

# CHEWTON CHAT

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CHEWTON DOMAIN SOCIETY  
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## MONSTER MEETING - 153 YEARS ON



The 153rd anniversary of the Forest Creek Monster Meeting was commemorated with a simple event on the 15th of December 2004. Meeting on the same date, on the same site, and at the same time of day made a poignant experience. As in 1851, an anonymous letter written by "A. Digger" was posted around the goldfields summoning the populace to a meeting. In 2004 more than 150 people accepted this invitation and gathered in the bright sunshine, while the music of Helen McGeachin, Pip Grinter, Kate Burke and Danny Spooner created an atmosphere of times gone by.

The replica of the Monster Meeting flag was flying on a makeshift flagpole, and Parks Victoria provided the flags of many nations that they have in their collection at the Forest Creek Tourist Mine.

A replica of the Red Ribbon Rebellion flag was brought down by

visitors from Bendigo. It was a very colourful scene and made the front pages of the next editions of the *Castlemaine Mail* and *Bendigo Advertiser*!

Doug Ralph took the impromptu stage and introduced a succession of speakers. David Bannear set the scene with an interpretation of the site, and the prevailing social conditions of the early goldrush in 1851. He outlined the role this Monster Meeting played in the development of democracy in the new land. An amateur historian from Bendigo, Billy Allen, read the "A. Digger" letter which included the word "pusillanimity". Billy probably thought, "Fie upon such pusillanimity!" The Fellow Diggers Letter and a description of the meeting were presented by Howard Penberthy and Pat Milthorpe. Segments of the speeches of the day as reported in the *Argus* were read by Brian Gavin, Ian O'Halloran, Trevor Miles, Glenn Sutherland, Peter Skilbeck and Richard Piesse. The resolutions that were passed in 1851 were read by Geoff Walker - and unanimously re-endorsed by those present in 2004.

Mount Alexander Shire Mayor Dave Gittus then spoke about the importance of democracy and its development in the new land. Helen McGeachin, as President of the Chewton Domain Society, thanked everyone for attending, and invited everyone back to the historic Red Hill Hotel (1854) where the CDS had provided nibbles. Helen also made a presentation of a Monster Meeting Flag from the CDS to Doug Ralph, Doug having been a passionate supporter of this significant historic event for many many years. The first Monster Meeting reenactment in 1995 was Doug's idea, and he played a leading role in the 2003 and 2004 commemorations. Doug had also invited everyone back for the 2005 one!

The feedback has been very satisfying to the organisers. As at the first meeting visitors came from far and wide. Broken Hill, Bendigo, Geelong, Melbourne, Ballarat and the Ballarat Reform League were all noted in the visitors' books. Steve Gibbons was present, as were the acting CEO and the majority of Mount Alexander Shire Councillors. Several prominent Castlemaine identities obviously enjoyed participating!

*14,000 at the 1851 Monster Meeting from a Forest Creek goldfield population of approximately 30,000 at the time; more than 150 from a Chewton population of less than 400 in 2004 - is this proportionally equivalent?*



AND ALSO INSIDE...125th Birthday...Pool Opening...Money "Granted"...Shopping Around...Eureka...  
...Flagging Sales...Alpacas Now and Then...New Driving School...Wrestling Results...Crosswords in Chewton...  
...The Pointy End of the Darts Season...Recycling in 1859...4 Year Old sent to Gaol...and much, much more!