



# Monster Meeting - 2014

The Monster Meeting gathering at the Soldiers' Memorial Park began with many more flags than people to carry them! The flags had been brought along by the Bendigo group who keep the Red Ribbon Rebellion celebrations going year by year, and the collection of flags they have gathered for this is very impressive. The Welsh flag is spectacular and was grabbing attention at the start – and it was only fair that the bearer from Bendigo was warned there would be competition encountered along the way.

It's amazing how things pick up when the bagpipes start – from lounging languidly in deep conversation in the shade of the park trees suddenly the flags were hoisted, watches checked and latecomers scurried from their cars. The piper, Langley Rowbottom, was worth his weight in gold! He led us up the footpath, accompanied by the toots of encouragement from passing motorists, to the shade of the Red Hill veranda. Here, the rest of the flags were shared and MC Phil Hall rallied the troops, many who were in costume, with a rousing speech. It was here that Brian Stant made a claim on the Welsh flag and after some intense discussion about Welsh forebears Brian held the dragon aloft.

Across the highway in the front of Max Lesser's lens, the vista of Forest Creek opened up. There's something about this part of the annual march that really has impact – possibly it's the sight of the flags strung out along the dry grassy track that mixes with the images of the historical photos of the intense mining that had this stretch of creek turned upside-down in the search for gold. Then at the junction of Wattle and Forest Creeks it was time to bunch up for a photo of the creek crossing that Castlemaine Mail photographer Max Lesser was waiting to take.

The chairs waiting for the marchers were taken up and others sat lower to the ground as proceedings got underway. Jan Wositzky opened proceedings with the appropriate selection, "The Monster Meeting", which contains the words "Meet me at the Monster Meeting." Parks Victoria's Culture and Heritage Manager, Da-



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vid Major, then took over the microphone to acknowledge the significance of indigenous culture.

MC Phil painted the picture of the background to the Monster Meeting for us, breaking into song a couple of times. He presented Martin McKenna's Monster Meeting Song Award winner, "Thirty Shillings a Month." This song is becoming a Chewton anthem as each time it's sung in public more and more people are joining in the choruses. This Monster Meeting celebration didn't have the usual concentration on the speeches made on the dray in 1851, but we didn't miss them entirely. Doug Owen captured the spirit of Captain Harrison on that day with a short reading, and Vaughan Greenberg reprised the Dr. Webb Richmond speech – but not before a contemporary aside linking the 1851 tax doubling proposal to the 2014 co-payments proposal!

Jan Wositzky took over for the second half of proceedings and spoke of the Monster Meeting book that is now available on the internet. The book that he thought would be a three week project but turned out to be years in the making, and the research behind the book that made him sympathetic to Governor La Trobe who was, after all, and artistic and cultured man who didn't want to be a governor – much less a governor with a gold-rush on his hands. This book, and interviews with leading historians, is available to view or download on [www.monstermeeting.net](http://www.monstermeeting.net)

Doug Owen then led us through the stirring anthem "Three Quid for the Privilege" with the audience enthusiastically joining in on the no ways and not evers. Jan's renditions of "Gather Round the Flag" and "Good Time a Coming" led the way for Langley to bagpipe our way to the end of proceedings at the meeting site. And at this stage Tom Taft took over custodianship of the Welsh flag – Wales obviously has a big footprint in many local lives.

Then there was just time for some staged stage photos before the big pack up. The flagpole had to be lowered and the wagon had to be returned to the Maldon Museum. It was at this time that the input of Parks Victoria staff Noel Muller, Vince Cafari and Brendan Smith is really reflected on – again a fantastic effort from Parks Victoria ensuring another Monster Meeting anniversary was marked in a superb way.

Then it was off to the Red Hill for the planned wind down barbecue – this being the place that traditionally brings forward the best suggestions for following years. Not sure if great ideas were the subject of all conversations at the Red Hill because the BBQ was well received and tackled with enthusiasm!

But when a photo of MC Phil and Monster Meeting fanatic Bettie Exon arrived by email that night (thanks Debbie Hall!) it was obvious the 2014 Monster Meeting commemoration had gone off well. How could two people look any more relaxed?

