

MONSTER MEETING SITE



Monument at the Monster Meeting Site, erected by the Ballarat Reform League Inc. on registered land



Photo taken from a location similar to that in the 1851 engraving



monster meeting site air photo.JPG



Monster Meeting site



1851 engraving of the Monster Meeting drawn by D.Tulloch, engraved by Thomas Ham



Image and line work by Ken McKimmie, Chewton Author, suggesting the similarity of the hillside contours in the 1854 sketch and the existing view



1854 Pen and ink sketch of speakers at the Monster Meeting (artist unknown)

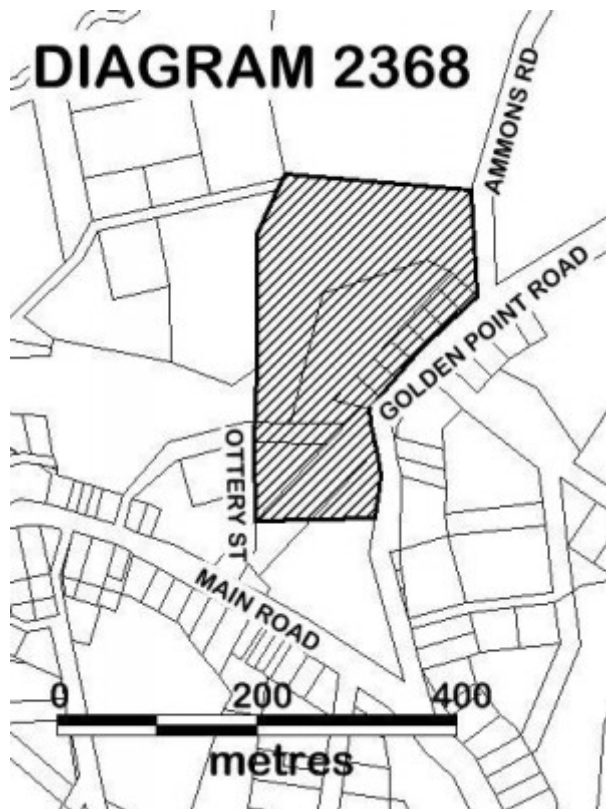


Diagram 2368

Location

GOLDEN POINT ROAD GOLDEN POINT, MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

Municipality

MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2368

VHR Registration

July 13, 2017

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

History Summary

In the first week of July 1851, Victoria separated from New South Wales and became a colony in its own right. In the same week, gold was discovered in the new colony. Attempting to slow the rush of workers to the gold fields, and generate revenue, Governor La Trobe introduced a licence fee of 30 shillings per month for the right to mine for gold, effective from 1 September 1851. Even when enforced, the licence system did little to slow the rush, and by the end of November 1851, diggers were leaving their jobs in cities, towns and on pastoral stations and travelling to the gold fields in their thousands. On 1 December 1851 Governor La Trobe issued a proclamation which proposed to double the licence fee to £3, effective from 1 January 1852. Shortly after, notices appeared along the Forest Creek diggings urging diggers to meet and object to the proposed increase. During the following days a meeting of up to 3,000 people was held to establish the day and location of the Monster Meeting or the Great Meeting as it was originally known. The Monster Meeting, of approximately 10,000 to 15,000 diggers, took place on 15 December 1851, at the Shepherd's Hut, Forest Creek. Two days later the government announced that the licence fee increase had been revoked, although Governor La Trobe's decision to revoke the licence fee increase had been made on 13 December 1851, two days prior to the Monster Meeting. The gold licencing system continued to be a point of contention and continued objections led to the Red Ribbon Rebellion in Bendigo in 1853 and ultimately to the Eureka Stockade in Ballarat in 1854.

Description Summary

The Monster Meeting Site is located on the northern outskirts of the township of Chewton, in the locality of Golden Point, near the confluence of Forest and Wattle Creeks. It is surrounded by the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park (VHR H2407), but was not part of the Park in 2017. The site itself consists of grassed land across a shallow rise, which falls away towards Forest and Wattle Creeks. A large corrugated iron shed, a cattle yard and fencing are located on the site and a Monster Meeting commemorative monument is located to the south of the shed, on the recommended land.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Dja Dja Wurrung.

WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT?

The Monster Meeting Site including all the land identified in Diagram 2368. The modern structures including the shed, cattle yard, and fencing are not of significance.

HOW IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

The Monster Meeting Site is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

The Monster Meeting Site is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

The Monster Meeting Site is historically significant as the location of the first organised mass protest meeting objecting to the gold licencing system in Colonial Victoria. It was also the first time workers had stood united in protest against the government. This meeting was the precursor to the Red Ribbon Rebellion (1853) and the Eureka Stockade (1854) which led to the introduction of the more democratic Miners Right. The Monster Meeting Site is located in what was one of the most productive gold mining areas in Victoria, and is historically significant for its association with the development of Victoria through the discovery of gold, and for its association with the beginnings of democracy in Victoria. [Criterion A]

OTHER LEVELS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Monster Meeting Site is also significant for the following reasons, but not at the State level:

The Monster Meeting Site is of social significance at a local level. A special association is evidenced by regular engagement with the Monster Meeting Site by community members and historians whose research activities, since the early 2000s, led to rediscovery of the location of the site. Since then, a website, publications and CDs of original songs have been produced, and performances have been held at the place. The Ballarat Reform League

Inc. has erected a monument at the place, where events are held annually on the anniversary of the Monster Meeting.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

PERMIT EXEMPTIONS (under section 42 of the Heritage Act)

It should be noted that Permit Exemptions can be granted at the time of registration (under s.42(4) of the Heritage Act). Permit Exemptions can also be applied for and granted after registration (under s.66 of the Heritage Act)

General Condition 1

All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

General Condition 2

Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

General Condition 3

All works should ideally be informed by Conservation Management Plans prepared for the place. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

General Condition 4

Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

General Condition 5

Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the relevant responsible authority, where applicable.

Specific Permit Exemptions

- . Maintenance of existing vegetation.
- . Removal of plants listed as noxious weeds in the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*.
- . The removal or pruning of dead or dangerous trees to maintain safety.
- . Weed and vermin control activities.
- . Fire suppression and firefighting duties such as fuel reduction burns and fire control line construction, provided all heritage features and values of the place are protected.
- . Interpretation and safety signage of a modest size provided it does not adversely affect the heritage features and values of the place or obstruct views to and from it.

These permit exemptions are consistent with those in the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park (VHR H2407).

Theme

4. Transforming and managing the land 7. Governing Victorians

Construction dates	1851,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	SITE OF GREAT MEETING OF MINERS AT FOREST CREEK,
Hermes Number	123107
Property Number	

History

HISTORY

Part 1: Background to gold licence

Under English law passed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, gold and silver was the property of the Crown. If land was purchased from the Crown, it did not include ownership of minerals on that land. The 1850s gold rushes in NSW and Victoria were the first in the British Empire, and as such, there were few precedents in British law to guide governments.

Fearing a rebellion and a loss of their political power and workers, authorities and pastoralists did not reveal early gold discoveries. However, when gold was discovered in central NSW in 1851, the resulting gold rush proved unmanageable, and notices served on gold seekers to cease digging went unheeded. When the authorities could not stop the gold rush, they decided to regulate it through a licence system through which gold diggers paid a fee for the right to mine for gold.

Part 2: The discovery of gold in Victoria and the introduction of the gold licence system

In the first week of July 1851, Victoria became a separate Colony from New South Wales, and gold was discovered. On 15 August, Charles La Trobe, the Lieutenant Governor of Victoria followed the lead of NSW and issued a proclamation stating that regulations were being prepared for the issue of licences to mine for gold at a reasonable fee. The regulations were enforceable from 1 September 1851 and required an upfront payment of 30 shillings per month. Licences would be issued only for unalienated Crown land and would be issued on the spot by a commissioner who would determine the size of the claim, initially 8ft x 8ft, but later increased to 12ft x 12ft.

In August 1851 gold was discovered at Buninyong south of Ballarat, and for the first time, the Government dispatched a Gold Commissioner to administer the field. Instead of paying the licence fee, gold diggers staged 'a solemn protest of labour against opposition' and then simply abandoned the goldfield and moved to a new location.

Part 3: The Mount Alexander Gold Rush and gold licence fee increase

By the end of November 1851, gold had been discovered at Mount Alexander (Forest Creek) which was to become the location of the largest rush seen in Australia. The amount of gold (two tons per week, which in terms of today's gold price would amount to \$1 billion per week) flowing into Melbourne from Mount Alexander, meant the desertion from jobs, and inward migration, could no longer be controlled. The population increased significantly with people arriving from other colonies and from overseas.

In an effort to slow the rush, Governor La Trobe declared that from 1 January 1852, the licence fee would be doubled to £3 per month and that it would not only apply to diggers but to all connected with the search for gold including tent keepers, store keepers and cooks. Notices quickly appeared along the Forest Creek diggings at Mount Alexander urging diggers to meet, agitate for justice and object to the proposed licence fee increase. During the following days a meeting of up to 3,000 people was held to establish the day and location of the Monster Meeting or the Great Meeting as it was originally known.

Part 4: The Monster meeting

The Monster Meeting, or the Great Meeting as it was originally known, was attended by 10,000 to 15,000 diggers protesting against the increase to the gold licence. Various speakers spoke from the back of a dray, and flags were flown from the trees and raised on poles. One of these flags may have been the precursor to one used at the Red Ribbon Rebellion which depicted scales, a bundle of sticks, and a kangaroo and emu. Although thousands of men attended, the meeting was peaceful. All present agreed not to pay the licence fee. Two days after the Monster Meeting the government announced that the licence fee increase had been revoked, although Governor La Trobe's decision to revoke the licence fee increase was made on 13 December 1851, two days prior to the Monster Meeting.

The term 'Monster Meeting' originates from mid-eighteenth century Ireland, and was a term used at that time to describe large protest meetings, generally of Catholics, aimed at mobilising mass support to end the union between Ireland and Britain.

Part 5: Location of Monster Meeting, Golden Point, Forest Creek

On 9 December 1851, the Argus reported that 'bills [were] posted along the Creek calling on diggers to meet this evening at 7 o'clock, near the Post Office to make arrangements for petitioning any increase on the licenses.' That evening, a meeting of about 3,000 men was held near the Post Office. They formed a committee, and determined to meet with the Commissioner the following morning with the expectation that a meeting of 12,000 to 15,000 men would take place the following Monday 15 December 1851.

The location of the Monster Meeting is described in contemporary articles as being held at the Shepherd's Hut, near the Post Office, about one mile higher up from the Commissioner's Tents. Maps from the period indicate that these structures are located at both Forest Creek, and nearby Fryers Creek. The meeting was advertised through notices addressed to the Mount Alexander diggers which were posted along the creek. The month before, the Argus reporter described the location of the Mount Alexander goldfields as 'not on Mount Alexander, as is generally supposed, but in a gully known as Forest Creek.' In addition, the Argus office was located at Forest Creek and if the meeting was at Fryers Creek, it would be expected that the reporter would have stated this. Speakers and attendees also describe arriving at Forest Creek.

Later reminiscences about the meeting recall it being held 'near an old shepherd's hut, at the junction of Mount Alexander [Pyrenees Hwy] and a new cut, called the Chewton Road [Golden Point Road] Forest Creek (afterwards named Castlemaine)'; 'at the old shepherd's hut, Golden Point, Forest Creek'; and 'at the Shepherd's hut near Chewton (a piece of rising ground not far from the Mount Alexander Hotel).'

This documentary evidence confirms the location of the Monster Meeting as Forest Creek, which is covered by the area recommended for registration.

Part 6: The Red Ribbon Rebellion and the Eureka Stockade

There were a number of subsequent protest meetings against the licencing system and perceived unjust governance of the goldfields. The most significant of these include the Red Ribbon Rebellion (1853) and the Eureka Stockade (1854).

In June 1853, the Anti-Gold Licence Association was formed in Bendigo. Delegates took a petition of more than 5000 signatures to Governor La Trobe complaining of hardship on the goldfield. They asked for the licence fee to be reduced, and condemned the harsh treatment of those unable to pay. When the delegates returned on 13 August 1853, they were greeted by thousands of diggers at View Point holding flags of all nations, as well as the diggers' flag designed by William Dexter, a china painter from Devon. This flag featured a pick, shovel, and cradle; scales; a bundle of sticks; and a kangaroo and emu, and is thought to have first been flown at the Monster Meeting, Forest Creek. The event became known as the Red Ribbon Rebellion, as supporters wore red ribbons to show their solidarity.

In 1854, a series of events led to the most well-known gold field protest, the Eureka Stockade where, for the first time, the government used force against the protestors resulting in deaths and injuries on both sides. The catalyst for the Eureka Stockade was the imprisonment of men perceived to be unfairly accused of arson. Diggers met to lobby for their release, protest against the licence and demand the vote. The Ballarat Reform League was formed and at a later meeting, the diggers burnt their licences. On 30 November, diggers met on Bakery Hill and again burnt their licences. They then marched to the Eureka diggings, raised the Southern Cross flag, and constructed the stockade. They were attacked by government troopers and regiments, outnumbered and defeated. Although unsuccessful at the time, the protest eventually resulted in the demise of the gold licence system and the introduction of the more democratic Miner's Right.

KEY REFERENCES USED TO PREPARE ASSESSMENT

Annear, Robyn (1999) *Nothing But Gold*, Text Publishing

McKimmie, Ken (2011) *Chewton Now and Then*, self published

Wositzky, Jarn (2014) *The Monster Meeting Book, How Eureka began with the 1851 Forest creek Monster Meeting of Diggers*, Chewton Domain Society

<http://www.monstermeeting.net/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballarat_Reform_League

Assessment Against Criteria

The Monster Meeting Site is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

The Monster Meeting Site is historically significant as the location of the first organised mass protest meeting objecting to the gold licencing system in Colonial Victoria. It was also the first time workers had stood united in protest against the government. This meeting was the precursor to the Red Ribbon Rebellion (1853) and the Eureka Stockade (1854) which led to the introduction of the more democratic Miners Right. The Monster Meeting Site is located in what was one of the most productive gold mining areas in Victoria, and is historically significant for its association with the development of Victoria through the discovery of gold, and for its association with the beginnings of democracy in Victoria. [Criterion A]

Plaque Citation

PROPOSED TEXT FOR THE BLUE HERITAGE PLAQUE

On 15.12.1851 more than 10,000 diggers met here to object to the gold licence fee. It was the first organised protest meeting and led to the Red Ribbon Rebellion and the Eureka Stockade. It was also the first time workers had protested against the government.

Extent of Registration

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 1995**, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the following place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2368

Category: Heritage Place

Place: Monster Meeting Site

Location: Golden Point Road, Golden Point
Mount Alexander Shire

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2368 encompassing all of Crown Allotments 49-55, 55A, and 145F, Section E Parish of Chewton, parts of Crown Allotments 145E and 146A Section E Parish of Chewton, part of Crown Allotment 2005 Parish of Chewton and part of the road reserve for Ottery Street.

Dated 13 July 2017

TIM SMITH

Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 28 13 July 2017 p.1513]

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>