



# Monster Meeting

This year's Monster Meeting celebration moved beyond those of the past. The 1851 meeting wasn't forgotten but there was a link made between the fight for democracy back then with the continuing fight for democracy in 2016. Democracy needs constant vigilance, constant protection and constant improvements.

Legendary folksinger Danny Spooner returned to the Monster Meeting scene to team with MC Jan "Yarn" Wositzky in performing many of the songs that are now so familiar to us. "The Monster Meeting" (what else?) opened the show and Michael Smith showed no signs of fatigue from his recent walk to Canberra as he bounded onto the dray. Michael outlined the issue that faces Australia today – we can be led into war and overseas missions without the approval of our parliamentary representatives. He gave many examples of where this had happened, many in the recent past. Yet many Australians remain unaware of this undemocratic situation as he discovered by talking to so many people along the trip to Canberra – and even some of the politicians greeting him were unaware too. There's a need to change, and we must change, was his message. It was great to see our federal member in the audience. Lisa Chesters had been at the Chewton Town hall to wish Michael bon voyage on October 23rd and been at Parliament House to greet him a month later, and was now at the Monster Meeting to hear him speak.

A tribute to Doug Owen followed. After years of dynamic contributions to Monster Meeting celebrations Doug passed away earlier this year. Doug's life in music and in promoting the Monster Meeting was outlined before Jan and Danny presented "Three Quid for the Privilege" – the song Doug penned and performed on the Monster Meeting CD. It was easy to envisage Doug sharing the stage during that performance.



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# December 15, 2016 - now 165 years on

Another tribute, and this to another Doug, followed. Doug Ralph had been the driver and enthusiast behind the Monster Meeting celebratory promotions, beginning in 1995 when the celebration had a political air – a demonstration about the undemocratic imposition of commissioners in the newly created Shire of Mount Alexander. A march to the steps of the Castlemaine Town Hall was an early political stirring. Author Robyn Annear had worked closely with Doug from the time she and her husband arrived in Castlemaine to document the goldfields remnants and who was better to introduce the goldfields and Box-Ironbark Forest to them? The sentimental tribute to Doug was punctuated with the introduction of the hand-sewn Monster Meeting flag that had emanated from long discussions about design clues that had been gleaned. Robyn mentioned Doug's love of research that translated to his later passion for Trove with its collection of old newspapers.

Speeches over, it was time for some closing songs, "Gather 'round the flag" and "Good Time A Coming" and then to turn to the barbecue. And the old-time games! Parks Victoria staff do a wonderful job in supporting these events. Transporting a heavy horse-drawn vehicle from (and to) Maldon Museum, setting up games like skittles, quoits and horse-shoe tossing and barbecuing for an unknown number of mouths must be an annual nightmare – but one that is appreciated by the crowd in Chewton each Monster Meeting celebration.

"I'd no idea of the importance of the Monster Meeting until today," was one of the most memorable quotes overheard at the end of a very enjoyable occasion. The other was, "Let's do it all again next year." But then, they all say that don't they?

## December 15, 1851 - only 165 years ago...



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