

# An historical question that turned hysterical

It started with a query on Facebook's Maine Memories, a query about who found the "Monster Meeting site". This quickly became a witch hunt as the query became a demand – shouted (in capitals) no less. It seems that in this day of advanced technology and communication we have reverted to shouted demands like we used to, and reverted to a need for an automated immediate response. Remember the old catechism that began with the basic "Who made the world?" And the one line response that excluded any thinking, questioning or logic? God made the world! And, by God, generations of kids had to learn it!

As a non-historian looking on from the outside I find this need for an automated response by purported history aficionados interesting to observe. The Monster Meeting site? 15,000 people would occupy a fair piece of land one would think. So are we looking at acreage? Or should the posted question have referred to the Shepherds Hut site which was the location of the large gathering that took place and sometime later became known as The Monster Meeting?

The next thought that springs to mind is who actually lost the Shepherds Hut site? It must have been well known in 1851 for 15,000 people to respond to the call, but now we demand answers about who found it. Putting these together we have to assume that in the mists of time, as people left the area and generations died out, the exact location became blurred. But clues existed. A key one was a map in the possession of the late Barbara James. Barbara was not an historian as I found out to my chagrin. Barbara began contributing items of interest, and historic value, to the *Chewton Chat* in its infancy. In my enthusiasm as editor I introduced her as an historian – only to receive an indignant phone call. She was a researcher she insisted strongly. I learnt, and she remained a researcher in the pages of the *Chat*. Then shortly before she died Barbara insisted the Chewton Domain Society receive the collection that resulted from her research. Talk about valuable! Gems in it are still being found, and much of it formed the basis of the recent book, "History of Golden Point" by Ken James and Allan Dry.

It was during the period of Barbara's research that she provided the source material for the Geoff Hocking designed map that is still on Chewton's Tourist Information Board. This map was drawn before computer usage became common – so it was quite some time ago. Barbara indicated on the map a spot 53 called simply "Protest Site". Interestingly, it is in the same area as the

Shepherds Hut site we celebrate today – east of the junction of Forest and Wattle Creeks but over Golden Point Road on what is now private property. And, interestingly, when Barbara James passed all her research material to the Chewton Domain Society a map came to light. This map used the Shepherds Hut as a landmark.

A copy of this map was passed to Glenn Braybrook and the scale on it was used to place the Shepherds Hut's location. East of the junction of Forest and Wattle Creeks, but not as far east as Barbara's Protest Site. Note

Barbara's wording – Protest Site, not the Shepherds Hut. Especially important because the Shepherds Hut is one spot, the Protest Site was an area covered by 15,000 people. 15% of a packed MCG or 85% of Mount Alexander Shire's population! Much bigger than someone's backyard! And is the junction of the two creeks exactly where it was in 1851? 1850s'



photographs of Forest Creek show scenes of devastation – the creek and its edges central to this devastation.

Glenn's contribution regarding the site's location was acknowledged by a gathering that was recorded on the front page of a subsequent *Chewton Chat*. Apparently radio interviews recorded at that time are now in the People and Places collection in the Chewton Town Hall.

Enter Ken McKimmie and his fantastic "Chewton Then and Now" book. The chapter on the Monster Meeting site is fascinating. Ken matches the silhouettes of the surrounding hills to the hills in the 1851 cartoon sketched at the Monster Meeting, and makes the point that the meeting crowd "would most likely to have spread to the eastern side of Golden Point Road as well."

Repeating the claim of not being an historian, I find it fascinating to see people need to find one answer (their "truth") rather than embark on a wonderful journey of discovery. History, I believe, is for everyone – and for everyone to journey through. It does not belong to any one of us. I hope from this response the nonsense behind the original question is recognised as just that. The truth isn't as cut and dried as some people might hope – and is still evolving. So let's acknowledge the work of all researchers who add to our knowledge base.

Having said that, could I draw your attention to the Wikipedia statement on the Monster Meeting? Google it.

Wikipedia is a composite of people's contributions and interpretations. It's worth a look – and it changes! So look again every so often... no doubt there will be more discovered and more writings about the Monster Meeting in future - and more claims made!

John Ellis.

