

Monster Meeting 2011

The 160th anniversary of the Great Meeting of Diggers at Forest Creek in 1851 was celebrated in style yet again. These celebrations have been annual events in Chewton since 2003 and last year's was filmed and screened around the world as part of the Tony Robinson Explores Australia series.

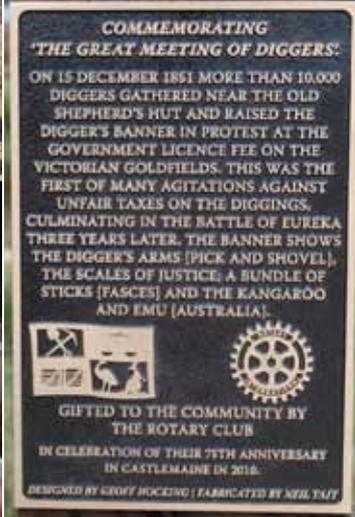
A gathering at the Red Hill set the scene for the afternoon. MC Jan Wositzky assumed the role of a goldfields trooper and surprised several people coming through the door with the demand to see their licence. This performance was complemented by singers Doug Owen, Stuart Manderson and Ange Lawson who entertained everyone with some original compositions.

A colourful parade left for the Monster Meeting site, waving flags and being encouraged by some enthusiastic motorists passing by. The parade stopped beside the tourist information board at the end of Golden Point Road where the new Monster Meeting sculpture has been installed. Co-ordinator of the Rotary Sculpture Project, Gary McClure, outlined the background to the sculpture and invited sculptor Geoff Hocking to unveil the plaque on it.

The parade then headed north up Golden Point Road to the Monster Meeting site where Parks Victoria had the dray ready for the occasion. A dray was used as the stage for the speakers at the original Monster Meeting when 15,000 gathered to hear them. In 2011 the crowd was considerably smaller and the speakers were assisted by a PA system! The passion of those assembled was probably no less than in 1851 as the speakers and singers were enthusiastically greeted.

Marjorie Theobald and Doug Ralph spoke about the research they have been doing into the backgrounds and lives of the original Monster Meeting speakers. Although The Argus reported the speeches in detail, until now very little has been known of those who delivered the speeches. Marjorie and Doug spelt out what they had been able to glean, and pointed out that this research is an ongoing project. They appealed for anyone with additional information to share it with them. Doug Owen closed proceedings with a stirring rendition of *Three Quid for the Privilege* a finalist in the Monster Meeting Song Award last year.

Then it was back to the Red Hill for conviviality, conversation and contemplation about what can be conceived for the 15th of December 2012.



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Understanding the MM

To fully understand the significance of the Monster Meeting at Forest Creek in 1851 we need to go back a few years and examine the events that were occurring throughout Europe, Britain and Ireland.

1848 was the year of revolution with almost every country experiencing uprisings and social unrest. This revolutionary wave began in France in February, and immediately spread to most of Europe and parts of Latin America. Over 50 countries were affected. In the years 1845 and 1846 a potato blight caused a subsistence crisis in Northern Europe. The effects of the blight were most severely manifested in the Great Irish Famine, but also caused famine-like conditions in the Scottish Highlands and throughout Continental Europe. Monster Meetings were all the go as people gathered to voice their disapproval, gatherings of up to 100,000 were common.

Many people were leaving and travelling to other countries to find a better life. My family left Cornwall in that year and moved to South Australia. Some of the men that came to Victoria had been involved in political groups such as the Chartists and continued their activities here. An active Chartist in Suffolk, Robert Booley, had arrived in Australia as part of a migration scheme, arriving in Victoria in the late 1840s. He helped found the Geelong People's Association for the "moral, social and political advancement of the people" in 1851. When gold was discovered at Forest Creek and Bendigo some of these men moved here and took on leadership roles in the movement to oppose the licence fee. We should remember the Monster Meeting at Forest Creek as the beginnings of a passive resistance movement that went on to achieve much for the people, research now revealing that most of the gains attributed to the violent Eureka event had been won prior to that. The 30,000 people who had collected on the gold fields were determined to win through passive resistance and the government and authorities understood this well.

It is now recognised that the course of events that had their beginnings at the Shepherds Hut on Forest Creek in 1851 laid the foundations for the democracy that has made Victoria (and Chewton) one of the best places in the world to live.

Doug Ralph.





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