



AURUM

Newsletter of the Ballarat Gold Museum Society

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JUNE MEETING

The next meeting will be on Thursday, June 12th at 1.30pm when our speaker will be Snež Cosick from Melbourne Museum who will speak about H. V. McKay who developed and manufactured the Sunshine Harvester. The 5-minuter is from Ian Smith and entitled “Who was he”? Ann Doggett, Heather Christie and Barbara McPherson are on the Tea Roster—if you can’t cover this would you please tell Joanne .

MAY MEETING

This trip has to have been one of our most successful excursions--and thanks to Bill and Nance Llewelyn for setting it up, and to Jo for all her help. The weather was perfect, there was good company, everyone got to the bus early and the drive was beautiful with all the Autumn colours. We were all aware that we were to visit the construction site of the new Buddhist Stupa outside Bendigo but that was a blatant understatement!

When we pulled into the car park the awe-inspiring Stupa dominated our view. On a gentle mound, it is constructed of steel and white concrete and designed to last a thousand years: it is 50 metres square and will be 50 metres high. It is amazing--surrounded by three terraced meditation walks, already planted with trees, and below that, young groves of shrubs and trees. Standing inside this building felt calming, uplifting and healing, in spite of the fact it is still very much a building site.

Ian Green welcomed us and introduced us to the reality of this Buddhist community. His father had given the first tranche of land, which he and his mother had increased to 160 acres. There are already a teaching centre, a visitors centre, a monastery and convent. In the plan are housing, a school, a hotel, an aged-care centre and an expanded teaching centre.





We had lunch there and then went into Bendigo to see the Chinese museum and a very different visit. Russell Jack was our very enthusiastic guide, showing us round the entire site, including the gardens, and bursting with plans for a huge extension. He has recently been approached by a collector from South Australia who has offered the museum his collection providing a suitable building is available to house it. (Shades of the Gold Museum!) Already on show are two, very large, ceremonial lions and attending creatures, several armed warriors, three huge carved and embossed wooded screens and a jade carriage--yes, it is made entirely of jade and is sufficiently large to take a least one person but would not have been used in any practical way.

Both visits were charged with energy and enthusiasm but in such very different ways--if you weren't with us you missed a very special day.

Final instalment from Aboriginals on the Goldfields by Fred Cahir

In this account Mount Elephant and Mount Buninyong were once men.

Mount Elephant had a stone axe. Buninyong offered him some gold for it. Having agreed they met at what is now the Pitfield diggings for the exchange. Some time later Buninyong reconsidered, and desired his gold back. Elephant refused. Buninyong sent him a fighting message, and the challenge was accepted. They met again at Pitfield diggings. Elephant buried his spear in Buninyong's side, and the hole can be seen to this day. Elephant received a deadly blow on the head from Buninyong's stone axe. The gaping hole in Elephant's head can also still be seen. The two men, mortally wounded, retired in opposite directions. Their bodies

turned into mountains at the spot where they died.[6]

The discovery, but not the acknowledgement in history texts, of new goldfields by Aboriginal people has become a recurrent theme in Australian gold history. This inattention by goldfields writers is remarkable considering the score of primary documents which testify to the very active participatory role Indigenous people assumed in the gold mining period. Firsthand observations in newspapers reveal a number of diggings were initially discovered by Aboriginal people who maintained their land tenure association with the district through and beyond the 1850s. Paul Gootch, writes:

The way in which the Eureka diggings were discovered was on the occasion of my sending out a blackfellow to search for a horse who picked up a nugget on the surface. Afterwards I sent out a party to explore who proved that gold was really to be found in abundance.[7]

Edward Tame recalled in his reminiscences that in his frequent travels to the goldfields of Victoria he often encountered groups of presumably northern Wathawurrung clans people near the township of Ballan in central Victoria. As an example, he noted that in Ballan ‘we often saw aborigines squatting about...I continually came across them.’ And again in Creswick Creek penned: ‘sometimes meeting a lot of natives, of whom there seemed to be a large number about Creswick Creek.’ He was surprised on one occasion he did not ‘remember [seeing] a single native all the way going or coming [Melbourne-Ballarat], which was very remarkable.’ and maintained that he ‘never saw them at work, - they said “white man fool to work for white money” [silver or gold]’, yet later related how possum skin rugs form ‘good articles of commerce’ for them. George Rowe, an English artist and gold miner on the Bendigo and Castlemaine goldfields, directly questioned a number of Djadjawurrung people on their attitudes towards gold mining and manufacturing goods for monetary purposes. Their responses were on first appearances both self-effacing and pragmatic:

I went to see an encampment of natives we found them in the forest about 60 to 80 lying about some asleep others crouched before a fire wrapped up in a skin or an old blanket many of them speak English the women sitting by a fire had 3 opossums [from] which they were pulling off the fur and then singeing over fire preparing them for eating I asked why they did not kill them and sell the skins “black fellows too idle” to why don’t you dig get gold “got no tools white men work black fellows no work we plenty eat without”.

However, it should be stressed that in earlier letters Rowe had written several times of Djadjawurrung laboring for both gold and the manufacture of possum skins for money:

Their dress is only a blanket or an opossum skin rug thrown over their shoulders and wrapped around them the opossum fur is beautifully soft and makes a warm covering to sleep under and is what most diggers have as it is very light a good one costs 4 pounds...Since I took a sketch of King Billy I have had a visit

from all the tribe every day – they bring me small quantities of gold which they pick up from the surface they begin to search for it just behind our tent and go away over the hills they creep along leaning on a stick they are very keen sighted.

Given the numerous accounts of Indigenous participation in gold prospecting itself it is remarkable that they are recorded as expressing a disdain for it. Arguably it was the needless forever toiling that they wish to refrain from, particularly given similar sentiments had been voiced in the earlier pastoral period about shepherding for squatters. Effectively the Djadjawurrung women felt there was no need to consistently participate in an economic activity such as gold mining, and did not possess the necessary tools for a task acknowledged by all races to be a risky venture at the best of times, especially given they had no professed difficulty in procuring all their needs from the bush (an activity looked upon with awe by many non-Indigenous visitors to the Victorian goldfields). One observer noted that without having witnessed the ‘consummate art’ of the kangaroo hunt by Aboriginal people it would be impossible to conceive of, and that their actions when hunting ‘are unequalled by anything we have ever seen in the whole science of calisthenics.’ Many miners’ accounts equally attest to their supremacy in the bush. One such account, by Edward Tame, ran as follows:

They are such adepts in the use of primitive arms and implements, and unrivalled in tracking down game, also showing great skill in things concerning everyday life and food...Much cleverness is shown in discovering water and they will live for months when a white man would die of thirst. Every spring and hole containing water is known to them and when no water can be found they will support life on water obtained from the roots of certain trees, or on the dew collected on the grass and shrubs.

The wide range and significant incidence of situational encounters between Victorian Aboriginal people and prospecting for gold, ranging from passive presence, active discovery to shunning the goldfields, indicates the varied nature of interaction. The degree of Aboriginal participation in the gold rush activities has been shown to be dependent upon many factors such as where gold was to be found, and their ability to continue traditional lifestyles in the face of a very sudden and large population increase in immigrants.

Notes from the Curator

The Gold Museum was recognised last week for its excellence in the online record management of its extensive collections, being named a winner in the Sir Rupert Hamer Awards. The awards are presented annually by the Public Record Office Victoria. Named after former Victorian Premier and public records advocate, Sir Rupert Hamer, the Gold Museum's project was called 'Onsite and Online – Expanding access to the Gold Museum Collections', and won Category 1 of the 'Places of Deposit' section.

The Hamer Awards were introduced to highlight the work done by government agencies and the seventy or so Places of Deposit in protecting, preserving and giving access to the records or government and allied collections. The Gold Museum has been a Place of Deposit for ten years or so and as such is eligible to house public records which the Public Record Office decides it cannot house itself. This might include records deemed to be of local significance, rather than state or national. The main items we house here as a Place of Deposit are the City of Ballarat "Rough Minutes" from 1870 to 1970 and a selection of gold mining maps of our region. Rough Minutes are not the official minutes of the council, but the notes taken in the process of writing up the minutes.

A gala ceremony was held at Parliament House in the lavish surroundings of Queens Hall with the Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Heidi Victoria, welcoming the two hundred guests and the hierarchy of the Public Record Office presenting the awards.

Providing community online access to the Gold Museum's collections has been a labour of love that has proceeded over twenty years, with most of the data entry carried out by volunteers from the Gold Museum Society and the Ballarat Historical Society. We now have over 65,000 records and over 10,000 images online showcasing the rich history of Ballarat and the goldfields. This was achieved when our collection management computer system was converted to a new program called Vernon Collections. This allowed us to automatically put our records on to the Vernon website called eHive and through that on to the National Library of Australia's Trove website. We get hundreds of hits each day.

With the digital age upon us, it's important to provide the public with access to this extensive history, and we're thrilled that this important work has been recognized by the Sir Rupert Hamer Awards. My thanks to volunteers and staff for the role they played in contributing to this project.

Donation from Ballarat Agricultural & Pastoral Society

A very significant acquisition of records occurred during the month with the historical records collection of the Ballarat Agricultural & Pastoral Society being archived and brought to the Gold Museum. This collection fills two steel cabinets at present, but more is expected to be ready to collect in a month or so. It includes Minute books, annual reports, letter books, accounting records, show programs and associated memorabilia

Roger Trudgeon

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