

**Heritage Overlay No.:** 043  
**Citation No.:** 067  
**Place:** The Diggers Rest Hotel, 1434-1466  
Calder Highway

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**Other Names of Place:** Lock's Oval Hotel (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries)  
**Location:** 1434-1466 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest  
**Critical Dates:** Established 1852; construction of present (double-storey) building 1854; known renovations and minor extensions: c.1926, 1939, 1976. Burnt-out October 2008.  
**Existing Heritage Listings:** None  
**Recommended Level of Significance:** LOCAL.



**Statement of Significance:**

The Diggers Rest Hotel, at 1434-1466 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, constructed in 1854, is significant as one of the few Mount Alexander Road goldrush wayside hotels known to survive, and the only known surviving example of the many wayside hotels that were established between towns during the goldrush. Architecturally, the original Victorian building has been compromised by additions, primarily during the interwar period. Historically, these same additions also demonstrated the revival of the Mount Alexander Road as a competitor to rail transport with the advent of the motor car, a far-reaching transformation which almost certainly saved the hotel from demolition.

*Consultants: David Moloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie (2006) Sera-Jane Peters(2009)*

The Diggers Rest Hotel, at 1434-1466 Calder Highway, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although recently burnt and now in a ruinous state, it still demonstrates nineteenth century and interwar design qualities. The nineteenth century qualities include the composition of the massive two storey rough stone and brick walls the chamfered corner, , single window openings and main entrance doorway. The interwar qualities include the shallow-pitched gambrel roof form, broad eaves, and the timber framed window and door openings on the ground floor, and the two side additions.

The Diggers Rest Hotel, at 1434-1466 Calder Highway, is of historical significance at a LOCAL level (AHC A.4, B.2) as a rare wayside hotel associated with one of the most dazzling goldrushes in world history, and with Australia's largest goldrush. Wayside hotels are expressive of a major phenomenon of the goldrush event – unforgettable for its participants – of the trip to the diggings. The throng that pushed up Mount Alexander Road in the early 1850s was of historic proportions, and often exposed to major hardships and dangers. Wayside hotels were the most significant type of place on this road, in terms of their number (an average of about one every three kilometres on the dry Keilor Plains); their grandeur; and their associations with the colourful days of the early goldrush (including the sheer scale of the traffic, bushranging, bullockies, and Cobb & Co staging posts). At the time these hotels, including the two-storey masonry Diggers Rest Hotel, were the grandest and most dominant type of building in the rural parts of the colony. They were typically distinguished from town and goldfields hotels by their incorporation of a blacksmith for cart repair, and large stables.

The Diggers Rest Hotel is one of few surviving Mount Alexander Road goldrush wayside hotels, and an even rarer example of a purpose-built (early 1850s) goldrush wayside hotel. It is the only known surviving intermediary (situated between towns) goldrush wayside hotel on the road. It is also set apart by having been one of the few hotels identified in goldrush-era maps as a waymark of the journey to the Mount Alexander goldfields. Its undeveloped and relatively isolated setting, dominated by the double-storey hotel, preserve it as a striking representation of a goldrush intermediary wayside hotel. Although much of the rear of the hotel was substantially impacted by grading in recent years, it retains potential to provide archaeological evidence of the repair facilities (blacksmith and wheelwright shops), and also Cobb & Co stables. Its evocative name also contributes to the place as an expression of the goldrush. Its relative proximity to the headstone and grave of a journeying digger contributes to an understanding of the nature of the journey, and the role of hotels as mortuaries. Its interwar alterations and additions are historically significant as expressions of the revival of both the highway and the hotel as a result of the advent of motor traffic. This transformation almost certainly saved the hotel from demolition, which was the fate of most other wayside goldrush hotels in the early twentieth century.

The hotel is also historically important at the LOCAL level as the place after which the small township of Diggers Rest was almost certainly named.

The Diggers Rest Hotel, Calder Highway, is scientifically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC C2). The site has the potential to provide archaeological evidence that would contribute to the history of the goldrush era.

The Diggers Rest Hotel, Calder Highway, is socially significant (AHC G.1) at a LOCAL level as a place which is the recognised locally for its goldrush history, and valued as a place of recreation and community.

Overall, the Diggers Rest Hotel, Calder Highway, is of LOCAL heritage significance.

### **Description:**

The Hotel was badly burnt out in October 2008, rendering this description obsolete. The description has been retained however for comparative reasons, as the assessment of the hotel's significance was made at this time, whilst it was still operating. ( February 2009)

The Diggers Rest Hotel Calder Highway Diggers Rest is a local heritage landmark in a rural setting. Mature eucalyptus and oak trees flank the building.

The asymmetrical, two storey, rendered brick, altered Victorian and interwar hotel building is characterised by two storey wall planes. These walls represent the original (nineteenth century), as do the single window openings, main corner entrance doorway on the ground floor with bluestone threshold, rendered brick window sills and the rendered chimney bases. The shallow-pitched gambrel roof form clad in terra cotta tiles, multi-corbelled chimney tops, broad eaves, timber framed double hung windows with 6 paned upper sashes, timber framed window and door openings, arched ground floor windows, together with the flat roofed verandah supported by square painted brick piers, gabled porch at the corner entrance and the shallow gabled single storey east and west wings reflect the alterations and additions of the interwar period.

Internally, the building has high ceilings, and thick (approximately 750 mm) external walls. Some of the internal walls, including one of the main passage walls, are also of these dimensions. The spaces and rooms appear to have been minimally altered. Interior wall surfaces have been remodelled and repainted, although some early or original fabric may remain. Two of the large ground floor windows feature an arched or elliptical top. Chimneys may have been remodelled into similar forms.

At the rear of the hotel building is a garage. It is constructed of weatherboard and corrugated-iron, with a concrete floor and has two horse stalls at the back end. It may have been a coach house and stable erected sometime in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, and then resurfaced and used as a motor vehicle garage (further assessment is required to more fully ascertain its historical development). It may retain remnants of an earlier building or paving. It is of heritage significance and should be subject to archaeological investigation before any demolition is considered. While in need of repair and maintenance, it appears to be in quite reasonable structural condition.

Adjacent to the outbuilding is a small area paved with bluestone pitchers. A post and rail fence was removed a few years ago; the base of one post is visible. A mature exotic tree was also removed in recent years; there are many suckers around the outbuilding. An old oak tree is situated some 10 metres behind the outbuilding.

The hotel is situated on 2 acres of land. Although it was extensively disturbed by grading works about four years ago, this area retains archaeological potential. Surplus surface material was pushed into two heaps with a front end loader. An examination of one of these shows roughly squared bluestone building or paving blocks, some with hard concrete attached. Some of these were moved off the site recently. There are also remnants of iron machinery / tools.

Behind the hotel, towards the centre of the property an electric pump is erected over what is thought to be a substantial underground tank, although surface evidence of this is not now visible.

At the western end of the rear of the building is a substantial platform roughly constructed of bluestone blocks and rubble, with a concrete cap. This is also said to be part of a former underground tank.

To the north of the hotel, and perhaps included in the original site, is a gate entranceway to what appears to have been a former house site.

## **History:**

### Contextual History

#### *The Rush to Mount Alexander*

The alluvial gold rushes of the 1850s changed the face of Australia. Victoria's goldrush was also an event of major international significance, comparing with (shading according to local contemporaries) the Californian rush in fame and size. 'Far famed Melbourne' and the names of Victorian goldfields rang around the globe in the early 1850s.<sup>1</sup> The 'diggings' of Ballarat, Castlemaine and Bendigo constituted the richest alluvial goldfields in the world.

The first rush to Ballarat's sensational Golden Gully in August 1851 was eclipsed by that to the Mount Alexander goldfield in October.<sup>2</sup> By late December some 25-30,000 diggers were on the Castlemaine goldfield.<sup>3</sup> In the grip of the gold 'fever', more than 20,000 of Melbourne's population of 25,000 left for the diggings.<sup>4</sup> The town was electrified, its people 'went mad', nothing was talked about but gold. Labourers, clerks, police, shopkeepers, professionals, and even clergymen and Members of Parliament deserted their posts and callings to prepare for the diggings.<sup>5</sup>

In early 1852 news of the fabulous Mount Alexander diggings reached England, and gripped the world. London was astounded when ships from Melbourne arrived with up to ten tons of gold each. Merchants advertised tents and provisions, and 'going to the diggings' inspired plays and a 'moving panorama'. Charles Dickens wrote of the 'legions of bankers' clerks, merchants' lads, embryo secretaries, and incipient cashiers; all going with the rush, and all possessing but faint and confused idea of where they are going, or what they are going to do.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Robins, in *Records of the Castlemaine Pioneers* (Adelaide, Rigby, The Castlemaine Association of Pioneers and Old Residents, 1972), p.175

<sup>2</sup> Serle, Geoffrey, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861* (MUP, Carlton, 1968), p.23

<sup>3</sup> 'Murrays Guide to the Gold Diggings: The Australian Gold Diggings: Where they are and how to get to them, with letters from settlers and diggers telling how to work them' (1852), in *Australian Historical Monographs*, edited by George Mackaness, Vol.8 (1956), p.37; Flett, James, *A Pictorial History of the Victorian Goldfields* (Rigby, Adelaide, 1976), p.xii; McCulloch, Alan, *Artists of the Australian Gold Rush* (Melbourne, Lansdowne, 1977), p.31

<sup>4</sup> Flett, 1976, op cit, p.xi.

<sup>5</sup> Garryowen (E. Finn), *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne 1835 to 1852, Centennial Edition, Vol. 2*, (Melbourne, Fergusson and Mitchell, 1888), p.807; Murrays Guide, op cit, p.31

<sup>6</sup> Hocking, Geoff, *Castlemaine, From Camp to City: A Pictorial History of Forest Creek & the Mount Alexander Goldfields*, (The Five Mile Press, 1994), pp.29, 37, back dustcover; Hocking, Geoff, *To the*

The furore was fed by press reports, hastily published travel guides, and letters home. 'Each mail was like a bellows on popular excitement,'<sup>7</sup> confirming tales of untold wealth awaiting in Victoria. 'We turn up our noses at California' said one letter, incredulous that the Mount Alexander escort was bringing 'a *ton* of gold' to town each week.<sup>8</sup> A Castlemaine digger later recounted how the 'startling' news created 'uncontrollable excitement' among the youth of his town of Selkirk, who all wanted to pack for the diggings.<sup>9</sup> The entire male population of another Scottish village is said to have set off for Port Phillip on the strength of one letter home from a former local.<sup>10</sup>

In September 1852 the foreign influx landed; by May 1853 an average of two foreign and five colonial ships were arriving in Melbourne each day.<sup>11</sup> Their crews deserted for the diggings:- 'The waters of Hobson's Bay were scarcely visible beneath a forest of five or six hundred vessels' observed William Westgarth.<sup>12</sup> Whereas nearly 14,000 people, most from neighbouring colonies, had arrived in Port Phillip in 1851, in 1852 95,000 people came, with the influx only marginally less (over 92,000) in 1853. In 1854 there were 83,500 new arrivals, and another 66,500 the following year. In 1856-58 the number was still nearly 50,000 per annum, falling to under 30,000 per annum 1859-61. Between 1851 and 1860 Victoria's population increased sixfold.<sup>13</sup>

The overwhelming majority of arrivals in the years 1852-1854 headed for 'Mount Alexander' (Forest Creek, later Castlemaine) and Bendigo, a distance of almost 100 miles (160 kilometres). As early as November 1851 the road 'was one continuous line of diggers'.<sup>14</sup> Observers, in awe at the ponderous cavalcade, at first tried counting it.<sup>15</sup> The rush to Bendigo's Eaglehawk Gully in late April 1852 saw the road become even more famous and its traffic more numerous.<sup>16</sup> With the influx of the Europe's young and fit from September 1852, the traffic increased again. Locals estimated that traffic on this road was greater than all the other major roads in Victoria combined. Assistant gold commissioner C Rudston Read wrote that the road was 'lined with people ten times as numerous as New South Wales, all on their way to Mount Alexander.'<sup>17</sup> Others registered the international proportions of the phenomenon:- 'The road resembled one of the great thoroughfares out of London', observed a clergyman, 'so full was it of wagons, drays, carts, gigs, equestrians and pedestrians,

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*Diggings! A Celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Discovery of Gold in Australia* (Lothian, 2000), p.67

<sup>7</sup> Blainey, Geoffrey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (revised edition, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1988), pp.177-8

<sup>8</sup> Murray's Guide, op cit, p.38. (Letter was dated 8<sup>th</sup> December 1851). Another, dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 1852 declared that 'There is no mistake about the matter. Mount Alexander is without doubt the richest gold field in the world'. (p.43)

<sup>9</sup> Walter Wilson, in *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.93

<sup>10</sup> Hocking, 1994, op cit, p.23

<sup>11</sup> Blainey, op cit, p.197

<sup>12</sup> Westgarth, William, *Victoria and the Australian Gold Mines in 1857* (Smith Elder, London, 1857), p.194. (Westgarth, p.194. He was looking back from top of Flemington Road, in late 1854.

<sup>13</sup> McCulloch, op cit, p.34; also Austin, KA, *The Lights of Cobb & Co: The Story of the Frontier Coaches 1854 -1924* (Adelaide, Rigby, 1972), pp.36-37

<sup>14</sup> Annear, Robyn, *Nothing But Gold: The Diggers of '52*, (Melbourne, Text Publishing, 1999), p.58

<sup>15</sup> G Butler Earp, *Gold Colonies of Australia: comprising their history ... and every advice to Migrants* (Geo Rutledge, London, 1852), pp.196-7. (This calculates at about one dray every three minutes, or a near continuous stream of traffic at the speed of a bullock dray.). See also the *Argus*, 1/10/1851, p.3

<sup>16</sup> Serle, op cit, pp.23, 35

<sup>17</sup> C Rudston Read, *What I Heard, Saw and Did at the Australian Gold Fields* (Boone, London, 1853), p.123

proceeding to the diggings.’<sup>18</sup> In a paper delivered to the Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science in 1855 engineer Edward Richardson declared that in the period late 1852 - early 1853 the traffic on the Mount Alexander Road had ‘exceeded that of any road in England.’<sup>19</sup>

As much as the sheer volume of traffic, it was the nature of that journey, including its colourful cast of travellers and the appalling state of the road itself, which were portrayed in contemporary writings and illustrations.

At the very time that the foreign influx landed, ceaseless traffic and a particularly wet winter had made the ‘roads’ (unformed bush tracks) virtually impassable.<sup>20</sup> But boggy roads, unbridged creeks and unimagined costs for provisions and repairs did not deter the brave young ‘new chums’ or more seasoned ‘colonials’ from their prospects.

In the early months the movement of Melbourne ‘mums and dads’ up the road presented a spectacle:- ‘With the vehicles were a motley assemblage of all sorts, stout, sturdy, active men, an assortment of lame and halt, women with young children, boys with frying pans and tin dishes, girls with bundles as big as themselves, and old men with loads that would appal even the sturdiest in the mother country.’<sup>21</sup>

Soon the experienced colonial campaigner - ‘huge burly fellows’, a ‘sturdy and determined pedestrian’ - appeared, with:

‘...of course, either pistols or gun... Nearly the whole of his person is covered with his accessories – a roll of blankets strapped across his shoulders, tin saucepans, pots and pipkins...tied to his waist...articles numerous and unknown hanging before him.’ ‘Almost every man had a gun, or pistols in his belt, and a huge dog...their spades and picks tied together, and thus they marched up the country, bearing with them all they want, and lying out under the trees.’<sup>22</sup>

They were part of an event of historic proportions. John Sherer’s guide to the diggings provided a view of the road to Mount Alexander that was simply epic:

‘Hundreds of drays and carts were tearing and toiling through the deeply rutted track; horses and bullocks smoking and sweltering beneath a broiling sun; drivers shouting and cracking their whips to the loudness of pistol reports.....All except the women were armed with weapons of some kind or other, from the Irish shililah [sic] up to the six barrelled revolving pistol. Verily, I believe, there never was seen, in any part of the world before, such a heterogenous stream of human prodigality, pouring itself along a single line of road, with such golden prospects in view. Every face was radiant with hope and every one was sure of his fortune.’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Adcock, WE, *Gold Rushes of the Fifties*, with notes by James Flett (Poppet Head Press, Glen Waverley, 1977), p.70

<sup>19</sup> Richardson, E, ‘Keilor Bridge’, paper read June 7<sup>th</sup> 1855, in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science* (1854/55, Vol.1), p.149

<sup>20</sup> Flett, 1976, op cit, p.xii.; Annear, op cit, p.61

<sup>21</sup> *The Argus*, 1/10/1851, p.3

<sup>22</sup> Contemporary sources cited in Bradfield, Raymond, *Castlemaine: A Golden Harvest* (Lowden, Kilmore, 1972), pp.10-11

<sup>23</sup> Sherer, John, *The Gold-Finder of Australia* (Clarke, Beeton, London, 1853; Penguin, Facsimile edition 1973), pp.21-22. Sherer’s noted diggings guide is probably not first-hand. (M.Rosalyn Shennan, ‘A Goldfields Adventurer’ in *Victorian Historical Journal*, March 2000, p.31) However the

### *The Keilor Plains*

Most set out cheerily on foot, and if the road wasn't too heavy could reach the Keilor the first night. The many who laboured under a heavy swag usually broke down here.<sup>24</sup> 'At this distance from town men with large swags generally found that they had more than they could carry, consequently the [Keilor] storekeeper had an immense stock of goods on his hands.'<sup>25</sup> Most simply discarded excess gear along the road.<sup>26</sup>

Weather permitting, the adventure and joy camping in the pristine Australian bush was irresistible.

'The first night we camped on Keilor Plains, everything being romantic and pleasant, water and firewood being near at hand. After supper, smoking and yarning began until, one by one each dropped off to his resting-place for the night. Bullocks, and horses did their best to lull us to sleep with their tinkling bells around their necks ... and our whole experiences might be likened to a repetition of the thousand and one nights'.<sup>27</sup>

'With light hearts we strolled on through Flemington ... and reaching the verge of the plains, camped, having Mother Earth for our mattress and heaven's bright canopy spangled with myriads of stars, amongst which shone the Southern Cross, for our bed-curtains.'<sup>28</sup>

In later years such experiences were remembered nostalgically by old diggers. One recalled the camp at 'Diggers Rest':

'Little do those who pass this place now in railway trains, on holidays bent, know the number of 'new chums' who have boiled their billies, fried their chops, made their beds of bush leaves, and put their blue blankets over themselves at this spot'.<sup>29</sup>

Bullock teams were an unforgettable part of the Mount Alexander Road experience. The exertions, thirst, and language of the bullockies shocked most:

'You see huge piles of goods on heavy drays, dragged by from 10 to 16 bullocks, labouring and ploughing their way along the deep mire and clay ... sticking fast in deep bogs ... Yet they go on by incredible exertions, and incredible exercise of patience ... The amount of swearing, shouting, thundering cracks of the heavy bullock-whips, and the persevering straining through difficulties that to a newcomer appear hopeless, are such scenes as have no parallel anywhere else.'<sup>30</sup>

'All day the bullock-drivers are shouting and swearing at their teams, and all night they are drinking, singing, rollicking. I fancy that there is not an equal amount of

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author is able to paint (others') first-hand accounts and views onto larger canvasses. It is notable that he was prepared to describe the road to the diggings in 1852 in such unequivocal terms.

<sup>24</sup> WH Wilson, *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.158

<sup>25</sup> William Ottey, *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.56

<sup>26</sup> Robert Mitchell, *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.35

<sup>27</sup> *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.225

<sup>28</sup> *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.224

<sup>29</sup> William Ottey, in *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.56

<sup>30</sup> Howitt, William, *Land, Labour and Gold, or Two Years in Victoria ...* (Lowden, Kilmore, 1972), pp.163-4

swearing and blasphemy perpetrated in the whole world equal to that which is daily concentrated on the roads to the diggings of Victoria.’<sup>31</sup>

William Kelly, arriving at the top of Aitken’s Gap in 1858 found a scene:

‘of extraordinary bustle and uproar, for it was then a special camping place for drivers and carriers, and the scores upon scores of horse drays and bullock-wagons that were preparing for a start, produced an amount of tumult, altercation, blasphemy, and compound abominations which would not find many readers even if I succeeded in reproducing it.’<sup>32</sup>

In winter the roads defied description. May 1852 brought one of Victoria’s worst ever floods. Most of the few flimsy timber bridges were washed away, streams could not be forded for days, there were deaths by drowning and exposure, and the price of cartage to Mount Alexander increased from about £15 to as much as £160 a ton.<sup>33</sup> Even walkers struggled to get through the quagmires; those on foot ‘crawled like flies across a plate of treacle’.<sup>34</sup> James Briggs’ party, setting off on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, ‘plodded through mud a few miles each day.’ It took them three weeks to reach Bendigo.<sup>35</sup>

As many as 1500 drays on the move at once meant that mud was churned a metre deep in places.<sup>36</sup> The road became progressively worse as hauling, digging and levering a cart or bullock team from a mud hole would leave it in worse state for the next team, which blundered into the slush-filled chasm.

The Keilor Plains were notorious. That winter carrier Chandler set off across the Keilor plains for Castlemaine; he recounted later:

‘To describe the state of the roads would be impossible. Horses were bogged everywhere, and often horses and bullocks left to perish. We have taken a whole day to get our drays half a mile. Sometimes they were capsized and we had to drag our goods along on top of the mud. When you got off the track down you would go with the dray, while the horses would also sink up to their bellies, and then we had to dig both horses and drays out. Very often we got stuck ourselves, and then we had to help each other, and frequently we lost our boots and had to dig them out. We had to cut down scrub and boughs of trees for our horses to get a footing... We had as many as ten or twelve horses on one dray. I have seen three horses hooked on to one poor beast and then drag him out by the neck. The sufferings of both man and beast were fearful...’<sup>37</sup>

At ‘Clarke’s Special Survey’ (past the Gap) they ‘were bogged nearly all day; when we got one dray out, the other went down. Here we had to stop with our drays up to the axles in water, and camp on a kind of island and walk to our drays up to our knees in water and mud on a cold wet night. We had no cover for we were obliged to

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<sup>31</sup> Howitt, op cit, p.390

<sup>32</sup> Kelly, William, *Life in Victoria...1853...1858*, (facsimile edition., Lowden, Kilmore, 1977), p.169 (1858).

<sup>33</sup> Serle, op cit, p.70; Annear, op cit, p.61; Westgarth, op cit, p.251; Yandel (Castlemaine Pioneers op cit), p.22; Clacy, Ellen (Mrs Charles), *A Lady’s Visit To The Gold Diggings Of Australia In 1852-53*, (Landsdowne, Melbourne, 1963), p.28; Adcock, op cit, p.86

<sup>34</sup> Howitt, op cit, p.326

<sup>35</sup> ‘Memoirs of Mr James Briggs, JP of Springbark, Cudgewa’, State Library of Victoria, Manuscript.

<sup>36</sup> Annear, op cit, pp.60-61

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, pp.66-67



keep our tarpaulins over our loads, and to all our miseries it came on to rain harder after dark and our poor horses stood shivering with cold.’<sup>38</sup>

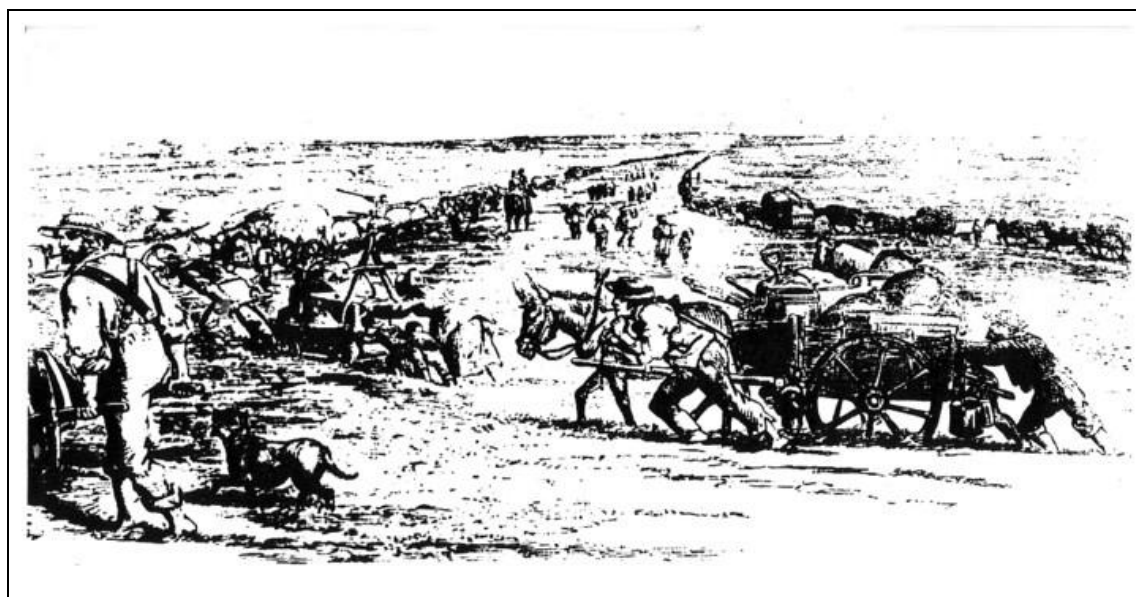
Just beyond Essendon’s Lincolnshire Arms William Howitt discovered:

‘six miles of the most villainous road that I ever saw ... besides being regularly nearly a foot deep of this stiff adhesive mire [there were] holes in it a yard deep, that took a cart at once up to the axles – sudden, abrupt holes, perpendicular down to them, and perpendicular out again, and brimful of mud’.<sup>39</sup>

Ellen Clacy described the ‘disheartening’ prospect awaiting those who arrived on the Keilor Plains, a ‘vast expanse of flat and dreary land’:

‘The Keilor Plains seemed almost impassable, and what with pieces of rock here, and a waterhole there, crossing them was more dangerous than agreeable. Now one passed a broken-down dray; then one’s ears were horrified at the oaths an unhappy wight was venting at a mud-hole into which he had stumbled.’<sup>40</sup>

Little had changed when young Lucy Birchall’s family crossed the same dismal landscape a few years later: ‘Now we were in a crabhole, places three of four feet deep filled with soft mud and water ... it was quite dark, the rain was falling fast and we were up to our knees in mud. Mama carried baby ... so wretched wet and miserable.’<sup>41</sup>



*‘Travelling to the Rushes’ (Illustrated London News)*

Even after nearly two years roadworks the Keilor Plains were in such a condition that:

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<sup>38</sup>Chandler, John, *Forty Years in the Wilderness*, (Arthur’s Seat, Loch Haven, 1990), pp. 68-69

<sup>39</sup> Howitt, op cit, p.166

<sup>40</sup> Clacy, op cit, p.34-5

<sup>41</sup> Birchall, Lucy, Hannah, ‘An Account of a Journey from Melbourne in July 1855 written to her Grandmother by Lucy (with accompanying letter)’ in *La Trobe Library Journal*, Vol.7 No.27, April 1987, pp.63-66. Their trip was in 1855.

‘none but determined men will attempt it, for it is nothing but load and unload, bog, bog, whip, whip, and shout until the throat is sore.’<sup>42</sup>

Animals pulled till they could pull no more, and their skeletons and carcasses lined the track. Many travellers reported on the dead horses and bullocks, ‘fallen under the severe toil’, or stuck in muddy bogs and left to starve to death. ‘From those that had died within a week there was a fearful stench.’<sup>43</sup> Even after good timber bridges had finally been constructed on the Kororoit Creek (just north of the Gap), by winter their approaches were impassable, and four broken drays and one dead horse lay at a ford that had been improvised by travellers as a consequence.<sup>44</sup>

The troubles didn’t end with winter. Isaac Batey reported that when the strong basaltic clay of the Keilor plains was saturated with rain ‘it was bad enough, but when half-dried it was something awful.’<sup>45</sup> Even in the summer of 1853-54 Henry Brown’s party ‘had to put our shoulders to the wheel and heave and push with the horses’ as drays sank up to their axles in the heavy clay: ‘we constantly saw drays and carts, heavily laden, overturned.’ A few miles further, near the Gap, ‘if possible, the road became worse’, and drays were constantly loaded and unloaded in order to get through the ‘tenacious mud.’<sup>46</sup>

Midsummer provided little relief. The road, gouged with ruts and holes, was ground into a fine powdery dust by the unceasing traffic. The same holes that had been filled with mud now became filled with dust, with similar results: ‘The horses were quite unable to get through it, and more than once were stuck fast in the deep holes which it concealed...’<sup>47</sup> Police Magistrate William Lavender, travelling in depths of the 1852 winter quagmire, was told that the plains in summer were worse: ‘not a drop of water is to be had and the dust there is knee deep.’<sup>48</sup>

Dust, flies, burning sun and hot winds were the cause of great discomfort.<sup>49</sup> ‘Smothered in dust raised by bullocks’, many contracted the eye disease ‘ophthalmia’.<sup>50</sup> The countless bullock drays were a hazard: ‘such is the cloud of dust they throw up that frequently you cannot see three yards before you, and great care has to be taken to prevent a collision.’<sup>51</sup> ‘Bearded men’ wore veils over their eyes,<sup>52</sup> and Lord Cecil struggled:

‘The dust was absolutely unbearable. It hung in a dense cloud about the cart, getting into your eyes, ears, mouth, and nose, stopping respiration utterly and clinging to hair, whiskers and beard as if it were flour. The particles were so small that they penetrated through the thickest clothing and choked up every pore of the skin.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Argus*, 25/5/1854, p.4

<sup>43</sup> Brown, Henry, *Victoria as I found it during five years of Adventure* (Newby, London, 1862), pp.78-81; Annear, op cit, p.61

<sup>44</sup> *The Argus*, 25/4/1854, p.4

<sup>45</sup> Batey, Isaac, untitled typed manuscript (RHSV, 27/1/1910), pp.48-49

<sup>46</sup> Brown, op cit, pp.78-81, 92-93

<sup>47</sup> Scott, Earnest, *Lord Robert Cecil’s Gold Fields Diary* (MUP, Melbourne, 1935), p.15

<sup>48</sup> Letter William Lavender, 15/6/1852 (held by Mr David Francis).

<sup>49</sup> Kiddle, Margaret, *Caroline Chisholm* (MUP, Melbourne, 1969), pp.202-203

<sup>50</sup> Snell, Edward, Griffiths, Tom (ed), *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell: The Illustrated Diary of an Artist, Engineer and Adventurer in the Australian Colonies 1849-1859* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1988), p.282; Sherer, op cit, pp.20, 286

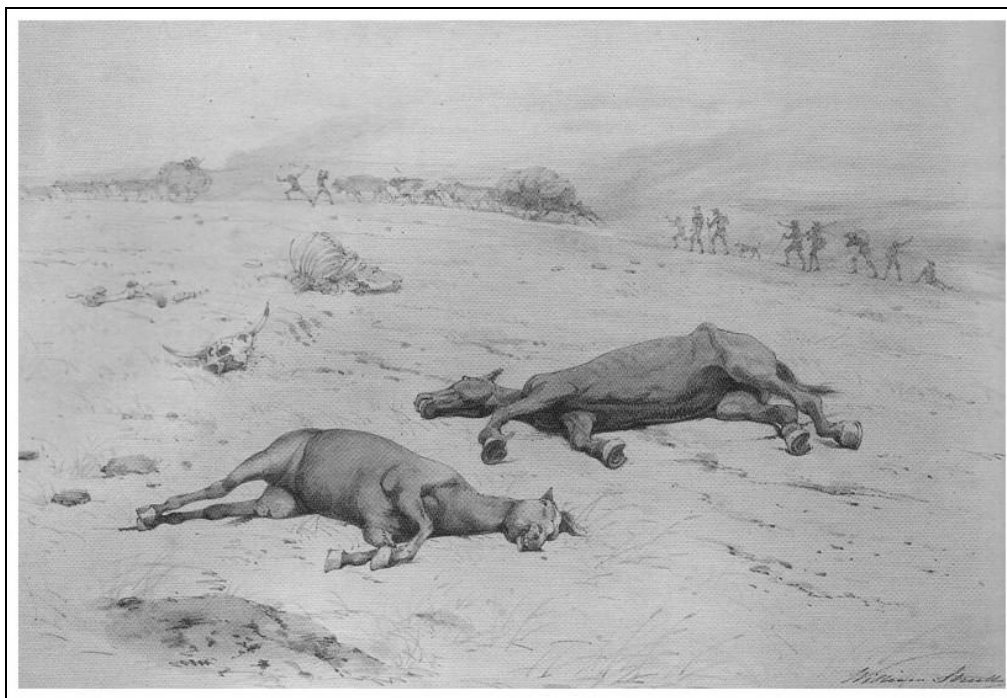
<sup>51</sup> Nawton, William Cussons, *Diary* (SLV manuscript), Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> 1853

<sup>52</sup> Blake, LJ, *Gold Escorts in Australia* (Rigby, Adelaide, 1978), p.18

<sup>53</sup> Scott, op cit, p.14

‘Orion’ Horne, on the gold escort, described:

‘ ... burning heat, and clouds of dust, which flowed by us so like a dense sandy torrent that we could see nothing below our knees, and very often, nothing in front but the horse’s neck and ears’.<sup>54</sup>



‘Martyrs of the Road, 1851’, William Strutt.  
(Reproduced with the permission of the Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Victoria)

For those trudging along under an ‘almost tropical sun’<sup>55</sup> the exposed and waterless Keilor Plains were the worst part of the journey. The stands of she-oak trees that had once been plentiful there had been cut down by bullock drivers for their cattle ‘when feed was scarce’.<sup>56</sup> In summer there was now no shade from the burning sun, feed for animals, or water for man or beast:

‘The sun was very hot and the road very dusty, and we had no shelter from the heat, and we suffered severely from thirst...The sufferings of poor animals crossing Keilor Plains with heavy loads in those days was very great.’<sup>57</sup>

A shanty near the Gap sold buckets of water for 2 shillings each, and John Chandler and his mate bought five to share with their horses. Robert Thomas, suffering seriously from the ‘burning sun’ and thirst, and choking on dust carried by the north wind, was truly thankful for the drink of milk he was able to obtain from a roadside shanty near Diggers Rest.<sup>58</sup> Another,

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<sup>54</sup> Adcock, op cit, p.97

<sup>55</sup> Prout, JS, *An Illustrated Handbook of the Voyage to Australia and a visit to the Goldfields* (London?, 1852?), p.24

<sup>56</sup> Chandler, op cit, p.38

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, p.78

<sup>58</sup> Robert Thomas, *Autobiography* (Manuscript M2090, SLV), pp.124-127; Henry Boyle, in late 1851 was also happy to pay ‘two shillings for a quart of milk’ at perhaps the same shanty (Castlemaine Pioneers, op cit, p.118)

‘fearfully thirsty’, gave half-a-crown for the pannikan of cold tea he obtained from perhaps the same hut. In November 1852 a party was forced to obtain all its drinking water on the Keilor Plains from ‘ruts in the roadway’.<sup>59</sup>

Bushranging was rife an almost daily occurrence on the Mount Alexander Road in 1852.<sup>60</sup> Many a lone, successful digger disappeared on his way back to Melbourne. As a result, the travelling diggers were all well armed and travelled together for protection.<sup>61</sup> The Black Forest - ‘the dread of all unarmed travellers’ - between Gisborne and Five Mile Creek (later ‘Wood End’), and its notorious ‘Black Douglas’ (a gigantic African American) seem to have been known to every international arrival.<sup>62</sup> But the almost treeless ‘great plain district of Keilor’ was also prime crime territory, as bushrangers could ensure they would not be unexpectedly interrupted by other travellers. This country was ‘flat and monotonous in the extreme [and] melancholy and lonely beyond description in those days when lawlessness and insecurity were prevalent’. Squatters like Kerr trusted their superior steeds to put themselves beyond ‘range of pistol-shot’ in such expanses.<sup>63</sup>

The establishment of gold escort stations along the road from about Spring 1852 quietened bushranging such that by the late 1850s it was reported to be ‘remarkably rare’.<sup>64</sup> A police escort had been established at Aitkens Gap, and police stations at Keilor Junction (the junction of the present Melton Highway and Calder Freeway) and Keilor.

### *Wayside Hotels*

Wayside hotels provided bushrangers the opportunity to appraise their prospects. The publican of an unidentified Keilor plains hotel warned squatter Kerr that a cut-throat party had designs on his thoroughbred horse.<sup>65</sup> Tulip Wright’s Lincolnshire Arms at the top of the Keilor plains (the corner of Keilor and Mount Alexander Roads) was also a known harbour for desperados.<sup>66</sup>

The significance of wayside hotels is evident in early maps to the diggings, in which some of the travel stages are indicated by mileages between the ‘famed hostelries’ of the road:- ‘Gregory’s’ (Diggers Rest), ‘Gap Inn’, ‘Bush Inn’, and ‘the Porcupine’ being principal ones.<sup>67</sup>

Prior to licensed hotels there were canvas stores and shanties (unlicensed sly-grog shops, usually masquerading as ‘coffee tents’) ‘every mile of the way’ to provide drinks for travellers. Some were established where wagons ditched.<sup>68</sup> Travellers regularly report

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<sup>59</sup> Mark T Amos, *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.181

<sup>60</sup> Serle, op cit, p.36; Elliott, op cit, p.47; Flett, 1976, op cit, p.xii.; Adcock, op cit, 91-97

<sup>61</sup> Hall, op cit, p.174; Annear, op cit, p.56, 69-70

<sup>62</sup> Eg, Thomas, *SLV ms*, op cit, p.132; Adcock, op cit, p.95; Blake, op cit, p.25

<sup>63</sup> Kerr, JH, *Glimpses of Life in Victoria, by a ‘Resident’*; introduced by Marguerite Hancock (Carlton, Miegunyah, 1996), p.106

<sup>64</sup> Adcock, op cit, p.92; Dobie, William Wilson, *Recollections of a Visit to Port Phillip Australia in 1852-55* (Edinburgh, Thomas Murray & Son, 1856), p.50; Westgarth, op cit, pp.250-251; *Australia As It Is, or Facts, Features, Sketches and Incidents of Australia and Australian Life ... by a Clergyman* (Paul Flesch & Co, Melbourne, 1967), p.154

<sup>65</sup> Kerr, op cit, pp.119-120

<sup>66</sup> Flett, 1976, op cit, p.xii.

<sup>67</sup> Mitchel, in *Castlemaine Pioneers*, op cit, p.34; Maps, eg:- E. Gilks, ‘The Diggers Road Guide ...’, 1853’, Chas E Glass, ‘Road Guide to the Gold Fields with Distances, 1859’, Philp, ‘Map of the Roads to all Gold Mines in Victoria’.

<sup>68</sup> Maguire, Paul, *Inns of Australia* (Heinemann, Melbourne, 1952), p.196

passing groups of shanties on the thirsty Keilor Plains. Hotel historian Paul Maguire portrays 'long lines of taverns and coffee houses, mostly under canvass and stringy-bark' on these plains, and estimates that there were at least half a dozen inns between Keilor and Diggers Rest.<sup>69</sup> I have found at least 13 licensed hotels established across the 40 kilometres between Keilor and Gisborne (not including those in these two towns), an average of (at least) one every 2 miles (3 kilometres).<sup>70</sup>

Goldrush wayside hotels were distinct from the goldfields hotels. The major characteristics of wayside hotels were large stables for coach staging, blacksmith shops for repair of drays and (in quite a number) very substantial quarters for accommodation. Some also appear to have incorporated small cemeteries. The hallmark of the goldfield hotels on the other hand was entertainment, expressed most commonly in attached music halls and, occasionally, 'tea' or 'pleasure' gardens.<sup>71</sup>

Although quite a number of the early wayside hotels were of two stories, and had large tents for ancillary accommodation, they were always overcrowded. On his way up Mount Alexander Road Henry Boyle's party could only find accommodation in the cow-sheds and stables of shanties and hotels; at Elphinstone 'on paying a shilling each, we were allowed to sleep on the kitchen floor.'<sup>72</sup> Most preferred to camp, but especially when the weather was poor, over-crowded and expensive hotel accommodation was rushed by miserable travellers.<sup>73</sup>

Stories of broken shafts delaying progress for a week, and drays (and their passengers) stuck in mud near the Gap explain the high number of wayside hotels between towns.<sup>74</sup> The defining characteristic of wayside hotels was their provision for dray repairs. The hotels between towns typically incorporated the blacksmith and wheelwright services that in towns were established independently. For example, the Diggers Rest, and the former Monmouthshire (corner Vineyard and Mount Alexander Roads) and National (between the Gap and Gisborne) hotels are known to have incorporated blacksmiths.

While accommodation was profitable, the vast bar trades made fortunes. Westgarth thought that most publicans were happy with 'the tap', and that their accommodation was perfunctory.<sup>75</sup> The 'sobriety' of the colony, he observed in 1855, had improved 'since the riotously prosperous years of 1852-1854.'<sup>76</sup> William Howitt's portrayal of these years was colourful but not complimentary. The bullock drivers, he said, 'labour, and swear along; and the publicans flourish everywhere along the lines of road. Wherever digger or bullock-driver sees an inn, there he must go.' Bottles of brandy, costing 10-20 shillings each, 'drained dry',

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, pp.204-5

<sup>70</sup> Gold-era hotels known to exist on this stretch included the 'Junction', the 'Live and Let Live', 'Robertsons Arms', 'Mooney's House' the 'Diggers Rest', the 'Yorkshire', the 'Monmouthshire', the 'Gap Inn' (later the 'Fox and Hare'), the 'Bald Hill', the first and second 'Manchester' Inns, the 'National', the 'Laurel', and the 'Shamrock' ('near Tea Tree Creek, Keilor Plains'). The 'Union' hotel may have been another that pre-dated the railway.

<sup>71</sup> Re Music Halls, see Cole Manuscript, SLV, notes on 'Mt Alexander Mail'; also VHR listings, eg the hotels and former hotels at Guildford, Red Hill, Maldon (Royal) and Tarnagulla (Victoria). For Tea Gardens, see early maps re the British and American hotel near Chewton at one end of the Golden Point Road, and the Northumberland Arms near Faraday at the other; also Bradfield, 1972, *op cit*, pp.69-70

<sup>72</sup> Henry Boyle, in *Castlemaine Pioneers*, *op cit*, p.118

<sup>73</sup> Mossman, Samuel, Banister, Thomas, *Australia Visited and Revisited...* (Ure Smith, Sydney, 1974), pp.39-40; Annear, *op cit*, p.71

<sup>74</sup> Birchall, *op cit*, pp.63-66; Robins, in *Castlemaine Pioneers*, *op cit*, p.176

<sup>75</sup> Westgarth, *op cit*, pp.254-5

<sup>76</sup> Westgarth, *op cit*, p.243

lay ‘in mountains’ before these inns. ‘Such is the rude, riotous life they lead along these roads.’<sup>77</sup>

Wayside inns were indeed roaring places in these years. Gisborne’s famous Bush Inn was one of 6-7 original ‘peacetime’ (pre-gold) inns that was transformed into a place of ‘immense confusion and drunkenness’ by those ‘loaded with gold, who spent their time in noisy festivity’.<sup>78</sup> It was now heralded by broken glass for miles, its arrival announced by heaps of bottles outside.<sup>79</sup> A writer in January 1852 counted 59 bullock and 37 horse drays drawn up at the Bush Inn.<sup>80</sup>

While for north-bound diggers these hotels were places of quick refreshment for the journey, for successful diggers returning to Melbourne, bullockies, bushrangers and others they were an opportunity to party. At the National Hotel nine barmen attempted to serve the hordes of customers, and its two bars were so crowded that a ‘change pail’ was placed in the centre of the floor to collect patrons’ money.<sup>81</sup> The Bridge Inn at Bulla (the alternative route while the Keilor bridge was reconstructed in late 1852/53) also presented a vital scene:

‘The inn at this spot was crowded, and several hundreds had stopped for the advantage of the water for their cattle. Those coming from the diggings were riotously enjoying themselves at the inn; those *en route* to them preparing for the night by first unyoking, watering, and turning out their bullocks or horses, and then proceeding to light a fire ... evening bush fare, viz tea, damper and mutton.’<sup>82</sup>

Respectable travellers were generally wary of the wayside hotels and, of course, shanties. On the Keilor Plains, before arriving at the Diggers Rest hotel, Ellen Clacy reported passing two or three groups of ‘coffee-shops’ or ‘coffee-tents’. One of these, although only consisting of a canvas tent and a little wooden shed, had been known to accommodate forty people of a night. ‘As there are always plenty of bad characters lounging in the neighbourhood of such places’, she reported, ‘we kept a respectful distance’.<sup>83</sup> The ‘notorious’ Porcupine Inn half-way between Forest Creek and Bendigo was another venue given a wide berth.<sup>84</sup>

The squatter and ‘gentleman’ classes who happened by on other business were especially scathing. Their writings were coloured by indignation at lost privileges, and reflections on a social order in upheaval. Squatter JH Kerr for example was most put-out at publicans transferring their ‘obsequious’ deference from the ‘squatter’ to the ‘lucky digger’ - ‘rude men, insolent with drink and success.’ Kerr’s memoir includes a long, colourful description of the scene at a hotel in the vicinity of Kyneton at the end of a day. There rose a ‘babel of voices’:- noisy campers, loud women, rich drunks embracing cases of champagne. Inside, out of the ‘fervid heat’, it was ‘pandemonium’ - a riot of drinking, shouting, and quarrelling. To his chagrin, separation of ‘the better class of travellers’ from ‘the *roughs*’ was barely possible

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<sup>77</sup> Howitt, op cit, p.390

<sup>78</sup> Flett, James, *Old Pubs Inns Taverns and Grog Houses on the Victorian Gold Diggings* (Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1979), p.4; Adcock, op cit, p.70

<sup>79</sup> Annear, op cit, pp.67-68

<sup>80</sup> Flett, 1979, op cit, p.4

<sup>81</sup> Luebbers, Roger, ‘An Archaeological Investigation of the National Hotel; A Mid Nineteenth Century Roadhouse on the Calder Highway between Millett Road and South Gisborne, Victoria’ (Prepared for VicRoads, Nov 1994), p 57.

<sup>82</sup> Mossman, op cit, pp.34-5. This was during the period when the Keilor bridge was down.

<sup>83</sup> Clacy, op cit, pp.34-35

<sup>84</sup> Bonwick, James, *Notes of a Gold Digger and Gold Diggers’ Guide* (Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1942), op cit, p.6; Blake, op cit, p.25

in those days.<sup>85</sup> But pre-revolution civility was not completely lost. William Dobie was pleased to report the ‘little old waiter...the most remarkable specimen of domestic politeness and attention I ever met with in the colony’ who attended to his every need at the Gap hotel.<sup>86</sup>

‘Prices the most fabulous’ were given for leases and good-wills of these hotels,<sup>87</sup> and Keilor Plains hotel land sites also changed hands at enormous prices. Pastoralist WJT ‘Big’ Clarke, having paid about £1 per acre for the ‘Clarke’s Special Survey’ in 1851, had disposed of at least four one and two acre hotel allotments (land only) for as much as £2000 each by 1855.<sup>88</sup>

Some shanties progressed from tent to rough timber, and eventually substantial weatherboard buildings. The early, single-storied (with an attic) weatherboard inn at the Gap was valued by the Government at £4,449 (improvements only) in 1854, but owner Owen Fisher disputed this, claiming that he had twice been offered £7000 for the inn.<sup>89</sup> By 1855 quite a number of hotels were built in stone - ‘very large and costly establishments’, ‘handsome buildings’ and ‘quite a feature of the country’ in the view of Westgarth.<sup>90</sup> Howitt described them as ‘built in the same style as London gin palaces, and infinitely larger’, speculating that some must have cost more than £10,000.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, in 1852 ‘Tolmies Inn’ (Kyneton’s Robert Burns Hotel) is known to have cost £14,000.<sup>92</sup>

Hotels were clearly ‘the best and most conspicuous mansions’ in the wayside towns; in 1852 Kyneton’s ‘chief buildings’ were four hotels; there were no churches or banks; in 1858 ‘Harcourt comprised three large bran-new [sic] hotels only’.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, when three hotels (The Gap Inn, Bald Hill and Manchester) replaced crude shanties, the government surveyed a township at the Gap.<sup>94</sup>

#### History of the Place:

##### *The Diggers Rest Hotel*

As noted, many shanties and ‘coffee tents’ had been established on the road between Keilor and the Gap by late 1852. Most travellers, especially in summer appear to have been keen to cross the dry and exposed Keilor Plains, some 16 miles (26 kilometres) between Keilor and The Gap, as quickly as possible, and make camp at water somewhere between the Gap and Gisborne. In other seasons however the creek stream behind and to the south of the Diggers Rest Hotel would have provided water, and parties did camp there. William Ottey for example, noted that ‘our next camp was at “Diggers’ Rest”, as it was appropriately called.’<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Kerr, pp.90-93

<sup>86</sup> Dobie, op cit, p.48

<sup>87</sup> Westgarth, op cit, pp.253-4

<sup>88</sup> PROV VPRS 460/P1/455 (47044); Kelly, op cit, p.169; Batey, I, ‘Further notes on the Keilor and Werribee Plains’, SLV Manuscript, p.1; Clarke, M, ‘*Big’ Clarke* (Queensberry Hill, Carlton, 1980), p.157; Batey, 1910, op cit, pp.103-4; Luebbbers, op cit, p 5.

<sup>89</sup> PROV, VPRS 44, Unit 472.

<sup>90</sup> Westgarth, op cit, pp. 253-4.

<sup>91</sup> Howitt, op cit, p.389

<sup>92</sup> Flett, 1979, op cit, pp.2,5.

<sup>93</sup> Westgarth, op cit, p.195; History of Kyneton, op cit, p.9; Kelly, op cit, p.183. Early maps of Taradale also show three hotels as its only large buildings.

<sup>94</sup> Flett, 1979, op cit, p.4; SLV Map:-Vale Vol.4a Fol. 131(1854); Batey, 1910, op cit, p.102

<sup>95</sup> William Ottey, in Castlemaine Pioneers, op cit, p.56

There are numerous early goldrush travellers' reports of shanties at or near 'Diggers Rest', but it is not known for certain which of these became the Diggers Rest hotel, or when the district became known as Diggers Rest. AC Yandell crossed the area in about December 1851 with a swag weighing 78 pounds:

'We went on very well for the first 17 miles, till we reached somewhere about where the 'Diggers' Rest' station is now, when I became fearfully thirsty, and there was not a drop of water to be had anywhere. At last we found an old hut, but no water; spirits we could have had, but I was too thirsty to crave for such stuff as was sold at such shanties. The occupant of the hut then offered me a pannikin of cold tea, which I was glad to get, and paid him half-a-crown for it.'<sup>96</sup>

Henry Boyle recalled his trip up the road, also in late 1851:

'At the Diggers' Rest there was a slab shanty kept by a black, but as he could not accommodate us we had a shilling nobbler, gave two shillings for a quart of milk, and slept in the cow-shed.'<sup>97</sup>

In December 1851 another traveller, ten miles past Keilor (at about the location of the present hotel), found:-

'a boarded hut kept by some dirty Irish people, who sell equally dirty-looking and miserable stuff they call coffee at 6d a cup.'<sup>98</sup>

The 'shanty or refreshment tent' from which Robert Thomas' party all gladly purchased a drink of milk in late December 1852 would also have been situated at or very close to present-day Diggers Rest.<sup>99</sup>

This 'slab shanty and eating house run by an African black' encountered by Boyle may have been, as Flett contends, 'the original pub' at Diggers Rest.<sup>100</sup> Other sources refer to the original hotel having its origins in a coffee shop established by the Page brothers on their *Glencoe* station (on the north side of the road), and sold to Thomas Gregory in 1852.<sup>101</sup>

Noted early historian AS Kenyon stated that Thomas Gregory obtained a licence for his inn in April 1852.<sup>102</sup> Although Robert Thomas' party appears to have bypassed it without comment, 'Gregory's Inn' was established and well-known by about July 1852 when Ellen Clacy's party passed by:-

'... after passing two or three coffee-tents, we arrived at Gregory's Inn. The landlord is considered the best on the road, and is a practical example of what honesty and industry may achieve. He commenced some nine months before without a shilling – his tarpaulin tent and small stock of tea, sugar-coffee etc, being a loan. He has now a large weather-board house, capable of making up one hundred beds, and even then unable to accommodate all his visitors, so numerous are they, from the good name he bears. Here we got a capital cold dinner of meat, bread, cheese, coffee, tea etc for three shillings a-piece.'<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Castlemaine Pioneers, op cit, p.18

<sup>97</sup> Henry Boyle, in Castlemaine Pioneers, op cit, p.118

<sup>98</sup> Webb, Charles, Memoranda and remarks book, 1847-1852 (SLV, Manuscript collection) p.79

<sup>99</sup> Robert Thomas, op cit, p.124-127

<sup>100</sup> Flett, 1979, op cit, p.4.

<sup>101</sup> Judith Bilszta, from files.

<sup>102</sup> *The Age*, 11/12/1937

<sup>103</sup> Clacy, op cit, p.35



In September 1852 ‘Gregory’ (Gregory’s Inn) appears on Bonwick’s map of ‘Routes to the Victoria Diggings’, confirming its reputation, and its emergence as one of the major waymarks of the journey.<sup>104</sup> The hotel was strategically situated where the road split into two:- the present line of the Calder Freeway heading north-east to the Gap; and the earlier pre-gold era track through Aitken’s station parallel to and a little to its south. The Aitken’s station route was still taken by some before surveys and roadworks confirmed the present route around late 1852.

In the winter of 1852 local resident Isaac Batey observed William Gregory as he ‘flew’ across the plain on his stylish mount to alert the Bulla Mounted Patrol that the hotel had been ‘stuck up by four armed bushrangers’.<sup>105</sup>

Batey confirms and adds to Clacy’s report regarding the hotel’s origins:

‘Messrs William and Thomas Gregory began with a coffee shop at Diggers Rest, converted the same into a public house and then say about the beginning of 53 sold out to Speary.’<sup>106</sup>

The Bateys believed that William Speary, who had been transported to Tasmania, was an active abettor in the cattle duffing that plagued local farmers and pastoralists from about 1854 to 1859. Batey thought Speary would have been popular if he had stayed honest, but he was ‘surrounded by the ex-convict element’ amongst whom were several quite bad and brutish men.<sup>107</sup>

Batey’s recollection of the date of the sale by the Gregory’s is supported by a family account book, which recorded sales of fowls and turkeys to Speary on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1853.

In September 1853, the young Batey on an errand to the hotel was astounded at the scene:

‘The crowd at the counter was three if not four deep, the landlord with a brace of assistants drew liquor as fast as possible which those in the front rank passed to those behind. The outsiders on giving the orders threw their shillings over the heads of those that stood before them. ... Being a very shy bushlad I may have waited half an hour for the crush to slacken off. ... It has to be stated that the people did not remain drinking for as soon as the liquor was drank they took their departure. ... It was reported that some of those roadside pubs some days took £150.’<sup>108</sup>

Writing in 1910 (at which time the hotel was known as The Oval), Batey reports that, after succeeding the Gregorys, Speary ‘then built the present Oval Diggers Rest Hotel into which he moved in 1854.’<sup>109</sup> Batey frequently delivered his father’s fat sheep and bullocks to the hotel, and his dates are usually quite accurate, but travellers’ accounts around this time are unable to provide any corroborating evidence. In late 1854 or early 1855 William Westgarth

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<sup>104</sup> Map dated September 1852, in Bonwick, op cit.

<sup>105</sup> Batey, 1910, op cit, p.43

<sup>106</sup> Batey, 1910, op cit, p.43

<sup>107</sup> Batey, 1910, op cit, pp.103-111. (Speary also built the nearby Monmouthshire hotel on the corner of Vineyard Road, which he let to ‘Flash Riley’ who Batey claims worked a rouse called ‘the oracle’, in which bullockies sold merchandise to the publican illegally. This hotel, now demolished, became a bastion of local society, the scene of the inaugural Melton Roads Board meetings, and later in the century a noted sportsmans hotel, by virtue of its association with the famous Diggers Rest greyhound coursing Plumptre.)

<sup>108</sup> Batey, 1910, op cit, p.43.

<sup>109</sup> Batey, 1910, op cit, p.103

describes two of the hotels he encountered between Aitkens Gap and Keilor, which included ‘one large brick building’ ... ‘some ten or fifteen miles’ from Keilor (which could be either at Diggers Rest or the Gap). The hotel, only just completed, was shut up due to the temporary depression in the economy, which particularly affected the ‘very large and costly establishments’ recently built as a result of the fortunes that were made by hoteliers in ‘the early days’ of the rush. His party settled on a ‘usual weatherboard’ structure, with a cut-away corner for the bar door, nearer to Keilor, which was possibly the Diggers Rest, but more probably the Junction or one of the other hotels on this part of the road.<sup>110</sup> In July 1855 young Lucy Birchall’s family, after travelling three hours from Keilor ‘stopped at the “Diggers Rest” to water the horses.’ Standing in the doorway while her father took some porter to her mother, she overheard a conversation between ‘the waiter and the barmaid.’<sup>111</sup> This was clearly a substantial business.

Previously, in January 1851, WJT (‘Big’) Clarke had purchased from the Crown the land upon which the hotel was subsequently built.<sup>112</sup> Clarke was notoriously scrupulous in pursuing every possible economic benefit from his vast land assets (down to ensuring that the lands repurchased by the Crown for the Mount Alexander Railway would not be permitted to house ‘drinkables’ for goldrush travellers).<sup>113</sup> The rents he would have charged would have encouraged both the Gregorys and Speary to invest in and achieve the best possible returns from their businesses.

In November 1856 Clarke conveyed ‘to William Speary of Keilor Plains’ the two acres upon which the hotel was already built. The land, which would have cost Clarke no more than a few pounds per acre, cost Speary £1600 (land value only). The documents associated with this land sale provide a fair description of the property at this time:

‘... the Public House known by the name of the Diggers Rest Hotel, with the Wheelwright and Blacksmiths Shops, and Stables, Coach House and other buildings now erected and built ...’.<sup>114</sup>

The stables and coach house reflect the important new function that the hotel had acquired as a staging post for coaching companies. The most famous of these was ‘Cobb and Co’, born with its inaugural Mount Alexander Road service on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1854. The company introduced Australia to ‘a new coaching age’ which lasted until the mid 1920s.<sup>115</sup> By the time it ceased services on the road as the result of the opening of the Bendigo railway in 1862 the name ‘Cobb & Co’ was legendary around the country; it was later immortalised in Henry Lawson’s poem ‘The Lights of Cobb and Co’.<sup>116</sup>

Founded by four enterprising young North Americans, the company’s coaching revolution was achieved by its innovatory staging, vehicles, teams, and drivers.<sup>117</sup> Its teams of

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<sup>110</sup> Westgarth, op cit, pp.253-255. (In one of the more unusual references to the familiar theme of water scarcity in the Melton area, Westgarth added, somewhat facetiously, that the hotel’s ‘counterpanes and sheets showed marks of considerable service, and indicated also how scarce and valuable a commodity was water in Australia.’)

<sup>111</sup> Birchall, op cit, p.64

<sup>112</sup> Parish Plan, Parish of Holden, Section 8 (640 acres).

<sup>113</sup> Clarke, ‘Big Clarke’, op cit, passim.

<sup>114</sup> PROV, VPRS 560/ P001/455.

<sup>115</sup> Austin, op cit, p.59

<sup>116</sup> Austin, op cit, pp.60, 66-67; Bradfield, RA, *Flour Mill, Railway Foundry, Cobb & Co* (Castlemaine Early History series, nd)

<sup>117</sup> Austin, op cit, p.64

thoroughbreds ‘maintained a fast trot or hand-gallop up and down hills over the short stages of 10 miles.’<sup>118</sup> ‘They are horses that stand pretty high, with a good action’, Freeman Cobb noted proudly.<sup>119</sup> Local Isaac Batey concurred, noting that the best team did the last return leg from Keilor to Melbourne: six horses, ‘all of them magnificent greys...a grand show.’<sup>120</sup> The company’s short stages meant fresher horses and faster travel and by the end of 1855 Cobb & Co’s two services to Bendigo took just one day, half that of its respected rival, the Royal Mail.<sup>121</sup>

The most famous trait of Cobb & Co was their admired and popular ‘Yankee Whips’ whose driving style was considered very progressive.<sup>122</sup> The Diggers Rest Hotel was one of the company’s staging posts, providing Isaac Batey with numerous opportunities to observe the drivers when the teams were being changed. He noted their ‘proudly taciturn manner’, and observed one putting on his driving gloves ‘with the dignity of a haughty aristocrat who imagines he is no small part of the universe.’ Still, he was an admirer as he observed a ‘Cobbs coach’ on its run down the long straight grade of Gap Hill:

‘The way the driver tooled his team down at a pace a little short of a gallop without question was something grand.’<sup>123</sup>

As occurred elsewhere, a small cemetery developed near the Diggers Rest Hotel around this time.<sup>124</sup> This association probably sprang principally from the function of hotels as mortuaries in pioneering times, and the relative isolation of the early wayside hotels.

No-one can know the number of bones that came to rest beside the Mount Alexander Road through mishap, murder, or sickness. ST Gill’s painting, ‘Unlucky Digger That Never Returned’, portraying the skeleton of a traveller in the bush, suggests it was considerable. ‘Unlucky diggers were often seen stumbling in rags along the track back to Melbourne, pathetically begging or taking whatever menial jobs they could find.’<sup>125</sup> Travellers, such as Clacy’s party, sometimes reported coming across human bones on the roadside, though whether there by ‘accident or design’ none could tell.<sup>126</sup>

The grave of American Jack Sanger, one of two diggers who died in an accident at nearby Bald Hill on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1855, is rare, perhaps unique, for having had a headstone erected. But when American relatives sent money for a headstone a few years afterwards, all that was known was that he was one in a row of nine graves, so the headstone was placed at the top of the row.<sup>127</sup> The headstone and body have recently been relocated, and the original location of the other graves may now be forgotten.

A theory that the name of the hotel and subsequently the town derived from this incident (ie it was originally named ‘Digger’s Rest’ rather than ‘Diggers’ Rest’) is possible, but less likely than the alternative. The earliest contemporary record I have been able to find that

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<sup>118</sup> Serle, *op cit*, p.235

<sup>119</sup> Blainey, *op cit*, p.143

<sup>120</sup> Batey, 1910, *op cit*, p.51

<sup>121</sup> Austin, *op cit*, pp.64-5

<sup>122</sup> Austin, *op cit*, p.64

<sup>123</sup> Batey, 1910, *op cit*, pp.50-51

<sup>124</sup> Batey, 1910, *op.cit.*, p.51

<sup>125</sup> Cannon, M (ed), *The Victorian Gold Fields 1852-3: An Original Album by ST Gill* (O’Neill, Library Council of Victoria, Melbourne, 1982), pp.96-97

<sup>126</sup> Clacy, *op cit*, pp. 37-38

<sup>127</sup> Batey, 1910, *op cit*, p.51

uses the name ‘Diggers Rest’ is that of Lucy Birchall in about July 1855. Sanger and his mate died in May 1855 so it is conceivable the hotel acquired its name from this incident. But digger roadside deaths were not uncommon, and the headstone was apparently not erected until some years after the event. Also, AS Kenyon, writing on the origin of the name ‘Diggers Rest’, reminds us that the word ‘rest’ was commonly used to signify a wayside inn: ‘there were many ‘Travellers’ Rests and several Shearers’, Farmers’, Squatters’ ditto’.<sup>128</sup>

### *After the Goldrush*

In March 1858 Speary took out a £1000 mortgage on the hotel property from Hugh Glass, which amount plus interest was subsumed in an advance of £2000 from WJT Clarke to Speary in December of that year. Very soon after, in April of 1859, Speary and mortgagee Clarke put the property up for auction. The property was auctioned in the Collins Street rooms of Symonds and Perry, who advertised:

‘The whole of that valuable property, situated at Keilor Plains, known as the Diggers Rest Hotel, with about 2 acres of land, with blacksmith’s and wheelwright’s shop; and stabling for 70 horses. The hotel consists of 25 spacious rooms.

The whole of the above property is very substantially built of stone, with slated roof.

The hotel is now let on lease at £600 per annum, which lease expires on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1859.

The above property offers opportunity for either investment or otherwise rarely to be met with, and should not be lost sight of, especially as the hotel is situated close to the Railway Station of the Melbourne and Mount Alexander Railway, and is at present doing a splendid business.’<sup>129</sup>

Discussing the use of the hotel as a stage change station, Batey refers to ‘a commodious store of brick’, apparently the coach house and/or the stables.<sup>130</sup> It is possible that this building was constructed of both brick and stone.

The references to the railway, and the ‘present’ trade of the hotel are telling. While rushes to new fields in Central Victoria continued for decades, by this time the peaks of alluvial gold, and the rushes to Forest Creek and Bendigo, had passed. More critically the first major stage of the new Melbourne to Mount Alexander railway, to Sunbury, was officially opened in January 1859 (the Diggers Rest platform was constructed a little earlier). As the railway was opened in stages towards Bendigo, almost all traffic used the railway to the latest terminus, from where travellers took a coach, or walked, on to the goldfields. Presumably the completion of the railway to Bendigo in 1862 meant that almost all goods traffic was also consigned to the railway. Road dependent operations, such as the gold escort stations, Caroline Chisholm Shelter Sheds, hotels and stores closed or went into immediate decline.

Cobb & Co immediately discontinued services on Mount Alexander Road, confining itself to routes beyond the railway. In 1862, the same year that the railway reached Bendigo, it moved its headquarters from Melbourne to Bathurst.<sup>131</sup> The railway symbolized as well as produced the definitive end of the Mount Alexander Road phenomenon. For Henry Lawson the arrival of the railway represented the end of the goldrush world of campfire camaraderie,

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<sup>128</sup> AS Kenyon, letter to the *Age*, 11/1/1937.

<sup>129</sup> *The Argus*, 3/1/1859, p.2

<sup>130</sup> Batey, 1910, op cit, p.50

<sup>131</sup> Hocking, 2000, op cit, p.87

dashing coaches and bold-hearted freedom:- ‘the mighty bush with iron rails, is tethered to the world.’<sup>132</sup>

Hotels declined overnight. The National Hotel which had cost £1000 (land only) in 1855 was sold, buildings and substantial blacksmith inclusive, for just £475 in 1862.<sup>133</sup> In March 1862 the publican of the North Pole Hotel, on the road south of Keilor, gave notice that he was abandoning the licence.<sup>134</sup> The Bush Inn and many other hotels in the Gisborne area closed after the Woodend stage of the railway opened.<sup>135</sup>

The Diggers Rest Hotel, land and improvements, was purchased at the 1859 auction by John Sully, licenced victualler of Collingwood, for £2000.<sup>136</sup> It appears to have continued on very quietly, with very little change, for most of the remainder of the twentieth century. The footprint of the property at this time shows the hotel, four outbuildings and a stock yard in the south-east corner.<sup>137</sup> One of the outbuildings, no doubt the stable, is nearly as large as the hotel. A smaller building on the road, to the south of the hotel, is likely to have been the blacksmith/wheelwright shop. The hotel building itself appears similar to today, but without its present single-storied side extensions. There is however a small extension on its south-east side which would appear to be a part of the present single-storied building.

John Sully died on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1883. A valuation undertaken on the hotel in that year described the property as ‘a large stone house of seventeen rooms with stables and outhouses.’ The impact of the railway had changed its fortunes completely:- ‘This property was before the opening of the railway very valuable but is now of very little value as there is little or no traffic on the road and very little business to the hotel. Only about three rooms and the bar are used.’ A large property owner nearby had valued the hotel at £450, but the owners doubted it would ‘fetch anything like that amount if it is saleable at all.’<sup>138</sup>

### *The Twentieth Century*

In the late 1880s George Lock of Diggers Rest gave the compilers of *Victoria and its Metropolis* his history: born Tasmania 1842, working on various farms in Victoria until c.1874, then taking over the Gaythorn and then the Telegraph Hotels in Gisborne, until in 1883 ‘he removed to Diggers Rest, where he purchased his present hotel, and rents 200 acres of land, combining grazing and dairy farming with hotelkeeping.’<sup>139</sup> It was common for the publicans of quiet rural hotels to combine hotelkeeping with farming in the nineteenth century.

Lock was obviously the publican of the hotel, but he apparently did not own it, or own it outright, in 1888. Indentures show that it was 1892 when Misses Jane and Emma Sully sold the property, still known as the ‘Diggers Rest Hotel’, at ‘Keilor Plains’, to George Lock for £550. Lock was somehow able to immediately mortgage the property for £3000. It is possible that

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<sup>132</sup> Henry Lawson, ‘The Roaring Days’

<sup>133</sup> Luebbers, op cit., pp.4,5

<sup>134</sup> PROV VPRS 3211, Book 2. (Two years later the Keilor Magistrates Court granted a licence to a different publican.)

<sup>135</sup> NM O'Donnell, ‘The Bush Inn’, the *Gisborne Gazette*, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1912

<sup>136</sup> Conveyance, 6/4/1859, in PROV VPRS 460/P001/455. (A little further information on the hotel's subsequent licensees is available in: Cole, Robert Kerr, ‘Hotel Records: Victorian Country Hotels’, State Library of Victoria, Manuscript, Vol.6.)

<sup>137</sup> Lands Victoria, Historic Map: ‘Rail 9a’ (nd, most likely c.1860s).

<sup>138</sup> Document submitted in support of probate on the will of publican John Sully, died 1883 (PROV, VPRS 460/P001/455)

<sup>139</sup> Sutherland, Alexander, *Victoria and Its Metropolis: Past and Present* (McCarron Bird, Melbourne, 1888), p.429

this was for improvements to the property, but this is not evident in its valuation: its Net Annual Value in 1903 was a low £40, the same figure as it had been in 1883.<sup>140</sup> In 1901 he took out another mortgage, of just £150, from a daughter and her husband.<sup>141</sup>

During Lock's occupancy the name of the hotel was changed to the 'Oval Hotel', and appears on all plans and documentation by that name or, sometimes, 'Locks Hotel',<sup>142</sup> or 'Locks Oval Hotel'. Lock was apparently a considerable identity. The Diggers Rest historical society believes that the hotel was renamed The Oval when the Diggers Rest football team defeated the Collingwood football team at an oval in front of the hotel sometime during the 1890s.<sup>143</sup> Lock may have organized the game. The name Oval Hotel was still being used into the 1940s, well after the Lock family's association with the hotel had ceased.<sup>144</sup>

In 1910, looking back at the year 1853 when three daily coaches changed at the Diggers Rest Hotel, Isaac Batey wrote:

'I unhesitatingly assert that there were more travellers to be seen in one day than can be seen in twelve months now.'<sup>145</sup>

These were very quiet times for the hotel. In 'reinventing' the hotel - providing it with a new marketing theme - Lock was about 90 years ahead of his time. His enterprise probably saved the hotel from the Licences Reduction Board which, to the satisfaction of Temperance campaigners, closed all but 818 of 2002 Victorian country hotels between the years 1906 and 1929.<sup>146</sup> Many of the Mount Alexander Road goldrush hotels – such as the Gap's Bald Hill, and Kyneton's Robert Burns and Kyneton hotels – were delicensed in this purge, resulting in their immediate demolition, or terminal decline.<sup>147</sup>

George Lock died suddenly in 1906 and the hotel was carried on by his wife Jane.<sup>148</sup> There were no apparent significant redevelopment of the property during her period. Between 1898 and 1926 the NAV on the property rose slightly (probably in line with general Shire revaluations) from £40 to £55.<sup>149</sup>

Upon Jane Lock's death in July 1924 the property was inherited by her three daughters who put it up for auction in August of that year. The auctioneer advised that they had sought £3750, not for the building, but for 'the hotel licence, goodwill and furniture'. The sale was unsuccessful.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Shire of Melton Ratebook 1903; PROV, VPRS 460/P001/455. (The ratebooks show that the Net Annual Value of property was £52 in the period 1872-1882.)

<sup>141</sup> Various documents in PROV, VPRS 460/P001/455.

<sup>142</sup> Eg, 1892 Shire Map Series: Parish of Holden.

<sup>143</sup> Mr Charles Watson, personal conversation, 9/12/2005.

<sup>144</sup> Eg, Melton *Express*, 12/11/1938.

<sup>145</sup> Batey, 1910, op cit, p.50

<sup>146</sup> Priestley, Susan, *The Victorians: Making Their Mark* (Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, McMahons Point, 1984), p.184

<sup>147</sup> Symonds, IW, *Bulla Bulla: An Illustrated History of the Shire of Bulla* (Spectrum, Melbourne, 1985), pp.81-83; David Francis, personal conversation.

<sup>148</sup> PROV VPRS 460/P001/45.

<sup>149</sup> Shire of Melton Ratebooks, 1898-1926.

<sup>150</sup> Robert W Whinfield, 11/9/1928 (PROV VPRS 460/P001/45).

The hotel itself was in a ‘dilapidated condition’ at this time, and there was no money in the estate with which to repair it. A solicitor for one of the parties in a subsequent legal dispute explained:

‘to preserve the licence which gives the value to the property it was absolutely necessary that the property be reconditioned at an early date and if same was not done there was danger of the licence being lost.’<sup>151</sup>

The solution was to sell to Alice Sharp (nee Lock), who paid her younger sisters £1986.13.4 for the property, in December 1925. On the same day she mortgaged the property to Bacchus Marsh grazier David Robertson for £2500. However by 1927 she owed Robertson £6000, and he consequently took over title to the property, the arrangement providing for Sharp to stay on as tenant for £720 pa. However, her husband had died, and she moved to Malvern. By October 1928 the licensee was Albert George Yott.<sup>152</sup>

It is almost certain that the £6000 that bankrupted Alice Sharp had been borrowed to undertake the urgent hotel renovations. This is confirmed in the Shire ratebook assessments, which show that the valuation (NAV) on the property leapt from £55 in 1927 to £200 in 1928.<sup>153</sup>

By this time the advent of the motor car had begun the reversal of Mount Alexander Road’s fortunes. This was symbolised in its new name – the Calder Highway – in honour of William Calder, the first Chairman of the Country Roads Board, after his death in 1928. This historical turning point in the road’s fortunes was reflected in the hotel. In 1938 the hotel was in the course of being ‘renovated inside and out’ by Mrs Cameron, and ‘presented a fine spectacle.’<sup>154</sup> This suggests substantial external renovations, perhaps new roof tiling, rendering, or modernisation of windows. The modern era was signified by the erection of a neon sign.<sup>155</sup> In March 1939 it was reported that an ‘all night café’ had been erected at the ‘Oval Hotel’ was proving a ‘boon for night traffic on the Bendigo road.’<sup>156</sup> This may have been the origin of the hotel’s western side single-storey extension.

Plans for renovations lodged with the Shire of Melton in 1972 show a new eastern extension, being a bottleshop and cool room, and a games room extension to the public bar. The rear parlour was converted into an extended saloon bar, and a number of internal renovations occurred in the area of the ground floor lounges. One of these was the bricking up to 5 feet from the ground a door and a window, today the westernmost windows on the original

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<sup>151</sup> Francis McNab, solicitor for Frances Cleland, 3/2/1928 (PROV VPRS 460/P001/45)

<sup>152</sup> PROV VPRS 460/P001/45: Various documents.

<sup>153</sup> Shire of Melton, Ratebooks: 1926-1933.

<sup>154</sup> *The Melton Express*, 12/11/1938. This contradicts one local story, or speculation, that the second storey might have been added to the hotel c.1939 (Mr Charles Watson, personal conversation, 9/12/2005). Although, surprisingly, no historic photographs of the hotel have been able to be sourced, early evidence - descriptions of the size of the hotel, and maps of its footprint - correspond with the size and extent of the existing building. Neither does a quick inspection of the fabric – its layout, ceiling heights, stone walls, windows etc - support this story. The circumstantial historical evidence also makes it improbable:- a struggling rural wayside hotel in the 1930s undertaking a doubling in size is unlikely; on the other hand many rural hotels had their exteriors (and no doubt their interiors) renovated in the 1930s, as described in the *Melton Express* report.

<sup>155</sup> *The Melton Express*, 3/12/1938

<sup>156</sup> *The Melton Express*, 4/3/1939

building.<sup>157</sup> (These are the most recent alterations according to Council records, and are probably those elsewhere described as occurring in 1976.<sup>158</sup>)

These plans confirm that the hotel had not changed substantially since the Second World War.<sup>159</sup> In fact in 1972 the discrete ‘Public Lounge’, and ‘Guest Lounge’ probably dated to the original 1854 building.

### **Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:**

Melton Historical Themes: ‘Transport’; ‘Community’.

Known comparable examples:

#### *Other Surviving Wayside Goldrush Hotels on Mount Alexander Road*

There has been no comprehensive professional heritage survey of surviving goldrush era hotels on Mount Alexander Road. While hotels were also constructed in towns to service the goldrush traffic, hotels situated between towns are more expressive of the unique origins (need for intermediary accommodation due to the poor state of the road and the number of travellers) and features (blacksmith shops, and sometimes substantial accommodation quarters, isolation) of the classic wayside hotel in the goldrush years.

All of the most famous goldrush road hotels have been demolished:- the Bush Inn, the Gap Inn, and the Porcupine. Kyneton’s famous Robert Burns and Kyneton hotels are long gone. A hotel at Elphinstone might be an altered goldrush original. No early hotels survive between or Elphinstone and Malmsbury, although several small buildings that locals believe may have been early hotels or coach stables survive at Taradale and Faraday.

A preliminary survey of the Victorian Heritage Register and local historical society sources reveals the following sites that are or may be comparable:-

- The Keilor Hotel (VHR H1974) is believed to have been constructed in 1848, and its primary significance is as a representative example of an intact 1840s public house. However it is also significant as a Mount Alexander Road goldrush wayside hotel. Its two projecting hipped bays and recessed central verandah are a classic single storey hotel form of this era; it retains its slate roof. It has been extensively remodelled internally. It is situated in a town.
- The Alexander’ Family (Temperance) Hotel (1854) at Kyneton has been ‘largely rebuilt’, its façade remodelled in a 1930s style. Bluestone stables and outbuildings survive. It still operates as a hotel.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> D. Graeme Lumsden Ashton and Hale, Architects: ‘Alterations and Additions to Oval Hotel Diggers Rest for Diggers Rest Hotel Pty Ltd’, May 1971 (Shire of Melton No.3717).

<sup>158</sup> Hotel manager, Jeanette Piliciauskas. Frank Banks undertook these building works (Charles Watson, personal conversation, 9/12/2005)

<sup>159</sup> Mr W Deverall, personal conversation, 18/1/2006

<sup>160</sup> DGM Francis, ‘Historic Kyneton: Guidebook and Map with Walking Tours’; Joff Allan, ‘William and Agnes Alexander and the Family Hotel, 1854-1880’ (1997); David Francis, personal conversation.



- The former Guthrie Hotel is one of three hotels built in Harcourt in the 1850s. Originally double storey, it is now a renovated single storey private dwelling. It is situated in a town.
- The Royal George (1852, probably timber originally, rebuilt with bluestone sometime pre-1860) in Kyneton was doubled in size in 1891, and a large verandah and parapet pedestals were added in 1915.<sup>161</sup>
- Macedon House, Calder Highway, Gisborne, is a single storey structure built in various stages, the oldest part having been built as a hotel probably in 1847. The symmetrical architecture is now Italianate in style, 'most probably the result of later remodelling.'<sup>162</sup> No longer used as a hotel.

Numerous later replacements of early hotels may retain some degree of heritage significance in terms of remnant fabric, historically strategic sites and contexts, or just continuing names. Examples would include the Ravenswood Junction Hotel, Essendon's Lincolnshire Arms, and the Barkers Creek hotel.

The Diggers Rest Hotel is one of only six known surviving hotels that were situated on the Mount Alexander Road during the goldrush, and one of only four of these that were built specifically for the goldrush in the early 1850s. Although architecturally the Diggers Rest Hotel is no longer an intact nineteenth century hotel building, it is the most intact of the three of the Mount Alexander Road goldrush period hotels that are double-storey. It has been in continuous use as a hotel since the goldrush, and is one of only four of these known surviving hotels that are still in operation. It is the only known surviving intermediary (situated between towns) wayside hotel on the road.

#### *Archaeological Sites*

Archaeological evidence of many other former hotels might survive in places not affected by highway improvements. Some have been identified in heritage surveys undertaken as part of the VicRoads Calder Freeway project. There are likely to be other sites that have not yet been identified in this way. Some, such as Englishes Hotel in the Black Forest, which are also known through other historical records, are potentially of greater interest. The site of the former Porcupine Inn near Harcourt would also be of great interest. Some intermediary wayside hotel sites may retain evidence of stables, blacksmiths and, possibly, cemeteries.

#### *Some Other Surviving Goldrush Wayside Hotels Not On Mount Alexander Road:-*

There are two former goldrush-era wayside hotels on other goldfields roads included in the Victorian Heritage Register:-

- Former Leahy's Residence (VHR H907), is an 1847 residence converted to a hotel for a short period to take advantage of the goldrush traffic on the Melbourne to Ballarat Road.
- Former Royal Mail Hotel, Avenel (VHR H335), constructed c1855-6 as a store, obtained a licence in 1857 and became a prominent staging post on the Sydney and

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<sup>161</sup> Francis, Historic Kyneton, op cit; David Francis, personal conversation.

<sup>162</sup> Register of the National Estate (No.5589).

Beechworth routes. It was closed in 1872 with the coming of the railway. It is little altered.

The former Travellers Rest Home Hotel, Epping, a relatively intact former wayside hotel, was rejected for the Victorian Heritage Register in 2002.

Other early hotels may survive on the important Geelong to Ballarat goldrush route.

The Rockbank Inn, a gold-era hotel site on one of the Melbourne-Ballarat side routes, is included in the Victorian Heritage Register for its high archaeological potential (VHR H1933).

#### *Other Surviving Hotels in Melton Shire*

The Diggers Rest Hotel is the only nineteenth century hotel in the Shire that remained in operation, until recently.

The Diggers Rest Hotel is the most historically significant of only two surviving early hotel buildings in the Melton Shire. The other building, which has not been used as a hotel for many years, is the former Rose and Crown Hotel (now the Sundowner Caravan Park office), 2057 Western Highway, Rockbank. (The former Rockbank Inn is a ruin and archaeological site.)

#### **Condition:**

Ruinous

#### **Integrity:**

Partially intact

#### **Recommendations:**

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	No
Internal Alteration Controls:	No
Tree Controls:	Yes (oak tree)
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	Yes (garage, remnant paving and other potential archaeological material)

Other Recommendation:

- Although the hotel is clearly of State historical significance for its association with the Mount Alexander goldrush a comprehensive, professional, heritage survey of goldrush-era wayside buildings on the former Mount Alexander Road is recommended before a final determination that this particular place is of State heritage significance worthy of nomination to the Victorian Heritage Register.

- It is recommended that such a comparative assessment be undertaken, along with a Conservation Management Plan of both the building and site, as part of the consideration of any proposal for major redevelopment of the hotel and its site.