

EUREKA
EDUCATION

—
THE
JOURNEY
TO
EUREKA

EUREKA
CENTRE
BALLARAT

ART GALLERY
OF BALLARAT



THE JOURNEY TO EUREKA

image p. 11
ST Gill
On the road from Forest Creek to Bendigo
Circa 1854 (detail)
watercolour and gum arabic on paper
18.9 x 25.1 cm
Gift of Mr. Tony Hamilton
and Miss SE Hamilton, 1967
Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat

The origins of Australia's democratic system can be found in its colonial history and the Eureka rebellion played a significant role in developing Australia's identity.

THE CHARTISTS

In 1838, a working class movement now called Chartism, demanded democratic reforms in Britain and published an important document setting out a number of demands, including manhood suffrage (the right to vote). This document was called the People's Charter and those who championed its ideals became known as Chartists.

THE YEAR OF REVOLUTIONS

Revolutions swept through Europe in 1848. The monarchy was overthrown in France and other European states, barricades blocked the streets of Berlin and the Irish rose against their British rulers. Italian Raffaello Carboni and German Frederick Vern witnessed the revolutions in their home countries before coming to Australia during the early 1850s.

THE EQUALITY OF GOLD

People from all walks of life and different corners of the globe worked side by side on the diggings. For many arriving from Europe, the free and equal nature of the goldfields was a welcome escape from the class-based societies they had left.

‘[The Ballarat digger] will always be a lover of order and good government and, provided he is kindly treated, will be found in the path of loyalty and duty’

LIFE ON THE DIGGINGS

The life of a miner was tough. At the start of the gold rush in 1851, miners would live in tents, eventually building more permanent shelters using timber and stone. Many faced homesickness and loneliness. A few were lucky and found their fortune but many failed. The first miners tended to travel to the diggings by themselves, carrying very few possessions. They would sometimes strike up friendships with fellow gold seekers along the way. The number of different nationalities on the goldfields also contributed to the feeling of isolation.

The second wave of miners brought their families with them. By 1854, women and children made up a third of the population and the families settled into life on the Ballarat goldfields. This group brought with them precious mementos of home and were more settled. Life was still tough for new arrivals as they battled to understand their new environment. The weather ranged from cold winds and sleet, when they

Governor Charles Hotham writing after his visit to the diggings.
VPRS 1085/P Unit 8, Despatch 112, Public Record Office of Victoria Collection.



ST Gill
Refreshment shanty (Ballarat), 1854
 1854
 watercolour & gum arabic on paper
 25.3 x 34.2 cm
 Gift from the Estate of Lady Currie, 1963
 Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat



ST Gill
Diggers hut, Forest Creek
 Circa 1852
 watercolour & gum arabic on paper
 19.2 x 25.2 cm sheet
 Gift of Mr. Tony Hamilton and
 Miss SE Hamilton, 1967
 Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat

Government Printing Office, Victoria
Gold license issued to W Tittal 1854
 ink and print on paper
 Accession Number: 78.0971D
 Ballarat Historical Society Collection,
 courtesy of the Sovereign Hill Museums
 Association.



ST Gill
Pensioners on guard, Forest Creek
 Circa 1854
 watercolour & gum arabic on paper
 sheet: 24.8 x 18.7 cm
 Gift of Mr. Tony Hamilton and
 Miss SE Hamilton, 1967
 Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat



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might have to work waist deep in freezing water, to periods of extreme heat, when they could only find relief by going down the mine shafts.

The goldfields also proved to be a dangerous place. Bushrangers, mining accidents and disease were constant threats. There was a limited supply of fresh food and medicine. Diets were very basic and fresh fruit and vegetables were expensive. Living conditions were often unhygienic and doctors were difficult to find.

FINDING GOLD

Miners on the goldfields would find gold in shallow creek-beds, known as alluvial gold. They would collect this gold using gold pans or cradles. At first it was relatively easy to find gold this way but after a couple of years, most gold was depleted from the creeks. Miners then had to dig underground to extract gold from leads, veins of gold found in quartz rock. Deep lead mining could be time-consuming and dangerous.

GOLD LICENCES

The huge increase in population created significant difficulties for those governing the colonies who were trying to provide basic services as well as maintaining law and order. Charles La Trobe was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Victoria in 1851, and quickly introduced a licence system to raise money. Money raised from these licences was used to pay for roads, administration and police. When they were first introduced, licences cost 30 shillings (\$375 AUD today) and would last a month. The licence fee was very unpopular with the miners because they had to pay even if they didn't find any gold.

LICENCE HUNTS

Police were stationed on the goldfields to enforce the licence system. Everyone had to carry a licence and produce it whenever it was requested. The miners resented the licence 'hunts' and often tried to hide. There were many reports of police, who were known as 'traps', insulting and bullying miners.

CALLS FOR REFORM

Many of the gold-diggers had radical ideas and became hostile to the gold administrators whom they saw as corrupt and arbitrary. They thought the gold licence system was unfair and brutally administered. They also felt they should have a voice in the government of the colony. Throughout 1853 and 1854, their calls for 'true British justice' fell on deaf ears.

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