a hoax—but when each succeeding ship conveys a much larger quantity of gold than the previous one, all his doubts will vanish, and his astonished eyes will awake to the truth that he possesses at the Antipodes a dependency of inestimable value.

What will be his emotions when he hears that our very roads and bridges have been covered with this auriferous deposit, and that we have been actually sowing grain upon soil richly impregnated with the precious metal? Marvellous as this may appear, it is no more strange than true.

Argus, Thursday September 25, 1851, p 2

There is a sense of bated breath in this report, as if the writer was waiting for a smoking volcano to erupt. And two days later Buninyong/Ballarat took a quantum leap forward in terms of amounts of gold discovered.

THE GOLD

The city was all alive, yesterday with a report that an eminent firm in Melbourne, had purchased one lot of gold from the Ballarat diggings, to the amount of eleven hundred pounds.

We have not heard whether this report be duly authenticated, but it was generally believed.

In connexion with reports from other sources, there can now, we think, be no doubt whatever that the new diggings near Buninyong are of a very rich description, and that they will probably furnish a very large quantity of the precious metal opened up as their resources will be, by the hundreds rapidly flocking to the neighbourhood.

We trust that the Government is fully aware of the state of things likely to arise, and is prepared to take measures equal to the emergency.

Complete police control is of the first importance, to check any tendency to outrage to which a suddenly accumulated, and very heterogeneous mass is so prone.

A large part of the crowd fast trending in that direction, will consist of men of very objectionable character, the seventy four Vandemonians²², kindly brought to us by the Screw, probably amongst the number; and as all reports agree that every road is lined with fresh pilgrims to the Golden shrine, it is obvious that a body will soon be assembled, for which Captain Dana and a black fellow²³ or two will constitute a very inadequate protection.

A bad spirit is more easily prevented than checked when once created; and we therefore trust that immediate measures will be taken for the full enforcement of order, and protection to life and property.

Periodical escorts ought also to be provided both to Melbourne and Geelong. It is highly inexpedient to allow of large accumulations of gold upon the ground, or to force its transmission along our lonely roads without protection. Either

²² There was general fear of ex-convicts from Van Diemen's Land migrating to Victoria. In particular, there was strong antipathy to the proposed importation of particular Vandemonians who were known as 'Military Pensioners'. These men were ex-guards from convict ships pensioned off on the condition that they could be recalled for military duties, such as becoming a 'police force' on the gold fields. Governor La Trobe was proposing to the Van Diemen's Land government that they send Military Pensioners for this purpose.

²³ Captain Henry Dana was appointed by La Trobe to form the Native Police from Aboriginal recruits. From 1842 to 1851 they worked as police officers, collecting licence fees, guarding gold shipments and generally assisting the police in keeping order on the gold fields.

of these courses would be sure to lead to outrage, quarrelling, robbery, and bloodshed; and as these are the means of converting our gold discoveries into a curse instead of a blessing, we hope to see them timely averted, by vigorous and intelligent action upon the part of the Government.

Argus, Saturday, September 27, 1851

The impression given by the media is that up till now there had been some gold found but now the temperature was rising with the beginning of a serious gold rush and, whilst many could see what should be done to administer the change, the government was seen to be doing nothing. And the fear of the lower classes is here palpable, especially with the mention of 'Vandemonians' – ex-convicts from Van Diemen's Land.

On the following Monday 29 September the Argus contained seven articles about gold. The pot was threatening to boil over, or it had already done so in Geelong a week or so earlier:

THE GOLD FIELD

The whole town of Geelong is in hysterics. Gentlemen foaming at the mouth, ladies fainting, children throwing somersets, and all this on account of the extraordinary news from Buninyong. On Saturday afternoon, two gentlemen arrived from the Gold field, bringing the bewildering intelligence that a party of six had procured in one day 900 pounds²⁴ worth of pure gold!

And so the editorial proceeded, with wondrous stories of gold for the taking at Buninyong (which would have stalled a rush to Mount Alexander). But, aware that it was all a matter of luck and that some found nothing, the Editor cautioned like a father to a child:

..... But, good people all, beware: be not lead away by such an extraordinary piece of good luck as this, do not throw up good situations, or neglect a small profitable business, for the glittering chance of a fortune at the mines. Already, hard working men, who have tried the diggings, have returned to Geelong to take work at their old trades. The maddening excitement will soon abate again, and many of you will deeply regret the present imprudent rush to the mines.

Argus, Monday September 29, 1851, p 2

The news is like a wildly swinging pendulum: mad excitement at the riches to be gained and the bitter disappointment of those who missed out. But what else do you expect from a gold rush?

²⁴ 900 pounds = 335.9 kilograms

Chapter 12

La Trobe's Dilemmas

On 2 October La Trobe was “...pleased to direct that the several Commissioners of Crown Lands for the Pastoral and Settled Districts already appointed shall be Commissioners to carry out the regulations of 18th August last...”²⁵ The Gold Commissioner for the Forest Creek – Mount Alexander area was Frederick Arnold Powlett.

The same Victorian Government Gazette (VGG 8 October 1851) that announced the appointment of the Gold Commissioners also contained the first advice about arrangements for a gold escort from Buninyong. And in the Gazette of 15 October there were instructions that diggers could place their gold with Commissioner Doveton.²⁶ At the time diggers could also convert gold to cash via other commercial agents.

At this stage there was little clear information about what was happening across the gold fields and consequent confusion about the most appropriate government response. Obviously the Gold Licence was not working as a deterrent to the gold seekers. Instead La Trobe now had to accommodate the gold rush at Buninyong by supplying a gold escort and to anticipate rushes elsewhere by the appointment of Gold Commissioners.

Meanwhile in September 1851, amidst the cobbling together of these measures, Victoria's first Legislative Council was elected. The successful 20 candidates elected as Members of the Legislative Council were announced in the Victorian Government Gazette, October 22, 1851.

- John Hilton Dight & John Thomas Smith - Electoral District of North Bourke
- Henry Miller - Electoral District of South Bourke, Evelyn & Mornington
- John Henry Mercer - Electoral District of Grant
- James Frederick Palmer - Electoral District of Normanby, Dundas & Follet
- William Rutledge - Electoral District of Villiers & Heightsbury
- Adolphus Goldsmith - - Electoral District of Ripon, Hampden, Grenville & Polworth
- John Pascoe Fawcner - - Electoral District of Talbot, Dalhousie & Anglesey
- Robert Turnbull - - Electoral District of Gippsland
- Francis Murphy - Electoral District of The Murray
- William Campbell - Electoral District of The Loddon
- William Francis Splatt - Electoral District of The Wimmera
- William Westgarth, John O'Shannesy, James Stewart Johnston - Electoral District of Melbourne
- Robert Robinson, James Ford Strachan - Electoral District of Geelong
- Thomas Wilkinson - Electoral District of Portland
- Thomas Hamilton Osborne - Electoral District of Belfast & Warrnambool
- Peter Snodgrass - Electoral District of Kilmore, Kyneton & Seymour

²⁵ Victorian Government Gazette, October 8, 1851

²⁶ Commissioner Doveton was appointed the Gold commissioner for Ballarat 21 August 1851.

In early October Governor La Trobe visited the goldfield at Buninyong. In his Despatch 36 of 10 October 1851 to Sir Charles FitzRoy, Governor General in Sydney, (with a copy to Lord Grey the Colonial Secretary in London), La Trobe summed up his dilemmas. This information was of course not available to the general public or the press.

La Trobe begins by describing that on the Buninyong diggings there were ...²⁷

14 ... probably no less than 2500 persons, either working or making their preparatory arrangements, while the arrivals were computed at 100 daily; and one or two thousands were known to be on the roads from Melbourne and Geelong.

One party is known to have raised sixteen pounds weight at an early hour of the day, and to have secured thirty pounds weight in the days work. Many parties have shared day after day ten ounces²⁸ per man. I can testify to the fact of ten pounds weight and upwards being the produce of a single working during one of the days of my visit; and have no reason to believe that that this case was at that time an isolated one.

A rough calculation would lead me to believe, that on an average for a considerable time, the proceeds have been about 100 ounces, and upwards per diem....

Within the last three weeks, the towns of Melbourne and Geelong and their large suburbs have been in appearance almost emptied of many classes of their male inhabitants. The streets which for a week or ten days were crowded by drays loading with the outfit for the workings, are now seemingly deserted. Not have only the idlers to be found in every community, and day labourers in town and the adjacent country, shopmen artizans and merchants of every description, thrown up their employment and in most cases, leaving their employment and their wives and families to take care of themselves, run off to the workings - but responsible tradesmen, farmers, clerks of every grade, and not a few superior classes have followed: some, unable to withstand the mania and force of the stream; or because were really disposed to venture time and money on the chance, but others because they were, as employers of labour, left in the lurch and had no other alternative.

Cottages are deserted, houses to let, business is at a standstill, and even schools are closed. In some suburbs, not a man is left and the women are known for self protection to group together to keep house. The ships in the harbour are in great measure, deserted; and we hear of instances, where not only farmers but respectable agriculturalists have found that the only way, as those employed by them deserted,

²⁷ For ease of reading La Trobe's Despatches as written here contain paragraphing that may not have existed in the original.

²⁸ 10 troy ounces = 0.31 kilograms, 10 pounds = 3.73 kilograms. For gold weight conversions see www.thecalculatorsite.com/conversions/substances/gold.php

was to leave their farms, join them and form a band and go shares, but even Masters of Vessels, foreseeing the impossibility of maintaining any control over their men otherwise, have made up parties of men among them to do the same.

Fortunate the family, whatever its position, which retains its servants at any sacrifice...Drained of its labouring population the price of provisions in the towns is naturally on the increase...Both here and in Geelong all building and contract work, both public and private, almost without exception, are at a standstill....

15. In the country, Your Lordship will easily conceive that viewing the season that these circumstances have occurred, and particularly the pastoral interests at stake, - this is the commencement of the shearing season, and that shortly the harvest will call for labour, - great embarrassment and anxiety prevails. I...should have been glad, if it had been in any measure in the power of Government to alleviate it.

Some would wish to see the Government decline to sanction the issue of the Gold-licences, and to forbid the working at this season of the year, till the shearing and harvest are over. Your Lordship may readily conceive that even if really held expedient, it would be quite impossible to withstand such a general popular movement, created by such a cause, by any practicable measures whatsoever, - There is but one way, and that is, to let the current spend itself and meanwhile see that, as far as possible, it is kept within proper bounds.

16. At the same time...had (the new Colony) possessed the power of timely and firm legislation, which had been quite beyond its reach, and further, acquaintance with the views of the Home Government, a much more satisfactory system for the working of the Gold-fields, with an eye to the general interests, might have been set up from the very outset.

17. ...to the difficulties under which Government has laboured...It could not be expected...that the various classes of subordinate officers... would remain uninfluenced by the prevailing excitement... many such would consider themselves forced to entertain the question of abandonment of the public service. In fact at first, many constables, boatman, messengers and officers of this class at once threw up their employment, and at one time it became probable, that... not only the inferior grades, but also the clerks in the various public offices would be unable to withstand the prevailing mania, and would leave the head of Departments and superior officers alone at their posts.²⁹

²⁹ Gov. La Trobe Despatch 36: 10 October 1851, Sections 13,15,16,17

He then talked about the 'sacrifices' made to keep these employees at their posts: Governor Fitzroy in NSW augmenting the pay of certain classes of officers to keep them in employment when gold was found in that state and how he had found that to be necessary in Victoria too, for 'certain classes'.

19. *As a result, there has been minimal disruption in the public service.*

20. *...all Government works, depending in great measure on contractors and the labour employed by them, are at a standstill. I do not see the possibility of carrying on... until the reaction which must shortly set in, may place the required labour at the disposal of Government in reasonable terms.*

21. *In addition to the causes of embarrassment I have just stated, Your Lordship will understand that at a time when Government was called upon by these grave and unfortunate circumstances to adopt prompt measure their influence upon every department of labour interposed almost insuperable difficulties, and no supplies of accoutrements or services required for the Police could be secured without great exertion and much sacrifice.*

However, it is very satisfactory to me that by the energy and hearty cooperation of the Heads of Departments and superior classes of public officers of the branches of the Service, all has been done that would appear for the moment to have been practicable... and their exertions have been thus far rewarded by the ...maintenance of public order and the rights of the Crown and the uninterrupted discharge of the functions of Government.³⁰

And Governor La Trobe hoped that once the diggers had experienced the rigours of digging for gold many would discover...

...that they are physically unfitted for the labour and self-denial which it entails. Large numbers will find that they are equally morally unfitted for it, and will gladly return to the steady gains and comforts of a fixed sphere of labour and home.³¹

However, he notes:

There are workings now carried on at Mount Alexander about 70 miles north west of Melbourne, which are becoming so productive, that I have taken steps to enforce the regular issue of licences in that locality.³²

³⁰ Gov. La Trobe Despatch 36: 10 October 1851, Sections 19,20,21

³¹ Gov. La Trobe Despatch 36: 10 October 1851, Sections 21

³² Gov. La Trobe Despatch 36: 10 October 1851, Sections 21

So Mount Alexander was now on La Trobe's radar. And he hoped the gold rush would bring immigrants to ease the labour crisis...

25. That a considerable permanent advance in the cost of labour and its produce must be looked forward to until immigration to the Colony, which may not unnaturally be expected to be greatly accelerated by these astonishing discoveries...

It's an odd idea that gold would bring immigrants who would then become labourers. One wonders if La Trobe was simply being naïve or was he just trying to convince himself and his superiors in Sydney that all would be well?

26. There can be no doubt but that gold must stand as one of the most important product of the Colony, and that from this time forward a very considerable and valuable section of the population will be employed in realising it.

In this expectation and belief, I think it will be incumbent upon us to look the future boldly in the face and estimate the influence which it must exercise upon the community at large, and on our relations with the Mother Country, and be ready to adopt such measures as may not only exchange the present system for a more regular and satisfactory mode of developments, and secure to the Colony and the Mother Country the full measure of advantage which it may, under God's Providence, gather from it, but may obviate the costs which might appear otherwise inseparable from its presence, and its unequal distribution in the soil of a country³³

It is interesting to note that La Trobe saw change as necessary, and the need to '...exchange the present system for a more regular and satisfactory mode of developments...'. And the reason for doing so was to '...secure to the Colony and the Mother Country the full measure of advantage which it may...gather from it....(and) '...obviate the evils which might otherwise appear otherwise inseparable from its presence...'

Modern politicians so often promote themselves as champions of individual and family prosperity, but back in 1851 La Trobe's concern was for the State to gain the advantage. And the 'evils' he saw? He didn't say specifically, but one of the evils at least was the possibility of a society being turned upside down.

But in summary, this gem of a Despatch from October 1851 provides a rich insight into La Trobe's dilemmas:

- The gold rush was unstoppable.
- The Masters and Servants Act was unenforceable. Employees of all classes were walking away from their jobs and tramping to the gold fields.

³³ Gov. La Trobe Despatch 36: 10 October 1851

- As a result of the exodus, the machinery of government and the business activity of the city were coming to a standstill.
- Whilst the situation clearly needed decisive administration and action, it was not happening. La Trobe was the Lieutenant Governor of a brand new colony and as yet he did not have the necessary laws or government administration in place to deal with the situation.
- Nor could he get Legislative Council agreement to the use of funds from the General Revenue.

The situation called for decisive action but La Trobe, for whatever reasons, was not able to take such action.

Chapter 13

A Slow Fuse

The Gold Licence failed to stop the gold rush and failed to keep people in their jobs when there were just 2,500³⁴ gold seekers at Ballarat/Buninyong - and this was only 10% of the 25,000 who would soon be on Forest Creek. So La Trobe attempted to staunch the flow by bolstering the Masters and Servants Act with a directive to sailors and public servants, specifically...

Colonial Secretary's Office,
Melbourne, 8th October, 1851.

LICENSES TO DIG AND SEARCH FOR GOLD.

WITH reference to the notice of the 18th August last, His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor has been further pleased to direct that every exertion will be made by the Commissioners for the Gold Districts, to prevent seamen or other persons leaving their hired service, without permission of their employers, from obtaining licenses to search for gold, and further that any persons known or recognised to have been at a late date in the public service will not be allowed to hold a license to dig or search for gold, unless satisfactory proof be given that their leaving the service at this juncture, has not only been authorised, but is unattended with embarrassment to the Government.

By His Excellency's Command,
W. LONSDALE.

Victorian Government Gazette, October 15, 1851

"...to prevent seamen and other persons leaving their hired service, without permission of their employers, from obtaining a licence to search for gold, and further that any persons known or recognised to have been at a late date in the public service will not be allowed to hold a licence to dig or search for gold, unless satisfactory proof be given that their leaving of the service at this juncture, has not only been authorised, but is unattended with embarrassment to the Government."³⁵

Victorian Government Gazette, October 15, 1851

Today it takes a war for a government to dictate when and under what circumstances a person can leave their employment if the job is deemed essential to the national interest. However, in 1851, the interests of the government and the ordinary citizen were in conflict. Would La Trobe's measure work? The Argus

³⁴ Noted in La Trobe's despatch of 10 October, 1851

³⁵ Victorian Government Gazette, October 15, 1851

correspondent writing from Buninyong thought not - and he had many other ideas about how to administer the gold rush:

The general expectation both here and in New South Wales seems to be, that the late gold discoveries will induce the Legislature of each colony to frame measures that will set the working of our gold fields on a firmer, safer and more equitable footing than that miserable apology for management which now exists.

It appears from all accounts which reach me from the Bathurst and Buninyong Diggings that not one-half of the people employed at the mines pay the licence fee. Consequently, nearly two-thirds of them are engaged in a contraband trade, which must, in the ordinary course of things, and in a much less time perhaps than many imagine, lead to very serious results.

To prevent this, and to make the tax on gold digging bear as equally as possible on all engaged in this branch of industry, should be the aim of any measures brought forward bearing on this question. It matters not whether the money raised be termed a licence fee, an assessment, or a rent, it is still a tax on labour; and although the present amount of it is monstrously high, few reasonable people will deny that a moderate demand is absolutely necessary.

When we consider the number of people likely to be engaged as diggers, we must make allowance for a large proportion of them being very abandoned characters – men who would rather rob for gold than dig for it – men who would eagerly join in any dispute with the authorities, and do all that's laid in their power to subvert every kind of discipline and good order; these acting by themselves, or in unison with another and a better class, who, although inclined to submit to a just system of legislation, might have good grounds for making a stand against oppressive measures, would form a very formidable force to contend against, a force of which it will be much more prudent to prevent the formation, than to repel when once organised.

To meet such emergency the present system is bad; the fact is notorious that thousands "dodge the Commissioners;" the Government do not obtain one half the amount they are entitled to; the honest hard working digger pays £18 per annum, which the dishonest one evades; the licenced digger who obtains one ounce of gold per week, pays the same licence as he who obtains ten or twelve ounces per day, and there is no

standard value to guide him in disposing of it after he has got it.

To tax the gold instead of the digger would be more just; but at the same time a nominal licence fee should be imposed on each man – say £1 per annum – to act as a check against runaway servants, or men without characters, being allowed to work at the gold fields. And a penalty should be inflicted on every individual found working without having taken such licence out.

The amount of the tax on the metal is then to be settled. If we set it down at two shillings per ounce, and take an ounce as the average week's work of each digger for twelve months, the amount he will have to pay under this system will be £5/4s, added to the £1 for licence fee, making in all £6/4s instead of £18, as at present; and if we reckon the number of diggers at steady work to be 4,000, each averaging one ounce per week, the revenue per annum thus derived would be, for gold tax £20,800; for licence fees at £1 each £4,000; total £24,800: whereas at present, if we take the number of those who have taken out licences at 30s per month to be 1,350, we only get a revenue of £24,300.

But whether the revenue as at present raised, would be more or less than that under the new, is of little consequence when we know that the revenue arising from the tax on gold, would much more than meet any necessary expenses. For instance if we allow sixty troopers at £150 per annum each; 10 Commissioners and officers at £300 per annum each; 30 constables at £90 per annum each; and this force ought to be quite sufficient for the next six months at least, if placed under *proper* officers, we find that the cost of this force is only £14,700, which leaves a balance of revenue, unexpended, of upwards of £10,000.

The next, and perhaps most difficult, point to settle is to secure the payment of the gold tax; for unless some measure be devised to induce parties to pay it voluntarily, it is not probable they will be forced to it, and a large amount of smuggling will therefore be carried on.

The proposition for obtaining this object, is one which may be thought to act prejudicially against the private purchasers, but there is no reason that it should do so; besides, the question is one of very great and momentous importance, and the colony is very young, and the object we should have in view is "to protect the greatest good of the greatest number." It is a

question that would attract the serious attention of the most able men in much older countries than this.

Suppose, then, that the Government becomes the purchaser of all gold, at a certain price, and establishes at once an assay office for purifying it; and that it allowed no individual connected with the Government to purchase gold on its behalf, either directly or indirectly, except in such assay office.

Let the Government issue its debentures as payment, and let the price of gold be such that, while there will be no danger of the Government losing on its purchases, there will be a great inducement held out for every ounce of gold being deposited with it, instead of making the price such, or establishing regulations, that the diggers would conceive compulsory, for the mere sake of obtaining the tax of 2s per ounce; let them see that it is a very advantageous matter for them to get the Government price minus the 2s.

Such an arrangement, although it might prevent private purchasers buying so largely in the metropolitan towns as they at present do, would not check their trading in gold in other towns, or in the country, or even at the mines; on the contrary, it would rather prove a guide and a safeguard to them. It would not be necessary for the man who dug the gold to be the seller to the assay master; it might pass through twenty different hands before it reached his office; but before it could be profitably taken out of the colony, or converted into a circulating medium, it would require to pass through the Government furnace.

The eternal cry is a want of money to purchase. Some such measure as this seems the most fitted to meet the exigencies of the case, and allow what money there is in the colony to circulate freely for its more legitimate purposes.

A very great saving would also be affected to the colony, by depriving the absentee English capitalists of the enormous profits they drain from us through the local banks. Their financial policy has ever been a grinding one, never liberal. Whenever a crisis has happened in the colony, the banks³⁶ instead of affording relief at a time when assistance was much wanted, have invariably clapped on the screw of oppression, by raising their interests and discounts, and *vice versa*, as trade revived, and confidence was restored, they lowered them again.

³⁶ There were 3 banks in Melbourne, all privately owned – Bank of Australasia, Union Bank of Australia and Bank of NSW.

Several parties have returned from Ballarat since Saturday morning, a great many of whom are perfectly satisfied that they will be more profitably employed within sight of Corio Bay, than on the barren stringy bark ranges near Buninyong. Some few are still making fortunes: and another fraction are doing well; but the majority are decidedly of opinion that they ought not to have left their homes...

Police Office, Monday morning

Present – G. F Strachan, Esq.

Argus, Wednesday October 15, 1851, p 2

One interesting piece of information in this report is that most gold diggers were just making wages. But La Trobe, after visiting Buninyong himself, wrote in his Despatch of 10 October, about the wonderful riches being made as if it was normal. Today it's generally believed that most diggers were doing it tough. So it's fair to say that La Trobe's accounting was incorrect and inflated. However if La Trobe sincerely believed his figures then he may have believed that the diggers could pay the thirty shillings a month without hardship.

Meanwhile the slow burning Mount Alexander/Forest Creek rush was yet to explode. Curiously, it took six weeks from the publication of Worley's letter on 8 September for the Argus to make a second report on the new diggings - on 22 October when it reported that a party made £200 in a week:



The party of which I previously informed you, who had succeeded in obtaining £200 sterling in one week, have not been quite so fortunate since, but other parties, actuated by the fever proceeding from the diggings at Ballarat, left the township a week since for the purpose of prospecting in the vicinity of Mount Alexander, and have succeeded almost beyond credibility.

One party, composed of four men, obtained in eight days 72 ounces; two others obtained 16 ounces in three days and a half. Other parties, who left on the arrival of the news, in about twenty-four hours realised from 3 to 4 ounces. In fact it is impossible to give you any idea of the extent of these diggings, but from what information I can collect, there will be no cessation for several months.

Argus, Wednesday October 22, 1851, p 2

Well if that doesn't start a rush... ..

Meanwhile a certain Mr Crate was offering the government gratuitous financial advice, and seemed to know what he was talking about:

THE GOLD DISCOVERIES

To the Editor of the Argus

Sir, - In our present position of such prolific gold deposits being daily found, it becomes a matter of very serious consideration in our monetary system to prevent a depreciation in its value to the miner from want of capital. I would suggest that a medium be introduced: doubtless there are many plans; one simple in its nature should be adopted, by which the medium could be turned into cash after the crisis.

Let a Government Mint be established and gold cut into square or round blocks of one ounce, stamped 22 carats, value £3. Thus give the trader value for goods delivered and remuneration to the speculator. Having analysed some of the Ballarat gold, its properties are 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ carats of pure gold to 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ of silver and dross.

Let the miners take the gold to the Government office, and get the medium, subjecting them to the expense of the analysis and smelting into bars.

The introduction of some system must be obvious to all, more particularly those engaged in the traffic.

Scarce a month back, and gold sold for £3/3s per ounce; now in town £2/17s; and on the diggings £2/14s and some at £2 /10s. While advices lately received from some of the first Bullion Brokers, are: - Refined gold, £3/16/4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d; not refined £3/12/3d per ounce.

I am only persuaded, and that belief is borne out by others, we have not sufficient means without a medium to meet the needs thereof necessity must be in short time.

JOHN CRATE

Argus, Tuesday October 28, 1851, p 2

Along with advice from the business end of town, the Argus also editorialized on the dangers presented by the lowest classes in society:

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1851

THE GOLD FIELD

Again and again we urge upon the Government that they are trifling with a very serious subject in their treatment of the gold diggers and most particularly in the matter of the escort.

All accounts agree in stating, that the amount which arrives by that means is a mere fraction of the actual yield. And why is this? For no possible reason except the charge being inadequate to the service. A man will not pay one pound for bringing one hundred pounds seventy miles; and he ought not be asked to pay for it. The escort is inoperative to anything like its proper extent: and the consequence is that a stream of unprotected gold flows regularly along the main roads to the spots in which it seeks a market.

The papers report thousands of pounds worth being brought by single conveyances. The next thing will be that we shall have robbery, and probably murder, of the drivers, for the sake of so rich a plunder. The thing is easily done, and detection almost impossible. It is but a gun behind a log, and a life is sacrificed – a murder committed to signalise the impracticability of the Executive.

There is not a cargo of visitors from the adjacent prison-colony, which does not contain ten men who would think no more of doing such a deed than they do of killing a sheep for their supper.

To prevent this, the escort ought to be the channel for the transmission of nearly *all* the gold, and that it will never be, till the charge is so moderate, as to be inappreciable to the sender.

Our suggestion of a reduction to five shillings per hundred pounds has been met by a statement of the expenses incurred, which, involving a relay of fresh troopers four times upon the road, amounts to a larger sum than we imagined, or than we now conceive to be necessary.

We don't see why a suitable conveyance should not be provided, which should carry the guard as well as the gold; and then the weekly wages of five men, and the cost of transmission of the car, would be all that need be provided for, and we think that it would be amply covered by one-fourth the present charge upon the gold.

But even if some loss should accrue, it would make but a slight hole in the amount realised from the licence fees, and it would be well expended in doing away with the present very great liability to very serious crimes.

Argus, 30 October, 1851

As with other suggestions coming from the general public, these ideas seem sound. So would La Trobe countenance such measures?

On 30 October he wrote Despatch 45 to the Colonial Secretary, Earl Grey, in London. He began by acknowledging that, from his reading of Despatch 36 to Governor-General FitzRoy in Sydney, Earl Grey would understand how the discovery of gold at Ballarat had exercised a significant impact on the colony over the previous 8-10 weeks. He continued:

2. The interval which has since elapsed, brief as it is, has done much to calm the ferments then generally observable not because the field was exhausted but because hundreds have already gained the experience that they were morally and physically unfitted to the work - or having been disappointed of their expectations in the first instance and have neither the perseverance nor the means to continue the search, or meet the labour and self denial attendant upon it, naturally seek return to the more certain, thought less lucrative, occupations which they had temporarily abandoned.

3. The consequence is that business in town especially is beginning to revive. Many are still seen repairing to the Buninyong district, but probably a far greater number are in their return, and in that vicinity while Golden Point itself remains crowded and the works are still carried on with receipts, far larger numbers are scattered over the country, prosecuting the search with more or less profit, within a circle of ten or fifteen miles.³⁷

This view seems to be based on Buninyong/Ballararat alone³⁸ and was quite different to La Trobe's view in Despatch 36 of 20 days earlier. And although he mentioned it in the previous despatch, Mount Alexander does not seem to have come into his calculations.

In this Despatch of 30 October La Trobe related that 2,246 Licences had been issued in October, but that many more people were scattered in the country

"whom the officials have not been in a position to enrol amongst the duly authorised, and I find it will be absolutely requisite to strengthen the force in that quarter."³⁹

³⁷ Governor La Trobe, Despatch No. 45, to Earl Grey, 30 October, 1851

³⁸ The 'Golden Point' referred to being in the Ballarat vicinity and not to be confused with Golden Point which was later named as a locale on the Forest Creek rush.

³⁹ Ibid, part 4

Previously he was alarmed at 2,500 men on the Buninyong diggings. But in the month since his visit to Buninyong nearly that number of licences had been issued. So, if he was now feeling relatively sanguine about the slowdown in people going to the diggings as well as those returning, who did he think were taking out these licences? Men previously on the fields or new arrivals? And with the addition of those scattered about the fields, La Trobe probably had little real idea of how many diggers there were and how much gold they were finding.

He remarked that “...under the extraordinary circumstances which have brought the adventurers together (on the Ballarat field, that) good order prevails”...(and) ...”I am anxious to take such precautionary measures as are calculated to preserve it, and for the prompt repression of any infraction of the law or regulations”.⁴⁰

La Trobe continued, qualifying – or is it contradicting - his earlier assertion that things were quietening down, with a mention of the attraction of the new diggings which...

*I stated in my previous despatch, had been commenced near Mount Alexander in the Mount Macedon district, about 70 miles North West from Melbourne have within the past fortnight unexpectedly been attended by results which have drawn aside for the moment the public attention which had been almost wholly absorbed by Ballarat, and directed a strong current of adventurers in that direction, both from Melbourne and its vicinity and from the Buninyong ...*⁴¹

With his saying on the one hand that things were returning to normality and on the other that a new rush was beginning, the feeling is of a man wishing to present a tidy picture to his superiors. Additionally, given that the Despatch would take months to get to Earl Grey and months for a reply to get back, such reporting was not of any practical use but it was his duty to make the reports and he did so.

La Trobe continued, saying that he would shortly visit the Mount Alexander field to see for himself what it would require to maintain order and administer the regulations. There must have been a break in the writing of this despatch at this point because next La Trobe accounts for this journey to Forest Creek and wonderfully provides us with a most detailed account of Worley's find of gold on Dr. Barker's run and of the beginning of Forest Creek rush. His information came partly from an account handed to him by persons unknown and partly from his personal visit.

9. It appears that the first gold in this quarter, the search for which originated in a small piece combined with quartz being picked up by a shepherd on his folding ground, was discovered in a seam of compact quartz of about a foot in thickness lying between the strata of clay slate and mica slate.

⁴⁰ Ibid, part 6

⁴¹ Ibid, part 7

It was chiefly worked by one party who followed the seam with great labour into the face of the hill for ten or twenty yards, obtaining either from the quartz rock itself or from small deposits in the narrow layers of clay, which lay between it and the adjacent rock, in the course of a fortnights, gold to the value of three hundred pounds or more.

The report of the find becoming known, others joined in the search but with little success. Within the last fortnights however the discovery of gold in the bed of an adjoining creek, descending from the Mount Alexander Ranges and forming a junction with a branch of the East Loddon River,⁴² drew off the attention of all from the quartz seams.

8. The results of the work commenced here was found to be so considerable that there was an immediate rush to the spot, and although the certain intelligence could only have been heard in a few days previous, I found on my arrival on the ground, that there were upwards of 250 men on the spot. Arrangements having been made to carry out the regulations before I quitted on the following day, 170 Licences had been issued and the produce of a few hours labour in various instances was seen to be very considerable, as much as four or five pounds weight of gold in large sized grains, falling to the share of a party of two or three hands.

10. There can be no doubt but these workings will be of equal importance with those at Ballarat and that a very great influx of adventurers will take place before the lapse of many days. The gold is in all appearance equally pure with that of Ballarat, a large proportion of the grains weighing more pennyweights. No very large pieces had been found at a rough calculation at the time of my visit about fifty pounds weight might have been collected, during the few days which have elapsed since the discovery.

11. On my return to Melbourne I found the whole population again under renewed excitement in consequence of news from the workings. The majority of persons of all classes arriving from Van Diemens Land and Adelaide at the rate of some hundreds per week were directing their steps thither. I have ascertained also that large number of those who have met with indifferent success at Ballarat are disposed to make for Mount Alexander. The two localities are about forty miles apart.

⁴² Forest Creek

The following report in the Argus on 31 October – the day after La Trobe penned his Despatch - would certainly have added to the numbers who were “*disposed to make for Mount Alexander*”.

ARGUS
DOMESTIC INTELLIGENCE

MOUNT ALEXANDER – As an instance of the productiveness of these diggings, we may mention that a gentleman was at our office last night, who has procured 371 ounces⁴³ of gold in little more than a week. This quantity is to be sold by auction, this day, at the rooms of Messrs. Symons and Perry.

Argus, Friday 31 October 1851, p 3

The fuse lit by Worley on 8 September was about to detonate.

⁴³ 371 troy ounces = 11.54 kilograms

Chapter 14

November Disquiet

On 5 November the Argus published a more detailed account of the scene at Mount Alexander/ Forest Creek.

MOUNT ALEXANDER DIGGINGS.
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT)
November 1st, 1851.

HAVING an opportunity by private hand, I send you a hurried report of a little that is going on. I arrived here last night at six o'clock, and was highly amused with the novelty of the scene. Though gold is found more or less along the creek, the richest deposit appears to be at one point, and at this spot there are 122 tents pitched, containing as near as I could judge, 610 persons, independently of about 400 in the neighborhood.

The Commissioner's (Mr. Powlett's) tent stands on another hill opposite, and the whole scene is highly interesting. As soon as the evening meal is finished, which is at dusk, bugles are sounded, fiddles played, songs sung, guns fired, and this, coupled with the numerous bright fires on each side the creek, gives a stranger some hope of a good night's quarters.

About the centre of this canvass village, stand the stores of Messrs. Fentum and Elmiston and Mr. Tucker. The former appears to be supplied with every necessary article, and at very moderate rates, when carriage is taken into consideration; and if they continue as they have begun, they will have no cause to regret the accommodation they give the diggers.

As to gold, there is not the slightest doubt that it is here in abundance; but unless rain falls within ten days, the creek will be dry, and at the present time, I can only compare it to what parts of Flinders Lane used to be in 1845—not water, but mud. Still, good water is to be had within a mile, but it is only got for drinking and cooking...those who have worked here since gold was found, have been very fortunate; but I would not recommend any person to come here at present, as it is the general belief among the diggers that they will be compelled to leave off in another week.

This morning a party of five cleaned two pounds and a quarter weight by 12 o'clock, another of eight got 4 ounces, another of six one

pound; and many made from two to six ounces. I was even tempted to try my luck, and got a small portion after three washings in a tin dish, but I query much if it will pay for the washing of my clothes dirtied on the occasion, but as I do not understand shaking tin dishes or *saving* gold, I am not surprised that I lost some over the sides.

The Commissioner arrived here late last night, and commenced business this morning, at ten o'clock, in form, granting licences to all new comers. Those who had them before are to have theirs renewed on Monday next. Everything appears to be quiet – the people friendly with one another and with the authorities; the only complaint I have heard is that Mr Powlett insists on all and every person here taking out a licence. This the diggers do not fancy. They think the cooks should be allowed to prepare grub without paying for it. The bearer being mounted I must close until mail day.

P.S – A party has just come into the tent, who, I am informed, is one of five, who has cleared fourteen pounds of pure gold this week. I think he is connected with the cabs in Collins St. There have been at least 300 persons arrived here since nine o'clock this morning, and hundreds more are coming across the country from Ballarat.

Argus, Wednesday November 5, 1851, p 2

Here again were the common extremes: some were packing for home whilst 300 had arrived that day; some were measuring their gold by the pound whilst the inept digger – such as the *Argus* correspondent – could hardly pan a sliver of dust.

And it's curious that it took almost two months after Worley's letter on 8 September (see page 33) for 1,000 diggers to get to Forest Creek. Yet within another month there would be 25,000 diggers on the spot. And as yet there was no report of a thirty shillings licence causing angst, other than opposition to the charge being applied to cooks, tent keepers and such.

Two days later the *Argus* correspondent had his bearings a little better, and offered a more detailed description of the field:

MOUNT ALEXANDER DIGGINGS
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT)

November 3rd, 1851

My last was a hurried account of what I saw after a visit of a few hours, consequently it did not contain much interesting matter. Since that time I have been both up and down the creek, and having time on hand, will make you acquainted with what information I have gleaned.

The diggings are not on Mount Alexander, as generally supposed, but in a gully known as Forest Creek, and situated about seven miles from

the Mount, and twenty miles from the Loddon, which receives the waters from this creek. It is generally supposed that the gully contains gold the whole distance, and tents are being pitched for four miles lower down than the Commissioner's.

The sides of the ranges are covered with white quartz with veins of slate running from mountain to mountain forming bars at the bottom, on which then gold appears to have lodged – in some instances from twelve to seventeen feet below the surface, and in others, within two feet.

The work here I cannot call laborious. The first day or two will blister hands and make the back ache. The nights are cold and uncomfortable, and those who have been used to a dining room, or stationed behind a desk, would think it "*damned disagreeable*" and laborious; but I can assure you that carpenters, bricklayers and such trades, work much harder in Melbourne than here. Even the pressmen of your office may envy the life of a digger; for the latter have their night's rest; and I unhesitatingly assert, that had I a hut here, and compelled to work at the same wages, I should prefer being here.

Still, the idea to some of stooping so much and making themselves so *very dirty*, has induced them, after laying in provisions, tools and walking the whole distance (the hardest work to my mind of any) to sell quietly off everything, and decamp, to tell the awful sufferings and ill luck they have experienced....

...Since Saturday morning, the scene has greatly changed – then a tent would be seen here and there, but now they are becoming inconveniently crowded, and the confounded bull and mastiff dogs chained to tents and drays, compel one to have the eyes of an Argus, to escape feeling their teeth.

On Saturday, dozens were arriving at a time; on Sunday hundreds; Monday and Tuesday, one continuous line of new arrivals. Your Melbourne departures are but trifling compared to the arrivals from Ballarat and the surrounding country. Kyneton has but two men in it, and Mr Edmiston has allowed his carter to supply the deserted females of that village with water, otherwise they must go without.

Under the heads of deaths, marriages and accidents I have nothing to date; but under *births*, a Mrs – brought a little daughter to have a peep at the gold, and is doing well. There are about twenty women on the creek. Gold continues to be found in abundance – two, three or four pounds per day seem common among the *luckies*; but water is getting scarce. We had a few slight showers on Sunday morning, but nothing to affect the creek; and though thousands are arriving, and thousands

more on the road, the more experienced are quietly retreating to the Loddon, where report states that gold has been found in abundance. I was glad to find that the Commissioner has strictly forbidden any work being done on Sunday; and indeed, the diggers seem perfectly satisfied to make it a day of rest. The Rev Mr Sullivan, of Kyneton, visited the ground, and preached an excellent and appropriate sermon, selecting for his text, 16th chap. Mat., 26th verse: "For what profiteth a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." &c. The service was but thinly attended, owing in a great measure to most of the parties on the ground not knowing what hour service was to commence. I think this might be avoided, if some person was to sound a bugle within a half hour of the time, or make some other signal.

As your readers might like to know how provisions, etc, are selling, I will give you a short price current; - Black tea, 3s per pound; green, 2s 6d per do; sugar, 5d per lb; flour 5d per do; or £40 per ton; potatoes, 3d per pound; coffee, 2s per do; raisins 1s per do; pickles, pints 1s 6d per bottle. Herrings 4d each; tin dippers 3s each; pans 7s 6d and 12s each, spades 10s per do; cradles £4 per do; axes 12s; tobacco 8s per pound; cheese 2s per do; bacon 1s 6d per do, spiced beef 1s per do, and everything in like proportion; but the golden days for these articles are nearly over now, for the greater part of new arrivals are well supplied with stores, but goods even at this rate have been eagerly sought after without grumbling, and I may say that double that price might have been obtained if asked.

I have just heard that new diggings have been discovered about two miles from here; they lie in the ranges, and the gold is found in quartz. I shall go tomorrow to see them. You will oblige by making arrangements with the Kyneton mailman to bring up the papers.

Argus, Saturday 8 November 1851, p 2

In the same edition the Argus published the first serious objection to the Gold Licence from a digger:

JUSTICE AT THE DIGGINGS.
To the Editor of the Argus.

Sir, - No apology is needed, I am sure, for trespassing on your valuable paper in the cause of justice: the subject of the present communication I consider as such.

In the first place, from its being an imposition on the public, and, secondly, showing as it does the grasping propensity which our new Lieutenant-Governor and his lacqueys⁴⁴ intend to pursue towards us, and verifying the old adage, that “forthcoming events cast their shadows before.”

Perhaps, sir, you are aware that all parties intending to dig are required to pay the Government 30s per month each man, previous to so doing. My case, together with many others, was this: We started four days since for the diggings, and for two days after our arrival we were prospecting, and preparing our ground for work, so that it was not until the third day that we could really obtain any return for our outlay and labour, allowing us to hit upon a vein the moment we commenced.

However, notwithstanding this, we were compelled to pay 30s for our licence for the month of October; or rather 30s for eight days work. Now, Mr Editor, this is rather too bad. We never would object to have paid 15s for the few days left of the month, which of itself would have been more than the average, but I certainly think that 30s was too much:...

So far no one had objected to the tax per se. The opposition was based on the Government's inability to frame laws that worked well, and in the unfairness of the administration of the tax. A further trouble was that whilst the Government asked a fee from each digger, they were not set up to collect it.

The digger continued:

...still sir, in the face of this one imposition we are saddled with another still more unjust, and one which honour and justice cannot sanction, viz for our few days of work for which we paid 30s we are actually compelled to pay a royalty (*ie a fine for mining without a Licence*) of £5 upon whatever gold may have been found!!!

This I look upon as a gross injustice, because we were willing to take out our licence, but the Commissioner was not there, nor was anyone deputed by him, and surely neither his Excellency, the Lieutenant Governor, nor the Commissioner, Mr Powlett, could expect men, after arriving at the diggings, to return some 40 miles to Mr Powlett's house, running the chance of his being at home, for the purpose of getting a licence, more especially as he was expected daily on the ground: and again, I should think that neither Mr La Trobe or the Commissioner could expect men to remain mere idle spectators, when scores were picking up gold by ounces, merely because they had not a licence or that the Commissioner was not at his post to grant them one.

⁴⁴ Servile followers

I trust Sir that you will take our cause in hand, and prevent us from being ridden too severely by Government.
Apologising for thus trespassing on your valuable time,
I remain Sir
Your most obedient servant
A LOVER OF JUSTICE
Forest Creek Diggings
25th October 1851

Argus, Monday 10 November 1851, p 4

This letter took a long time to come to press. Powlett the Gold Commissioner had arrived on October 31, six days after the above letter was penned and when, at a guess, there were not yet any troopers on Forest Creek. It appears to be the first time an actual digger (that is, not a reporter) had publicly raised a voice in the *Argus* against the Gold Licence. And it's interesting to note that letters in the papers were anonymous, and that this digger was very literate – not one of the lower classes that La Trobe dreaded.

The next day in the *Argus* another correspondent who had travelled to Forest Creek from Ballarat, reported that diggers were not making money, and also that there was dissatisfaction with the Gold Licence – which is natural if you were not making much. He continued that “*after visiting Ballarat...*”

... the number of persons does not appear great. I should judge them to amount to 1200. Highly exaggerated accounts had reached the other diggings, and numbers flocked there, but the very unpopular regulation of demanding from every individual on the ground a licence fee of 30s per month, has today driven hundreds away. Most having been unsuccessful at Ballarat, had not the money: while many parties thought 30s each was too much to add to the risk of their expenses, for all gold seekers have ever found their new calling to be of the most speculative character, independent of its hardships and privations: were it not for the name of the thing, a convict on the roads is better off than a gold digger, and all this perhaps at an absolute loss of money.

Argus, Tuesday 11 November 1851, p 2

So, according to this account, with “*hundreds*” turning away because of the Gold Licence, the Government’s aim of deterring people from leaving their allotted station and heading for the gold was working. But as usual the reports were very checkered: some made a fortune, others made little, there were hundreds a day arriving on Forest Creek, there were hundreds leaving because of the difficulties - which included their lack of physical prowess to dig and the economics of the Gold Licence – whilst for others the digging was easy. So there was no one simple description of what was going on. It was a varied and mixed scene.

Also on the day of this last Argus report, Symons & Perry of the Commercial Sales Room in Bourke St. reported the returns from Gold Sale held at their rooms:

Mt Alexander £196-17-0

Ballarat £568-1-0

Turon (NSW) £218-6-6

And they reported also that the purchasers preferred Mt Alexander gold to the others.⁴⁵

But this Argus report also indicated that Mt Alexander was still a junior field in terms of gold produced.

FOREST CREEK, MOUNT ALEXANDER.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

November 9, 1851.

Sir, - In my former communication I informed you that a few days would be sufficient to dry up the creek, and such is the case this day, for a quarter of a mile above and below my tent, the creek is dry, and the diggers are now compelled to cart the earth to water some half a mile off, and those who are not provided with a cart are carrying it in tin dishes on their heads, or shouldering it in bags to wash out the wished for treasure.

Still, with all these inconveniences many are doing very well. Last evening a party of five sold to Messrs. Fentum and Edmiston, in my presence, 47 ounces 17 pennyweights 18 grains⁴⁶ the return for 8 days work. Another party of four dug and washed 20 ounces 4 pennyweights on Saturday, and this same party has averaged for the week 13 ounces per day. On Friday, a party I am acquainted with, obtained 2 lbs 4 ounces by twelve o'clock, but all are very averse to having their names brought forward. There are many making 3, 4, and 5 ounces per day, but there are far more doing literally nothing, and hundreds are leaving the ground for other diggings on Barker's Creek, and other places...

Argus, Wednesday 12 November 1851, p 2

If you walked directly to Barker's Creek from the epicenter of the Forest Creek diggings (today at the corner of Golden Point Road and the Pyrenees Highway, where the Monster Meeting site is located) the distance would be four kilometres at most. So the description of Barker's Creek as another rush comes as a surprise - a surprise that the diggers were working in such a closely defined small area. Barker's Creek is also where Worley discovered his gold, so it took the diggers quite some time to get there - presumably having been waylaid by the nuggets they found on the way.

The Argus correspondent continued:

⁴⁵ The Argus, Wednesday November 12, 1851, page 2

⁴⁶ 1 pennyweight is a unit of mass equal to 24 grains or 1.55 grams.

Yesterday some six or seven hundred persons arrived from Melbourne, and I am given to understand that a general break-up took place at Ballarat on Thursday last, all wending their way to these diggings. Some regret having left them, for they state they could have done much better there had they remained. One thing is certain, hundreds will return in worse circumstances than when they started - hundreds will make wages and a few an independence. It is remarkable to see the success some meet with, while others who slave and toil from day to day, sinking holes and prying into crevices, get not sufficient gold to pay their daily expenses.

The Creek for ten miles down, as far as Mr. Campbell's station, is lined with tents, diggers, and dangerous holes. The new Golden Point, four miles below the Commissioner's⁴⁷, contains about 1000 persons, Barker's Creek about 200, and altogether I should judge that there are at least 8000 persons on the two creeks, independent of those gone to the Loddon.

I am happy to say that, up to the present time, no accidents have occurred. Parties are upon the most friendly footing, and, with the exception of a case I sent you in my last, the Commissioner has nothing to do but grant licences.

Mr. Sturt is still here, assisted by Captain Dana, and whatever the Geelong papers may say about the latter gentleman's conduct at Ballarat, I can assure you that here he treats every one with civility, and will answer all and every question put to him with an affability of manner I did not expect, after reading the Advertiser.⁴⁸

Licences are being granted daily, from ten till four, and notices are posted to the effect that gold will be received for the escort daily within the same hours. Parties still continue to be fined for digging without licence, and many think it hard that they are compelled to take out a licence before they find the gold.

When I first arrived, there were only two stores on the ground; now, handkerchiefs and flags are flying in all directions, as signals that such are stores, licenced hawkers, &c &c.

Since my arrival I have been repeatedly and earnestly solicited to open a post office between here and Kyneton. Hundreds of letters would go down to Melbourne, if a conveyance could be obtained. I have spoken to Captain Dana upon the subject, and I expect to receive an answer today. I do not think the post office authorities will

⁴⁷ This indicates that the Commissioner's tent was originally somewhere near the location of the present Golden Point Reservoir. The word 'new' here probably distinguishes this Golden Point from a previous Golden Point in Ballarat/Buninyong.

⁴⁸ The Geelong Advertiser

object to it, as it will tend to increase the revenue without incurring expense. If they do, let them commence one themselves; but let them do it at once; for if they take the same time to decide upon this, as they do upon many other affairs, the diggers will be gone.

Argus, Wednesday November 12, 1851, p 2

The next day, 13 November, the Argus reported that the Commissioner's tent had moved four miles downstream (estimated to be near where the Monster Meeting was held) and that the police numbers were low; not enough to patrol the fields at night and too few to distribute over the extent of the entire goldfields.⁴⁹

The Argus now reported daily from the 'Mount Alexander Diggings', and so whilst the actual diggings at Forest Creek and the town of current Castlemaine were quite a way from Mt Alexander, the name had stuck and still remains - today this area is called the Shire of Mt Alexander.⁵⁰

The reports were typical of most gold rushes and other get quick rich schemes - some were making a fortune and many more, as the Argus puts it, "*not making their salt*".⁵¹ Making a rough guess, the Argus estimated that in the three weeks since the first licences were issued on 21 September, the 10,000 or so diggers occupied on the various fields had unearthed about 25,000 ounces of gold,⁵² to a value of £200,000. This now rivalled the total value of NSW gold shipped from Sydney - £218,910.⁵³

Often enough the Governor, La Trobe, remarked that this gold was God-given. However the Argus, in its editorial, handed out the medals for these riches, not to God, but instead sought to "*...congratulate our fellow colonists on our own endowment, in that way, being quite as ample as is good for us...*"⁵⁴

FOREST CREEK DIGGINGS, MOUNT ALEXANDER.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

Argus, November 19, 1851.

I mentioned in my last that we had been visited by heavy showers for two or three days, since which we have had very heavy rains, causing much damage to the holes on the creek. Last night it poured without intermission for four hours, and this morning the creek was running some six feet deep tearing away the earthen partitions of the various holes, sweeping cradles, tin dishes, &c. down the creek, and causing hundreds to suspend their labour for some time to come. This flood, will cause considerable loss to many who were working on the creek, as it will be some time before the water will fall, and afterwards, much labour to empty the holes, some of which are eight feet square and sixteen or eighteen feet deep.

⁴⁹ The Argus, Thursday November 13, 1851, page 2

⁵⁰ The Shire of Mt Alexander was created by the amalgamation of several smaller municipalities in the area in 1995.

⁵¹ The Argus, Friday November 14, 1851, page 3

⁵² Equal to 777.56 kilograms

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ The Argus, Wednesday November 19, 1851, page 2

There has been extraordinary success within these two days among the surface diggers, one in particular realised 4 lbs weight before dinner, and hundreds are making from £3 to £30 per day.

The tents along the creek are still increasing, and one would almost wonder where so many human beings came from. In a ride of eight miles down the creek, I am satisfied I passed 10,000 souls, men, women, and children indiscriminately working for the ore, one lad of 14 years of age, has 21 oz of gold for his share for 24 days, and that too for minding a tent and tin dish washing.

Another field has been discovered eight miles nearer Melbourne, where they are doing wonders.⁵⁵ In fact the whole country for miles round contains the precious metal. Horse tether rope, and hobble stealing, is becoming quite fashionable. No less than eighteen persons complain of having their horses taken; and numerous cases of hobble pilfering occur.

There was a serious disturbance down the creek this morning. Some dispute took place between two men as to their boundaries - different parties took different sides - from words it came to blows; and fists, sticks, and stones were used without mercy. One unfortunate was so severely handled, that his life is despaired of. As soon as the authorities were made acquainted with the disturbance, four troopers and an officer were marched off under arms, but they arrived too late, one man was taken prisoner, who will most likely be marched off to Melbourne.

I sincerely hope Mr. Sturt will carry his power to its extent, for if a check is not put to this barbarous way of settling disputes, this hitherto agreeable spot will be a hell-upon earth; severity must be used to check it in its bud, or no man's life will be safe. I am not averse to a man standing up for his rights, but when it comes to sticks and stones, no man's crown is safe.

The Escort will leave here on Tuesday next, and I am informed is likely to take a much larger amount to Melbourne than the first. Large quantities of gold are disposed of on the ground, several mercantile houses in Melbourne have agents here, who are buying - up at £2 15s per oz, and had I the cash I could make more by buying than digging. Should anything occur before next mail, I will make you acquainted with it.

Argus, Wednesday November 19, 1851, p 4

This report is certainly less laconic than previous reports. The number of diggers was increasing, with more gold fields in the general area, including Fryerstown. As for the

⁵⁵ Probably Fryers Creek/Fryerstown

inevitable clashes over claims, there were not many police at hand – here a mere four marched off to keep the peace. So it's probably fair to say that the authorities were still behind the pace when it came to administering the Mt Alexander gold rush. Which means they couldn't be too mean and nasty about collecting the Gold Licence - not yet.

But in Ballarat the Licence issue was starting to bite:

**ARGUS
BALLARAT
(FROM A CORRESPONDENT)**

Golden Point 14th November, 1851⁵⁶

Mr Armstrong, one of the Commissioners for the issuing of licences "to dig, search for and remove gold", has been engaged all day, accompanied by two troopers each with a pistol in his hand, and a black fellow, in going from tent to tent and enforcing the people to take out a gold licence, whether diggers or not, including butchers, bakers, storekeepers and others who are not diggers and have no inclination to dig, but to carry on their own proper and legitimate business of supplying the diggers and the residents of the ground with the necessaries of life, and this with the threat that, if not complied with, the tent would be cut down.

It is no doubt right and proper that the diggers should take out a licence, and this for many reasons which for the present it is not necessary to enumerate; but it has suggested itself to the Storekeepers that they should not be compelled to take out a licence.

For, in the first place, the land on which their tents are erected is already licenced by Mr Yuille of the Government, and it is an absurdity to suppose that the Government having so done, can licence it again to four, five or ten thousand additional occupants: nor can the commission of Mr Armstrong give him such a power, that power resides in the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the district and he cannot move in the matter unless set in motion by Mr Yuille.

I have not heard that any tents have actually been cut down by the Commissioners, perhaps because accompanied by such an imposing force (black and white) they fear the threat will be performed, although it strikes me that the Commissioners would not venture on so arbitrary and illegal a step.

This proceeding, as far as the storekeepers are concerned, is a very bad policy on the part of the Government, and the Governor has

⁵⁶ There are two Golden Points – one on Forest Creek and one at Ballarat.

been but ill advised in the matter, for not only is the measure arbitrary and illegal, but it carries with it an evident absurdity and something as counting very much like extortion.

It is arbitrary to compel a person to do what he does not wish to do, and it is arbitrary to compel a man to take out a licence to dig for gold who has no interest to do what the law cannot compel him to do; it is illegal because the Government are letting the land to thousands of persons, when it is already let to another for a stated time, and for a pecuniary consideration. It is absurd because the licence (when forced upon a storekeeper) is not to pitch a tent and occupy a piece of ground but to dig, search for and remove gold, and this every month: it is extortion because it compels a person to take out a licence to do a thing he never intends to do.

The Government should on the contrary, encourage as far as it can, the settlement of storekeepers, for if they did not come and venture their capital in a most precarious market, and subject to many additional risks, besides the risks in ordinary trading, it would be impossible for diggers to live on the ground; for most of them are people of such small means that they have arrived without even a pound of flour, and possessing but a few shillings to enable them to buy food till fortune favours their exertions and they find gold sufficient to supply their wants by either selling it for money or exchanging it for the necessities of life.

And yet it is out of these men's earnings and labour that the tremendous revenue of some thousands of pounds sterling per month, for the use of about twenty acres of land (for that is what 'the Point' is estimated at) is raised, the risk is fearful because the carriage of the gold is heavy beyond all our perceived notions, the difficulty of finding competent and trustworthy assistants, the high rate of wages when they have to be paid, the insecurity from robbery and the weather, which the paltry shelter of a tent effects, the fluctuating state of such a market occasioned by the movable nature of the population, and the frequency with which today becomes a dead loss tomorrow; the privations and the toil and anxiety of the life itself all that would tend (if any tax is imposed on them – the butchers, bakers and other traders) to drive them from the market, and then what would be the result?

Either that the Government would lose *all* its revenue derivable from the goldfields, or almost all the flocks, herds, houses and stores of the settlers in the neighbourhood would be sacked by a horde of lawless ruffians.

This impossible course has been occasioned by the want of previous arrangement, so as to compel all diggers to take out a licence. Had previous arrangements been made, and had the Government acted with wisdom and dignity on the first discovery of these goldfields and prohibited people from digging till the land had been surveyed and planned and marked out and numbered, every person would have been compelled to take out a licence before he could venture to dig at all, and many advantages would have accrued to the diggers and the people.

The selling of grog on the sly has been one cause, perhaps of taxing each tent in the way I complain of; but had such a course as I suggested been adopted, every man on the ground would have known and these pests would have found as many difficulties to encounter in the exercise of their nefarious trade, that they would have been but few in number, and even rooted out; but the Government because it has been supine, wanting in foresight and energy, and running an indecent race for money with the best of gambling speculators that crowd upon the goldfields, should not turn on the respectable trader and extort money from him...

...Mr Editor, are the matters which I have above stated, the true reasons solely, or is there another at the back of them all? What would be the result to the Commissioners themselves – if while folks are migrating to Mount Alexander and other places, the Commissioners failed to return any licence money to the Government? Would you have any objection to answer these two questions and state how the law stands as to the licences for the tents? It is hard that a man should be compelled to buy a horse if he does not want it. Suppose some swaggering fellow came to you and said, "I have a horse to sell; you must buy him; if you do not, I'll compel you". The cases are similar – "I have my licence book, you must take out a licence for this tent, or I shall pull it down." Could not the Commissioner be proceeded against for extortion? If he ventures on this extreme step cannot an action be maintained against him for trespass?

If any part of my imaginings should have any foundation, would it not be better that the Government at once guaranteed their salaries to the Commissioners? Besides the hardship of the case in all the features I have just given, it comes with the usual bad grace of an *ex post facto* law for the licence fee is enacted for the whole month, whereas it is not taken (compulsory as it is) till the day before the 15th, when tomorrow would have required according to the practice prevailing with the diggers, only half the fees or 15 shillings; one gentleman I have just heard has paid his money under protest.

I would before I conclude recommend the storekeepers to petition the Government on this subject, with a view to have their money restored and full liberty accorded to them to erect tents, and carry on business without licence for the future. If this is not done, some John Hampden⁵⁷ will arise in the cause of freedom and resist the imposition of an illegal and oppressive tax.

This gold crisis is one in which the Governor may exhibit his tact for government, and skill in managing a difficult subject (without reference to whether they hold offices under Government or not) call to his Council, the ablest men he can find within his administration: and all good supporters of a Constitutional Government will respond to the call with alacrity and zeal; for the well-being of the country is every man's affair, and this Gold question will, unless sagacious measures are adopted, unhinge society, and as is always the case when that happens, the blame falls on the shoulders of the rulers.

J. P

Argus, Friday November 21, 1851, p 2

This is the first harbinger of what was to come, and the sternest warning so far regarding possible outcomes of the Government's "*illegal and oppressive*" Gold Licence and its administration. It added to a gathering body of opinion, all reasonably argued, against the Gold Licence as it stood. These views came from people who appear to have some experience in the field. The word 'crisis' had crept into the description of the gold rush and it was becoming generally accepted that this event had the proportions of an emergency.

In the three months since the rush had begun, La Trobe had instituted a Gold Licence, converted Land Commissioners into Gold Commissioners and set the limited number of police at his disposal to collect the licence fees and protect gold shipments. However, with the Mt Alexander/Forest Creek rush in full swing and unstoppable, the Government was left to also plug the holes in its previous regulations, and shore up the interests of the squatters who were now in the Legislative Council.

To meet the squatters' demands, on 17 November La Trobe issued a regulation that no one was to dig for gold within half a mile of a homestead, providing the squatters with some protection against the influx of the gold miners.⁵⁸

Apart from this, La Trobe took very little effective action. In the context of this 'emergency', as well as having a less than cooperative Legislative Council, La Trobe was unwilling and unable to take action that dealt with the realities of the gold rush – such as had never been anticipated in the constitutional and administrative framework

⁵⁷ John Hampden (1595-1643) was of English aristocracy, and many regard him as the leading figure in the English Revolution. He is credited as being 'the noblest type of the parliamentary opposition, sword at his side, ready to defend Parliament's rights and privileges by any means necessary.'

⁵⁸ The squatters' wanted the right to purchase acreage around their homesteads as part of their leasehold agreements.

of the new colony. The police force was decimated as police officers left for the gold fields, prices soared and horses, forage and equipment were hard to get. One thing for sure, to view the gold rush from the window of La Trobe's office could well be the most interesting perspective on the whole affair.

One problem that La Trobe had in collecting the gold licence fees from diggers was a lack of police. The following is one of few mentions of police at Forest Creek, there being approximately 15 on the field.

MOUNT ALEXANDER.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

There is no news stirring with the exception of another robbery, supposed to be by the weaker sex. I send you the advertisement, there was 16 oz. of gold taken at the same time, a tarpaulin was stolen from Fentum's store yesterday afternoon, and several petty thefts. There appears to be no scarcity of liquor, from the men reeling about occasionally, but they are to be seen most near the stores...

...Captain Dana and nine troopers left yesterday with gold, (what amount I could not ascertain,) but I hear that it was too heavy for a couple of horses, and was, consequently, conveyed in a spring cart.

Gold still continues to be found in abundance: I weighed last evening, three pounds four ounces, the receipt of the day's work, for five men. Many are still doing well; others the reverse. The diggers are spreading daily, and they will be a long time occupied. To show the necessity of a Post-office, I take down to-day 402 letters to post at Kyneton.

Three troopers have just passed with a prisoner; he had on his person £120 in notes, a stolen cheque for £42 odd, and a quantity of liquor was found buried under his tent. Two other parties have been arrested for sly grog selling, and a plant (as they call it) was found by Corporal Strong, this morning, at the new diggings. This speaks well for the activity of the police, very few of whom are left.

Argus, Saturday November 22, 1851, p 2

Meanwhile, Mount Alexander continued to provide riches for some and heartache for others:

FOREST CREEK DIGGINGS, MOUNT ALEXANDER

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT)

Since my last, the escort has not returned, and there are many very uneasy on account of their non-arrival. A large quantity of gold is now lying at the Commissioner's ready for transit., Symons and Perry

having lodged 600 ounces, and that is only a small part.

Gold still continues to be found in large quantities. Three parties have obtained in nineteen days 360 ounces; another of five got yesterday 2½ lbs; another party of four, weighed at Messrs Fentum and Edmiston's tent, 11 ounces at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, being the proceeds of their work for that part of the day; a party of three, who had been to Ballarat, and lost everything, obtained in fourteen days £1,000 worth, and sold their claim yesterday for £20 pounds.

Hundreds of other instances could be quoted of surprising success; but, again, there are a great many unsuccessful. Men can be engaged on the ground for £1 per week and rations; but they are among those who have sunk many holes and obtained nothing but emery. Disheartened and penniless, they are glad to do anything for a subsistence. ...

Argus, Saturday November 22, 1851, p 2

On 19 November 1851, a mere 72 days after Worley's letter had been published in the *Argus*, the "*Township of Castlemaine*" on Forest Creek was declared as a place for holding a Court of Petty Sessions.⁵⁹ And so, with a Governor's proclamation and a tent set aside for adjudicating on such matters as the Gold Licence, the idea of Castlemaine began.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, with many of the 15 or so police on the Forest Creek field occupied with the gold escort and sly-groggers, there were barely any remaining to attend to Licences. So at a guess there was little activity to enforce the Licences, although we don't know how many diggers were paying willingly and how many were not.

The crusade against sly-grog sellers is still actively carried on by the police. Another party has been detected and conveyed a prisoner to Kyneton. The force is entirely insufficient. I believe it musters about fourteen or fifteen men. The escort takes six, and two prisoners to Kyneton took six more, leaving but two or three to keep order and guard the peace among twelve thousand souls, covering a space of some twenty miles. The nearest police are four miles from my tent, and eight and ten from others; whereas two police and a corporal and sergeant ought to be stationed within every mile.

It is true that, with but one exception, their presence had not been required. Still no one knows how soon they may be; and if we pay a licence, our lives and property ought to be protected, and that efficiently.

Hundreds are still arriving from various parts, and many are returning,

⁵⁹ Victorian Government Gazette, 26 November 1851

⁶⁰ The actual boundaries were not established until August 1853.

some with full pockets, and a few almost penniless. I purchased on the road last Thursday half an ounce of gold, all that a poor fellow had to pay his way to Melbourne.

Argus, Wednesday November 26, 1851, p 2

It is interesting that the Argus estimated that 12,000 were on the field. With 22 days to go to the Monster Meeting on 15 December, that left about 13,000 new diggers to arrive in the next three weeks – if the Argus estimates were correct. And as all who have investigated the gold rush acknowledge, it was very difficult to estimate numbers.

In the following edition the Argus editorialised that on 26 November the escort had brought 10,128 ounces of gold from Mount Alexander, and had to leave about 6,000 ounces⁶¹ behind that they could not carry. (On the same day there were 1,678⁶² ounces from Ballarat.) And the Editor claimed that if anything they were underestimating so as to guard against the *“prospects of hundreds of industrious persons, by lighting up a golden fever in their blood, which nothing short of absolute ruin might ever allay”*.⁶³

In the 1850s gold rush, the first of the Australian boom and bust cycles,⁶⁴ the immediate losers were the employer and squatter landholding class, who could not obtain labour because workers were going to the gold fields. Hence the Gold Licence to keep people in their allotted place – and job - in society. And in the 1850s there were smaller booms and busts amongst individuals and handfuls of men, with some fellows becoming rich and others finding nothing. Unlike the mining booms of today which can be more easily predicted, the gold rush of the 1850s was very hit and miss, all happening on new ground that no one had properly explored or even seen before, and it was a wild, unpredictable lottery. But, as the word ‘boom’ implies, there’s got to be a ‘bust’.

FOREST CREEK DIGGINGS, MOUNT ALEXANDER
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT)
November 27th

The reports of large quantities of gold being found, have become so frequent, that it is now looked upon as quite common: but I think the present will throw all former ones in the shade.

⁶¹ 10,128 ounces = 315.02 kilograms. 6,000 ounces = 186.6 kilograms

⁶² 1,678 ounces = 52.2 kilograms

⁶³ The Argus, Thursday November 27, 1851, page 2

⁶⁴ A reflection: Australia seems to be blessed and cursed with boom and bust cycles in mining. In the iron ore boom of the first decade of the twenty-first century big mining companies reaped mega-profits whilst ordinary people in mining areas could not afford housing because, with highly paid mining employees taking the rental properties, rents rose to astronomical prices, and manufacturers struggled to export goods because the mining success had driven up the Australian dollar.

Yesterday a lump of pure, clean gold free from quartz, was obtained from the surface near Messrs. Fentum and Edmiston's new tent, weighing 60 ounces. A party of four obtained on Monday £1,200 worth before night; and numerous instances occur of one, two, three and four pounds weight being obtained.

I feel satisfied that many will have doubts as to the truth of such reports, but as I will not give without seeing them, they may be depended on. A gentleman who had his doubts as to these facts, would not be satisfied until I had introduced him to the parties, and, on showing him the precious metal, he could only find words to exclaim, "Tis wonderful!"

The generality of the diggers are doing well although I hear complaints from parties that they have not cleared their expenses and intend returning. This is not unlikely: out of a multitude (some 12,000 or 14,000) it cannot be expected that all will be lucky, but I will not hesitate in saying that four out of five, when asked, "What success?" will answer. "Why I can't complain!"

Argus, Saturday November 29, 1851, p2

In late November the law enforcement numbers were to be increased, with the imminent arrival of "*able bodied men*". The first ten to arrive were described as "*dressed in drab Californian hats, blue monkey jackets and trousers, and armed with short carbines*".⁶⁵ These reinforcements were required, said the Argus, because of sly-grog sellers, petty crime and bushranging on the road to the diggings.

⁶⁵ The Argus, Saturday November 29, 1851, page 2. We presume these "able bodied men" were Military Pensioners from Van Diemen's land.

Chapter 15

La Trobe's Gordian Knot

Central to La Trobe's difficulties in administering the gold fields was lack of available funds. He required the Legislative Council to give him permission to use the funds from the General Revenue to pay for the administration of the gold fields as he had received legal advice that he could not use the Territorial revenue (from the gold licences) because it was derived from Crown lands.⁶⁶ But the Legislative Council would not agree to his requests.

The Argus had little sympathy for La Trobe's difficulties and took a derisive view⁶⁷ of his attempts to handle the '*emergency*' – as evidenced in the following article reporting his efforts to secure funding from the Legislative Council to administer the gold fields.

Before a large looking-glass, on the morning of Thursday, the 13th November, the interesting spectacle was to be witnessed of a tall, dark gentleman, painfully struggling into a suit of regimentals. The operation over, the said gentleman, the "firm and judicious" Governor, who is fast reducing this fine Colony to a state of anarchy and confusion, proceeded to the Legislative Council under the stately salute of four guns; was welcomed with becoming dignity, by half a dozen notes of a key-bugle; and favored the world by reading to a very small section of it, an elaborate and somewhat prosy address.

... In reference to the difficulties in which the Executive had been placed by the Gold discovery, His Excellency spoke as follows.

I found it absolutely necessary at the commencement of October, to assume the responsibility of directing such further and general increase, in the scale of remuneration to the clerks in the various Government departments and subordinate officers of the Government...and remove every just cause for desertion.

It has also become imperative upon me to make considerable additions to the police force of the Colony, not only for the purpose of assisting the Crown Officers in carrying out the regulations, and furnishing escort for the gold sent to the towns; but also for that of ensuring good order, and due observance of the law, amongst the large population

⁶⁶ He eventually received this permission from London in 1852.

⁶⁷ It was well known that George Kerr, Editor of the Argus, waged a verbal war against La Trobe.

congregating at the various workings, and pouring into the Colony.

But it happens, unfortunately, that the Lieutenant Governor is in a very difficult position with respect to the detail of this business, for he is restricted by the Constitutional Act from applying any moneys arising from the Territorial Revenue to any other than certain purposes, and cannot, therefore apply the first principles of all business transactions to this gold affair, namely, that every business should first bear its own expenses.

If this were the case, the Lieutenant Governor would have at his command a sum of money equal to all demands made upon it by the appointment of surveyors and other necessary officers.

Argus, Monday Dec. 15, 1851, p 2

The editorial then outlined that the members of the Legislative Council ... by a large majority “*declined to endorse His Excellency’s pleas of poverty*”.

La Trobe’s revenue problem that the Legislative Council could or would not resolve, was referred to in the Argus as La Trobe’s “*Gordian Knot*”: a Gordian knot being an unresolvable problem symbolised by a rope so cleverly knotted that one cannot find either end. Story has it that when Alexander the Great, the namesake of the Mount Alexander goldfield, was confronted with such a knot, he solved the problem but simply cutting through the knot with his sword, thereby unravelling the tangle. The Argus wrote:

This seems to be the main difficulty of the whole question, and there is now a splendid opportunity for the Lieutenant Governor to display his ability in governing; and since this Gordian knot cannot be untied, let him adopt the example of Alexander, and sever it at once.

When the Constitutional Act was passed, it contemplated a certain state of affairs only, and no idea was then entertained of the transcendent change the Colony has so lately undergone, or due provision no doubt, would have been made for so momentous an affair.

One mark which distinguishes genius from the common plodding, everyday character, is the ease with which the former surmounts a difficulty, which to the other is insuperable....

Argus, Monday Dec. 15, 1851, page 2

In terms of the wider circumstances surrounding La Trobe’s Gordian knot, the Argus correspondent JP, being on the ground, had suggestions about the Licence, based on

the many different ways the goldfields operated for different diggers as well as other business people. His suggestions included:

- Surveying all gold fields land and controlling where people could dig
- Properly constituted courts with lock ups to enforce the laws, to avoid the chaining of diggers to trees or letting them go free.
- The licence to be transferable to another
- No licence to be payable by tent keepers, butchers, bakers, purveyors or suppliers of goods, with the single exception of liquor, and the government to have power to licence hotels⁶⁸

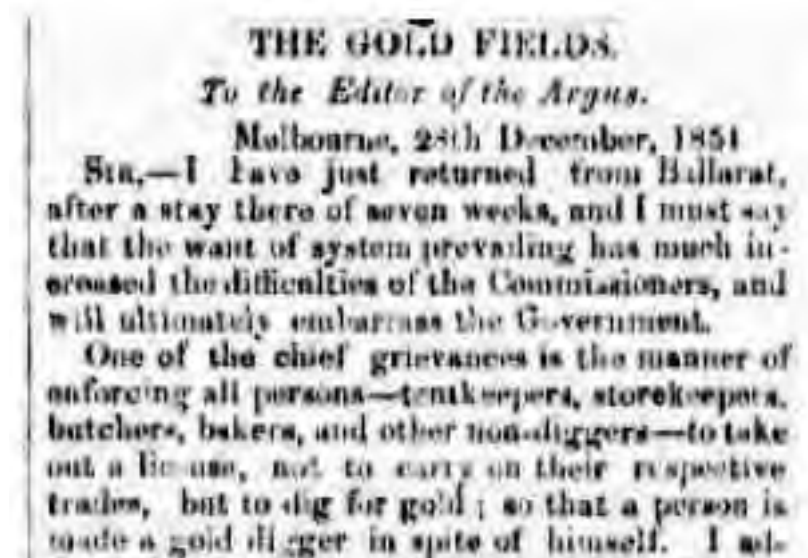
JP made many other suggestions which would clearly have been beyond the scope or capacity of La Trobe to administer, but abandoning the fee for tent keepers and the like was something relatively simple to administer.

⁶⁸ Argus, Monday Dec. 15, 1851, page 2

Chapter 16

The Police

As La Trobe battled away with the Legislative Council in Melbourne, on the Ballarat gold fields police brutality was also becoming an issue (note that the following Argus article must have been written in November, not December as quoted in headline):



THE GOLD FIELDS.
To the Editor of the Argus.
Melbourne, 28th December, 1851
Sir,—I have just returned from Ballarat, after a stay there of seven weeks, and I must say that the want of system prevailing has much increased the difficulties of the Commissioners, and will ultimately embarrass the Government.
One of the chief grievances is the manner of enforcing all persons—tentkeepers, storekeepers, butchers, bakers, and other non-diggers—to take out a licence, not to carry on their respective trades, but to dig for gold; so that a person is made a gold digger in spite of himself. I ad-

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JP then described the enforcement of the gold Licence at Ballarat:

...to chain a man like a dog to a tree all night or all day, and after a time to let him go at liberty, whatever his offence may be; or to wink at offences and let the offenders go scot free.

Argus Tuesday December 2, 1851, p 3

Until this time there was no mention from Forest Creek of police brutality of any kind, let alone men being chained to trees. One explanation for this could be the small police numbers at Forest Creek.

But it may be worth asking now to be investigated later: was there a culture of poor policing at Ballarat? Could the inconsistency – some diggers without licences chained to trees whilst others were set free with the wink – indicate shonky practices by poor quality policemen? Did resentment build there that flowed through to Eureka?

Chapter 17

The Pendulum

Accounts of the gold to be found continued to swing like a wild pendulum. The Argus of 3 December also contained a detailed, sober account of the Mount Alexander field, with the usual recounting that most diggers made some wages, others had no luck and a few made a fortune.⁶⁹

On the same page the Argus editorialised in glorious fashion, boasting of Victoria's riches in comparison to NSW, saying that those in NSW "*do not know the wonders that are dazzling us here*".⁷⁰

And in the same edition there was an account of Mount Alexander from a "*well known...colonist of many years standing*" - Mr Mortimer:

... And now, Mr Editor, I will tell you a little, and but a little, for I cannot spare the time to tell you the hundredth part of what I saw, nor can you spare the space to publish it.

The first person I spoke to on the ground, was Mr Howard, your reporter, who informed me the people were doing wonders, and that of the many thousands already there, no one who would work need be without his half ounce to an ounce per day.

The next persons I met were some relations and friends, one of whom gave me ten ounces, and an order to receive 2lbs weight by the next escort, the result of his individual labour for three weeks.

Mortimer's account of Mount Alexander continued with more such examples. Next he met an old friend:

... his name was Miller, and... he had sailed two voyages for me in the brig "Skerne" to the Mauritius. I then asked him how he was doing. His reply was, "pretty well, Sir." We took out of that hole (pointing to one about twenty yards from his tent) 10 lbs 4 oz weight in four days this week, and this (putting the gold into my hands, tied up in a handkerchief) is the stuff;" and sure enough it was beautiful stuff too, for assayed the nuggets weighed over seven ounces.

Mortimer concluded with an illustration of the dream for a comfortable, plentiful life that could become reality for any poor lad who wished to come to Mount Alexander

⁶⁹ The Argus, Wednesday December 3, page 2

⁷⁰ Ibid

gold fields and swing a pick, and cited the example of a "*little boy*" who had just made £2 and ten shillings, to which his father said:

...“Now, Tom, look here, if you had been in England now, my boy, you would have been able to earn 1s per week and that for one year would be £2 12s; but now you are in Victoria you not only can earn good wages, but see here is £2 10s, my boy, for one day, in Victoria. Who would not live here instead of at home, if he could help it? Oh, that more of my countrymen would come here and do as I have done; for when I landed I had but 10s in the world, and now I rent a farm of Mr Malcolm, at £60 a year. I have got two bullock teams and one horse and dray of my own, and I would not take less than £600 or £700 for what I possess, and have got it all in three years and a half, except the 10s I brought with me.”

Yours respectfully

H. W. MORTIMER

Argus, Wednesday December 3, 1851, p 3

Much of the reporting of the gold rush seems to be extrapolation from the particular to the general: if the writer met a lucky digger then the gold fields were a bonanza, but if the writer met an unlucky digger then the gold rush was a fraud. However Governor La Trobe might have viewed such glowing reports as ample justification that the diggers could afford to pay 30 shillings - and more - for the Licence.

Chapter 18

A World Turned Upside Down

On the same day that Mortimer's letter was published in a privileged position within the Argus editorial section (3 December 1851), Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe wrote his next despatch to London, (number 53), which was received there in April 1852.

He began by reminding that in his earlier despatches he had noted that workers and servants were returning to work from the Buninyong field, but that the effect of Mount Alexander was yet to be seen. And he continued:

3. I must now apprise your Lordship that the progress, and results, of the successful search for gold in this quarter, in the short interval which has since elapsed, have been such as to completely disorganise the whole structure of society.

The discovery of Gold in a pure state not only under the surface, but in many instances upon the very surface, requiring but little or no labour to collect, and the enormous gains in many instances, after a few days or even hours labour, - clear proof of which is seen in the large amounts brought down by the Government Escorts and by private individuals - could have no other effect, and at this date it really becomes a question, how the more sober operations of society, and even the functions of Government, may be carried out.

Great as the excitement was in the case of the Ballarat workings, there can be no doubt but that which now pervades the community is far more general and threatens to be far more lasting in its character and serious in its results...⁷¹

As with his account of Worley's find, Governor La Trobe here again leaves us with a beautiful description of the impact of gold. He estimated that there were 12,000 diggers at Mount Alexander/Forest Creek with many arriving daily from Ballarat, South Australia and Van Diemen's Land, and then continued:

4. The present excitement that pervades all classes, to a much more serious extent than two months ago, is so general and so unrelenting that I make no doubt that as in the case of Ballarat, there will be a reaction; and before the close of the month probably hundreds may be induced to return to their ordinary occupations, still it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the facts and of the inevitable results of these discoveries,

⁷¹ Despatch 53, 3 December 1851, part 3

the limits and extent of which, in this Colony it is quite impossible to estimate.

5. I have to apprise your Lordship that I have deemed it advisable, with the consent of my Executive Council, to decide upon revising the amount of the monthly Licence fee, and propose to double it from the 1st January.

Three reasons may be adduced for this measure, 1st the notorious disproportion of the advantage derivable under the licence system to the Public revenue, compared with the amount of private gain.⁷²

2^{ndly}. That the Legislative Council of the Colony, as your Lordship will be apprised in due course, decline to sanction any expenditure from the Ordinary Revenue under its control, on account of any services, which in its opinion, is consequent on the discovery and search for gold and that therefore extraordinary charges, to a very considerable extent – if incurred at all – must for the time be carried to account of the Revenue of the Gold-fields; ⁷³

and 3^{rdly}: To place some additional impediments in the way of those frequenting the Gold-fields, and who may not be in a position, or of a character to prosecute the search with advantage to themselves or the community.⁷⁴

6. Whether it will have the effect remains to be seen, but I earnestly look forward to the introduction of some better system for do what you will the present cannot be held to be any other than a scramble, and a scramble in which nothing but the most unremitting and breathless exertion enables Government, under every circumstance of disadvantage, to keep pace with the popular movement and maintain an appearance at least to some degree of public order and respect to the laws and regulations.⁷⁵

La Trobe also reported that he had increased the pay of public servants but it did not keep them in their jobs. And with the Legislative Council now refusing to fund this pay increase from Ordinary Revenue, the expenditure would no longer be possible. And so he anticipated difficulty in keeping 'Subordinate Officers' from becoming diggers:

.... The Superintendant of Police and Sheriff, have received notice of the resignation of by far the greater majority of Constabulary, Turnkeys &c employed, and it is known that

⁷² Ibid, parts 4, 5

⁷³ Ibid, part 5

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid, part 6

*many Clerks in the Public Service, are bent upon the same steps: and I have under the circumstances no choice but to take such steps as may be in my power to secure the maintenance of public order which I must effect at all hazards, even if the ordinary efficiency and convenient performance of the functions of Government be, for the time, out of the question.*⁷⁶

Normal government was impossible with no public servants to put to the task. So doubling the Gold Licence fee was a desperate stop-gap move, especially so when he hadn't the police on the field to enforce it.

La Trobe had applied to the Governor General (in Sydney) for an increase to Victoria's small military force to guarantee the safety of the gaols, stockade and banks, and also sought 'Military Pensioners' from Van Diemen's Land⁷⁷ to assist in keeping order.

*9. I look forward to the next three months, with the certainty that they will be very trying for all classes of the community. There can be no doubt that large numbers of both the prosperous and the disappointed will be dispersed to repair to Towns where the advance of the season and failure of water may diminish the profits of the workings or lessen the chances of success and, that much distress, disease and embarrassment will follow at the very time when the Government may be least in a position to apply suitable remedies.*⁷⁸

It is unclear exactly what remedies the government would have been able to apply to remedy people's misfortune should that situation have come to pass, since Government welfare services were not a reality then. But whatever he had to do he would use his power, he said, in the cause of 'public welfare and safety'. Meanwhile...

10. I trust gradually to introduce into the management of the gold-fields to confine the search for and removal of Gold under the licence to certain proscribed limits, to be duly proclaimed, and interpose such further restrictions as soon as the proper machinery can be secured, as may be evidently called for.

This seems like wishful thinking. He hadn't the staff to collect licence fees or do many other tasks, so he had little hope of designating such limits and administering them.

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ These men originally came as guards on convict ships and were given land on the provision that they could be called up. They assisted in the collection of licence fees, gold escorts and so on but were generally poorly regarded.

⁷⁸ Ibid, part 9

In section 12 of his despatch, La Trobe envisaged that gold would bring thousands to these shores from around the world, bringing immediate changes to the whole structure of society, and continued:

The maintenance of the character of the Colony as a British protectorate, subject to the laws and attached to the constitution of another country and offering a suitable house and place of refuge, not only to the poor, indigent or restless, but for the sober and enlightened middle classes, as had been hoped before hitherto, depends in great measure upon the power of the Executive to assist good order and maintain respect to the laws, in the absence of which no really respectable person would wish to make it his dwelling place, however great the natural advantages.

It matters little whether the regulations are effective or ineffective, wise or foolish, in respect to Revenue or secondary interests, insofar that security is given; and viewing the cause, character and effects of the excitement which exists, though intermittent, from the very circumstances, be henceforward a constant one, I consider that no measure short of a force subject to Military law and discipline will give that power to this Government, or feeling of security to the public.

In short, that is imperatively my duty to urge whatever stipulations Her Majesty's Government may be pleased to make, that immediate steps should be taken to afford this security to the Colony, both as respects (word unclear) disturbance or attack from without, Melbourne might be made, the Headquarters of one Regiment at least.⁷⁹

He asked for a Man of War to be stationed in Port Phillip to guard against piracy of gold ships, either from pirates or crew, and pleaded that Victoria was a particular case, given the lack of Government resources, ease of getting gold, proximity to the convict-riddled Van Diemen's Land and South Australia, and nearness of the goldfields to towns.

At this point it's worth considering the purpose of these Despatches. This Despatch (number 53), written in early December 1851, arrived in London four months later on April 6, 1852. The despatches took months to get to London, and more months for the return of any response - by which time any emergency would have moved on to another phase. So in terms of real decision making it's likely that La Trobe was simply following procedure, knowing he was on his own in many respects. He had to beg his superiors in London for military men to enforce laws which he was bound to uphold, and all this with the gold rush happening NOW and a reply from London - not to mention any extra troops - about nine months away.

What follows speaks of La Trobe's fear of change in society, that the...

⁷⁹ Ibid part 12

.. acquisition of wealth, by the lower classes has already had some influence upon the sale of country allotments, particularly, and the second to establish the fact that a very considerable increase of deposits in the Savings Bank has taken place from the same cause.⁸⁰

Earlier in this despatch La Trobe seemed to suggest that he was concerned that the poor wouldn't know how to handle the money they made from gold. But now, in the same report, he wrote that the 'lower classes' were turning their gold into land and healthy bank balances. So whichever contradictory argument he used, the motivation was always the same – to keep the 'lower classes' as the lower classes.

That said, La Trobe was a captive of his upper-class upbringing, and if we can forgive, or at least put that mindset aside for a moment, La Trobe was in a difficult position:

- He had reluctantly become head of government of a new colony which was immediately thrown into crisis by circumstances beyond his control.
- Society as he knew it was being pulled apart.
- His job was to run a steady colony, but he could not – he had neither the personality nor the capacity to do so - he was a cultured gentleman of his time with no training as an administrator.⁸¹
- His only remedy - charge them a hefty licence fee and they'll stay home - seems to be based on old paradigms of master-servant relations that were now being exploded by the pandemonium of the gold rush.
- La Trobe could not get the necessary funding to administer the gold fields; being hamstrung by the refusal of the squatters in the Legislative Council to allow him to use funds from the General Revenue to administer the gold fields and unable to collect the licence fees because of inadequate numbers of police.

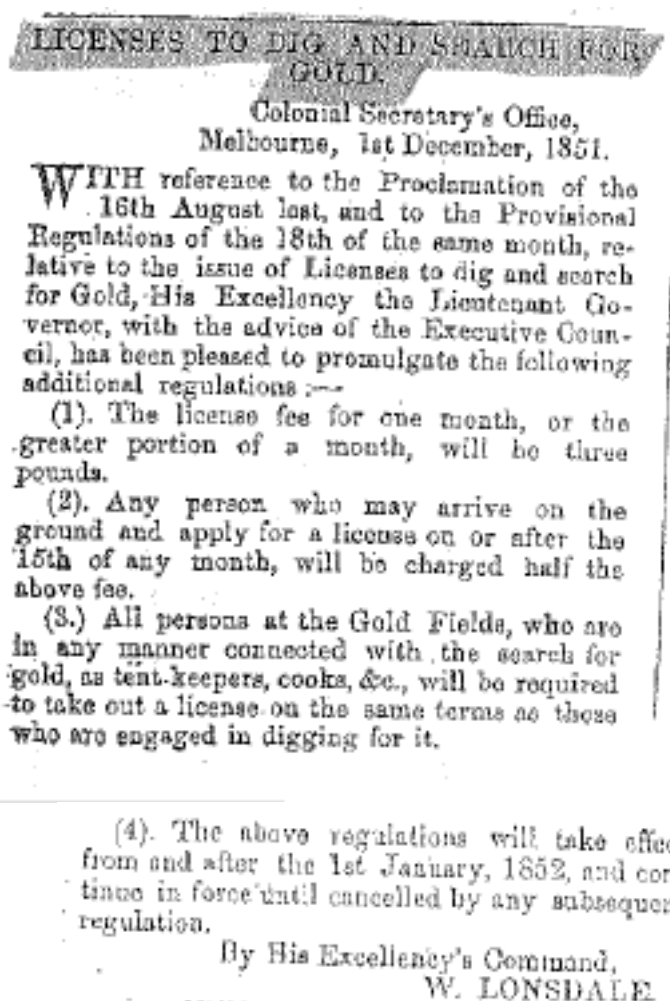
⁸⁰ Ibid, part 10

⁸¹ For more information about La Trobe see biographical notes by Jill Eastwood in Australian Dictionary of Biography Vol 2 @ adb.anu.edu.au

Chapter 19

Double the Tax

Buried in La Trobe's despatch of 3 December was a line that he '*proposed*' to double the licence from 1 January 1852. But in fact he had already announced this change two days earlier, on 1 December. Was this to be his sword through the Gordian knot and all the complicated circumstances surrounding it?



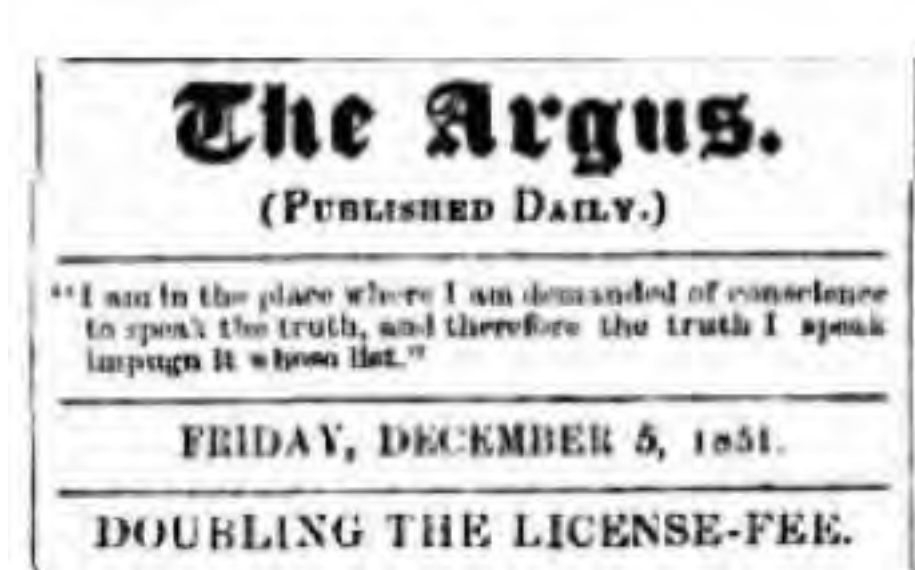
Victorian Government Gazette, 10 December, 1851

And this doubling of the licence fee was accompanied by both a concession – a digger did not have to pay the full amount after the 15th of the month – and an impost – others supporting the gold seekers also had to pay for a licence. With the latter measure the formerly illegal collection of licence fees from tent keepers and the like was now legitimised.

So what exactly was La Trobe's plan here? He hadn't enough police to enforce the fee, so was it to simply double whatever he could collect? Seeing that the 30 shillings licence fee did not work as a deterrent, was he hoping that the £3 per month would

stem the flow of people to the gold field? Charging the licence to shopkeepers and tent keepers had already been done without the sanction of law at Ballarat, and making this measure enforceable would not be popular. But driving this increase had to be the urgency to raise revenue which he could not manage to get from other sources.

In response to the proposed doubling of the Gold Licence to £3 per month and its application to tent keepers, cooks and others on the field, the Argus was somewhat restrained - possibly awaiting a response from the diggers whilst putting La Trobe on notice. The Editor said of the gold Licence, that:



This is a very important step, and one which, ventured upon directly after the confession in the House by the Colonial Secretary, that the Executive was powerless as regards the diggers, we trust has not been adopted without due consideration.

We shall wait with very considerable anxiety to see the effect of thus doubling the rate of licence fee, above that exacted on the New South Wales side, and to find whether not it will be patiently submitted to by the parties concerned.

It is a strong step and it remains to be seen whether it be a judicious one. We believe that the amount would be very much more willingly paid, if it were thoroughly known what was to become of the sums received.

The diggers are sharp-witted, but reasonable men, and would not grudge even a heavy tax if it were absolutely necessary, and likely to be expended in a legitimate manner.

But we doubt if such will be the case, if so copious a fund is to be poured silently into the Government sink; if no intimation is to be given that it is likely to be applied to the wants naturally accumulating round our present rapid career; and if the Government, when questioned on the subject by the people's representatives, contents itself with mumbling through the lips of the Colonial Secretary, some vague and puerile generalities about the necessity of immigration.

Argus Friday December 5, 1851

Chapter 20

Bendigo

By early December 1851 another field, called Bendigo,⁸² had begun 30 miles north of Forest Creek. The first report from Bendigo came on 14th December from the Assistant Commissioner Robert Horne who wrote a report from Bendigo Creek to Commissioner Frederick Powlett.

On his arrival Horne had found 100-120 people digging for gold and, with more slowly coming in, there were 250 people on the scene by 14 December. He concluded: *"I will not close this letter without drawing your attention to the general determination which the diggers appear to have come to resist the increased licence fees."*⁸³

In fact by the time Horne wrote his report the Bendigo diggers had already held two meetings about the Gold Licence, on Monday 8 December and another on the next day, Tuesday 9, which were reported in the Argus:

MOUNT ALEXANDER.

To the Editor of the Argus.

SIR, - As your valuable journal has ever been open for the advocacy of just and even handed justice, alike for the poor as well as the rich, I feel much pleasure in forwarding you a report of the proceedings of a meeting, held at Bendigo Creek, by the gold miners.

When it was understood that His Excellency had issued a proclamation to double the licensing fee in January next, the people exhibited so much dissatisfaction that it was thought advisable to call a public meeting on the subject.

Accordingly Captain Harrison⁸⁴ undertook the trouble of having notices posted on the trees along the creek, announcing a meeting to be held on Monday evening the 8th instant, to take into consideration the proper steps to resist the heavy tax with which they were about being visited.

⁸² Bendigo was named after a teamster, a good boxer who took his name from Bendigo Thompson the celebrated 18th century bare-knuckle English boxer who was named after the Old Testament hero Abednego, who refused to acknowledge the 'one true god' and bow before an altar of gold. It's a lovely irony for the name of a gold rush town.

⁸³ VPRS 2878, Unit 3, 51/945, 17 December 1851. Correspondence relating to the Monster Meeting from the Land Commissioners' Correspondence. Note: from July 1851 to November 1852 inward correspondence from the Gold Commissioners was filed in this series because they were originally Land Commissioners and now had additional duties on the gold fields.

⁸⁴ Captain Harrison who was previously a speaker at the meetings of the Geelong People's Association, was now digging on the Bendigo field.

The appointed place of meeting was in front of Captain Harrison's tent, over which floated a red flag with a white star, — the signal for the meeting to commence was the firing of three guns. A severe shower prevented the people from assembling for some time, but as soon as the night cleared up, and the moon shone out from the dark clouds, the miners assembled to the amount of about two hundred, being all the men on the diggings with the exception of tent keepers.

A large fire was kindled to give light to read the resolutions. It was a most solemn sight to witness a number of determined resolute men assembled in the wilds of the forest around a fire — the moon shedding her pale light occasionally, giving effect to the scene, deliberating in sober seriousness upon the proper method of resisting the injustice and oppression of the Government.

Captain Harrison was called upon to preside, and commenced the proceedings by reading the proclamation in question.

He spoke to a considerable length on the subject, setting forth the duty incumbent on every gold digger to resist the horrid imposition of a £3; he was heard patiently throughout a long address, and loud and long were the tokens of approbation with which the miners responded to his appeals. Never before did this part of the Australian Territory resound with the hearty cheers of British subjects, banded together to resist oppression.

Mr. Henry Frencham⁸⁵ was called upon by the President to address the meeting, and was vociferously cheered by the assembly. He addressed them in his usual happy and energetic style, setting forth the danger of yielding to the unjust imposition of the Governor and Executive Council, in attempting to fetter the energies of the public for developing the resources of the Colony.

The meeting being only a preparatory one, there were three men appointed to prepare resolutions for a meeting to be held the next evening at eight o'clock.

Argus, Saturday December 13, 1851, p 2

Frencham's words about developing the colony's resources contradict the commonly accepted idea that all gold diggers were rabble-rousers. His words imply fealty to the idea of the Crown, even if the government was off-track. And, unlike La Trobe and the squattocracy, he saw the efforts of the gold diggers as promoting the wealth of the colony.

⁸⁵ Frencham later unsuccessfully claimed the reward for the discovery of gold in Bendigo.

And so to the meeting on Tuesday 9 December:

At the appointed hour the resolute gold diggers assembled to a man, except those engaged in looking after the tents. For miles they came, and assembled to the amount of about 250, the reason of so few being at the creek, is because it is a new diggings, and the people are not more than fourteen days at work on them, but they are of so much importance, that Capt. Horne, the Commissioner, and a staff, have been sent up to them from Forest Creek, a distance of thirty miles.

The proceedings of the meeting commenced by Captain Harrison being called upon to preside, and the business of the evening was opened by him in a very neat and elegant speech, expressing the objects which had brought them together. He then called upon Mr H. Frencham to propose the first resolution.

Mr Frencham came forward in digging costume, amidst the prolonged cheers of the assembled people, and after a few prefatory remarks, read the resolution which was entrusted to him.

“That we, the gold miners assembled on Bendigo Creek, having learned that the Lieutenant Governor and Executive Council of Victoria, by proclamation, have intimated their intention of doubling our licence fee from and after the 1st of January next; and considering that it is unjust and extremely oppressive, we are, to a man, determined not to submit to the wholesale robbery which is contemplated by such proclamation, and to the uttermost will withstand its imposition.

We, therefore, solemnly pledge ourselves to resist it in every shape and form, and will aid by all the means in our power those who will do the same elsewhere.

We wish to be understood as not objecting to the present heavy tax of thirty shillings per month, although we consider it too much. As a proof of which, there is a large surplus fund arising therefrom, amount to £3, 000.”

Which formed the ground work of his speech. Want of time prevents the full report of what was said on the occasion; suffice it to mention, that it was argumentative, eloquent, and to the point. He withdrew amidst tremendous cheering.

The resolution was seconded by Count Landoski, a Polish nobleman, who was at work on the Creek, his speech was very appropriate, and strongly advocated supporting the Government, so long as it was consistent with their interests, and

while they acted justly. Passed unanimously.

The second resolution was proposed by Mr. Ross, and was as follows: "That we hereby take this opportunity of testifying our unshaken loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign Queen Victoria, and deeply regret being forced to resist the unrighteous tax with which her Majesty's Representative and Executive Council of Victoria are about imposing upon us."

This gentleman made only a few concise remarks, and his firm and unflinching attachment to her Majesty called forth the unanimous approbation of the audience. The resolution was ably seconded by Mr. McDonald, and was carried with acclamation.

The third resolution was moved by Mr Russell in a neat and appropriate address, which well deserved the attention which the meeting gave to it. Moved by Mr. Russell—

"That if any person be brought into trouble and expense by the persecution of the Government authorities in his or their persons or effects in consequence of withstanding payment of the heavy tax about being imposed on us, we hereby unanimously agree to assist all such with pecuniary aid if required, and that no man shall sustain loss or injury in his efforts to promote our rights without being recompensed by us."

It was seconded by Mr. McGrath, who depicted the state of serfdom to which they would be subjected if they yielded to this unjust tax.

The fourth resolution was proposed by Mr. Sandbach, who declared his firm determination of adhering to the cause of the people; it was to the Press, he said, they mainly looked for support, for more good could be effected by one issue of its broad sheet, than there was formerly by ten thousand guns, he had, therefore, great pleasure in proposing the fourth resolution, which was seconded by Mr. Regan—

"That the thanks of this meeting be given to the Editors of the Geelong Advertiser, and the Melbourne Argus and Daily News, for the noble manner in which they have advocated our cause, and earnestly request the further aid of their mighty engine in the struggle in which we are about to engage, in resisting the Government in their present unjust and arbitrary proceedings."

The meeting then broke up, after giving three cheers for the Queen, three cheers for the Editors of the Argus, Daily News, and Geelong Advertiser, and a groan for the Herald.

The above resolution will clearly show what the gold diggers mean, and collectively their struggle is not to be despised. They

have it in contemplation to raise a large fund, by each man contributing an ounce of gold, and I believe it will be so throughout the diggings at Forest Creek and Ballarat. If the Government would act wisely, let them, in time, desist from carrying into effect a measure fraught with danger to the constituted authorities and the welfare of the Colony at large.

The people are willing to pay the 30 shillings per month, but more they will not pay, for even that is too much. It ought to be so regulated that a man would only have to pay from the time which the licence is taken out. If that were the case, the revenue derivable from licensing fees would be double what it now is, for many evade it who would pay were it altered. As regards the success of the diggers, it is tolerably certain the majority are doing well, and few making less than half an ounce per man per day. Amongst the most successful are the parties of Frencham, Regan and McGrath. On this creek there is an abundant supply of water, which is likely to last the summer.

Hoping you will excuse the length of this epistle,

I remain, yours, &c.

BENDIGO.

Argus, Saturday December 13, 1851, p 2

What is striking in this report is the picture of a democratic movement - small 'l' liberal, as Weston Bate says⁸⁶ - with no sense of infidelity to the Crown, and a meeting ordered in a dignified, formal fashion. The movement at this stage was a long way from the bloodshed at Eureka.

However not everyone saw the Bendigo diggers as honourable. Captain Henry Dana, the Commander of the Native Police, also reported to Commissioner Powlett from Bendigo Creek, on 13 December 1851. He told of a meeting at Bendigo, that another was planned for the 15th at Mount Alexander and opined that the police force must be augmented:

Despatch from Captain Dana to Commissioner Powlett, 13 December 1851

"A meeting was held at Bendigo Creek on Wednesday last the 10th instant⁸⁷ at which a man named Harrison calling himself Captain Harrison presided. The language made use of was inflammatory in the extreme inciting the diggers to resist the regulations issued. I have since heard from credible people that the same man in

⁸⁶ See Bates' interview @ www.monstermeeting.net/the-monster-meeting-interviews/

⁸⁷ Although Dana said the meeting was on Wednesday, 10 December we assume he was referring to the meeting of Tuesday 9 December

*conjunction with Mr Plaistowe, a Mr Frencham, a man called Booley, Dr Webb Richmond and others have convened a meeting for Monday the 15th to take measures to resist the regulations contained in the proclamation last issued by his Excellency the Lieutenant Governor and in this instance should any disturbance arise from these meetings it will be utterly impossible for me to suppress it with the force at present under my control.*⁸⁸

⁸⁸ VPRS 2878, Unit 3, 51/945, 17 December 1851

Chapter 21

First Forest Creek Meeting

Like their fellow diggers in Bendigo, the Forest Creek diggers also held a meeting on Monday evening 8 December. Writing earlier that day the Argus correspondent said that:

...Something of a serious aspect made its appearance this morning in the shape of handbills posted along the creek, and which I hope you will publish, so that the Government may take warning in time.

It appears that the Government have determined to raise the licence to £3 per month, and so sure as it does they will find 25,000 men to oppose them; but of this hereafter. A notice appeared on the Creek this morning to the following effect:

FELLOW DIGGERS!

The intelligence has just arrived of the resolution of the Government to double the licence fee.

Will you tamely submit to the imposition or assert your rights like men?

You are called upon to pay a tax, originated and concocted by the most heartless selfishness. A tax imposed by your Legislators for the purpose of detaining you in their workshops, in their stable yards, and by their flocks and herds. They have conferred to affect this; they would increase this seven-fold; but they are afraid!

Fie upon such pusillanimity! And shame upon the men who, to save a few paltry pounds for their own pockets, would tax the labour of the poor man's hands.

That the precious metals are the property of the Crown, has for long been decided by law; and those who search for and obtain them, pay a fair percentage of their earnings, as an acknowledgement of them, is but right; but is it fair ?

Is it just, that the gold seekers should pay as much as the gold finder?

Your Legislators talk of the *difficulty* of deciding upon some mode of licensing that will press equitable upon all; and because, forsooth, these sapient worthies cannot devise some scheme founded upon *justice*, they have recourse to one that is unjust and oppressive.

It will be vain for one or two individuals to tell the Commissioner, or his emissaries, that they have been unsuccessful, and that they cannot pay the licence fee.

But, remember, that *union is strength*, that “though a single twig may be bent or broken, a bundle of them tied together yields not nor breaks.”

Ye are Britons! Will you submit to oppression and injustice ? Meet – agitate – be unanimous – and if there is justice in the land, they will, they *must* abolish the imposition.

Yours faithfully

A DIGGER

Three things are worth noting here: this report was the first time anyone estimated 25,000 diggers on Forest Creek; the poster quoted must have been printed on an illegal printing press since presses had been banned on the gold fields; and, the poster did not call an actual meeting.

The Argus continued:

This has caused considerable stir: expresses have been sent in all directions to brother diggers, and from the arrangements reported to be making, the cause is evidently in the hands of determined and, I may say *prudent* men.

What can induce the Government to act so madly, no one can conceive; this step will eventually break the only link that holds the crowds on the ground in order.

I will venture to say, that during my five week’s residence among from 10,000 to 25,000 men of all classes here, there has been less disturbance than in one Ward of Melbourne, for the same time.

Even though the Government find a few faint-hearted men who will pay the tax, they will gain nothing by the £3 imposition. Men who will have voluntarily come forward and paid the 30 shillings licence without asking, will do all in their power to avoid paying £3.

I believe it is intended to swear in the leading or head men of each party as special constables; the Government think, by his act, to secure the services of the men connected with such specials; but they are mistaken.

In the first place, the leading men will refuse to be sworn, and, I believe, they cannot compel them to take the oath; and in the second place, most of the men being independent of each other, will not be lead by such special, but treat him or, at least think

him, little better than a spy in the camp. Though willing to act in a good cause, they will not move in one like this.

Now, what is *likely* to be the consequence? If the Government persist in enforcing the regulations, the police force will take a man prisoner for digging without a licence. This will cause a meeting, the second man taken, will cause a disturbance – a rescue – perhaps broken heads – or murder; for if death occurs, I should consider the Government had caused murder, if not legally, at least morally speaking.

You have no idea of the bitter feeling that is already beginning to show against the *new law*. Men of apparent respectability are going over the ground, from pit to pit, and tent to tent, to know the minds of their fellow diggers; and it is evident to me that the arrangements made have not been the work of an hour.

Weeks ago reports were abroad that a rise in the licence fee would take place, and, from appearances, I should think that the leading parties have only been waiting until such law was passed. It is a ticklish game the Government are trying to play, and one, I think, that will not be *won easily*.

A poor fellow has just been carried past on a sheet of bark. I fear that there is but little hopes of him. While undermining, the earth fell in, and he was dug out a short time after, but, apparently in a dying state, bleeding profusely at the nose, eyes and ears. Another similar accident took place this morning, although not so serious, as the earth covered the body only, leaving the head above. The latter party is out of danger.

Argus, Friday December 12, 1851, p2

The idea that the government would enlist diggers to collect fees is new, and possibly only a rumour. But, even if untrue, nature abhors a vacuum and such stories may well have filled the void left by a government who didn't have a workable police force to collect all those licence fees.

After the correspondent got his copy off to Melbourne, a second bill (poster) appeared along Forest Creek calling a meeting for that night – Monday 8 December – at 7pm near the commissioner's tent.

The Argus correspondent wrote his account of the meeting:

THE ARGUS

Monday, 12 o'clock p.m.

Early this evening, a crowd collected near the post-office, pursuant to notice of "A Digger", and by half-past seven, some 3,000 persons were collected, all anxiously waiting for the appearance of the convenor, but as no one came forward, it was proposed, by one of the crowd, that Mr Plaistowe do take the chair.

After some delay, Mr Plaistowe rose above the heads of the crowd, mounted on a barrel, and was received with a welcome shout, which was heard two miles down the Creek.

He commenced by stating that, though the meeting was not convened according to the usual requisition, still, from the great crowd he saw around him, he was satisfied that such a meeting was held by the general wish. They all knew what they had met there for that evening. It was for their serious consideration; and though the notice was very short, and but few bills out, he was happy to see the cause was taken up with spirit.

He would read to them the Proclamation of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor, of the 1st instant, relative to increasing the licence fee (Proclamation read from *Herald*). It was unnecessary for him to say anything on the subject, but he felt satisfied some more able person would come forward from the crowd (cries of Mr Potts).

Mr Potts made his appearance amidst deafening cheers, and called the attention of the diggers to the necessity of conducting themselves in a quiet, orderly manner: he came forward to resist the imposition; he was ready and willing to meet any reasonable demand of the government, either by paying a licence or supporting order, but he was not willing to be imposed upon (and he was satisfied that such was their opinion).

If the Government obtained their wish in the present instance, what guarantee had they that next month the licence would not be increased two-fold?

Were they to be ridden over with an iron hand, to please the wishes of the squatters or any other class? Were they tamely to submit to have their hard earnings to be torn from their grasp,

to enrich the pockets of a few? Or were they to come forward like men, and maintain their rights? (Cheers.)

He was one of the last who would wish to see a disturbance in the hitherto quiet and peaceable community, and he trusted that the Government would see the error of their ways before it was too late; but if Government would tyrannise, they must maintain their rights. (Cheers.) Yes! And they would do so (Cheers).

They were now met to decide what was to be done; and he trusted that any resolutions they might come to, would be such as would meet with the support and sanction of their friends at home and abroad. The speaker retired amidst unanimous cheering.

Mr Lineham followed in the wake of the former speaker. He perfectly coincided with all the statements of his friend, Mr Potts, but he would draw the attention of those around him to something more.

They must be united in their opposition to the £3 licence, or they must pay. Now, which would they do? (several voices – we will not pay £3.) Very well – then you must oppose. It was folly for men to say we will not, and at the sight of a Commissioner run with money in hand.

The *Herald*, in one of its leading articles, kindly terms us the scum of the country; he bolsters up Government resolutions at the expense of the labouring man; but he was of opinion that there were as good men, as true, and possessed of as much talent as either George Cavanagh or any of his associates (Cheers). At any rate he should feel much disappointed if the diggers did not prove true to themselves (Cheers – and we will). And he trusted that they would stand firm against any Government imposition.

Hitherto they had lived peaceably and friendly together, and no doubt would continue to do so; and he believed it was for this reason that the Commissioner did not think it necessary to increase the police force. The greatest order had prevailed so far among a population of some 30,000 souls. Since his arrival not a female had been insulted, though walking in the most retired parts, and he believed the man who would attempt to do so, would be terribly punished (cheers).

Are not the licences already sufficient to cover the expenses five hundred times over? Must they still draw out the vitals of the labouring man, or deprive him of the opportunity of obtaining a comfortable subsistence for his family?

He should be sorry to see force brought against force, for as the Colonial Secretary had said, the Government could not enforce it, still it must cause trouble, and perhaps something more; as for the boyish police it was folly to talk to them about such force - weapons were not required. If they interfered the only thing necessary was to box the lads' ears and send them about their business; but he sincerely hoped even this would not be necessary.

All they had to do, would be to petition against the licence fee being increased; and if the authorities were so blind to their own interests as to try to make them pay, let them take the consequence (Vociferous cheering).

He should now read the resolution: - "That a committee be formed to wait upon the Commissioner, requesting him to call a general meeting of the diggers from all parts of Mount Alexander, for the purpose of taking into consideration the Proclamation of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor relative to increasing the licence fee from 30s per month to £3, and for other business connected with the diggings."

The resolution being put, was carried without a dissenting voice.

Mr Lineham then retired amongst much cheering.

A committee was then formed, composed of Messrs. McDonald, Mannington, Isaacs, Mundle, Potts, Lineham, Watson, Campbell, and Plaistowe.

Three cheers for the chairman, three for the diggers, three for their wives and families, made the valley echo for some time; and last of all three groans for the *Herald*, when the meeting quietly dispersed.

As to order, I have not seen a meeting in Melbourne so orderly and quiet. There was none of those vulgar threats made use of; so common at meetings of this kind. The men seemed to have come on the ground for the purpose of hearing only. Throughout the evening there appeared to be a quiet determination on every face *to act, and not to talk*.

I trust some of the Government officials were there, and once more I would caution the Government to *consider well* before they bring trouble on their heads.

The Committee adjourned to Mr Lineham's tent, where they determined to meet the next morning at 6 o'clock and proceed to the Commissioner's tent. I will give you the Commissioner's answer in my next.

It is thought that some 12,000 or 15,000 men will be collected on the ground next Monday at 4 o'clock, for the Committee have determined, in case the Commissioner refuses to call the meeting, to do it themselves. One thousand handbills are to be struck off, and sent express to the various diggings, and an advertisement I send, which you will find enclosed, is to be inserted in Friday's bi-weekly.

Argus, Friday December 12, 1851, p2

Given the gold field was a place of flux with people arriving and departing constantly, and all more or less newly arrived, that people such as Plaistowe and Potts were received with thunderous applause indicates that they were already known for their political stance.

These speakers, who sound to be socially and politically educated, were harnessing the licence issue to the Chartist and European ideas of class inequality. Potts' mention of linking in with friends "*at home and abroad*" indicates a wider political vision than just the Gold Licence. There was a strong emphasis on democratic process in Lineham's speech. His proposal, which the meeting accepted, was to work *with* the government via the Commissioner, with a fall-back position that they would fight if they had to.

The organisation and handling of this meeting, including what was said, and the method of addressing their complaints through the Gold Commissioner, all have the ring of experienced political operators rather than an indigent rabble of lower orders, as described in La Trobe's despatches. Also worth noting:

- Plaistowe notes that there were only a few bills posted that announced the meeting – so word of mouth was probably the most significant factor in attracting 3,000 people at such short notice.
- The sense of the media being impartial did not exist here. As well as reporting the news this correspondent offered the government advice and placed advertisements on the diggers' behalf.
- This report indicates that the speakers and the gathered diggers were strong, clear, passionate and articulate in their opposition to the Gold Licence.

On the next day, Tuesday 9 December, the diggers approached the Gold Commissioner, Frederick Powlett and, as decided at the meeting, asked him to convene the meeting on the following Monday 15. The Argus reported..

ARGUS
MEETING OF THE DIGGERS AT MOUNT ALEXANDER.
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

Monday, 15th December, 1851

....At an early hour the Committee waited on Mr. Powlett in a body, and informed him of what had taken place, and requested him to convene a meeting for Monday the 15th instant, near his own tent. This was declined by him, on the plea that he was compelled to proceed to Melbourne that morning,⁸⁹ and he requested as a favour that the meeting should not be held near that locality.

As Mr. Powlett, and, in fact all the Commissioners had been on the best terms hitherto, they acceded to his request, and selected a spot about one mile higher up. The Post Office being situated on the most central part of the diggings, was thought a good spot, as well as guide for all, and the "posters" were accordingly altered previous to posting.

No doubt Commissioner Powlett met with La Trobe in Melbourne, or at least with Colonial Secretary Lonsdale.

The notice the diggers placed in the Argus was not published until the following Friday 12 December. Given that it would have taken the Argus another two days to get to Forest Creek, the advertisement as such may not have had much bearing on the numbers who attended the Monster Meeting on the following Monday. It would however have served to advertise the cause in Melbourne and beyond.

NOTICE
TO DIGGERS AT MOUNT ALEXANDER
AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

A PUBLIC MEETING will be held on Monday next, the 15th instant, at four o'clock, on the ground, near the Commissioner's tent, for the purpose of taking into consideration the Proclamation of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor of the 1st instant, relative to increasing the licence fee from 30s per month to £3, and for other purposes connected with the diggings.
December 12

Argus, Friday December 12, 1851, p4

Meanwhile it was by word of mouth that the gold diggers on Forest Creek and Bendigo were spreading the invitation to come to the meeting of 15 December.

⁸⁹ One can assume that Powlett, as Commissioner, normally would have stayed for such an important meeting but he knew the resistance was so great that there was no need to stay - it was more important to brief La Trobe.

Chapter 22

The Government Capitulates

The Melbourne Morning Herald, reporting on the first meeting at Forest Creek, lambasted Mr Lineham for his insinuation that the Herald had said that *all* diggers were the “*scum of Van Diemen’s Land*”, and stated that from thence on the Herald would have its own reporter on the gold fields. It also reported again the rumour that occasionally surfaced, that the Government intended to institute a royalty to replace the Gold Licence.

The same day the Argus contained original correspondence from George Ward Cole, who wrote:

- Diggers were too scattered over too large an area to collect Licences and, besides, it was unpopular.
- A royalty, but not by that name, was the best replacement for the Licence, this being an “*extraordinary emergency*” requiring such a measure which was a departure from “*strict law*”.
- All gold to be processed through a Government office, so all gold smelted bore a government stamp – the diggers would cheerfully pay such a levy and from this the Council would pay all expenses of the gold fields.
- No gold to be exported or sold to a merchant without the government seal.
- All officers who “*remain at their posts*” to be rewarded with a pay increase.

Most of these recommendations were a repeat of suggestions already made by others but they seem to have had little response from the Government, which was sticking to its narrow response of a Gold Licence.

Cole asserted that these measures would save the colony from “*anarchy, and confusion, if not destitution*”, and “*blind reference to old precedents and to cramping rules (made by those who could not possibly have contemplated the present emergency) must be at once cast off where they interfere with necessary measures, to meet the present crisis.*”⁹⁰

On the same day the Argus editorialised:

<p style="text-align: center;">THE ARGUS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1851</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE CRISIS.</p> <p>A Letter appears in another column from that old colonist and worthy man, Captain Cole. We commend its perusal to our readers, but chiefly we commend its perusal to those connected with the Government.</p>
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⁹⁰ The Argus, Saturday December 13, 1851, page 3

We do not commit ourselves to the plan suggested for meeting the exigencies of the time, but we especially direct the notice of our rulers and their advisers, to such passages as are found at the conclusion of the letter :-

I trust that the Government will weigh carefully every proposal submitted to it, and will be able before long to frame some laws - that will save the Colony from anarchy and confusion, if not from destitution.

At all events I hope it will feel that a blind adherence to old precedents and to cramping rules (made by those who could not possibly have contemplated the present emergency), must be at once cast off, where they interfere with the necessary measures to meet the present crisis. Bold measures must be resorted to, and if any laws are superseded, indemnity, if required, must be granted by the Government at home, and it, with our fellow-countrymen at home, would applaud the measures adopted to save this important colony, and earn for themselves a title to be considered as the benefactors of our adopted country.

Captain Cole is known to belong to that party which is held to lean somewhat unduly to the Government, and yet this is the advice he gives. If other gentlemen of similar views would adopt the same course, and speak to the Executive in similar language, they would do good service to that Executive and to the public; they would do something to avert a crisis; and by checking a career of the most besotted folly, they would arouse the Government, by legitimate means, from slumbers, which appear to be otherwise likely to be broken by no slighter sound than the tocsin note of revolution.

Argus, Saturday December 13, 1851, p 2

Anarchy? Well it never came to that, even with the bloodshed at Eureka three years later. But like Cole, the *Argus* could see great trouble flowing from the Government's path of action.

Still only a day later (Saturday 14 December), the *Melbourne Herald* editorialised:

...The diggers will find us ready at all times to support their cause when we can do so without betraying that of the whole colony; and we heartily applaud those just and generous sentiments by which they seem to be influenced towards the land of their adoption. It is the great principal that Gold ought to contribute to the general good of the community, as well as the enrichment of the individual who finds it, that we are anxious to establish; and so long as this point is fully carried out, we shall endeavor to promote those measures which are most likely to be received with satisfaction by all parties.

Had we really been committed to any opinions which were opposed to the true interests of the diggers, we should not have been anxious to advert to those statements, which either folly or malice has prompted the speakers at the meetings, lately held at Mount Alexander, to put forth. If they knew that they were speaking falsely, and were actuated by unworthy motives to do so, they will injure themselves only; and the diggers at large may believe us when we say, that in directing attention to the "scum of Van Diemen's Land," we were actuated by a desire to protect honest industry at the mines and elsewhere from a set of ruffians, by whom they must know, as well as we do, that the diggings are infected...

Melbourne Morning Herald, Sat. Dec. 14, 1851

The implication in the Herald statements was that it was on side with the diggers' cause, but objected to the sentiments of some of the political leaders. However, any diggers reading this might have needed more convincing to believe that the Herald would stand with them against the doubling of the licence fees, or that the Herald's desire for the satisfaction of 'all parties' wasn't just code for having a bet each way and keeping close with the government.

In the Argus of 9 December 'JP' continued his critique of the government:

THE GOLD, THE GOVERNOR, AND THE SCHEDULES

To the Editor of the Argus

Sir, - The Governor is in a fix, and unless some spirited and wise measure is being shortly adopted, the Government will be in a fix also. The long and short of it is simply this, if it is necessary occasionally to throw overboard the cargo or guns of a vessel, warlike or otherwise, to save the ship and the lives thereon, it is necessary to do so now. The schedules are the cargo, they are encumbrances, let them be pitched overboard, and the colony will be saved; if not it will be ruined.

The Governor is reported to have always said that the Colony was not right for Separation – or in other words to govern itself. In this opinion, (and the members returned...have fully shown it) I have always coincided, but let him just at least give the first practical instance in himself.

He is no doubt placed in a most difficult position if he abides by the schedules, but the discovery of Gold was not (and indeed could not be) contemplated when those schedules were framed and I think the Crown Land Officers would do their duty best by advising, or at least acquiescing in a departure from the law in the present instance.

It is clear the Ordinary Revenue cannot bear the expenses consequent upon the Gold Discovery. It is clear, also, that it ought not to be charged with it. Let the schedules be pitched to Jobanum, but let the Colony be saved. Is anybody so unwise as to suppose that a bill of indemnity would not be accorded for such a departure? Can anybody suppose that even Downing-street itself would say one word of censure for so necessary a course? The Crown Officers hang too much to the law. Expediency should now be the only rule.

J.P

Melbourne, 4th December, 1851

Argus, Tuesday December 9, 1851, p 3

Clearly JP did not judge the doubling of the licence fee as the sword through the Gordian knot that would resolve the situation.

The following day the Argus editorial was a piece of classic verbosity:

THE CRISIS

There are circumstances under which, from the very force and number of ideas, expression altogether fails. Words may so cluster round the tongue that the lips refuse them utterance; and man stands speechless from the very quantity that he has to say, and from his being overpowered by the consciousness of matter of such accumulated importance, that it is hopeless to do adequate justice to the occasion.

In a similar position do we find ourselves now placed. We believe the circumstances have conspired to place the land of our adoption in a position, critical to a degree. While danger the most imminent and extreme stares us in the face, we look in vain for any indication of a power equal to the emergency. We see wavering, feebleness, and incompetency where there is need for firmness, energy and intelligence. The storm is upon us, and no one is by to take in sail, or lay a steady hand upon the helm.

The news from the great gold field continues of the most exciting character; the process of social disorganisation is rapidly going on. Day by day, new phases of our novel position are developing themselves and no man knows or guesses what any week may bring about. In such a crisis as this, men look to the Government; and they find it – just what anyone who has watched it would have expected. In stirring

times, as in the dullest, slow, treacherous, and incompetent; in great things as in small, petty, underhand, and feeble; true to its very nature, faithless and incapable to the last. Hugging its darling gold close to its heart, while all rushes to rack and ruin around it. Battening upon the sight of the yellow dross which it is preserving for Lord Grey, whilst this splendid Colony sinks into anarchy and confusion. Confessing itself utterly and hopelessly powerless to-day; attempting the direst absurdities tomorrow. Rejecting the advice and assistance of its truest friends, and instead of availing itself of the proffered hand of every well-wisher of the Colony, still further alienating the affections of men just when it least can spare a friend.

Never was infatuation persisted in, under circumstances more strongly telling of the necessity of awakening. The effete and shallow kings of the ancient *regime* in France rushed not more blindly on their fate; or displayed, whilst the storm arose around them, more pitiable inability to grapple with the difficulty, more puerile ignorance of the volcano upon which they slumbered.

On the 18th November last, the public were informed through the agency of the Government's most appropriate mouthpiece, the Colonial Secretary, in reference to the (meaning *any proposed*) increase of the licence-fee for gold digging, that:

The whole question had been well considered by the Government, particularly as regarded increasing the licence fee; and it had been thought that the excitement on the subject was so great, that if any attempt were made to raise the licence fee, serious outbreaks would occur.

And again on the 27th of November, that:

If, on the ground of expediency, any steps were taken to prevent them from digging gold, it would require a large and expensive police force, and might lead to a collision which would be attended with very dangerous consequences.

On the 1st December, the same public was informed, through the *Government Gazette*, that this was to be made and that:

The licence for one month, or the greater portion of one month, will be £3.

All persons at the gold fields, who are in any way connected

with the search for gold – as tent-keepers, cooks, &c., will be required to take out a licence on the same terms as those who are engaged in digging for it.

When we heard this rather startling announcement, we stated that we should wait to hear what the diggers said about it and we now hear from all sides, that the attempt to increase the fee is laughed to scorn.

The Commissioners are powerless....the increased fee, if paid at all, will be paid unwillingly, and but by a few. Its exaction by force of arms will end as the Colonial Secretary apprises us.

But now arises the consideration of another fact, strongly indicative of the wretched incompetency with which the present crisis is to be met.

At the precise time that this attempt is to be made, which we are assured by the Colonial Secretary himself is likely to lead to “collision” and “dangerous consequences” almost every policeman, foot and mounted, town and country, is throwing up his situation in consequence of insufficient pay.

This is to take place about the period of that great annual festival, Christmas; and just then while in this unprotected state, Melbourne and Geelong are to be favoured with the presence of some thousands of the fortunate diggers, who are to come to town on that bushman’s errand, “the spree.”

We have been sending up there, mob after mob, cargo after cargo, from Van Diemen’s Land. The high successes lately prevalent, and the wild, gambling nature of the pursuit itself, have naturally attracted every adventurer, every ne’er do-well, every man too lazy or too dissipated for steady employment; and these men are to be let loose upon us by thousands, to roam our streets, drunken, desperate, and brutal, at the same time that our police force is to be disbanded, and every other department of the public service virtually disorganised.

Are there no signs of this already? Is the successful digger utterly unknown; never rich till now, and whilst rich, only capable of enjoying riches in only one way?

Do the shallow incapables, who are hanging all this upon us, *ever* disentangle themselves from their trumpery pens and

paper, reports and returns, and walk the streets like other men? And if so, can they avoid seeing that small cloud, to-day like a man's hand, but which tomorrow may be a "great rain"?

Two days since, one of our own reporters saw a respectable woman grossly and repeatedly insulted by a drunken bushman, in the middle of Collins Street, and in open daylight. No constable was to be seen, and a complaint to their chief, resulted in the oft repeated intimation that the men were the masters and all that they wished was to be dismissed.

Let us think how this sort of thing will thicken as Christmas draws near, and the police force becomes more and more weak; and let us then properly estimate a Government which wallows in uncounted wealth, while it quietly tolerates this entire abrogation of the law, this destruction of all the decencies, amenities and securities of civilised life!

Our remarks are extending to an undue length, and we have still much to say, but once before in circumstances of a most critical character, we ventured to suggest a watchword for general adoption, "The convicts shall not land !" so we now propose another, upon a rigid adherence to which, we conceive the public safety imminently to depend – THE GOLD MUST BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RIGHTING OF ITS OWN WRONG !

Argus, Wednesday December 10, 1851, p3

In fact the above editorial was wrong in that the government was not "*hugging its darling gold close to its heart*". Rather it did not actually own the gold stored in the bank and government vaults. That gold was owned either by the gold diggers who had mined it or the agents who purchased it from them.

As always, it's a mixed picture: on the one hand La Trobe reported that diggers were buying land and banking money and on the other the newspaper was fearful of out of control diggers in Melbourne on a spree.

The Argus also reported that between Kyneton and the diggings there "*could not be less than 4,000 persons on the road*", but they were coming late in the season, as the water was drying up. Giving up work for such an enterprise when you couldn't wash gold was opined to be "*madness*".⁹¹

On Thursday 11 December the Argus continued editorializing where its previous editorial had left off:

⁹¹ The Argus, Wednesday December 10, 1851, page 2

THE CRISIS

"The Gold must be responsible for the righting of its own wrong," for two very sufficient reasons. Because there is no other fund at all adequate to the purpose, and because there is no other manner in which it can be so legitimately expended.

We have had another most melancholy exhibition in the Legislative Council; of the debates and divisions upon which we shall have something to say, although at present we must content ourselves with referring our readers to reports published in another column. But the small victory achieved by Government scheming upon one hand, and representative incapacity or venality upon the other, the case remains the same.

The splendid colony in which the lots of all of us are cast is *in extremis*, and nothing can save it from a very frightful crisis, but forcing the Government to depart from its present position of dull, narrow, sullen, stupidity to grapple with serious difficulties, in the manly and enlightened spirit in which they ought to be coped with; and casting off for once the snail-like and incapable pace with which they irritated us by travelling in old times; to step out boldly, with a stride as nearly equal to the occasion, as such political babies are capable of assuming.

There is no other found adequate to the occasion. The Estimates, which have been published, after some careful consideration on the part of an Auditor-General, of whose talents in figures we think as well as we think badly of his honesty of purpose, show a probable revenue for next year of about one hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds. The estimated expenditure for the same time, shows an amount of about one hundred and seventy-three thousand; leaving balance of about two thousand pounds.

His Excellency sends down a message, recommending increased pay to certain parties, boatmen, constables, letter carriers &c., involving an additional expense, probably of twenty or thirty thousand pounds, and accompanied with a hint that he is quite prepared to believe that such an increase may not be half enough to retain the men in their situations.

No hint is given of any provision for the many other public servants who have also to be provided for; but it is generally understood by everybody *but* the Government, that either a liberal allowance must be made, or that the public service will come to a standstill.

However, the poor General revenue is the willing horse, which cannot be pushed too hard; and up jumps the Attorney-General with the latest news of an unexpected threepence just received at the Custom-house; the Ordinary Revenue is reported to be progressing beyond all knowledge; and the elaborate tables of the Auditor-General are to be pitched aside for the more glowing calculations of the imaginative Lawyer.

Up jumps the Colonial Secretary and pleads with a most shameless perversion of a fact patent to every one of his hearers, that this much talked of gold fund is not a large fund at all; that there certainly is a trifling amount in the hands of the Government, but that it is very small, and therefore ought not to be meddled with; this very same fund being increased £770 by the arrival of the Escort, while this "golden pauper" is in the very act of insulting the Council with his balderdash.

And thus this childish career runs off. The expenditure will be necessarily increased by scores of thousands of pounds or general anarchy and confusion will prevail within these few days; and the difficulty is met by niggling with matters of a shilling.

These Atlases who are to support our work are so concentrating their attention, upon filching odd fifty pounds from the pockets of people that they cannot bestow attention upon the storm which will shortly howl around them.

They may tax the General Revenue as they please, but it will be found utterly inadequate at last, and that will have to be done eventually which would have come with a better grace at first, and have saved them the resort to some very discreditable manoeuvres, and the exhibition of much acrimony and ill-feeling, that will produce baneful effects thereafter.

And as the gold hoard of the Government is the only fund at all adequate to meet the necessities of these startling times, so it can in no way be so legitimately expended as in the maintenance of order and the preservation of peace.

We are talked to, indeed, of the sacred nature of Royalties, the *droits* of the crown and all such flummery. The importance of a large immigration fund is enlarged upon, and all possible and impossible excuses trumped up to prevent the separation of the Executive and its idolised treasure.

But gold is the property of the Crown, solely as trustee for the public. The fund is strictly applicable to the public service in the most advantageous mode of its expenditure. And men who would deliberately lock up their hoard for twelve months; awaiting orders from home, while for the want of that gold, the country over whose destinies they preside runs imminent risk of being shattered at their feet, prove themselves to be nothing short of wretched incapables, unfit to be trusted in influential positions by any people. They sacrifice the substance to the shadow. They trip across a cobweb, and tumble headlong down a precipice.

Argus, Thursday December 11, 1851, p2

The same edition of the Argus reported that the gold escort broke down somewhere near Kyneton because of the great weight of the gold it was carrying – 23,000 ounces⁹² of gold. At a conservative estimate of £2 per ounce that was worth £46,000. At a royalty of say 10% that was £4,600 - equal to 3,067 monthly Gold Licences at 30 shillings per licence.

The breakdown of the escort is a lovely metaphor. All that gold could be put to wonderful use. It could float a cash strapped Government. But instead, the weight of it seems to be crushing the Government.

Also in that same edition, reports from Ballarat said that many diggers had left for Mount Alexander, saying that “...no other place, to use a colonial phrase, seems to go down”. Stores had removed to the Mount, at a cost of £15 per ton, and it was said the police establishment was likely to be broken up, there being only 500 diggers left at Ballarat. So they were close to the time of Monster Meeting with many people still arriving. Although many of those at the Monster Meeting may have been very new on the field, they were nonetheless quite familiar with the Gold Licence issue.

On 8 December at Mount Alexander one party revealed that in the preceding week they'd won 57 pounds 2 ounces of gold⁹³ The Commissioner was reported to have one ton of gold in his care – that is 32,150 troy ounces,⁹⁴ one third more than the load which caused the escort to grind to a halt in the days before.

These figures could not have helped but create a sense that everyone must be rich, and could therefore afford a Gold Licence of £3 per month. But if these two figures – 23,000 and 32,000 ounces - were divided between the 25,000 diggers reported on Mt Alexander it amounted to only 2.2 ounces per person. Which was barely making wages and a £3 fee for a Gold Licence would take close to two-thirds of it.

Meanwhile in Geelong diggers were arming themselves and swearing not to pay.⁹⁵

⁹² 23,000 troy ounces = 715.4 kilograms

⁹³ 57 troy pounds 2 troy ounces – 21.3 kilograms (12 troy ounces=1 troy pound)

⁹⁴ 1 metric ton = 32,150 troy ounces = 999.98 kilograms

⁹⁵ The Argus, Wednesday December 10, 1851, page 2

GEELONG
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT)

Tuesday, 9th December, 1851

There appears to be a most extraordinary demand for guns, pistols, powder and ball, and even cutlasses are inquired for. The diggers are generally the purchasers, and people wonder what they can want with such a quantity of arms. If the Editor of the *Herald* were in the habit of hearing the expressions made use of that I do, he would say it was "virulent treason" and no mistake.

As it is not likely that the diggers are providing themselves with firearms to shoot at the gold, we may be allowed to suppose that they contemplate an excursion to the moors at the expiration of the present year.

"What will save the Colony?" Is a question in every body's mouth, and one which, though it might be answered satisfactorily, is much more difficult of solution than "Who will ruin the Colony?"

Many parties have left Geelong to-day and yesterday for the diggings, but with the solitary exception of one individual, they declare against paying the £3 fees. He said he would if the rest did, but not unless the great body of diggers do.

Argus, Wednesday December 10, 1851, page 2

An interesting question is which gold field did the armed diggers from Geelong go to? Was it Ballarat, where violence would erupt in 1854? And was Ballarat always going to be more violent, than Forest Creek? Was the atmosphere for the Eureka violence being laid three years earlier? Or were the diggers from Geelong heading for Forest Creek, even if via Ballarat?

Given all this news and opinion from all sections of society, all of it against La Trobe, and assuming that Gold Commissioner Powlett had gone to Melbourne and told La Trobe about the 3,000 strong meeting of Monday 8 December and the feeling against the doubled licence, what did La Trobe do?

On Saturday 13 December La Trobe issued a notice rescinding the increased licence fee. Though not published till Tuesday 16, the media got wind of the change - enough to print the following on Monday 15 December, the day of the Monster Meeting:

THE LICENCE FEE

We believe that we are warranted in stating, that the Government has seen the necessity of deciding that the exaction of the doubled licence-fee shall not be enforced. Very "firm" and very "judicious" certainly the whole proceeding!

The adoption of a charge upon the gold, in the shape of a royalty, is still under consideration; and the Licence system having proved a complete failure, we think that some better course should be decided upon.

Argus, Monday Dec. 15, 1851, p 2

The official notice, published on Tuesday 16, the day after the Monster Meeting, read:

Colonial Secretary's Office

Melbourne, Dec 13, 1851

Measures being now under the consideration of Government, which have for their object the substitution, as soon as circumstances permit, of other regulations in lieu of those now in force, based upon the principle of Royalty leviable upon the amount actually raised, : - His Excellency, the Lieutenant-Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, hereby causes it to be notified, that no alteration will for the present be made in the amount of the Licence Fee as levied under the Government Notice of the 18th August 1851; and that Governemnt Notice of the 1st inst, is hereby rescinded.

By His Excellency's Command

W. LONSDALE

Argus, Tuesday Dec. 16, 1851, p2

But the gold diggers on Forest Creek didn't get either paper till after the Monster Meeting. So, as they gathered there they thought that a fight still had to be won:

MOUNT ALEXANDER.
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

Forest Creek, Dec. 13, 1851.

You will excuse my writing much, in fact I have little to write about. Meetings have taken place at the various diggings, and deputations are to attend the general meeting on Monday next, at 3 o'clock, p.m. The whole of the men are in commotion, some cursing the Government and its myrmidons, others who are not quite so violent, censure the Government, and say that they should have thought that America had been a sufficient lesson; others simply state they will not pay £3, and these I think are most likely to act in case of emergency.

Argus, Wednesday 17 December 1851 page 2



'3 Cheers for the Argus &c.' Speakers on dray at Monster Meeting, artist unknown
 (Rex Nan Kivell Collection T2249, National Library of Australia)



'The Great Meeting of Diggers, 1851' by D. Tulloch, based on Thomas Ham's 1852 engravings titled 'Five Views of the Goldfields of Mount Alexander'.
(Collection, Allport Library & Museum of fine Arts, Hobart, Tasmania)

Chapter 23

The Monster Meeting

The Monster Meeting was held right at a moment when the escort delivered 18,191 ounces of gold from Forest Creek. Ballarat on the same day was delivering only 1,018 ounces.⁹⁶

The Argus reporter, Mr Howard, reported the meeting:

ARGUS
MEETING OF THE DIGGERS AT MOUNT ALEXANDER.
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)
Monday, 15th December, 1851.

Early on Monday, preparations were made, flags collected, and a temporary platform brought to the spot in the shape of a dray, which being well secured, answered the purpose. As the hour approached, men began to collect in small groups along the Creek, and wend their way towards the appointed spot, and by three o'clock some eight or nine thousand persons had collected. Hore's band was heard in the distance, and as it approached large crowds made their appearance from the lower diggings, which were welcomed with hearty cheers.⁹⁷

Every preparation having been made, the Committee took their stand, and **J. F. Mann, Esq.**, was called to the chair, who stated the reasons why the meeting had been called, and trusted that the numerous crowd assembled would conduct themselves as became men. He then called upon Mr. Potts to address them.

On this gentleman's appearance, he was welcomed with three hearty cheers, and addressed them as follows—

Brother Diggers and Fellow-Citizens;—

This unrighteous proposition of the Government compelled me to appear before you on a former occasion. You all know what was said and done at that meeting and the decision come to, to call the present, and though I expected to have the pleasure of addressing a large concourse of my fellow-diggers, I must say I was quite un-prepared for the present assemblage.

I see before me some 10,000 or 12,000 men, which any country in the

⁹⁶ Argus Thursday 18th December, 1851 page 2. 18,191 ounces = 565.8 kilograms, 1,018 ounces = 31.7 kilograms

⁹⁷ Hore's Sax-Horn Band played for the magic lantern shows 'phantasmagorica' in September of that year in Melbourne, and it was one of the first all Australian (family) brass bands. (pp.91,210,281. Whiteoak, John, Aline Scott-Maxwell, Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia, Currency Press 2003)

world might be proud to own as her sons. The very cream of Victoria, and the sinews of her strength.

Now, my friends, let it be seen this day whether you intend to be slaves or Britons, whether you will basely bow down your neck to the yoke, or whether, like true men, you will support your rights. (Cheers)

On this ground are collected some 25,000 or 30,000 men, who have hitherto united in the bonds of friendship, discarded all distillation of nations and needs, and lived like brothers.

Why then should we bear a grievous imposition, while it is in our power to avoid it? You must be aware, that the 30s charged by the Government is an illegal taxation⁹⁸, and that His Excellency has no power to tax us.

We are willing to pay a small tax, but the question is, will we pay £36 a year? (Voices from all parts, never.)

Because a few men think proper to say, you shall pay, that is no reason why a body of men such as I now address, should accede to such extortion. (No, no, we will not.)

The Herald describes us as a set of cut-throats and scoundrels, from that journal little else could be expected, and I should not have brought this subject forward, but that I conceive there is something in the back ground. You all know George Cavenagh, and you may easily know, that the article was simply written to gain favour with Commissioners, and those who ride after the gold cart. (Good men.)

Now we want no favour from such good men. Talk of honesty! I defy the world to produce the same honesty among the same number as at Forest Creek. Is there one of you who locks your door. (Laughter.) When I retire to rest, the last inquiry I make of those in the tent is, whether they have put the skewer in the blanket. (Renewed laughter.)

Men go to work, leaving thousands of pounds in their boxes, without lock or guard, and nothing but a bit of calico between that and a robber, that is, if there is any.

Do not fathers bring their daughters among us, husbands their wives and children, and where has there been a single case of one being insulted. You are living in better order here than they are in Melbourne, with all their blue coat force, pistols and carbines included.

It is useless to talk of physical force, moral force is what is required. You are men, possessed of the same power of reason, strength of mind and body, as your would-be extorters.

Now will you pay the £3 licence. (Never, from all parts)

Good—Now my friends I tell you, that if you were sued for the 30s only, no Court in the British dominions dare give it against you; we are willing to pay a little, but skinned alive we will not be!

The Home Government does not require, nor do they possess the power to enforce unjust taxation. It was such taxation that lost Great Britain, America. (A pause.) I hope brother diggers, as a Briton, such unjust

⁹⁸ This assertion that the Gold Licence was illegal was not correct

taxation will not be the cause of separating these splendid Colonies from the Mother Country.

But mind, if from any mis-government, the feelings and affection we at present possess as Britons, are torn asunder by Government misrule, and 50,000 British hearts are estranged by misrule — then, and then only, must violence be talked of. (Hear, hear.)

There are few here who would advocate separation; few who do not love the Country of their adoption; few who do not feel themselves Free! And none, I trust, who will be slaves! (Immense cheering)

I call upon you once more, to pledge yourselves to support one another - not only against taxation, but against disorder. We do not want the verdant youths of the Commissioner; they will do very well to rise after the gold cart- but, to keep us in order- why, men, the idea is absurd! We will see to one another. A Digger in distress shall raise a thousand brother-diggers, to support him.

This is the first chance the labouring classes have had to do good, but let them not abuse it. His Excellency is a squatter, a butcher, and he is interested in keeping down the price of labour.

They say, labour is too high, and men cannot be got. Why, I can employ a thousand men within a week. Let him pay a fair price; and he too will find no difficulty. Why should the laboring men be skinned alive, by what Sir Eardley Wilmot termed Wool Kings?

I will now read you the first resolution; this was seconded by J. **O'Connor, Esq.**

That this meeting deprecates as unjust, illegal, and impolitic, the attempt to increase the licence fee from 30s to £3.

Carried

Capt. Harrison, with delegates from Bendigo Creek and other diggings, made his appearance on the platform, and was received with three hearty cheers. The Captain addressed them in a few words, thanking them for the flattering reception, and promised to have something to say when his turn came.

Mr Lineham rose to address the meeting, and commenced by stating, that he would occupy their time a few minutes with a small matter concerning himself.

You will remember, friends, that at the last meeting I drew your attention to the leading article of the Herald, wherein he kindly termed you the scum of Van Diemen's Land, and many other opprobrious names. This has reached him through the columns of the Argus, and raised his anger against me individually.

He⁹⁹ tells you, in his last leading article, that he has sent you an agent to

⁹⁹ George Cavanagh, Editor of the Herald

watch over your interests, but I am more inclined to think it is for the purpose of looking after his own; and that I consider is very small, for I shall be much surprised if any man present will support the Paper which contains what I will read.

It was such men as George Cavenagh, and the lying Herald, that made peaceable men rebel against Government.

(Mr Lineham then read the objectionable parts of the Herald's leading article, which was heard with groans and laughter.)

Now, men, if George Cavenagh's Paper is not a libel against the whole of you, I am not worthy of standing here.

Having satisfactorily proved to you that my former statements were true, I would now draw your attention to a subject of more importance. It is the tax. Will you pay £3? (No, never.)

That's right. Now I will tell you how I intended to do, when the Commissioner came round. I should refuse to pay, and he would compel me to go with him. Now I should propose if one went, all went. (Yes, yes.) Of course we are too independent to walk, and it will take a curious number of horses to drag us to Melbourne. (Laughter)

I am not an advocate for forcible resistance, nor do I think any of you are; we can gain the day without it, though the Herald should use its thunders.

But, my friends, I find in the present number of that Government tool, that they have altered their mind, that they do not intend to enforce it, but to establish a royalty. Have we any assurance that such is the case? Or if such is the case, what guarantee have we that another change may not take place at the same breath?

I would advise, that until something definite is settled, pay nothing; it is the height of madness for Government to try the strength of a body of men like us, united as I believe we are; we can defy the whole colony put together if compelled to do so.

Some blame Mr. La Trobe for all this disturbance; now I beg to differ. Mr La Trobe has his faults, but I consider that he was too easily led by the advice of designing men.

I trust none will pay the £3 imposition or any royalty, though they were obtaining twenty-pound weight of gold per day. (Hear, hear)

He then read the second resolution, which was seconded by **Mr Doyle**, and carried:—

That this meeting while deprecating the use of physical force, and pledging itself not to resort to it except in case of self-defence; at the same time pledges itself to relieve or release any or all diggers that on account of non-payment of £3 licence may be fined or confined by Government orders or Government agents, should Government temerity proceed to such illegal lengths.

Captain Harrison came forward, amidst deafening cheers, and as soon as he could be heard, said: I am a little late, but you will bear in mind I have ridden 20 miles to address you. (A voice—"Put your cap on, Captain.") I took my cap off, my lads, to honor patriots, but I might not do so for Victoria or her myrmidons. I feel proud to have it in my power to stand before such a noble set or men—men who will protect themselves against the oppression of an unjust Government. Why has Government made this change? They say it is to pay the expenses of protecting us, but I say, men, they are false pretences.

We might have our throats cut, our tents robbed or fired for all the protection Government affords us. How was it at Ballarat, when a serious row took place by a set of midnight scoundrels; when the lives and property of several were in danger, and expresses were sent to the Commissioner to send up the police, or that murder and robbery would be committed? What did Government do? What did the Commissioner say? I'll tell you. He said—"I would send you the police with pleasure, but the truth is, I have not enough to protect myself."

What then are we paying for? We give a fee for protection, and got nothing in return. It is not the police protecting us, but it is we who are taking care of them.

There is now a surplus of £13,000, which has been screwed out of the sinews of the gold-diggers - (Shame, shame) - and what is to be done with it? They say it's for the Queen. Has the Queen not enough, or does she want it to buy pinafores for the children? They will tell you her salary is small. I wish to God I had 1-20th for mine!

I called a meeting at Bendigo Creek the other day, and all came except the tent-keepers, to a man, and it was unanimously carried that we would not present an humble petition to withdraw the tax, but, like free and independent men, we decided that we would publish to the world, by every means in our power, our determination not to pay the tax.

A subscription was entered into to pay expenses, and every man paid his ½oz of gold. I was appointed a delegate to visit Forest Creek, and endeavor to cause the same feeling here, but I was proud to find on my arrival that you were beforehand with me.

Fryers Creek has not been behind hand, from 150 it has swelled to 3,000, a small beginning, but a small spark will blow up a magazine, or increase as your present number shows.

Talk of doubling the fee, let them reduce it one half of the present charge instead of doubling, or they will find, like the fable of the golden egg, that in grasping all, they will get nothing.

As for the statements of the Herald with respect to a royalty fee, it is only put in another and more obnoxious shape. They say, that according to law the Queen is entitled to a royalty. The Colonies never cost the Queen or Government one shilling, and under those circumstances I consider that they are not entitled to the benefits of the land.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Presumably he means that the Crown never paid anything for this land.

John Bull was a quiet animal, but if imposed upon, might do the same as the camel; he would stand quiet enough until they overloaded him, but if he got one ounce too much, he would kick until he kicked the whole load off, and threw his rider into the bargain.

He considered the tax unconstitutional, and it was a similar tax that lost Charles the First his head; it was unjust taxation that caused the United States to throw off the burthen, and unless the Government learnt a little wisdom, an additional tax might lend to the same result here.

He knew he was rather warm on the subject, but he spoke as he felt, and he trusted all would do the same. He would not occupy their time much longer, but would wish to draw their attention to the support they had received from the Press, with the exception of one.

As to the lying Herald, whatever its proprietors might say, it was of little consequence, the journal was well known, it would crush all and every poor man, to exalt aristocracy. At first he professed to be the Catholic organ, they saw through his duplicity, and he, to save himself, panders with the Government. George Cavenagh put him in mind of the fable of the ass, who, when put between two bundles of hay, starved himself to death.

With respect to the squatter, he considered that class the worst used of any. They had been fostered up by Government for the purpose of preventing unity.¹⁰¹

Let us, my friends, unite as one people (Great cheering) without respect to creed or country, and victory will crown our efforts. (It was some minutes before the next speaker could be heard, from the cheering.)

Dr. Webb Richmond proposed the third resolution, and observed that he had resided among the miners here and at Ballarat for three months — he had been associated with large bodies of men in various parts of the world, and had never in his life met with a better conducted, quieter, or honester set of men than the lucky or unlucky vagabonds of Mount Alexander; he had never experienced more kindly feeling or seen more exhibited than among the miners assembled, and what pretence the Herald could have for stigmatizing them as it had, he could not divine, and although quiet and orderly, the Government had done nothing out of the thirty shillings licence money to protect them.

With regard to the said licence, he did not consider the Government had any right to impose anything as a tax or royalty. These Colonies were vested in Parliament, and no revenue could be raised out of them except for the benefit of the people.

The Crown Lands Act appropriated the proceeds to the specific purposes of emigration and improvement, and if any surplus arose after paying the expenses of protection, to the Land Fund, &c., to no other could it legally be applied.

¹⁰¹ Interesting point, considering the view that the squatters are in control of the Legislative Council, with power over La Trobe.

He doubted very much the wisdom of a licence fee, it was expensive to collect, unequal in its bearing, and a perfect collection all but impracticable.

The Sydney Government had in hurry and consternation originated the system, and this Government had blindly followed it, without any substantial reason.

He was certain that not one-fourth of the diggers had paid licence, or ever would, but the increased demand of £3 all were determined to oppose, not so much for the amount of the money, as the principle involved. If the Government obtained this increase, there would be no end to their demands, and they may depend on many increases.

He looked upon these measures as evidences of incapacity in the Government, and unless they did something towards governing themselves, they would inevitably fall into difficulties.

They were in the condition of a large mercantile firm requiring good management, and they would find themselves compelled to a system of self-protection, and he should recommend an Association, having a joint-stock Bank, to issue notes, melt the gold into bars, assay and stamp it, and export to the best market the surplus not required as deposit, to secure the stability of the Bank.

They may conduct all their business themselves; but if they did not, preposterous as it may appear, they would find while gold was worth £3 17s 10½d in London, it would fall to £2 10s, or perhaps to £2 in Melbourne.

All sorts of schemes would be devised to operate on the diggers, and reduce their profits, while, if they united and acted wisely, they could not only protect themselves, but add largely to the commercial prosperity of the Colony.

He would now move - That Delegates be named from this meeting, to confer with the Government, and arrange an equitable system of working the Gold Fields.

Seconded by **Mr. Potts**, and carried.

Moved, that **Captain Harrison, Dr. Richmond, and Mr. Plaistowe** be appointed Delegates from this meeting, to make arrangements with the Government in the spirit of the foregoing resolutions.

Carried

Mr Booley succeeded the former speaker.

Fellow-diggers—If anything ought to cheer the heart of a man, and place him in society, it ought to make him glad. There are few people who properly understand what a Government is, or what it ought to be. It should be the chosen servants of a free people, and to be just they ought to be a right-minded people. To be respected by fellow man, is a right-minded man's pride.

What ought to be the standard of man? Justice. Why do we cry out against Government? Because they do not do justice. Government ought to act with rectitude towards themselves. We ought not too readily to speak against Government. We do not wish to destroy the distance of a Government. We wish to look upon it as a beautiful picture, which that Government ought to represent.

I dare say you have seen a picture resembling a being with scales in one hand, and a sword in the other; the scales represent justice, and the sword represents the power of maintaining it. Such should be Government. A criminal, when brought to justice, hangs down his head and trembles but the innocent man stands erect, he asks no favor, and as equal man in estate, we ask but for justice! (Cheers.)

In America, the land sold, benefited the country. It caused immigration, repaired roads, and all and every part was fully and fairly accounted for. If Mr La Trobe has any foresight, he must see this tax ought to be appropriated to similar purposes and unfold the vast resources and manifest riches to the world.

Why does he require it for the Queen, who will never receive a sixpence? Let him expend it to make the Colonies what they ought to be. Let him make it a Colony of virtuous and thriving people.

We have been told that the poor man is starving, that work is scarce, and they have nothing. Now the scale may be turned. The poor man may be elevated, the independency so much desired is within his grasp.

I could not but laugh, when, in Geelong, at hearing a friend of mine complaining, "Why, said a passer-by, do as I have done." I went to the diggings - sank a hole - the next day I went down a poor man, and at night came out a gentleman. (Laughter)

Is it not as fair to give the poor man a chance as the squatter, when wool is up? Why should so much favour be shown them? What attention have they paid to the comforts of their men, - bad huts, bad food, and often bad treatment, while they were lolling in their mansions.

Let the poor man get the value of his labour. If the rich would not give it, Providence, in his wisdom, has thought fit to do so. Let them make good use of it, and let them act on the great principles—morality,— justice, and truth.

They talk of the morality of Mr La Trobe in private life, but I unhesitatingly assert that Mr. La Trobe is an immoral man, in every sense of the word. Like the man who strained at the gnat and swallowed the camel, he lay the tax upon the people that were compelled to shear, sow, and reap, until he drove them to agitate. He finds his conduct deprecated, and that destruction must follow. He says we must let it pass; the people will endure it no longer, and thus he plays with their feelings.

Now, my friends, make up your minds; if you find a man who does pay £3 for his licence, although he obtain 50 lbs. of gold per day, surround his hole, and prevent him working. (Long and continued cheering, accompanied with— we will, we will).

The Speaker then alluded to several instances, where men when combined, could do more with each other than the Government. You, my friends, will not want to fight at all; make up your minds you will not pay; you may if united, defy all power. I wish distinctly and earnestly to beg of you not to let anything divide you; carry out your purposes; there is no danger, when a Government is corrupt in nature as this is. (Hear)

I trust you never, never will be slaves. Form associations, banks; let money out at interest. Should you, as a poor man, want money, pay interest. Out of this may grow importance, rich in mind, rich in morals—free and independent as we would be. (Cheers.)

Mr E Hudson came forward and told his numerous hearers, that when they had settled down he would say a few words.

Previous to my coming here this afternoon, I candidly confess I did not do you justice. I expected to find, as on most such occasions, numerous interruptions, with all the &c., but I must say, the greatest credit is due to all assembled, for the quiet orderly manner in which this meeting is conducted. You have effectually shut the mouths of your opponents, both blue and red.

Now I happen to be a short man, and not favorable to long speeches, and you can do a great deal in a short time, not by physical force, for I am not built for fighting or rigged for running, but by a firm determination to stand together, and support each other against the £3. imposition. Will you pay £3? (No, no, from all quarters.)

We will deal in suppositions, though they make but a poor meal for hungry men. Suppose Government send power. Will you stand firm? (We will.) Well, then, if the noonies do come, put them in your cradles and rock them to sleep—but mind, keep your powder dry.

When I came over from Adelaide, I had various opportunities of seeing what scarcity there was for labour - men could be obtained if fair wages were offered; this the settlers would not do, and the men came to the mines.

Government wish to drive them back by a heavy tax, and compel them to accept the settlers terms; but I say, let the lazy, would-be-gentlemen, turn out themselves, or pay the price that gold will fetch.

Gold had no attraction, to leave picks, spades, and cradles, to come here to assert your rights. Be steady to your purpose, but as I said before, keep your powder dry.

The Speaker finished with once more entreating them to stand firm to their purpose, and if providence favoured them, to make good use of it on their return home.

The fourth resolution was then read.

That to meet the expenses of the Delegates and other incidents, a

subscription of 1s per month from each cradle be entered into. Carried.

Captain Harrison then came forward to draw their attention to the necessity of enrolling themselves into an Association, each member to pay 6s entrance, for the purpose of meeting any demands at a future period; if not wanted, to be equally divided between Melbourne and Geelong, and devoted to charitable institutions.

The fifth resolution was then read, and carried - which was as follows:- That the miners at each diggings appoint Committees to watch over their interests, and that a Central Committee be formed by a Delegate from the Committee of each Digging, such Delegates to be paid for their services, and report proceedings to a General Meeting of the miners, to be held the first Monday in every month.

As a Committee will meet at each of the diggings, and the various Committees meet together at places as may be agreed on, it is necessary now to select twelve parties; let them be divided so as to receive subscriptions and enroll their names.

Twelve gentlemen were then named by the meeting; and at the suggestion of Captain Harrison, **Mr. Howard**¹⁰² was appointed treasurer.

Three cheers were then given for the Argus, which was heartily responded to, when Mr. Howard, as the agent for that paper, returned thanks in a few words. He sincerely thanked them in the name of his employers. He knew that it was ever the wish of the proprietors of the Argus to watch over the interests of the working classes. He had been sent there for that purpose, and until he might be recalled, should endeavour to the best of his ability, fearlessly and frankly to make his reports.

One cheer more for the Argus—three groans for the Herald, a vote of thanks to the Chairman, a tune from Hore's band, and the immense crowds gradually dispersed to their respective tents.

At seven o'clock that evening no person could have surmised that anything of importance had taken place during the day. During Captain Harrison's address, there could not have been less than 14,000 persons on the ground, not a cradle was to be seen working. The men appear to have risen en masse, at the sound of the band, and retired in the same order.

Argus, Thursday 18 December, page 2

For further commentary on the Monster Meeting and the speeches, go to the Monster Meeting interviews (www.monstermeeting.net/the-monster-meeting-interviews).

¹⁰² The Argus journalist, author of this report

Chapter 24

La Trobe's Response to the Monster Meeting

On December 17, before he could have read the Argus report of what was said at the meeting, but four days after he rescinded the doubling of the licence, La Trobe wrote to London. This Despatch (57) was concerned with law and order, and reiterated La Trobe's request of Despatch 54 (2 December 1851) for military troops to be sent to the colony. He wrote:

2. With gold now in the hands of "*men of all classes*" there would soon be people arriving from all countries of the world – "*immigrants of every grade*" - increasing the need for a force to maintain security...

That with new gold fields being discovered, no pecuniary inducement would provide him with enough police... No other course is open to him than to request troops.
3. He was calling for external assistance (it seems) because the colonies could not supply his needs, particularly "*if great evils are not to result when the strong current of immigration of the mixed multitudes from more distant countries ... reaches us.*"
4. He believed that within 12 months of the Colony's birth the population would have doubled and that he would require a mounted and infantry force.
5. "*...great care should be exercised in the selection of a proper class of men to be incorporated in any regiment or regiments sent to Victoria. As matters are, no ordinary tie will keep men to their engagements. The great wealth which is handed from hand to hand ... by many as devoid of skill, character or industrious habits, as by the sober and deserving, is calculated to turn the strongest heads, and shake the firmest ordinary principle. None but tried men will pass through such an ordeal, with unshaken adherence to duty.*"
7. "*...nothing but a strong and well appointed government, giving full assurance of security, and professing the power of compelling obedience to the Law, will meet future difficulties, and reserve to this community the internal character of a British Colony.*"

I have the honour to be

My Lord

*Your Lordships most obedient servant, CJ La Trobe*¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Despatch No. 57, 17 December 1851

Curiously in this Despatch La Trobe makes no mention of his rescinding the doubling of the licence fee.

Two days later, on December 19, now undoubtedly in full knowledge of the Monster Meeting on Forest Creek, La Trobe dictated Despatch 58.

2. Matters would have been controllable if the gold fields situation had stayed as it was at Ballarat, but Mount Alexander (as outlined in previous Despatch 54) had changed "*the whole features of the case.*"

This made him "*obliged to anticipate the future, and ask in what manner the security and real prosperity and social welfare of the Colony, and the proper administration of Government provided for.*"

3. There were 20,000 people spread over 20 miles at Mount Alexander, and delivering two tons¹⁰⁴ of gold per week to Melbourne, and "*undoubted proof of the early acquisition of great wealth by the labouring classes abound(s).*" A pound weight¹⁰⁵ a day was usual, some made 50 pounds weight¹⁰⁶ a day, and it was being scraped from the ground.
4. "*Right and left throughout the whole region gold is found to exist*" and was being "*resorted to by many hundred adventurers*" – from Forest Creek, to Barkers Creek to Bendigo and Fryers Creek.
5. Gold was being discovered in other places in the Colony - Goulburn River, Omeo – and "*meanwhile the whole structure of society and the whole machinery of government is dislocated.*"
6. Most diggers had left Ballarat for Mount Alexander, and only about 300 diggers are left at Ballarat.
7. Men who returned to their towns and homes from Ballarat had now taken off again to Mount Alexander. Towns were again deserted and businesses not connected with gold were at a standstill.

The diggers were men of "*every grade*", landing from other colonies and England, and people are overlanding from SA and NSW.

And regarding the functions of government:

8. Even those who were "*amenable to sober reason and a sense of duty*" are enticed to the gold fields. And "*the great rise in the cost of all the necessities of life and the price of labour, interpose obstacles in the way of continuance in the Public Service.*"
11. He must increase the rate of pay to subordinate officers of almost every class, not only out of justice but also to retain them.
12. In administering the police to do their job "*my hands appear paralysed*". He had increased the pay for police in hopes that it "*might satisfy*" those who were in the service or who might join, and this even though..."*it is*

¹⁰⁴ 2 tons (metric) = 2,000 kilograms

¹⁰⁵ 1 pound = 0.37 kilograms

¹⁰⁶ 50 pounds = 18.7kilograms

impossible to deny that the circumstances of the times have not only congregated and given a species of power to no inconsiderable number of restless and unprincipled characters, gathered from this and the neighbouring Colonies, but there are many in their number bound by us to the social order, and but too anxious to sow dissatisfaction between the governed and those placed in authority."¹⁰⁷

So far this was a summation of what was already known. He continued:

Many opinions of the Legislative Council were "*little calculated to strengthen the Government...*"

"I have become conscious since the beginning of the month that the present licensing system, however suited to the circumstances of New South Wales, can never fully or satisfactorily be carried out in this Colony"

La Trobe had earlier suggested that a better system was needed, but this was the first time he said that the Gold Licence was not working.

In this Despatch La Trobe went on to say that he had requested from the Governor General a military detachment. The Governor General had previously agreed to 50, but now said that without difficulty he could supply another 30. La Trobe said he needed 200 men to cope with the pressures, and ensure the security of institutions in the towns and of the custody of gold.

2. *"The authorities must of necessity trust to the respectable inhabitants of the City, to come forward at this time, when many hundreds of successful adventurers from the gold fields have temporarily returned (for) Christmas and New Year, to assist in repulsing disorder and securing the peace of the town."*

An earlier letter to the Argus had also expressed this fear. There were no reports that this fear was founded in reality.

19. *"Judging from its effects upon the community in general hitherto, one would be disposed to regard the discovery of these great mineral treasures, in any other light than a blessing."*¹⁰⁸

And most notably, in this despatch there was no mention of the Monster Meeting, or of La Trobe's decision to **not** double the Gold Licence fee.

¹⁰⁷ From La Trobe Despatch No. 58, 19/12/51

¹⁰⁸ From La Trobe Despatch No. 58, 19/12/51

Chapter 25

Media Response to the Monster Meeting

The Melbourne Morning Herald correspondent, 'JW', arrived at Forest Creek the Sunday prior to the Monster Meeting and was immediately impressed by the number of diggers attending church.

On Monday he attended the Monster Meeting:

"...a large number attended...and after several resolutions had been put and carried, the gathering dispersed, as orderly as if they had been attending a meeting in Exeter Hall...

...From what I saw and what I heard, I am quite clear the Diggers will never submit to the increased fees; it will be unwise in the Government to make the attempt. I think a moderate Royalty would not be objected to (to cover all charges such as escort and assaying, and) the Licence be granted FREE. This arrangement would be a boon to all those who are unfortunate in their finding. The fortunate would not, I feel assured, object to a fair and moderate percentage and carried, the gathering dispersed, as orderly as if they had been attending a meeting in Exeter Hall...

...From what I saw and what I heard, I am quite clear the Diggers will never submit to the increased fees; it will be unwise in the Government to upon their gains, which after all...they are fully entitled to, if enterprise, hard labour, perseverance and the abandonment of almost every comfort, ought to be the reward of the gold-finder..."¹⁰⁹

Melbourne Morning Herald, Monday, December 22

This was the first time the word 'Diggers' was used as a proper noun, indicating that the meeting had unified the diggers into the Diggers - a political force, as David Bannear asserts in the Monster Meeting Interviews?¹¹⁰

In talking to diggers the following day the Melbourne Morning Herald correspondent found that he was "*met with courtesy, frankness, and communicativeness, that I should hardly have expected, - no reserve of jealousy whatsoever.*"¹¹¹

After relating a tale of a digger, David Morrison, retrieving JW's lost portmanteau, JW concluded: "*I am most agreeably gratified, and rather unexpectedly so from the reports that have been made to the prejudice of the Diggers.*"¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Melbourne Morning Herald, Monday, December 22

¹¹⁰ www.monstermeeting.net/the-monster-meeting-interviews/

¹¹¹ Melbourne Morning Herald, Monday, December 20

¹¹² Melbourne Morning Herald, Monday, December 20

On 22 December, two days after this positive report on the Diggers, the Melbourne Morning Herald delivered a report with another feel altogether. There is no clear indication of who wrote this, but it was probably the Editor:

**MELBOURNE MORNING HERALD
MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1851**

THE ANARCHICAL MOUNTEBANKS.

The deepest degradation that can befall a people, is the entrusting of the expression of its sentiments to rogues and quacks, and permitting them in a popular cause to thrust themselves forward as its leaders.

They impart an air of burlesque to that which may be worthy of grave consideration, and so disfigure a cause by their foolery and dishonesty, as to obscure its intrinsic merit, and render its discussion in a calm and reasoning spirit almost impracticable.

Should the conductors of the press be wicked or weak enough to crouch to these unprincipled wind-bags, lest they should receive a jet of their foul flatus in the shape of vituperation or falsehood, the state of affairs becomes bad indeed; but such happily is not yet the case with us.

At the risk of causing another leash of groans for the Herald to ring along the ranges of Mount Alexander, in obedience to the invocations of that convicted culprit, the liberated Lineham, we shall proceed to do justice upon him and his "party!"

It seems that we have given Lineham offence by calling attention to the fact that there are some unmitigated scoundrels to be found at the diggings.

We are not surprised at Lineham's objections to our putting folks upon their guard against roguery and rascality; but we were not prepared to find him classing himself among the honest diggers, and trying to persuade them that they were included among the "scum" against which we warned them. The man who stole the boots and got off by crying "stop thief," was a commonplace individual when contrasted with Lineham.

We should not condescend to notice the sputterings of this vapouring anarchist were they merely directed against ourselves; but when he contrives to bring ten or twelve thousand people together, and evoke applause for sentiments which are only remarkable for tyrannical selfishness and unblushing dishonesty, it becomes our duty to denounce the doctrines which he and some others have had the audacity to promulgate, and which, if they were to prevail, would degrade us into a miserable community, from which every lover of order and justice would retire in abhorrence and disgust.

Before entering upon consideration of the anarchical predilections

of Mrs. Potts, Lineham, and Co., we feel it due to ourselves to declare our own views upon the question which the meeting at Mount Alexander was professedly called to consider.

We avow our repugnance to the licensing system. We feel that it is unjust to the diggers and the general public; it presses hardly upon many, and unequally upon all, while it produces a sum that bears no proportion to that share of the public treasure which ought to be appropriated to the public welfare.

We are entirely with the diggers in their objections to the licence fees, while we believe that every honest man among them is willing to contribute a fair proportion of his gains to the general good under any system which should proportion the amount paid to what he obtained.

We have always advocated the establishment of such a system – a system that recommends itself at once to reason and justice. We may be misrepresented by the selfish and unscrupulous, but while our columns are open to the perusal of all, we can afford to treat with contempt those calumnies which a reference to our written sentiments will utterly and entirely refute.

We, however, insist upon the absolute necessity of enforcing the principles we advocate by constitutional proceedings. The moment that resistance takes any other shape than that of firm remonstrance, the gold fields of Victoria will become the burying place of its prosperity. Plunder, under the name of patriotism, will stalk abroad. Gold will be secreted instead of sold.

An article that cannot be owned without an admission that its proprietor has rebelled against the State, must be at once cease to be a subject of merchandize, and short but sharp would be the process by which those who had seized upon it in defiance of the law, would learn that, without the protection of the law it would be utterly valueless.

We rejoice that the withdrawal of the treasonable tirades of the orators of Mount Alexander, as, otherwise, the Government might have appeared to succumb to threats while it resisted the force of reason or have been constrained to assert a power it was taunted with not possessing, the exercise of which would, nevertheless, have been prejudicial to the interests of the people. From this alternative, which Potts and Co. would have forced upon the State, it is happily relieved.

We will now look into the “reasonings” of the Alexandrian orators, beginning, with those of Potts. After a burst of clap-trap, about cream and sinews, and an enquiry whether the company present preferred slavery to freedom, and possession of rights to subjugation to yokes, &c. &c., after declaring that the thirty thousand

diggers had up to that moment been most fraternal, he proceeded to enquire whether they would pay 36 pound per annum, and of course the proposal was at once rejected.

After an immense amount of jabber intended to prove that, if they resisted the Government, the Government had not the strength to put them down, that their powers of intimidation were strong enough to prevent even Courts of Justice enforcing the law, he wound up with an assertion that all were free, that none should be slaves, and closed his harangue, in which, under the name of freedom, the foulest tyranny was counselled, by asking, why labouring men should be skinned alive by Wool Kings, and proposing a resolution.

Then came Lineham, whose exordium consisted of a criticism upon one of our articles, in which he tried to make it appear that the exposure of its character was calculated to make peaceable men rebel against the Government.

He then went on to declare his conviction that the diggers could defy the whole colony, and to express a hope that no man would pay a farthing to the Government, either for licence or Royalty, even though he were obtaining twenty pound weight of gold per day. Having delivered himself of this patriotic sentiment, the colonial Cuffey moved a resolution pledging the meeting to use violence, if necessary, in resisting the payment of the licence fee.

Next came that furious rebel Captain Harrison, who began by declaring his contempt of Queen Victoria and her myrmidons, and poured forth a volley of rant and abuse so utterly beside the point, and so indicative of a diseased imagination, that we in charity treat it as the raving of a political maniac, and dismiss it accordingly.

The speech of Dr. Richmond we find no fault with; nor should we have complained much of Mr. Booley's, were it not for one atrocious proposal, which we find, to our deep disgust, was received with long and continued cheering.

It was nothing more nor less than that any man found in the diggings who should have paid a licence, should be mobbed and deprived of the benefit of his earnings. It is well that this daring avowal has been made. It shows in clearer light than volumes of reasoning the oppression that those who defy the law are prepared to perpetrate, and that there is no despotism more ferocious or unendurable than that which is exercised by those who set up their own wills and opinions above all laws, both human and divine.

We have now analysed every speech, with the exception of a short one by a short man named Hudson, which is as void of argument and as full of vapour as that of Harrison; and we ask our readers whether any assembly that ever met could have more effectually succeeded, through the instrumentality of its speakers, in mangling a good cause, than that which congregated at the Alexander gold-diggings.

We beseech you, the gold-finders of Victoria, to cast off and repudiate such revolutionists as were some of those who took upon themselves to address you at your late meeting. Your cause was good, but it was disgraced by your advocates. The selfishness of their sentiments, their utter contempt for the general prosperity of the colony, their stupid insensibility to the rights of others, or their unprincipled determination to disregard them, burst forth, in almost every word they uttered, and though some of the bystanders may have shouted, we are persuaded that thousands listened with silent disgust.

Be true to yourselves and to your fellow men, and you may derive, from the gold you are raising, all the benefits that, under the protection of law and order, it is calculated to afford you; but if once passion and brute force become the ruling spirits of Victoria, your gold will be cankered; your land, become a moral desert, and your life a continued struggle for the preservation, of your property instead of the healthful pursuit of wealth, to be expended, when obtained, in procuring reasonable enjoyment.

Melbourne Morning Herald, 22 December, 1851

Apart from the wonderful verbosity of the piece, it is clear that the Melbourne Morning Herald Editor was relying on his competitor, the Argus, for his information – although not his opinions. Whilst he was against the Gold Licence as it had been implemented, his opinion was not, it seems, based on support for the same democratic rights that the speakers at the Monster Meeting craved.

The Argus reported on 22 December that many parties were leaving Mount Alexander for Melbourne for Christmas, that water was scarce, and that the diggers were extremely polite to women on the fields.

And the Argus as well as the Herald was calling the diggers the “Diggers”:

“The Government proclamation has just been made known to the Diggers at all events for the present.

The Diggers received the announcement without either surprise or approbation; they knew their own strength, and although they are willing to pay a fair and reasonable sum for the privilege of working and working hard upon Government Land, yet they will never submit to vacillating, uncertain, oppressive, or tyrannical charges. One word as to the present unjust levy in the present Licence Fees:- A person arriving on the ground, even in the last week of the month is liable to be called upon to pay the whole fee 30s, as if he had been there at the very beginning of the month; this is unreasonable and very unfair.”

Argus, Monday 22 December, 1851

On Friday 26 December the Argus published the estimated total yield of the gold fields - 242,414 ounces¹¹³ worth £730,242 - and against those who complained about the gold discovery and its effects, the Argus had “... *no sympathy with the croakers....*” And whilst some on the fields would meet disaster “...*to the great bulk of the community the discovery will, undoubtedly, bring solid and material advantage....*” and that four good results would be “...*the cessation of transportation; the establishment of steam navigation with the Mother Country; the granting of the right of responsible government; and very copious immigration from England...*” and so “...*we hail the gold discovery as calculated to prove inestimable value to these Colonies; and in the hopeful contemplation of such mighty advantages, we can cheerfully enough submit, for the present, to such minor grievances as scarce servants, thirty shilling loads of wool, or a sixteen-penny loaf.*”¹¹⁴

On Saturday 27 December the Argus reported that the diggings had thinned for Christmas, that many said they would be back when the rain returned and that “*The Miners’ Association is swelling its numbers, and a Miners’ Bank is being seriously talked about.*”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Equal to 7,539 kilograms

¹¹⁴ The Argus, Friday 26 December, 1851, page 2

¹¹⁵ The Argus, Saturday 27 December 1851

Chapter 26

After the Monster Meeting

On 21 December, two days after La Trobe wrote his latest despatch, Dr. Webb Richmond asked for an interview with him, as a delegate of the diggers:

*'I have to communicate for the information of his Excellency the Lieutenant Governor that I am delegated by the Mount Alexander and other gold miners to confer with his Excellency's Government respecting a fixed licence fee and further to propose a plan by which the government will more readily obtain such licence and increase its amount.'*¹¹⁶

In the margin of this communication, La Trobe wrote:

Who is W. Richmond? And under what authority does he come forward? Any proposition of this character would better come through the officer in charge on the ground, who could but report upon the matters... Perhaps Mr C.C. Powlett would give a brief report when he comes to town at his earliest convenience.
C.J. La Trobe

However Dr Webb Richmond did meet with Lonsdale, the Colonial Secretary, on Tuesday 23 December and also on the Saturday 27. At the first meeting Lonsdale was "*favourably disposed to their propositions*", but at the second meeting Lonsdale was "*either in worse humour or an altered state of mind, feeling perhaps the strength of the troops from Sydney*". In between these two meetings the diggers' proposals were "*mentioned*" in the Legislative Council and received "*general approval*".

This information was given to a meeting of 400 diggers who congregated on Flagstaff Hill in Melbourne on 29 December. Dr Webb Richmond chaired the meeting, having his authority, he said, as a representative of the "*General Meeting of Miners at Mount Alexander*".¹¹⁷

He read a report which included the information that they had been refused access to the Mechanics' Institution for the meeting because the "*red and blue shirted vagabonds*" (that is, the diggers) might break the windows.¹¹⁸

He continued to say:

Having in conjunction with my colleagues looked upon the withdrawal of the £3 Proclamation without substituting any general or fixed code of regulations, as a mere ruse, I was the more confirmed in my opinion on my arrival in Melbourne, by

¹¹⁶ VPRS 2878, Land Commissioners' Correspondence Unit 3, 51/979, 21 December 1851. Note: from July 1851 to November 1852 inward correspondence from the Gold Commissioners was filed in this series because they were originally land commissioners and now had additional duties on the gold fields.

¹¹⁷ No one in any of these documents was calling it the 'Monster Meeting' as yet

¹¹⁸ The Argus, Tuesday 30 December, 1851, page 2

the perusal of a so called Vagrant Act, but in reality a coercive Bill, calling on the Legislature to authorize the Governor to expect from you whatever licence he may think proper to levy, - this, and a whisper from a respectable quarter that the Governor had sent to Van Diemen's Land for prisoners to convert into constables, and to Sydney to beg for more troops, which arrived and confirmed the weakness and faithlessness of the Government, and also their alliance with the Squatting interest to drive you to their service, was made manifest by the speech of Dr Murphy in the House.

The Squatters think, and their support of the Coercion Bill, a more unconstitutional measure than which such Bill could not be devised, it remains for you to impress on your representatives the necessity of opposing it, and if the Squatters and Executive should out-vote them, petition the Imperial Parliament against it. What I can do as your delegate to oppose the passing of this iniquitous measure I have done and shall continue to do.

Argus, Tuesday 30 December, 1851, p 2

He then read the Vagrancy Act¹¹⁹ to the meeting, "*which was received with the most unmistakable marks of disapprobation*".

The following resolutions were proposed and carried unanimously:

1. That the report, together with the regulations, now read by the Chairman, be approved and adopted, and that they be printed and distributed among the members of the Association.
2. That this meeting resolves to pay no licence, or other impost on the gold, until a final adjustment of the licence question takes place.
3. That this meeting views with disgust the arbitrary and illegal seizure of gold by Commissioner Fletcher, from Lambrick, Lang and Wilson, three members of this Association, and the President and Council be entreated to take such steps, on the part of the Association, for its restoration to the injured parties as they may consider necessary.

¹¹⁹ The colony of Victoria inherited the British Vagrancy Act 1824 (with subsequent amendments) that made it an offence to be homeless & penniless - to sleep rough or beg - or to commit acts deemed to cause moral outrage.

4. That the Council be instructed to oppose the passing of the unconstitutional Vagrant Act (as *miscalled*), and to impress on the representatives of the people the imperative duty of doing so also.

5. That petitions against the Vagrant Act signed by the members of the Association, be presented to the Legislative Council, and that the thanks of the meeting be given to those patriotic representatives of the people who have opposed the Bill.

6. That the Council be instructed to urge the members of the Legislative Council, elected by the people, not to grant any supplies for additional soldiers (they not being required,) and also to oppose the introduction of prisoners from Van Diemen's Land to act as constables, or on any other pretence whatsoever.

Before the meeting separated, thanks were voted to the *Argus* newspaper, for the manner in which that journal had espoused the cause of the diggers, and a subscription was commenced in aid of the funds of the Association.

Argus, Tuesday 30 December, 1851, p 2

So even with La Trobe keeping the licence fee at 30 shillings – he had little alternative given the numbers gathered and media opinion against the increase – nothing had changed in government-digger relations. In fact, it appears that with the introduction of the Vagrants Act the government was digging in deeper with its adversary relationship with the Diggers.

As one letter writer put it:

ORIGINAL CORRESPONDENCE

GOLD DIGGERS

Per favour of the Argus

The determination of the Government to abandon the £3 licence, made known since our meeting of Monday last, is, as I then told you, a mere "Tub to the Whale," a trick to arouse you, and when they think you lulled into security, and their own hand strengthened by troops from Sydney, pensioners from Van Diemen's land, and the shameful and unconstitutional Vagrant Act now passing through the Legislative Council with such indecent haste, they will then, I say, with the aid of doctor Murphy and the Squatters, endeavour to squeeze out of you your hard earned gold....

Yours

A LUCKY VAGABOND

Argus, Saturday 27 December, 1851, p 3

The Melbourne Morning Herald, probably on the last day of 1851, reported that the diggings were thinned of diggers because of lack of water; that Christmas Day passed quietly but for the gun fire, singing and music at the end of day; that the diggers were grumbling about the lack of police protection or action when their claims were pilfered; that butcher shops should bury the offal; and to finish, it was "*hoped the Government would see the policy of a moderate percentage, which, I think, will be paid without grudge or demur; but ten percent is too-large; the chances are that such a percentage will follow the fate of the intended £3 licence fees.*"¹²⁰

The Argus correspondent Howard reported the same story: many parts of the creek tent-less, and if there was no rain soon it would become deserted; many diggers not making wages and few were doing well; the sun was hot, the ground was hard, the water thick and muddy, all of which made the gold difficult to get at and process.

Howard also reported that the Gold Miners' Association was gradually increasing in numbers, but their committee was not productive as they devoted little time to their task. He also reported was that the Escorts from Mount Alexander brought down 10,958 ounces¹²¹ of gold, and 35 ounces¹²² from Ballarat.¹²³

And Captain Harrison wrote to the Argus:

TO THE GOLD MINERS OF VICTORIA.

Per favour of the Argus.

FELLOW GOLD DIGGERS, - In the Mother Country where the middle classes are daily sinking into a state of pauperism, and whose poverty is treated as a crime, men have been driven in a state of desperation to steal, in order to provide food for their starving families.

In such cases our sympathy rather than execration is due to the unfortunate criminal, but in this Heaven favoured land, the picture is reversed, and the poorest man may, by persevering, industry, possibly acquire a competence in a few weeks at the Gold mines, or if he prefer ease and comfort to hard work, and "all the ills that flesh is heir to" he may obtain the highest rate of wages in any employment. Under such circumstances there is not the slightest excuse for robbery; therefore let the old-hand, the new chum, all ranks and classes in Victoria, unite in capturing and punishing the THIEF.

Having been honored by the appointment of your Delegate, at the Monster Meeting, Forest Creek, and having subsequently received a flattering and tangible testimonial of their appreciation, of my services from the miners of Bendigo Creek, I consider it a duty incumbent upon me to use every exertion in promoting your political and social welfare.

I shall therefore visit the various diggings in the course of next week, when I shall have the pleasure of offering, for your adoption, an organised plan,

¹²⁰ Melbourne Morning Herald, from 'JW', December 27, 1851

¹²¹ Equal to 340.8 kilograms

¹²² Equal to 1.09 kilograms

¹²³ Argus, Wednesday December 31, 1851, Page 2

for the ignominious expulsion from the mines, of those incorrigible plunderers who have located themselves amongst you.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN HARRISON.

Collingwood, January 31, 1852.

It is worth noting that this was the first (and perhaps the only?) time the Forest Creek meeting of 15 December was referred to as a, or the, 'Monster Meeting'. Nevertheless this was the title taken up by the contemporary residents of Castlemaine when in 1995 they re-discovered this history and began commemorations of the event.

And so it remains.

Chapter 27

Agitation Hill

Although they were often called the police, it was the military troopers who ruled the goldfields. They set up camp on the Forest Creek diggings in October 1851 - a month after the Forest Creek gold rush began - and until the end of 1851 there were good relations between the diggers and the troopers.

But in 1852 new laws came in practice. Troopers were awarded 50 per cent of the fines they collected from unlicensed diggers and, with a system of paid informers, the military camp quickly became known as a place of “...*cruelty, dissipation, partiality, injustice and other enormities... where one would know the officers of law by the a la militaire costume and hauteur; gold-laced strutters whose daily and nightly duties were burning tents and all property therein, and destroying stores, without enquiry or trial*”.¹²⁴

One trooper in Castlemaine who received a 50% cut of the fines he generated was Sub-inspector Christian, who was known to be anything *but* Christian.

On the first Saturday in May 1853, Sub-inspector Christian was given information by a paid police informer, named Mangan, that a boarding-house keeper, Mr McMahon, was manufacturing and selling sly-grog. But the boarding house keeper, McMahon, was not selling sly grog. Mangan's information was false. However, selling sly grog attracted a £50 fine - a year's ordinary wages - so the spoils for Christian and Mangan were substantial. That night, Sub-inspector Christian and his troopers destroyed McMahon's boarding house and ransacked his possessions. Forty boarders stood outside in the dark and saw their belongings disappear into the government camp.

The following Monday the boarding house keeper McMahon was brought to court. But he was acquitted for lack of evidence. Instead, Mangan, the police informer, got five years for perjury.

Within three hours of the acquittal there were signs all over Castlemaine, proclaiming:

MEN OF CASTLEMAINE!

MEET ON THE HILL!

DIGGERS!

Avenge your wrongs and demand your rights, or otherwise you will live and die all slaves.

By four o'clock, 1,000 diggers, traders, shopkeepers, clergy and businessmen met on the hill which over looked the government camp. Today in Castlemaine the government camp is the sports oval called Camp Oval and the hill is Agitation Hill, the site of the Anglican Church. In 1853 the diggers would look down upon the government camp and loathingly call it the 'Sacred Camp'.

At the 1,000 strong meeting on Agitation Hill Mr Jones, a Campbell's Creek auctioneer, summed up the situation: “*The tyranny of the Government*” he said, “*has been such that, unless people take steps to intercept a despotic invasion of their*

¹²⁴ Source unknown

*constitutional rights, the relentless and unscrupulous authorities would take further liberties.*¹²⁵

And a Dr Southbee voiced the emotion, to tremendous cheering that “...if the Government persists in their oppression, the public of Castlemaine are unanimously determined to oppose the authorities, crumble them to the dust as useless worms, and chivalrously demand their individual liberties”.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Source unknown

¹²⁶ Source unknown

Chapter 28

Red Ribbon Agitation

In Bendigo the police brutality continued and escalated.

The military were located on what is still today called Camp Hill, overlooking the town of Bendigo. From there the police troopers rode on '*digger hunts*': armed troopers rode or marched out into the diggings and dragged men up from their pits, demanding their licence. Those without were chained to a horse and led around the diggings as the troopers continued to burn down premises where grog was found - especially if the owner would not pay a bribe. Then unlicensed diggers were fined £5 or chained to a tree for 10 days – day and night. Many fines went straight into the troopers' pockets.

"... the conduct of the officials generally toward the digging population was intolerably overbearing. The chief duties of the force on the diggings were the collection of the licence-tax¹²⁷ and the suppression of sly-grog selling. These were performed in a most objectionable, insolent and outrageous manner.

"Digger hunting', as the search after men who had no licence was called, was a favourite amusement of both officers and men, and it was followed up savagely, relentlessly, and with a refinement of cold-blooded cruelty that was not only exasperating, but disgusting in the extreme.

Men were chained to trees and logs, whose offences consisted simply of not being able to produce their licence on demand, although they protested, and their statements were often found to be correct, that they had left these precious documents accidentally at home.

But unless they had them in their pockets they were placed under arrest, and were all subjected alike to the indignity of being treated like criminals. Little wonder was it that disaffection was engendered to a dangerous degree."

Mt Alexander Mail, 13 May 1854, by William Howitt

"Those were the dark days of the diggings, in which under the supremacy of the squatting lords, the diggers were tolerated because of their numbers. That was the glorious era when men were chained to logs for even trivial offences."¹²⁸

"Sometimes the troopers would collect as many as fifty un-licensed

¹²⁷ Sometimes diggers had to line up for three days to pay the licence.

¹²⁸ Mt Alexander Mail, 13 May 1854, by William Howitt

diggers, and frequently they were roped or handcuffed together and driven like beasts before the swords and bayonets of their captors, perhaps for the greater part of a day, over rough country, in the blazing sun in the summer and slush and mud in winter, until such time as a good haul was made.

When at the camp they were chained like dangerous animals to logs to wait the convenience of the commissioner of Magistrate, where without proper trial or right of appeal they were fined £5 or sent to work on the roads.”¹²⁹

The practice of police harvesting 50% of the fines they generated continued in Bendigo. The hated Assistant Commissioner David Armstrong, for example, after two years service on the goldfields, boasted that he had cleared £15,000 although his salary was only £300 plus rations.

Unlike Forest Creek which was a domestic gold rush (in 1851 the gold seekers who went there were already in Australia) at Bendigo there were many nationalities as people had come from all around the world. They included Americans who had won their freedom from England, Irish Catholics who were strongly antagonistic to Queen Victoria and the British Empire and Europeans who had experienced revolution against tyranny in their homelands.

There were an estimated 29,000 diggers and their families at Bendigo¹³⁰ - a third of all gold miners in Victoria. And at Bendigo they found common cause.

In June 1853 - inspired by the Castlemaine townspeople's victory against the informer Mangan and Sub-inspector Christian - the Bendigo miners formed the Anti-Gold-Licence Association. Over the next month or so the leaders visited other Victorian gold fields and collected 30,000 signatures on what became known as the Bendigo Petition. It was thirty metres long and bound in green silk:¹³¹

*His Excellency, Charles Joseph La Trobe Esquire,
Lieutenant Governor of the colony of Victoria*

*The Humble petition of the undersigned Gold Diggers and other residents on the
Gold Fields of the colony*

Sheweth

That in the present impoverished conditions of the goldfields, the impost of Thirty shillings a month is more than Your Petitioners can pay, as the fruit of labour at the mines scarcely affords to a large proportion of the Gold Miners the common necessities of life.

That in consequence of the few Officials appointed to issue licences, the diggers, storekeepers and other residents lose much time at each Monthly issue in procuring their licences.

¹²⁹ Frank McKillop

¹³⁰ Gold Commissioner's correspondence, unit 86, 53/6564, Bull to Wright, 2 July 1853

¹³¹ The original Bendigo Petition is now held by the State Library of Victoria and a copy is held at the Museum of Democracy at Ballarat. To read more go to www.slv.vic.gov.au/our-collections/treasures-curios/bendigo-goldfields-petition.

That in consequence of Armed Men (many of whom notoriously bad in character) being employed to enforce the impost of Thirty Shilling a Month, there is much ill-feeling engendered amongst the Diggers against the Government.

That the impost of Thirty shillings a Month is unjust because the successful and the unsuccessful Digger are assessed in the same ratio.

For these reasons and others which could be enumerated, Your petitioners pray your Excellency to Grant the Following Petition.

First: To direct the licence Fee be reduced to Ten shillings a month

Second: To direct that Monthly or Quarterly Licences be issued at the option of the Applicants....

The Bendigo Petition also requested that diggers be allowed 15 days after arrival on gold fields to pay licence, that penalty be reduced from £5 to £1, and that the armed force be discontinued.

... Your Petitioners would also remind your Excellency that a Petition is the only mode by which they can submit their wants to your Excellency's consideration, as though they contribute more to the Exchequer than half the colony, they are the largest class of Her Majesty's Subjects in the colony unrepresented.

The Association's leaders - George Thompson, Dr Jones and Irish-born American, 'Captain' Edward Brown - took the petition to Melbourne for presentation to Governor La Trobe, and on 13 August 1853 about 10,000 diggers gathered on View Point, within sight of the government camp, to await the delegation returning from Melbourne.

"Gully after gully hoisted its flag, and various nationalities were represented by different flags. The Germans in particular seemed determined to come out strong on the occasion, having ordered some splendid new banners for the purpose. The English nation was well represented by royal standards and union jacks, and the Irish provided themselves with a very beautiful flag, with the harp in the centre, supported by a pick and shovel. But the one that attracted the attention was the Diggers Banner."

The Melbourne Herald, date unknown

William Howitt described the "Diggers Banner": designed by a Mr Dexter, a china painter from Devon,

*"The flag showed the pick, the shovel, and the cradle, - that represented labour. There were the scales, - that meant justice. There was the Roman bundle of sticks, - that meant union: altogether, - all up at once. There were the kangaroo and emu, - that meant Australia."*¹³²

¹³² Source unknown

Note: This is the flag which contemporary Castlemaine celebrants of the Monster Meeting have adopted to represent the 1851 Monster Meeting at Forest Creek. There is no documentary evidence that this flag was flown at the Monster Meeting other than a painting by Tulloch which was based on Thomas Ham's 1852 engravings titled 'Five Views of the Goldfields of Mount Alexander'. The painting from this collection is titled 'The Great Meeting of Diggers, 1851', and shows a flag flying above the podium. Only the top left quarter of the flag is visible and it shows a crossed pick and shovel.

The diggers gathered at Bendigo heard that La Trobe's response to the petition was that he was not inclined to make any change to existing laws. The diggers, he said, were grievance mongers, and if they troubled the Government much more, he would let them hear how cannon could roar.

At this news the diggers decided upon a tactic of civil disobedience: they would only proffer 10 shillings when paying for licence. The Bendigo Gold Commissioner, Joseph Panton, agreed not to take any action and to inform La Trobe of the diggers' grievances.

Another diggers' meeting took place on 27 August 1853, and this time many of the Bendigo diggers were armed. In the days leading up to the meeting the diggers stripped the lead out of all the tea chests in Bendigo to make ammunition.¹³³ They came to the meeting from all the gullies, trickles gathering into streams as they converged on Bendigo Creek and the town, groups marching beneath national flags, and up to View Point.

La Trobe had instructed his Chief Commissioner of Police, William Mitchell, to report on the meeting. At the sight of the armed diggers, and alarmed at the possibility of armed insurrection, Mitchell departed for Melbourne to advise La Trobe that "*Bendigo was in a state of revolution, and that if the licence fee was not reduced, or if an attempt to enforce it was made, it would end in bloodshed.*"¹³⁴

It could have turned into armed insurrection, but moderate voices prevailed. More passive resistance was agreed upon, this time taking the form of a symbolic red ribbon – from then on all diggers wore red ribbon on their hats "*as a sign that those who wore it pledged no longer to pay the licence fee.*"¹³⁵

The Bendigo movement was now called the Red Ribbon Agitation and nine out of ten diggers wore the red ribbon. Their dogs and horses wore red ribbons around their manes and necks, and shops put red ribbons in the window.

Meanwhile Police Commissioner Mitchell, who had not stayed at the meeting to hear the mood moderate from armed action to the Red Ribbon Agitation, arrived in Melbourne and delivered his shocking news of Bendigo teetering on the edge of armed insurrection. La Trobe increased the troops in Bendigo to 300, but over the next month the number of diggers paying for a licence fell from 14,000 to 400.

It was now impossible to jail them all. But La Trobe, instead of giving them the 10 shillings licence fee, introduced a sliding scale: £1 for 1 month; £2 for 3 months; £4 for 6 months and £8 pound for 12 months - and those who paid the one year fee could vote.

¹³³ In those days tea chests were routinely lined with lead

¹³⁴ Source unknown

¹³⁵ Source unknown

But the traps (troopers) could still arrest those they believed to be without a licence, so digger hunts prevailed and the diggers' resistance continued, adding to their demands that they all have the right to vote and to buy land.

The following year, in June 1854, La Trobe was replaced by Governor Hotham who introduced twice-weekly digger hunts, and ordered his troopers to collect the fees at all costs.

Then Hotham ordered thrice-weekly digger hunts on the Ballarat goldfields.

Chapter 29

Eureka

It was to reach crisis point 16 months later at Ballarat when miners rallied round another makeshift flag, blue with a white cross and five stars, at a place called Eureka.

Six soldiers and 22 diggers died in the dawn raid on Eureka Stockade on Sunday, December 3rd 1854.

A few days later the Mount Alexander Mail reported: “...as it is necessary that the diggers know their friends every miner agrees to wear as a pledge of good faith, and in support of the cause, a piece of red ribbon on his hat, not to be removed until the Licence-tax is abolished.”¹³⁶

Within months the licence fees were abolished and men¹³⁷ given the right to vote.

This victory is most often accredited only to the diggers at Ballarat. However, the earlier victories of the diggers at Forest Creek and Bendigo fired the movement, laid the foundations and set in train the agitation that culminated at Ballarat.

Eureka started with the Monster Meeting.

¹³⁶ Date unknown

¹³⁷ Women were not given the vote for another 50 years.

Appendix

THE MEN BEHIND THE MONSTER MEETING. Doug Ralph and Marjorie Theobald

In early December 1851, amidst the turmoil of the Victorian gold rushes, Governor Charles La Trobe made an astonishing error of judgement. He announced that from 1 January 1852 the already unpopular licence fee to dig for gold would be doubled to three pounds per month. On Friday, 5 December, the *Argus*, the main conduit of information to the miners, reprinted the new regulations in full. The miners at Mount Alexander acted swiftly and decisively. Over the weekend a manifesto appeared along Forest Creek:

The intelligence has just arrived of the resolution of the Government to double the licence fee. Will you tamely submit to the imposition, or assert your rights like men? You are called upon to pay a tax, originated and concocted by the most heartless selfishness ... Fie upon such pusillanimity! ... remember, that union is strength, that 'though a single twig may be bent or broken, a bundle of them tied together yields not nor breaks.' Ye are Britons! Will you submit to oppression and injustice? Meet – agitate – be unanimous – and if there is justice in the land, they will, they must abolish this imposition.

The manifesto called the miners to a meeting on Monday evening, 8 December 1851. The *Argus* reported that feelings were running high and that 'men of apparent respectability are going over the ground, from pit to pit, and tent to tent, to know the minds of their fellow-diggers'. The meeting, attended by about 3,000 men, greeted these leaders with 'a welcome shout, which was heard two miles down the Creek'.

This meeting was the precursor to the more famous Monster Meeting of 15 December 1851 which we commemorate every year on the site of the old shepherd's hut. In its rhetoric, theatre and ritual interaction between speakers and audience the Monster Meeting followed in the tradition of the great Chartist meeting of Kennington Common, London in 1848. The speakers showed considerable skill as orators (or demagogues as their enemies described them) rousing the miners into a white heat of indignation over the matter in hand. The imperative of the meeting was stark: in unity lay strength; if no-one broke ranks and paid the new licence fee, the miners would prevail.

The speeches may be read on-line in the *Argus* of 18 December 1851.

So who were these men who accomplished this remarkable feat of organisation in less than a fortnight and set in motion a democratic movement which ended only with the bloodshed of Eureka in December 1854 and the establishment of parliamentary democracy a year later? The three men who organised the initial meeting of 8 December were reported only by their surnames, E. Potts, Lineham and Plaistowe, and these three have proved the most difficult to track down.

E. Potts, we assume from research on the 'Pioneer CD Rom' (1836-1888) and the shipping records, was Edward Potts. He addressed the men as 'Brother Diggers and Fellow-Citizens ... the cream of Victoria and the sinews of her strength'. Potts was still on Forest Creek in October 1852 when he was an organiser of the mass meeting at Moonlight Flat to protest at the lack of police protection afforded to the diggers. He was also a speaker at the Castlemaine meeting to support the Bendigo Red Ribbon movement in July 1853.

For Lineham we do not even have an initial. The only Lineham arriving by ship before 1851 was Henry Lineham, so it is possible that the organiser of the Monster Meeting was Henry Lineham, licensee of the Old White Hart Inn in Bourke Street, who went bankrupt in 1853. He was singled out for special opprobrium by the conservative *Melbourne Morning Herald* which branded the leaders 'Pentonvillian orators and penniless Chartist demagogues'. So it is possible that he was already known to the authorities who, paranoid at the presence of English Chartists, German revolutionaries and American republicans in the colonies, had their spies busy behind the scenes.

The only entry for 'Plaistowe' on the 'Pioneer CD Rom' is for London-born solicitor, John Plaistowe, who died in the Melbourne Benevolent Asylum in August 1854. He was a prominent solicitor in Melbourne and of sufficient social standing to be invited to the soiree which followed the installation of Charles La Trobe as Lieutenant Governor of Victoria in July 1851. He is a likely candidate for our Plaistowe as many of the leaders in the miners' campaigns were from the educated middle classes.

There is no-one by the name of Potts, Lineham or Plaistowe on the first Castlemaine electoral roll of 1856.

Captain John Harrison is the best-known of the leaders and the only one with an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (available on-line). A sea captain and squatter from an impeccable English family, he became a prominent activist on behalf of the miners and was considered something of a traitor to his class. Before the gold rushes occurred he was active in many causes, including separation from New South Wales, the cessation of transportation, the opening up of the land and the institution of democratic government. He had ridden down to the Monster Meeting as a delegate from Bendigo, a field opened up only a few weeks before, where he had organised a meeting of 200 men on the previous Monday in support of the Forest Creek men. His concern was to establish the basis of a Gold Miners' Association and this formed the substance of the fifth resolution passed at the meeting. For some years he was active in this capacity on the gold fields, supported in part by donations from the miners. In January 1852 he was presented with a purse of gold by the Bendigo miners for his services to their cause. However, the itinerant life of the miners and the need to support his family defeated him and he eventually became a stationmaster at Williamstown, dying in 1869.

He was followed on the platform by Dr Valentine Webb Richmond, an English medical man who had organised the Bendigo meeting with Harrison. He also became an activist on behalf of the miners, one of the many doctors who made common cause with the men against the authorities. His frequent letters to the *Argus* suggest a specialist knowledge of geology, as well as the history and economics of gold discoveries. Writing in the *Lancet* in 1856 he referred to his experience as a surgeon at an ironworks in Wales and on board a troopship bound for Calcutta. He moved the motion that a delegation be sent to La Trobe to 'arrange an equitable system of working the Gold Fields'.

Harrison, Webb Richmond and Plaistowe were elected to the delegation but it was somewhat undercut by the news that La Trobe had rescinded the proclamation to double the licence fee two days before the Monster Meeting.

In February 1852 Webb Richmond held a meeting at the shepherd's hut to discuss issues such as self protection and the establishment of a miners' bank.

Robert Booley was a coach smith from Ipswich in Suffolk, England. According to Brian McKinlay he was a 'non-conformist lay preacher and active in Ipswich political life and a pioneer of both the trade union and Chartist movements in East Anglia'. In company with other increasingly disillusioned Chartists he migrated to Australia, arriving in Geelong in 1848 where he was living when the gold rushes began. His reputation as a passionate, if long-winded, speaker preceded him to Mount Alexander. He was a founding member of the Geelong People's Association, formed in mid-1851 to influence the nomination of candidates in the first elections for the Victorian Legislative Council. In this capacity he would have met Captain Harrison who was also prominent in the movement. On various occasions he stood for both the Geelong Town Council and the Legislative Council but was unsuccessful. He was a founder of the eight hour day movement in Geelong. At the meeting of 15 December 1851 Booley used the issue of the licence fee to speak movingly of the rights of working-class people to full democratic government and a better life. He died in Lake Bolac in 1876 and is buried there.

At the conclusion of the Monster Meeting three groans were given for the *Melbourne Morning Herald* and three cheers for the *Argus*. The *Argus* reporter on the spot, R.J. Howard, to whom we owe the meticulous report of the meeting, acknowledged this tribute and pledged his paper to 'watch over the interests of the working classes'. The enemies of the *Argus*, Governor La Trobe prominent among them, no doubt noted that the meeting had appointed him treasurer of the miners' fighting fund.

It is possible that J.F. Mann (Esq.), who chaired the Monster Meeting, was John Frederick Mann, sometime explorer with Leichhardt and a surveyor by trade, though his biographer does not mention that he was ever on the gold fields.

This research into the leaders of the Monster Meeting is a work-in-progress and any help, particularly with the identities of Potts, Lineham and Plaistowe, would be very welcome.

Sources:

Argus; *Melbourne Morning Herald*; *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vols.4 & 5; *Labour History*, no.15, 1968; K. Bowden, *Doctors and Diggers on the Mount Alexander Goldfields*, Maryborough, 1974; Pioneer CD rom of Births, Deaths and Marriages, 1836-1888; Shipping Records, PROV on-line (dralph@mmnet.com.au; mrtheo@netspace.net.au).

CHARTISTS IN AUSTRALIA

George Black was a native of Nottingham who had been active in Chartism from its early days, Black was a framework knitter and Methodist lay preacher who served as Nottingham delegate to the founding conference of the National Charter Association in 1840. There he warned delegates against setting subscriptions that the poor could not afford. By 1841, he had been forced out of his trade because of his political involvement and earned his living as an itinerant Chartist lecturer. Black served a short prison term for his violently expressed views and was regarded as too radical by the *Northern Star*. Black and his brother Alfred migrated to Victoria, where he set up the *Gold Digger's Advocate*.

Henry Richard Nicholls was active in the late Chartism of London. He was known both as a lecturer and poet before he emigrated in 1853 at the age of 23. He became assistant editor of the *Gold Digger's Advocate* but, unlike the Editor George Black, he was an atheist. He is credited with introducing "a flavour of the cosmopolitan radical milieu" of London to the paper, with letters from the Italian republican Giuseppe Mazzini and Hungarian nationalist Lajo Kossuth running alongside Chartist poetry and editorials on republicanism and temperance. The paper failed in September 1854 and Nicholls moved to Ballarat, where he became a gold miner and correspondent for the Melbourne *Argus*. Nicholls lived on to 1912. An obituary from the Tasmanian Mail can be found [here](#).

Charles Nicholls Brother of Henry Nicholls, moved to Ballarat in November 1854, becoming part of an expatriate Chartist fraternity that played an important role in the early phases of the movement that led to the Eureka rising.

Alfred Black Brother of George Black and an activist at Ballarat before the Eureka rising.

Henry T Holyoake was an eminent Victorian secularist and leading light of the co-operative movement. He was the Brother of George Jacob Holyoake, the last secretary of the National Charter Association, and had been an active Chartist in his own right before emigrating and becoming a member of the Ballarat Reform League.

John B Humffray Welsh Chartist who had migrated to Victoria in 1853, Humffray was a member of the Ballarat Reform League, and would later represent the town in the Victorian Legislative Assembly.

Charles Jardine Don Born in 1820 in Cupar, Fife, he worked as a handloom weaver before following his father's trade as a stonemason. In Scotland, Don was a Unitarian, Owenite, socialist and phrenologist - not to mention active Chartist from, 1839 to 1853 when he left for Australia. Don tried his hand unsuccessfully in the gold fields, and returned to Melbourne in 1857, working as a stonemason and joining their trade union. He helped to found the Operative Reform Association and in 1857 stood as Reform Association candidate in a Melbourne by-election including all six points of the Charter in his program. Although defeated, he stood again two years later and was elected, working by day as a mason and attending the Assembly in the evenings. Don's election campaign had been based at the Belvidere Hotel in Fitzroy, where radicals congregated in large numbers. Among them were former Chartists including Thomas Vince, James Galloway, Alexander Hunter and James Stephens.

James Stephens was born in South Wales in 1821. At the age of 18 Stephens heard Henry Vincent speak in Newport and was said to have been captivated by his oratory. Stephens participated in the [Newport rebellion](#) but escaped capture. He moved to London, where he worked in his father's trade as a stonemason, and during the

1840s became a skilled trade union organiser. Stephens arrived at Port Phillip in July 1855 and within weeks was involved in the Melbourne masons' organisation, initiating a campaign for the eight-hour day which proved highly successful.

Edward Hawksley was born in Nottingham in 1807. Hawksley emigrated to New South Wales in 1838 and consequently missed the launch of the Charter. But he regarded himself as part of an international British Chartist fraternity and contributed to the Chartist press in Britain. As editor of the *People's Advocate*, Hawksley ensured that it was a Chartist paper in tone and sentiment - placing it some way in advance of the less radical Constitutional Association whose voice it was intended to be. Hawksley expressed a class consciousness in the paper that directly contradicted the Constitutional Association's attempts to promote class unity, declaring in his first issue that his would be a "peculiarly Working Men's Paper".

David Buchanan Born in Edinburgh in 1823, Buchanan was the son of a barrister and prominent Whig who rejected his father's politics for the Chartist cause. After narrowly escaping prison in 1848, he decided to emigrate, and arrived in New South Wales in 1852. Buchanan continued to be active in radical circles while working in a succession of manual jobs, and in 1860 stood for the seat of Morpeth in a by-election on behalf of the Working Men's Political Association, promising to "divide the House night after night until the Charter was established, and when the Charter had been established he would turn his attention to the rights of man". Defeated, he tried again in the general election four months later and was successful.¹³⁸

Robert Booley was a coach smith from Ipswich in Suffolk, England. According to Brian McKinlay he was a "*non-conformist lay preacher and active in Ipswich political life and a pioneer of both the trade union and Chartist movements in East Anglia*".¹³⁹ Speaking at a meeting in the 'Ipswich Arms' in December 1837 he appealed to "... *the intelligent and morally influential section of the working class to campaign for an extension of the suffrage*"¹⁴⁰ However, as a prosperous tradesman Booley in fact was one of the few Chartists in Ipswich who was already enfranchised under the provisions of the Reform Acts of 1832.

In March 1838 he spoke at three meetings in Ipswich in support of the secret ballot and manhood suffrage. From these meetings came the formation of the Ipswich Working Men's Association, the first formal Chartist organisation in Suffolk. At the formation of the group, Booley had said "...*let us act with prudence, and carry our arguments with moral energy, and such a voice will be raised that no legislature will be able to silence us*".¹⁴¹

In October 1838, Booley was an unsuccessful candidate for the Ipswich Town Council elections. He later became active in the collection of signatures for a great National Charter, but in 1848, in company with other increasingly disillusioned Chartists he migrated to Australia, arriving in Geelong. He was living in Geelong when the gold rushes began. His reputation as a passionate, if long-winded, speaker preceded him to Mount Alexander.

He was a founding member of the Geelong People's Association, formed in July 1851¹⁴² to influence the nomination of candidates in the first elections for the Victorian Legislative Council. In this capacity he met Captain Harrison who was also

¹³⁸ Edited from: www.chartists.net (Chartists in Australia)

¹³⁹ B. J. McKinlay, *The Geelong People's Association and Robert Booley, a Chartist Pioneer in Labour History*, No. 15 (Nov., 1968), published by: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, (See PDF 128)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² The Argus, Friday 1 August 1851, page 2

prominent in the movement. The Geelong People's Association was the first expressly radical political organisation in the town's history. It declared its aims to be "... *the promotion of the moral, social and political advancement of the people of Geelong*".¹⁴³ The original influences in the Association seem to have been both liberal and Chartist and Booley was active from its inception. The Geelong Advertiser said of him: "*He is a man of the people, standing there with uplifted arms pouring out his ideas, for to him the hustings are a pulpit.*"¹⁴⁴

After the Monster Meeting Robert Booley, one of the principal speakers, continued his political activities. In 1853 he agreed to stand for the Victorian Legislative Council on the understanding that, should he be elected, his local supporters in the Geelong People's Association would provide him with a regular wage, as Legislative Council members were then not paid.¹⁴⁵

Booley's candidature in Geelong came six years before that of James Don who, at his election in 1850 for the seat of Collingwood, became the first working-class member of the Victorian Parliament. Booley might therefore be regarded as the first working-class candidate for the Victorian Parliament. He failed to secure election in 1853, although it is said that he gained a majority at the hustings, where a show of hands preceded the balloting.¹⁴⁶

Booley remained active in the People's Association which reached a peak of activity in the period following the Eureka rising. Three large and well-attended meetings were held in Geelong in the weeks after Eureka to protest at the treatment of the rebels by the government.

In 1857 Booley was again active in calling the first meeting held in Geelong to form an '8 Hours Day Committee', which later conducted the first campaign for an eight-hour day in Geelong.¹⁴⁷

It is of note that throughout his political career Booley remained a constant advocate of the basic principles of the Chartist movement, and the measures which he advocated while a member of the Geelong People's Association were all to be found in the platform of the Chartist movement.¹⁴⁸ He died in Lake Bolac in 1876 and is buried there.

Captain John Harrison (1802-1869) is the best known of the leaders of the Monster Meeting and the only one with an entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography. Harrison was a sea captain, squatter, agitator and later a stationmaster. He was born in Cumberland, England, son of George Harrison and his wife Anne. He joined the navy as a midshipman and was a lieutenant in H.M.S. *Ganges*. When he was 18 he retired from the navy to command his father's ships. Later he went to Sydney to join a relation, Henry Antill, near Picton. On 12 February 1831 at St Philip's Church, Sydney, he married Jane, née Howe, a relation of Horatio Wills - a grazier and politician who was killed by Aborigines in the Cullin-La-Ringo massacre in 1861. Harrison and his wife Jane visited England in about 1833 and on the return voyage his father was drowned. He planned to grow sugar in Tahiti but in May 1835 his ship *Friendship*, carrying government stores, was wrecked on Norfolk Island. He sought compensation in land without success and in 1837 with his family overlanded to Port Phillip. They settled in 1838 on the River Plenty and built a homestead, but by 1844 were squeezed out by other squatters.

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ G. Searle, *The Golden Age*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid p. 21

¹⁴⁷ Brownbill, *History of Geelong and Corio Bay* (1937), p. 554

¹⁴⁸ B. J. McKinlay, *The Geelong People's Association and Robert Booley, a Chartist Pioneer* *Labour History*, No. 15 (Nov., 1968), pp. 70-71
Published by: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History,

Harrison searched for land in Gippsland but lost most of his cattle and in 1845 took up Swanwater, a 70,000 acres (28,329 ha) property near St Arnaud, where he ran sheep. After losing the use of his right arm in a shooting accident in 1850, he divided the run, sold it on terms and moved with his family to Fitzroy.

Active in democratic movements, Harrison had campaigned against increased taxation in March 1844 and in April attended the first meeting of the Separation Society. In June 1844 on Batman's Hill, under a flag Harrison designed with a central white star centre on a crimson ground, militant squatters met to demand a clear policy on land tenure. Harrison urged stockholders to form a pastoralists' society to fight against taxation and for separation.

Always ready to air grievances in the press, his letter to the governor in Sydney in July 1845 declared that the proposed sale of crown lands by auction would enrich the wealthy but ruin poor squatters. In August he advocated more zeal for separation and in October sought better police protection and rural roads.

At the first Legislative Council elections in 1851, the Victorian branch of the Australasian Anti-Transportation League campaigned in support of anti-transportation candidates and appointed Harrison as organizer on 29 July. A provocative and lucid speaker, he worked hard and travelled widely but his job ended in September when the elections began. Harrison took his two eldest sons to the goldfields but he could not dig – presumably because he had only one arm – and was soon agitating for better conditions.

After the Monster meeting, in October 1852 at Forest Creek, Captain John Harrison was a delegate from Bendigo at a big meeting which petitioned the governor on such subjects as police protection and a proposed export duty on gold. He joined the deputation to Melbourne, but the petition failed: extra police were sent to the area and the export duty was rejected.

Although Harrison's role as an agitator was often exaggerated by his enemies, he was undoubtedly outspoken. At a public breakfast for Edward Hargreaves in December, he shocked all present by attacking the army and navy as inadequate safeguards for the colony and by hinting at republican measures. In the *Argus* of 25 May 1853 he appealed to the diggers to send the money they had collected for his wages. At a meeting in the Temperance Hall, Melbourne, a subscription list was organized because he had “*shown himself at all times a firm and faithful advocate of civil liberty and good order*”.

In September Harrison toured the country calling for the lands to be unlocked and the franchise extended to diggers.

He had no direct part in the Eureka uprising, but on 7 December 1854 he spoke to the great gathering in Swanston Street, Melbourne, which repudiated the armed resistance of the miners at Eureka but supported a peaceful settlement and withdrawal of troops.

In 1857 Harrison was again involved in the land question. At a meeting on 23 June he vehemently opposed the land bill which permitted the occupation rights of squatters, claiming that “*when the gold broke out the lands ought to have been thrown open to the people*”. He represented Collingwood at the Land Convention which demanded free selection anywhere and abolition of auction and open pasturage.

At times Harrison had been an auctioneer and gold-buyer. In 1859 he joined the Victorian railways and became stationmaster at North Williamstown but asthma forced him to resign in 1864. Aged 67 he died on 21 July 1869 and was buried in the Williamstown cemetery. He was survived by his wife who died in 1879 and by seven children. One his four sons, Henry Colden Antill Harrison, together with his cousin Thomas Wills, was a founder of Australian Rules football.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ From Australian Dictionary of Biography

Edward Potts. It is assumed that the 'Mr Potts' referred to in the Monster Meeting literature, was Edward Potts. Presumably, after the Monster Meeting he stayed around Forest Creek since, in October 1852, he was an organiser of a mass meeting at Moonlight Flat to protest at the lack of police protection afforded to the diggers. In early 1853 he and a partner by the name of Ely operated one of the first quartz crushing machines, at Quartz Hill in Chewton. Potts and Ely gave evidence before the Committee of Inquiry on leasing auriferous lands held in January 1853. As they were in favour of allowing large parties to lease land for mining, they would have offended most of their fellow diggers who were vehemently opposed, both to machinery and companies. In his evidence Potts demonstrated considerable technical knowledge on mining in various countries.

He was a speaker at the Castlemaine meeting to support the Bendigo Red Ribbon movement in July 1853, and an E. Potts chaired a meeting in Castlemaine in February 1855 protesting about the removal of puddling machines from the creek.

Edward Potts purchased land by auction in Fryers Creek in 1858.

Chewton researcher/historian Doug Ralph located an Edward Potts of Chewton, near Manchester Bridge, who died in November 1877 at the age of 88. If this was Mr Potts of Monster Meeting fame, then he was at least 38 when he arrived in Australia (given the shipping records begin in 1836), was 62 at the time of the Monster Meeting and continued mining into his sixties.¹⁵⁰

Mr Lineham. Henry Lineham arrived by ship sometime before 1851. A Henry Lineham was licensee of the Old White Hart Inn in Bourke Street, and went bankrupt in 1853. So it is possible that he was already known to the authorities who, paranoid about the presence of English Chartists and American republicans in the colonies, had their spies busy behind the scenes.

Lineham was singled out for special opprobrium by the conservative *Melbourne Morning Herald* which branded the Monster Meeting leaders 'Pentonvillian orators and penniless Chartist demagogues'.

In 1852 the notorious Gold Commissioner, David Armstrong, refused Lineham a licence to dig on the grounds that he was a bad character – saying that he had been convicted of sly grog selling. However this does not appear in the Petty Sessions records around that date.¹⁵¹

Dr Valentine Webb Richmond was an English medical man who had organised the Bendigo meeting with Harrison. He also became an activist on behalf of the miners, one of the many doctors who made common cause with the men against the authorities.

At the Monster Meeting he moved the motion that a delegation be sent to La Trobe to "*arrange an equitable system of working the Gold Fields*".¹⁵²

Along with Harrison and Plaistowe, Webb Richmond was elected to the delegation to meet La Trobe.

In February 1852 Webb Richmond held a meeting at the shepherd's hut to discuss issues such as self-protection and the establishment of a miners' bank.

His frequent letters to the *Argus* suggest a specialist knowledge of geology, as well as the history and economics of gold discoveries.

Writing in the *Lancet* in 1856 he referred to his experience as a surgeon at an ironworks in Wales and on board a troopship bound for Calcutta.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ From Marjorie Theobald & Doug Ralph, 'The Men Behind the Monster Meeting'

¹⁵¹ Ibid

¹⁵² The Argus, Thursday 18 December 1851, page 2

¹⁵³ From Marjorie Theobald & Doug Ralph, 'The Men Behind the Monster Meeting'

J.F. Mann – Chairman

It is possible that J.F. Mann (Esq.), who chaired the Monster Meeting, was John Frederick Mann, sometime explorer with Leichhardt and a surveyor by trade, though his biographer does not mention that he was ever on the gold fields.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

MONSTER MEETINGS IN IRELAND

One source of the term 'Monster Meeting' comes from Ireland in the 1840s - the decade before the Forest Creek Monster Meeting - when Irish patriot Daniel O'Connell led a movement to repeal the 1800 Act of Union, a British law abolishing the Irish Parliament and making Ireland a part of the United Kingdom.

O'Connell was known as the 'Agitator', the 'Emancipator' and the 'Liberator', and the campaign began during the general election campaign of 1841, which brought to power O'Connell's bitter adversary, the British Tory Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel. The peasantry of Ireland contributed their pennies and farthings to a fighting fund, known as the 'Repeal Rent', and Daniel O'Connell addressed a series of 'Monster Meetings' across the country, some attended by gatherings of 300,000 people.

One such meeting was held at Athlone, on 15 June 1843:

Now there arose a cry such as never before had greeted my ears; now all hats were raised in the air, and there burst forth the unanimous shouts: "Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Long live O'Connell! Long live the Liberator!" A hundred thousand voices sent forth these salutations to the man whose magic power had circled them around him. He sat on the box-seat of a carriage drawn by four horses, and answered the salutation with head, hand, and cap... How he made his way I do not even to this day comprehend, for there was not room for a person to fall, much less to walk. "Make way for the Liberator!" was the charm word which accomplished the wonder that otherwise had been an impossibility.¹⁵⁵

The greatest Irish monster meeting was on the Hill of Tara on 15 August 1843. This famous hill has been the home of many great events in Irish history, including The Battle of Tara during the 1798 Rebellion of the United Irishmen. Today it's accepted that the Monster Meeting at Tara was attended by at least 750,000 people. Even *The Times*, a newspaper fiercely hostile to O'Connell, reported the audience at Tara to be around a million.

To use an adjective that's much degraded these days, the spectacle must have been awesome. For three days in advance, from a wide radius by carriage, horse and on foot, people thronged to the famed hill. The fields for miles around were filled with vehicles. Bands, ceremonial floats and thousands of banners added colour as the occasion became as much a festival as a political rally. Priests and laymen made sure that there was no disorder, no shillelaghs and no strong drink. It took O'Connell's open carriage two hours to make its way through the vast crowd. The procession included a trumpeter on horseback, drummers, a harper on an open carriage drawn by six grey horses playing *The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls*, horsemen four deep, footmen six deep and flags and banners carrying the emotive word *REPEAL*.

Altars were erected on the various mounds around the hill and masses were celebrated on the morning of the rally. Two bishops and 35 priests were present as, soon after midday, O'Connell's carriage made its way up to the top of the hill through an archway that included the words *Tara of the Kings Hails the Liberator with 100,000 Welcomes*. As he spoke, O'Connell's words were relayed down the hill by officials assigned to that task. The vast audience shouted, laughed, groaned and exulted at appropriate moments during O'Connell's stentorian oratory – including those who were too far away to hear what was being said.

¹⁵⁵ Veneday, Jacob, 1805-1871: [Benjamin Franklin. Eon lebensbild, von J. Venedey. \(Freiburg im Breisgau, F. Wagner, 1862\)](#)

Note: In comparison the Forest Creek Monster Meeting was attended by an estimated 15,000 people. Barring a monumental gathering of Aboriginal Australians that we don't know about, the 1851 Forest Creek Monster Meeting was to that time the biggest gathering of people on the Australian continent. And we've often wondered how the 15,000 at the Forest Creek Monster Meeting actually knew what the speakers said. The explanation from Tara of people relaying the speech to the back of the crowd is the most likely. However some may never have heard a word and, as Robyn Annear points out¹⁵⁶, many wouldn't have finally comprehended what was said till several days after the meeting when they read the Argus newspaper.

In all there were over 40 Monster Meetings across Ireland in 1843, held at important historic and Celtic sites. Daniel O'Connell travelled up to 5,000 miles by coach to address 31 of these meetings himself. All were peaceful, and there were no incidents of violence. The last Monster Meeting was to be held at Clontarf, the site of the Irish hero Brian Boru's victory over the Vikings in 1014. But at the last moment the British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, issued a proclamation banning the rally for fears that it would have a military character.

With armed militia surrounding the site O'Connell faced a dilemma - confrontation or submission. It's possible that he himself feared violence, for at the Tara meeting, in an aside during his address, he said:

*"What could England effect against such a people so thoroughly aroused that they rose in rebellion? While I live such an uprising will never occur."*¹⁵⁷

So, fearing bloodshed, O'Connell sent messengers along all roads leading to Clontarf to turn the people back. It was a humiliating occasion for O'Connell and one from which he never recovered.

He was arrested, tried for "conspiring to change the constitution by illegal methods"¹⁵⁸ and imprisoned. He was released a year later on appeal and, though he continued his campaign, his power to influence matters in London was gone.

Daniel O'Connell's voice, which had once rung out over Tara, went silent forever in 1847 when he died at Genoa on his way to Rome.

Note: Many people, including bone fide historians, often conflate the various stages of the Central Victorian gold rushes and assume that newly arrived British, Irish, other Europeans and sometimes Chinese attended the rush at Forest Creek in 1851 – but this is not the case.

The Forest Creek gold rush was a 'domestic' gold rush, attended by people already living in Australia. The boats from Europe did not begin arriving until 1852, after having heard of the riches at Forest Creek.

The point being that, unlike many assume, the Forest Creek Monster Meeting was not attended by a coterie of Irish republicans with experience of the struggles in Ireland. They came later and were prominent at Eureka at Ballarat in 1854.

Also, the men who spoke at the Forest Creek Monster Meeting identified themselves as proud 'Britons'.

That said however, how could anyone with a desire for freedom not be inspired by the Monster Meeting at Tara? The population in Australia would certainly have read of the gathering.

¹⁵⁶ www.monstermeeting.net/the-monster-meeting-interviews.

¹⁵⁷ Source unknown

¹⁵⁸ Source unknown

THE EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS OF 1848

Looming large behind the Forest Creek Monster Meeting, and especially what was said at the meeting and the reaction of the Victorian government, were events taking place on continental Europe.

For centuries Europe had been dominated by royalty, warlords, religious bosses and wealthy political elites, with constant warfare as each power group in turn took over the other's land and its people. Over time these land-based and religious conflicts morphed from smaller European tribal fights towards a situation where the various tribes had consolidated into national groups, often under the control of an overarching empire.

Within these power blocs, the landless, the poor, those who lived a subsistence existence, the minorities and the politically and militarily weak lived at the mercy of their rulers – both local and Imperial. These people – the great majority of people – were dispensable serfs, to be used as soldiers, servant and labourers. To these downtrodden and to their rulers it was mutually unthinkable that they should have a say in the politics of their time, let alone the arrangements for their own economic life.

Then from about 1700 some people began to voice different thoughts, and things gradually began to change. The main ideas that gained currency were:

Tolerance: Was it right to judge someone by their religion? Would it not be better to tolerate each other than fight?

Reason: Linking back to the ancient Greeks and the Renaissance, in the works of people such as Galileo - who used clear and logical thinking and science instead of superstition and prejudice – people began to reason that all people are of equal worth. This also linked with the Christian idea that all men are equal before God.

Then those who preached reason and tolerance took it a step further. As well as teaching that all men were equal, they demanded that all be *treated* as equals, and that all had the right to live as they chose. Whilst this is familiar and obvious to us today, it wasn't then. But from 1700 on these ideas were debated, first in England and then France. It was called the Enlightenment.

Fast forward to 1815, and these ideas are powerful. But the fighting hasn't ceased. The first French Revolution of 1879 ended up with the power back in the hands of the old elites, and Napoleon was finally defeated at Waterloo.

And these ideas are still powerful in 1845-6 when poor grain harvests, blight in potato crops and generally depressed economic conditions across much of Europe led to sharply rising food prices, unemployment and the radicalisation of political attitudes.

By 1848 the idea that every man should be entitled to vote was powerful and widespread through Europe. Elections were held in France on the basis of a very limited suffrage: only 170,000 wealthy men from an overall French population of 35 million could legally vote. Many French people felt excluded from any possibility of gaining wealth, and there was a law against the right of assembly: official permission was required for any meeting to be attended by more than six persons.

So to get around this restriction on political assembly the political activists instead held 'banquets' where calls for reform were embodied in toasts to such things as 'electoral reform' or 'parliamentary reform'.

Note: It was such a toast that led to the formation of Amnesty International (AI) when in 1961 a young English barrister, Peter Benenson, riding to work on the underground, read in the paper of a group of Spanish students who were arrested because they stood in a café and raised their glasses to 'Freedom'...and so he began Amnesty International.¹⁵⁹ And didn't the Queensland Premier, Joh Bjelke Peterson, in 1977, legislate to refuse permits for street marches?

On 22 February 1848 the authorities banned a 'banquet' to be held to protest against such things as limitations on the right of assembly and the narrow scope of the political franchise.

The reaction was violence in the Paris streets during which soldiers and protesters were killed. Some units of the civilian National Guard refused to act against the protest and protestors threw up barricades in several areas of the city, chopping down thousands of trees and tearing up hundreds of thousands of paving stones in the process. There were further widespread instances of members of the citizen National Guard siding with the protesters against the government's authority.

On 25 of February a group of socialists, armed and carrying red flags, gathered in front of the City Hall in Paris, with a decree which proclaimed that a newly formed provisional government would undertake to provide work and would also recognise workers rights to combine *'in order to enjoy the legitimate benefits of their labour'*.

*'The Government of the French Republic binds itself to guarantee the livelihood of the workers by providing work ... it will guarantee work for all citizens. It recognises that workers may organise in order to enjoy the profits of their labour.'*¹⁶⁰

They were the Provisional Government of a French Republic. The Republic's manifesto was to conclude with this paragraph:

*The republic pronounced at its birth, and in the midst of a conflict not provoked by the people, three words, which have revealed its soul, and which will call down on its cradle the blessing of God and man: liberty, equality, fraternity.*¹⁶¹

On 26 February, in association with formally announcing its own appointment, the Provisional Government declared that *'in the name of the French people, monarchy, under every form, is abolished without possibility of return.'*¹⁶²

On 2 March the Commission of Labour reduced the working day in Paris from 11 to 10 hours, and from 12 to 11 hours in the provinces.

It was accepted that future elections would be based on universal adult male suffrage, which increased the number of eligible voters to 9 million. Eighty-four percent of those eligible to vote did so, with the overwhelming majority in support of the newly proclaimed 'Republican' situation. Nine hundred deputies were elected from across the provinces and cities of France, and The National or Constituent Assembly was convened on 4 May 1848.

News of these events in Paris quickly reached other European cities via a relatively new technology - the telegraph system. Those supportive of various forms of political

¹⁵⁹ Lighting the Candles, Clare Wositzky, 1995

¹⁶⁰ Above culled and edited from website www.age-of-the-sage.org/index.html then follow links: History & Historians/1848/European Revolutions of 1848

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² Ibid

liberalisation or radicalism saw the Parisian developments as an opportunity to press the case for liberalising or radical reform in their own cities and states. In Austria radicalised students, supported by the National Guard and tens of thousands of Viennese workers, sought enhanced wages together with shorter working hours; in Italy the movement sought the freedom of the press and the convening of a national assembly; in Berlin King Frederick was forced to stand bareheaded whilst the earthly remains of those Berliners killed in street fighting were paraded with their wounds exposed.¹⁶³

Very few of the people who experienced these events in Europe would have been in Australia for the beginning of the gold rush – so we can expect that maybe none were in attendance at the Forest Creek Monster Meeting.

However ideas travelled, and the ideas from Europe, Ireland and England were circulating in Australia and on the goldfields in 1851.

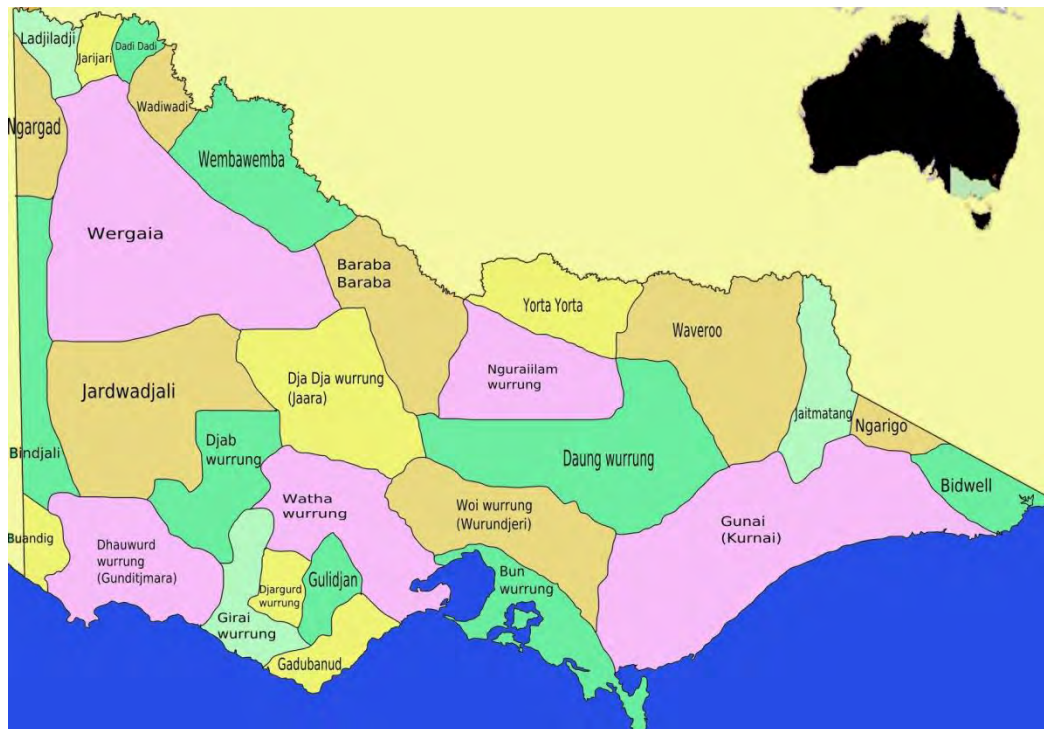
But the news of the gold in Australia did reach Europe in time for people who taken part in these uprisings and ideas to make it to the goldfields at Bendigo and Ballarat – the Italian, Carboni being the most famous of them.



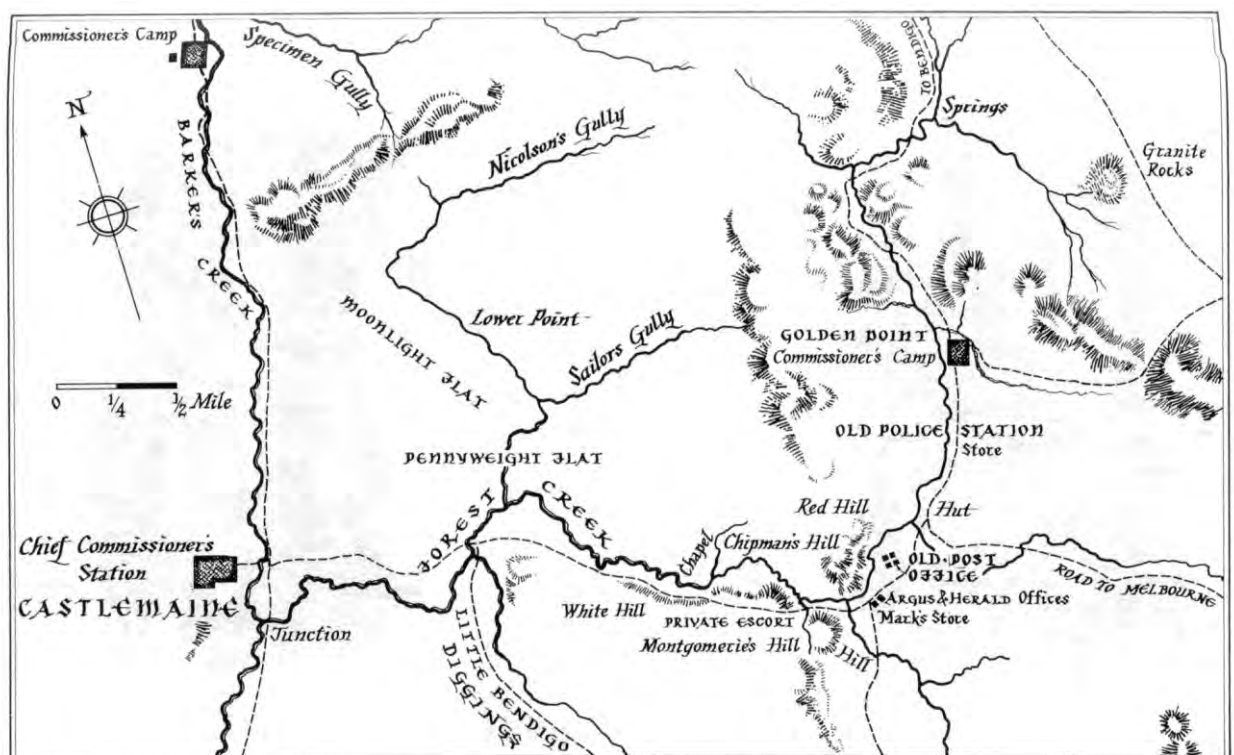
¹⁶³ Ibid

MAPS





Traditional Indigenous groupings of Victoria

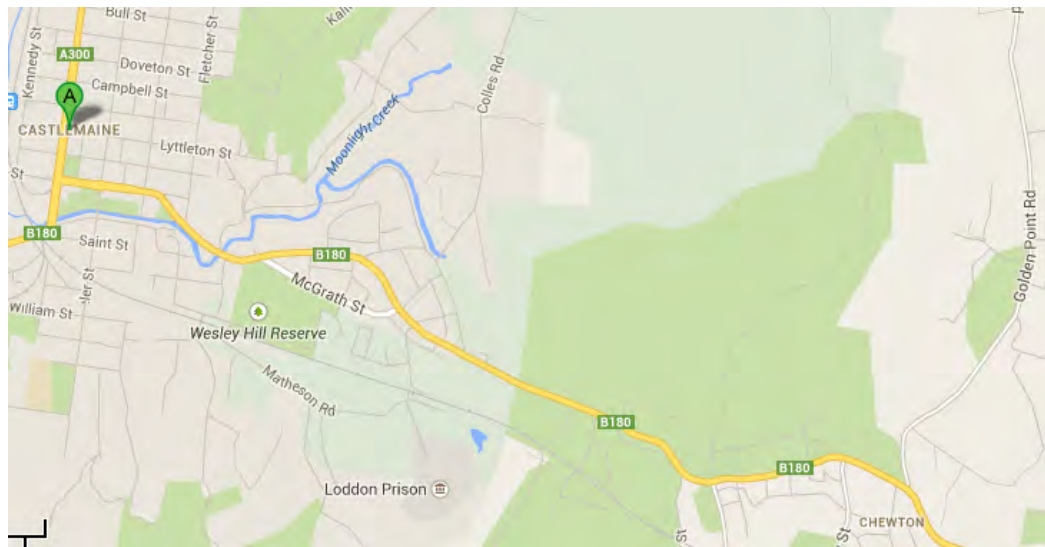


Map of Forest Creek goldfield in the years after the Monster Meeting.
The hut by the bottom right hand side by the creek junction marks the spot where the Monster Meeting was held.



Survey of Mr Wm Campbell's station Strath-Loddon, also the town of Castlemaine (detail), PROV, VPRS 8168/P2, Unit 2818, Loddon River Survey 94.

To locate the site of the Monster Meeting, follow Forest Creek east from Castlemaine, to where a joining creek flows in from the north. The site is located on the eastern banks of where these two creeks join, and below the junction of Golden Point Rd



GRAPHICS



The Monster Meeting flag, based upon a design by Robyn Annear – an imaging of the original flag.

THE CHEWTON DOMAIN SOCIETY
 in association with Parks Victoria, ABC Radio
 and Castlemaine's Theatre Royal is calling on

SONGWRITERS!

THE MONSTER MEETING SONG AWARD

For the best songs about or based upon the 1851 Monster Meeting of Diggers at Chewton, Castlemaine, Victoria.

1st prize - \$1000
2nd prize - \$500
3rd prize - \$250

Don't know about the Monster Meeting?

- Three years before bloodshed at Eureka, 15,000 diggers met and defied the Victorian Government's Gold Licence tax.
- They flew their own flag, the Diggers Flag. They demanded a vote. The government backed down.
- Can you write a song about it?

Entries close **October 15, 2010.**
Concert of finalists Dec 12,
Theatre Royal, Castlemaine, with
Shane Howard, Patron of the Monster
Meeting Song Award

To find out more come to the launch:
Red Hill Hotel, Chewton
Thursday July 15, 11 am

MC: **Jonathan Ridnell**,
 91.1 ABC Central Victoria
 Guest speaker: **David Bannear**
 Performance by: **Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky**
 from his show 'Gold in the Heart'.

SUPPORTED BY

For entry forms and Monster Meeting information, go to: www.monstermeeting.net

Graphic by Geoff Hocking

THE CHEWTON DOMAIN SOCIETY
in association with Parks Victoria, ABC Radio
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MONSTER MEETING SONG AWARD

For the best songs about or based upon the 1851
Monster Meeting of Diggers at Chewton, near
Castlemaine on the Forest Creek Diggings.

1st prize **\$1000**
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Parks Victoria
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ABC Central Victoria



CASTLEMAINE
GOLDFIELDS
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Graphic by Geoff Hocking



Doug Owen
Three Quid for the Privilege

Martin McKenna
Thirty Shillings a Month



Colin Fraser
Our Road to Democracy



Jamie Roberts
The Cards That Fell



Mickey Levis & Annie Morabito
More In Our Hearts Than Gold

Patrick Killeen
The Ballad of Forest Creek



Pete Kenyon
Fool's Gold

Monster Meeting Song Award

Theatre Royal, 5 p.m. Sunday 12th of December



Dave Maxwell
Stand Behind The Flag

Rod Willaton
Eighteen Fifty-One



Kimberley Clemens
Me and the Boys



Bill McAuley
Our Rights Democratic

Daniel Keohan
Letter to Bessie



Richard Lewis
We are starting something here



**Frank Jones &
Christy Wositzky-Jones**
Father Dear



Plus...

...Patron Shane Howard

Bookings 5472 1196

Graphic by John Ellis



**The
Monster
Meeting
Song
Award**

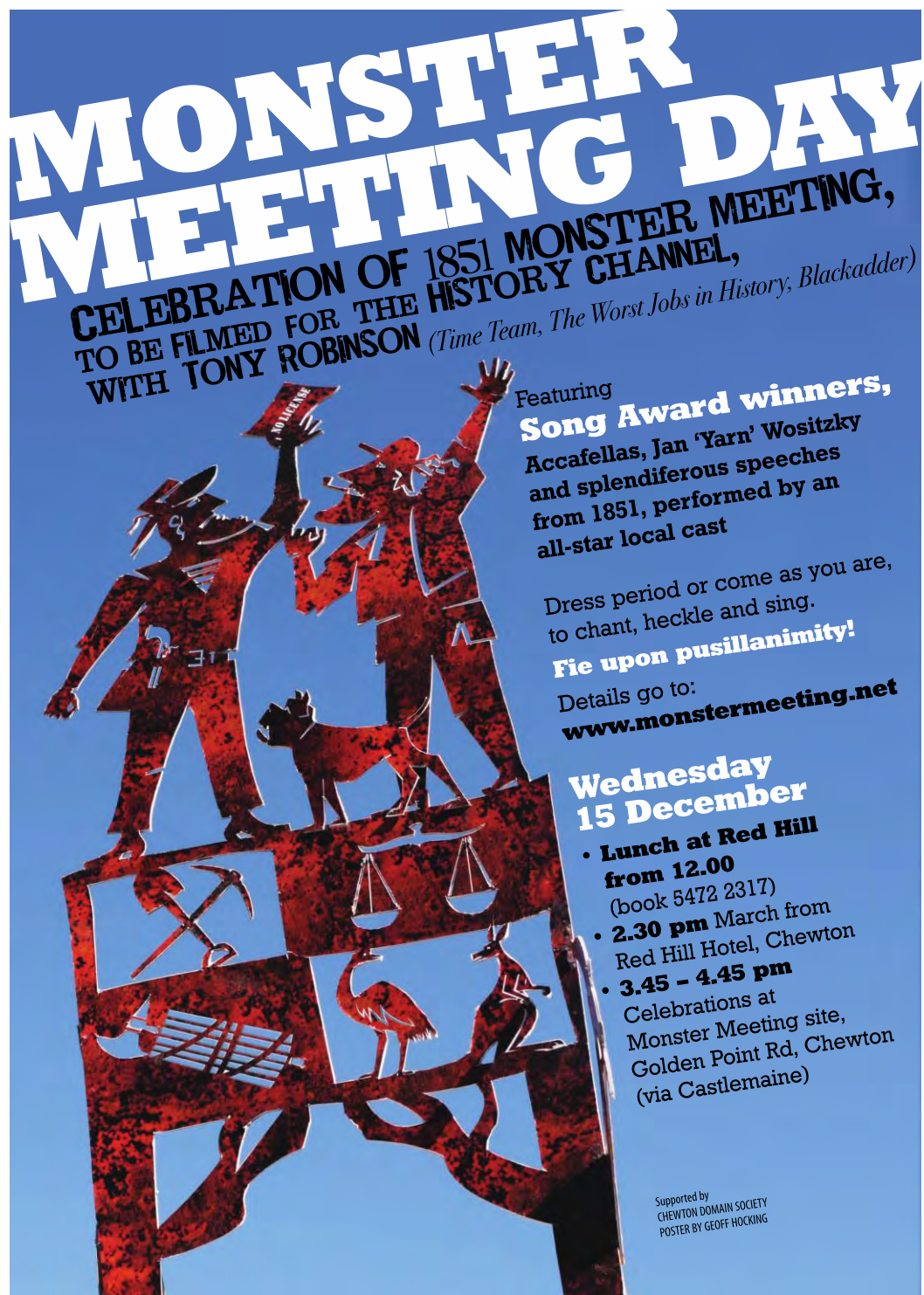
14 FINALISTS WITH THE
BEST SONGS ABOUT **THE MONSTER**
MEETING OF 1851, WHEN 15,000 DIGGERS
DEFIED THE GOVERNMENT'S GOLD LICENSE
SPECIAL GUEST & AWARD PATRON,
SHANE HOWARD
\$1750 PRIZE MONEY

THEATRE ROYAL
Sunday 12th December

5-8 pm,
\$7.50 entry
Bookings:
5472 1196
More details, finalists, etc: www.monstermeeting.net

Supported by Theatre Royal Castlemaine • Parkes Victoria • ABC Central Victoria • Castlemaine Goldfields Ltd • InstrAmental Music Centres
Burke's Music • Jan Wositzky-The Story Teller's Guide to the World • Maldon Community Bank • Chewton Domain Society • Poster by Geoff Hocking

Graphic by Geoff Hocking



Graphic by Geoff Hocking

MONSTER MEETING DAY

CELEBRATION OF 1851 MONSTER MEETING,
TO BE FILMED FOR THE HISTORY CHANNEL,
WITH TONY ROBINSON (*Time Team, The Worst Jobs in History, Blackadder*)

Featuring
Song Award winners,
Accafellas, Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky
and splendiferous speeches
from 1851, performed by an
all-star local cast

Dress period or come as you are,
to chant, heckle and sing.
Fie upon pusillanimity!
Details go to:
www.monstermeeting.net

**Wednesday
15 December**

- **Lunch at Red Hill
from 12.00**
(book 5472 2317)
- **2.30 pm** March from
Red Hill Hotel, Chewton
- **3.45 - 4.45 pm**
Celebrations at
Monster Meeting site,
Golden Point Rd, Chewton
(via Castlemaine)

Supported by
CHEWTON DOMAIN SOCIETY
POSTER BY GEOFF HOCKING

MONSTER MEETING DAY

CELEBRATE THE 160TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1851 MONSTER MEETING, WHEN THE DIGGERS STOOD UP FOR DEMOCRACY AND DEFIED THE GOVERNMENT'S UNFAIR TAX.

THURSDAY 15 DECEMBER

3.30 RED HILL HOTEL

SONGS, CASTING OF SPEAKERS, BACK STRAIGHTENING AND REFRESHMENTS.

4.30 MARCH TO MONSTER MEETING SITE.

LAUNCH OF MONSTER MEETING SCULPTURE EN ROUTE.

5.15 MONSTER MEETING SITE

(GOLDEN POINT RD) SPLENDID SPEECHES FROM THE ARCHIVES. MARJORIE THEOBALD & DOUG RALPH WILL TELL OF THE MEN AT THE ORIGINAL MEETING.

6.00 RED HILL HOTEL

CELEBRATORY MEAL & GENERAL CONVIVIALITY (12 DOLLARS/HEAD, BOOKINGS: 5472 2317)

MC: JAN 'YARN' WOSITZKY

DRESS PERIOD, WITH ATTITUDE, OR BOTH. BRING A FLAG, AND FIE UPON PUSILLANIMITY!



FELLOW DIGGERS!

The intelligence has just arrived of the resolution of the Government to Double the License Fee. Will you tamely submit to the imposition or assert your rights as men?

You are called upon to pay a tax originated and concocted by the most heartless selfishness, a tax imposed by Legislators for the purpose of detaining you in their workshops, in their stable yards, and by their flocks and herds.

They would increase this seven-fold but they are afraid! Fie upon such pusillanimity! And shame upon the men who, to save a few paltry pounds for their own pockets, would tax the poor man's hands!

It will be in vain for one or two individuals to tell the Commissioner, or his emissaries, that they have been unsuccessful, and that they cannot pay the license fee.

But remember, that union is strength, that though a single twig may be bent or broken, a bundle tied together yields not nor breaks.

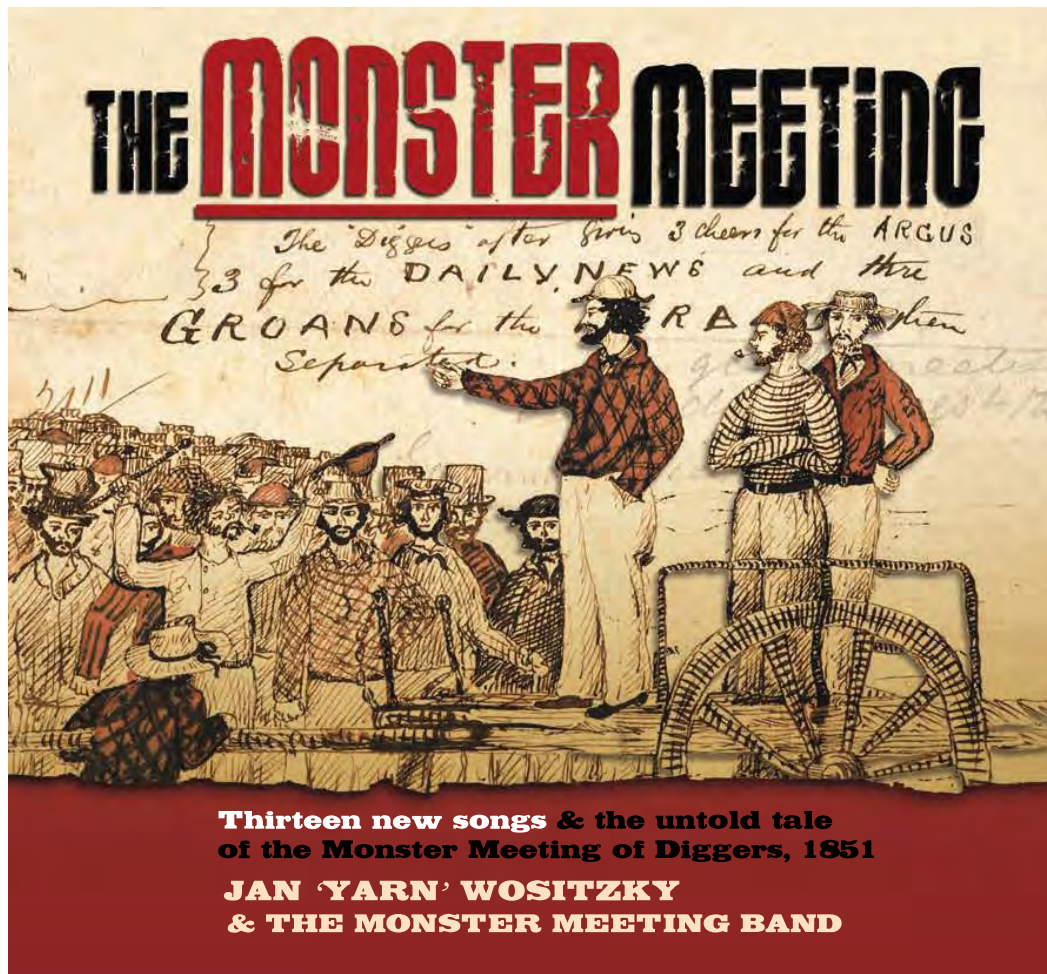
Ye are Britons! Will you submit to oppression or injustice?

MEET - AGITATE - BE UNANIMOUS - and if there is justice in the land, they will, they must abolish the imposition.

(Text from original 1851 flyer)

(OR LOOK IT UP IN A DICTIONARY.)

Graphic by Geoff Hocking



Front cover of Monster Meeting CD pack, graphic by Geoff Hocking