

## **Suicide on the Bendigo Goldfields 1860-1880**

By JAMES LERK and SANDRA KIPPEN

The celebrated rich gold fields discovered in the locality of Bendigo (originally named Sandhurst) in 1851, were to eventually accommodate the deepest reef mines in the world and attracted miners from nearly every continent. Many are the stories of great successes and huge fortunes made and owner/investors such as George Lansell<sup>1</sup> and John Boyd Watson<sup>2</sup> are remembered for both their personal success and the part they played in the development of the mining industry, the city and, indeed, the colony and the country. It is likely that the publicity accorded the great successes of the time encouraged those intimately involved in mining to be more optimistic than some other sections of the community. They were working with the notion of a ‘great strike’; one that would alleviate all their past problems and challenges; that through wealth they could attain happiness. Such optimism was not unfounded. George Mackay in his *History of Bendigo*, originally published in 1891, says, ‘The year 1870 had witnessed a marked improvement in the prospects of the district, and in 1871 numbers of rich discoveries were made simultaneously’. Mackay goes on to describe the resultant building boom and the unforgettable scenes at the Exchange where roads and traffic were blocked by thousands of people and ‘fortunes made and lost in few hours’.<sup>3</sup>

Significantly, much less is known about those people on the goldfields who did not share in those successes and instead lived with poverty, sickness and the embarrassment of lack of success. It is partly through perusal of the newspapers of the time that this forgotten history can be unearthed and some of their stories retold. Many women and children were left destitute when their husbands died, became ill as a result of their work in the mines or maimed as a result of mining or other accidents. Typical of these was Mrs Lake who lost her husband in a mining accident and was compensated with payment of all funeral expenses and £50 ‘to help to put her in a position to earn a livelihood for herself and children’.<sup>4</sup> Mrs William Foote, whose husband suffered severe injuries in an accident on the New Chum Reef, but lived, did not receive compensation and relied entirely on the charity of friends to relieve the financial distress of her family.<sup>5</sup>

Other families suffered when the husband left to find work elsewhere. Eight-month old Frederick Stoner died of malnutrition, leaving a mother who ‘was so ill bodily from the same cause that brought about the death of the child, and mentally from the loss of her infant’. The harrowing report continues with the story of this mother being too weak from lack of food herself to suckle the child and having to beg a little goat’s milk for the child in order to vary the usual diet of bread and water.<sup>6</sup>

Destitution and death was also common amongst men. William Williams died of severe inflammation of the lungs after being taken to hospital by the police. He had been found ‘in such destitute circumstances that he had been for some days actually without a roof to shelter him’.<sup>7</sup> The body of a 30 or 40 year old, unnamed ‘colored man’ was found with an old grey blanket wrapped around him. He ‘had apparently perished for want [of food] and exposure’.<sup>8</sup> In commenting on the casual nature of goldfields bush burials in nineteenth century Australia, Pat Jalland draws a picture of a community where death was common and where prospectors had little or no family to take responsibility for the rituals that they would have known in their countries of origin.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes the desperation experienced by goldfields’ residents was terminated by suicide, accounts of which are also to be found in abundance in the local newspapers of the time. The role that should be taken by the media in the reporting of suicide has been debated since the eighteenth century, and continued through the nineteenth century<sup>10</sup>. Currently, Australia is one of several countries that has developed guidelines for the responsible reporting of suicide by the media in order to prevent ‘copycat’ suicides (the so-called Werther effect),<sup>11</sup> but the debate still rages about whether the non-reporting of individual suicides (apart from those of celebrities) may have detrimental effects in making suicide a taboo subject that we do not wish to confront. Be that as it may, those reporting suicide on the Victorian goldfields showed little compunction about describing the suicide in as much detail as they could discern from official documentation, attendances at coronial enquiries and interviews with any and all who had any connection with the suicide, especially any witnesses. The reconstruction during inquests of the events that led to the suicide became a vivid source for journalists to reproduce in print.

This paper tells the stories of reported suicides from 1860 to 1880. For reasons discussed below, we do not claim that this paper necessarily provides a comprehensive compilation of cases. Its primary aim is to shed some light on the social context and conditions that surrounded suicide, rather than to provide accurate statistics. We do this mainly through paraphrasing stories that appeared in the local newspaper *The Bendigo*

*Advertiser*. An alternative approach would have been to use the files of inquest proceedings, available in the Victorian Public Records Office; however, the investigation and findings of the inquests are given in great detail in the newspaper and, in some cases, the work of reporters following the inquest unearths even more information. *The Bendigo Advertiser* is Bendigo's longest running newspaper. It was the first newspaper to be published on the Australian goldfields, beginning as a single sheet *The Bendigo Advertiser and Sandhurst Commercial Courier*, in December 1853. It became a daily newspaper on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1856 and had a variety of owners, but for the period covered in this paper, the proprietor was Angus Mackay who was elected to the Colonial Parliament in 1868 and became Minister of Mines in 1870.

In this paper we have not looked at the incidence of suicides compared to other causes of death, such as deaths during epidemics of such diseases as scarlet fever and diphtheria, or from such industrial conditions as phthisis (though the incidence of this problem was to emerge at a late date in the region), or from child and maternal mortality. Had we done so we would be surprised if suicides accounted for anything but a minor proportion of fatalities, but nevertheless the study is of significance in that it does focus on a subject that has tended in the past to be veiled from society because of societal and religious mores and sanctions.<sup>12</sup>

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study commenced with 4,740 inquests recorded in *Colonial Coroners Goldfields Reports* from 1860 to 1880. From these we extrapolated the Sandhurst (Bendigo) cases in which a finding of suicide was made. These were then compared with related newspaper reports from *The Bendigo Advertiser*, producing a total of 50 reports of suicides and seven reports of attempted suicides. The results of a content analysis of the reports were entered on a spreadsheet. This comprised demographic data on the person committing suicide (age, gender, race, occupation), motivation, methods used, the presence or absence of a suicide note, the findings of the jury at the coroner's inquest, as well as other data, both qualitative and quantitative, relevant to each particular case. We relied on the findings of the jury at the coroner's inquest to define those events that were suicide.

There are several limitations to presenting this study as a statistical representation of suicide incidence and prevalence on the Bendigo goldfields. First, *The Colonial Coroners Goldfields Reports* included all goldfields operating in the colony of Victoria at the time, thus their analysis for the purposes of this project required

separation of the Sandhurst studies from those related to other fields such as Castlemaine, Maryborough and Ballarat. This imposed some difficulties, as often only the area, not the town, was named and some of the places have disappeared or changed their name since the nineteenth century. To add to the challenge, some place or area names were also common on other goldfields and even on the one field place names could be replicated three or more times. For example, there were three Specimen Hills, three Slaughter yards, four Poverty Gullies and three Pennyweight gullies on the Bendigo goldfield.

Second, there were several that, from the reports, the authors might have determined to be suicide but which were found by the jury to be accidental death and were thus excluded from the study, with the exception of the case, discussed later, of George Beamsley. There was often difficulty, in the absence of a suicide note, to determine whether the resulting death was from suicide or accident and, where there was doubt, the event was more likely to be proclaimed an accident.

Suicide or attempted suicide was considered a very serious offence against the person, the Church and the State. Pat Jalland says, 'Above all, suicide was the negation of the good death, condemned for centuries by the churches as an offence against God',<sup>13</sup> and punishment was severe, particularly during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. On being found guilty by posthumous trial, 'their moveable property was forfeited to the crown or to the holder of a royal patent; their bodies were buried profanely, interred in a public highway or at a crossroads, pinioned in the grave with a wooden stake'.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century most of the draconian sanctions on a suicide's corpse and their family members had largely disappeared,<sup>15</sup> but much of the stigma associated with suicide remained, with the refusal of churches to allow burial on 'hallowed' ground and the proviso in life insurance that dependants of suicide perpetrators did not receive compensation.

Although the Colonial Coroner investigated death under particular circumstances, such as accident, murder or suicide, the inquest was essentially a local affair. When a suicide or attempted suicide occurred, it was the role of the police to deal with the body – in the case of attempted suicide, treatment would occur in hospital before the person was sent to gaol or the asylum – attempting suicide being both a criminal offence and an indication of insanity. Where death occurred, the inquest would be held very quickly, usually within a week, sometimes as soon as the next day, and frequently in a local hotel, where depositions from any members of the community who

were in any way involved or connected were heard by a ten-man (not women) jury selected from local citizens. The doctor who carried out the post mortem examination would give evidence on the physical injury associated with death, but it was the jury who gave the verdict on the cause of death and made the all important decision of whether this was accident or suicide. The finding of accidental death by the jury would spare families (often known to them) the indignities and inconveniences of being associated with suicide. It would therefore seem reasonable to suspect that suicide was generally under-reported in both the official reports and the media.

### **Findings and Discussion**

There is little difficulty identifying reports of suicide in nineteenth century editions of *The Bendigo Advertiser*. They are headed consistently with eye-catching headlines in bold print, such as:

- Shocking Suicide
- Death by hanging
- Found drowned in the Campaspe
- A Chinaman hanging himself
- Found hanged
- Suicide of a wardsman
- Suicide by drowning
- Suicide of a lunatic
- Strange suicide

This section examines the findings of the analysis of the reports of suicide as presented in *The Bendigo Advertiser* and discusses some of the implications in relation to goldfields society.

### ***Suicide and Madness***

Of the 50 cases of suicides reported, 20 (40 percent), reported madness in the form of ‘temporary insanity’ as being a significant factor in the event. These are often associated with further statements from the coroner that the person was ‘depressed by poverty’, or ‘was in a state of mental anxiety’. Other cases reported that the person committing suicide suffered from such conditions as puerperal mania, depression or alcoholism. In relation to the latter, of which seven cases (14 percent) were reported, Garton says that alcohol related diseases were ‘thought to be one of the common forms of temporary insanity’.<sup>16</sup>

Nineteenth-century juries found a high number of suicides to be the result of ‘temporary insanity’, or that the person was *non compos mentis* – of unsound mind – rather than a perpetrator of *felo de se* – self murder. This meant that whilst the fact of suicide was admitted, responsibility was removed from the individual, and the Church had permission for burial in hallowed ground. It is telling that one of the major grounds for committal of persons suffering madness under the *Dangerous Lunatics Act 1843*<sup>17</sup> was that they were in danger of committing suicide, and attempted suicide was very likely to result in incarceration in an asylum.<sup>18</sup> Thus insanity and suicide were strongly linked.

McDonald argues that over this period and earlier, doctors did not play a significant role in the verdict of insanity – that the use of the insanity defence to counteract the remains of earlier punishments of the suicide’s body and family was mainly the product of layman juries.<sup>19</sup> This would seem to be supported by the relatively low-key role apparently played by local doctors in the cases described here.

### ***Motivation***

The factors of ‘temporary insanity’ and ‘unsound mind’ are underpinned by circumstances that may have brought about the conditions. Both alcohol and poverty are strongly implicated. Many people came to the goldfields with nothing, or only very basic items, believing they would make their fortunes. Some like Mr. Robert Currie, a draper in Bridge Street, set up what should have been lucrative businesses but were nevertheless seduced by the potential riches of mining. Robert Currie’s death, through cutting his own throat (described in graphic detail), *The Bendigo Advertiser* said, aroused a ‘deep and painful sensation in Sandhurst:

The whole circumstances of this sad case tend to show the action of “a mind diseased” brought about by the intense excitement consequent on heavy mining transactions and fall in the mining market. These, combined with the anxieties in connection with his ordinary business and a seeking for relief in stimulants appeared to have completely unhinged the mental balance of the unfortunate man, and in his paroxysm of madness made him take his own life.<sup>20</sup>

Broken relationships played a part in the suicide statistics too. The letter left by 59-year old shopkeeper, Thomas Goodman, who died from taking strychnine, tells a sad story indeed. His letter was attached to the picture of a lady, which was pinned on his shirt;

This is the likeness of my lawful wife, who is still dear to me. I cannot see her to say goodbye, so I place her likeness upon my heart, with the intention to die. For many years together we have been, in number, 29 – and, since I have become reduced, she has forsaken me; but, should this catch the eye of my dear Bell, and cause her to reflect on days gone by, and now to hear of my most unhappy death; but should she hear of my sad fate, I suppose she will only laugh, and say to William – alias Henry – ‘Come, let us rejoice, dance and play upon Tom Goodman’s grave.’ My grave she will not know where to find. Expense to her it will be none and as for black, she need not wear when Tom Goodman be dead and gone. Dear Bell, I’ll soon be laid low in my grave. Pray let me lay at rest. God forgive my sins and receive my soul and let me be at peace. Adieu to the world, I am quite tired of life. Please advertise this, so that it may come under the eye of my wife.<sup>21</sup>

The opposite was the case of one young man who ‘had’ to get married because the projected forming of a relationship caused him to bring about his death.<sup>22</sup> Shame is also an issue - sometimes associated with loss of money and therefore poverty – gambling was often the cause. But it may have been simply a case of not finding any or sufficient gold. There were also cases of shame relating to sexuality where young men felt they were about to be exposed with ‘indecenty’ – a term that could cover many situations and widely used in the period in question – but that in at least one of our cases, was obviously referring to homosexuality.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Methods***

The favoured method of suicide was cutting one’s throat with a razor (n=12), followed closely by poisoning (n=11), hanging (n=10), and drowning (n=9). The prevalence of these methods is consistent with findings of studies carried out in other parts of Australia such as the comprehensive Tasmanian study<sup>24</sup> which found that the most common methods used in Tasmania over a period of 100 years were hanging and cutting one’s throat, followed by poisoning. The use of cut-throat razors for shaving and the ready availability of rope and trees, or even ridge poles of a framed tent, obviously provided readily available means for suicide. Poisoning was most often carried out using laudanum or opium overdoses.

Sometimes a determined person would combine methods – *The Bendigo Advertiser* described one case as ‘a wonderful example of firmness and determination, scarcely to be accounted for on any supposition, except that the unhappy man’s mind was diseased’. Lebrun de Massin attempted first to suffocate himself by blocking out air from his tent and allowing it to fill with charcoal fumes (carbon monoxide). When this failed because of the difficulty of excluding the air, he attempted to hang himself but the

rope broke, so he then shot himself with a pistol. This final act was successful, but the newspaper<sup>25</sup> reported that he had a razor nearby, apparently to use if the pistol had failed as the rope had done.

### ***Women***

In our sample we found only four reports on women for this period, one of which was unsuccessful. One woman, Mrs O'Donnell, was the wife of a local doctor, and she died after drinking a tumbler full of laudanum in front of her husband<sup>26</sup> – the ultimate revenge, one might think! There also seems to have been an element of revenge in the death of Bridget O'Grady, who died from peritonitis after slashing her abdomen with a knife, for the newspaper report<sup>27</sup> intimated that this woman had been brooding for some months over an accusation by a Mrs McMahon that her husband was using prostitutes. There was a public notice inserted in the *Advertiser* by the husband of Mrs McMahon that the accusation of his wife being in some way involved in the death of Mrs O'Grady was untrue and unwarranted.

The third report was the sad story of a 17-year old prostitute who attempted to poison herself by taking sugar of lead (lead acetate  $C_4H_6O_4Pb$ ).<sup>28</sup> She was unsuccessful and, on being detected was taken first to hospital and then to gaol. The last story was about German born Maria Schlemme who was found by her miner husband drowned in eight-feet of water in the house tank.<sup>29</sup> He apparently did not search for her although she had been gone all night and only discovered her when he saw her clothes next to the tank - he found her by using a pole to probe the tank. There were no marks of willful violence – but the doctor reported that her husband had abused her in the past.

Blainey places the ratio of men/women at 10/1 on the goldfields as late as 1897,<sup>30</sup> but in a more settled field like Bendigo the proportion of women was much higher. Even taking this into account, these results support the consistent research that completed suicide was, and still is, more prevalent amongst men than women. A number of explanations, fitting with the culture of the times, were put forward, most often by men.<sup>31</sup> These included the role of family and the woman at the hub of family life, it being believed that this was important in suicide prevention; also the submissive nature of women and their inherent loathing of violence or disfigurement that prevented them from taking violent action. Where women did attempt and/or complete suicide it was often seen as a result of melancholia or other mental derangement and was generally carried out by less violent means such as drowning or poisoning.<sup>32</sup> Maria

Schlemme was held to be suffering from melancholia following the death of her two children and the cases of both Mrs O'Donnell and Bridget O'Grady drew forth the 'temporary insanity' defence from the jury. The young 'girl of the town' Mary Jane Rodda, whose attempt to kill herself was unsuccessful, was given less sympathetic treatment, with *The Bendigo Advertiser* report providing only the bare facts, and concluding with the statement that 'the cause of her committing the rash act is unknown, but it is thought more than likely that drink was at the bottom of it'.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Ethnicity***

In terms of ethnicity, the Chinese feature fairly significantly in the reports. This is not surprising on two counts; first, they were a numerous presence on the goldfields.<sup>34</sup> For example, in 1871 there were reported to be 4,365 quartz miners and 2,756 alluvial miners in the Bendigo district, 1,266 of whom were Chinese. Many were successful in making a living, although more often in occupations other than mining such as storekeeping or market gardening. Secondly, Chinese miners in particular, were not treated well by the other residents and institutions on the goldfields, being accused of spoiling and wasting water and of being unfair competition to the British/European residents because of their tendency to work together with their countrymen in well-organized groups.<sup>35</sup> They tended to be isolated from the general community as much as from their home country. According to Cronin:

The 1881 Census revealed that Chinese suffered more from 'insanity' than any other group in the community. They were highly vulnerable and, after quarrelling with their mates or hearing bad news from home, Chinese readily succumbed to severe depression and some suicided.<sup>36</sup>

In Sandhurst for the period 1860-1880 there were reports of 13 Chinese suicides, seven of who died of opium overdose, three by hanging, one by strangling himself with his pigtail or queue and two by drowning. One of the latter may have been accidental. They appeared to be mostly miners, although only four were specifically identified as such.

Almost all the suicides of the Chinese seem to have been outcomes of poverty, through unsuccessful mining, gambling or business losses. According to historical sources, it was the aim of most of the Chinese to return to China as rich men, thereby rising in both material resources and social status in their own home province. However, the circumstances encountered on the goldfields meant that in many cases this aim could not be met or fulfilled, resulting in loss of both hope and face. Those who

did not make their fortune and did not have the means to travel home have been described as surviving ‘precariously, often without community support and bereft of female or family companionship’.<sup>37</sup> Suicide for the Chinese had a different cultural connotation than for their Caucasian counterparts. It did not have the same stigma in their society. To many Chinese of the period, suicide was viewed as a honourable death.<sup>38</sup>

The ethnicity of the Chinese was always identified in the newspaper reports. Nationality was only identified in six other cases, these being a Prussian, Austrian, Dane, Swiss, and two Scotsmen. The motivation of the Prussian, a 37-year old man, who shot himself, is unclear – although a verdict of temporary insanity was returned<sup>39</sup>. The Austrian also shot himself, and the public was informed there was a family history of suicide, with both his father and grandfather having died that way. Other rumours abounded, also faithfully reported, that he had suffered unrequited love and/or that he had pecuniary problems. The report ends with the comment that ‘The deceased, who was about 38 years of age was well educated and of gentlemanly manners and we believe at one time held a captain’s commission in the Austrian service’.<sup>40</sup>

Similar detail is given about the Dane. In a report headed ‘A Sad End’ *The Bendigo Advertiser* reported that the 29-year old

... was very unhappy at coming to Australia, though he was not in needy circumstances. His brother was a wealthy merchant in Hamburg and his father a Major in the Danish army. He was anxious to try the goldfields, but not being successful had becoming desponding so as to unsettle his mind.<sup>41</sup>

The jury returned a verdict ‘that deceased had hung himself whilst labouring under temporary insanity’.<sup>42</sup>

Little was said about the Swiss who attempted suicide by first cutting his throat and then jumping into a dam whilst under the influence of alcohol. He was unsuccessful but suffered ‘wounds ... of a dangerous character’.<sup>43</sup> Alcohol was also implicated in the cases of the Scotsmen. One, a surgeon, drowned ‘due to intoxication’,<sup>44</sup> which could well have been an accident rather than suicide. The other hanged himself whilst suffering *delirium tremens*. He had unsuccessfully attempted suicide by cutting his throat some three weeks earlier.<sup>45</sup>

Cusack makes the point about ‘the strange assembly’ of nationalities on the goldfields. The most numerous were British, particularly the Irish and the Cornish, but also well represented were the Germans. He further noted that, ‘Despite barriers of

language and cultural and racial differences a camaraderie existed, although it did not preclude a marked tendency to segregate in national groups'.<sup>46</sup>

The relatively young men described above had travelled to a place that was very different to that found on the other side of the world. There were few of the comforts they had enjoyed among their families at home and hardships to be suffered in the quest to make their fortunes. Perhaps the isolation accorded by the diminished presence of their countrymen and not having English as a first language were factors in their despair.

### ***Possible accidents***

Three events that were classed as suicide by the coroner may have been accidental; these all involved drowning, while the person was intoxicated – the finding of suicide by the jury relied largely on reported circumstances that may have given the deceased motivation for suicide. One event that was classed as an accident by the coroner we have included in the study as a probable suicide: a young man named George Beamsley fell down the shaft of the Passby Company on the Garden Gully Reef. Even though the jury at the coronial inquiry, held the same day, brought down a verdict of accidental death, *The Bendigo Advertiser* was inclined to question its findings on the basis of information that came to their knowledge after the inquest.

We are informed that he had for a long time been on intimate terms with a young woman for whom he had formed a strong attachment; that he offered to marry her, but she refused; that thereupon the acquaintance terminated, and that Beamsley took the affair much to heart<sup>47</sup>

Apparently, this young man had told witnesses that Saturday (the day he died) would be his last day on the claim, as he intended to go to his parents in Melbourne.

### ***Occupation***

Of interest is that miners do not figure as large in the statistics as we expected, given that it was the dominant occupation on the field. There were 11 miners, five of whom were Chinese (although, as stated previously, it is likely that more of the Chinese whose occupations were not identified were also miners). There were also stories of two mine managers in our sample. One was Mr Kedge, the 37 year old mine manager of the Old North Chum Mine who was said to have suffered depression from several life events, a significant one being that with the downturn in mining he had been forced to suspend

several of his staff. The jury said that, ‘the deceased had died from the effects of injuries which he had inflicted on himself while his mind was in a deranged state’. He actually died of pneumonia after trying unsuccessfully to kill himself by cutting his throat – and apparently lived long enough to publicly regret his rash action. *The Bendigo Advertiser* notes that the flags along the North Chum Line of Reef were flying at halfmast following this loss.<sup>48</sup> The other mine manager was William Joyce, manager for the co-operative claim on the Devonshire Line of Reef, whose motivation for suicide by drowning himself is vague, given that he ‘had money in the bank and was not driven by necessity to commit suicide’.<sup>49</sup>

The Cornish and Irish dominance amongst the miners may account for the apparent low suicide rate. Many, particularly the Cornish, came already well equipped with metal mining skills and so were able to hold their own on the fields. They had the support of many of their own countrymen, and many were religious and would have not contemplated suicide on the grounds that such action was sinful.

### ***An intriguing story***

George Spencer, 22 years of age, died of strangulation by hanging, using a hayband procured from the Durham Ox Store. According to his father, George was a quiet, reserved lad, fond of music and unmarried. He attended the Wesleyan Church and ‘had not faith in Spiritualistic ideas’ (Spiritualistic ideas were becoming fashionable in the period in question) – a point that attains some significance in the context of the case. There appeared to be no reason for his suicide apart from some recent deep family affliction, which, with unusual reticence, the newspaper reports did not describe.

John Lovett, a chimney sweep, heard that the deceased had been missing and so went out with two other men to search for him. They were all together when they found Spencer’s body, dressed in his working clothes, hanging from a sapling. They gave the alarm and the police constable came and cut the body down. The intriguing part of the story is that, John Lovett, the community-minded chimney sweep, knew exactly where to look for the body because he had had a dream in which he saw George Spencer, dressed in his working clothes, hanging from a sapling in that area.

Interestingly, there is little discussion in *The Bendigo Advertiser* about John Lovett’s dream apart from the bald statement of the facts, probably reflecting the legitimacy in many circles at that time of ‘spiritualistic ideas’.<sup>50</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The history of the goldfields is rich in stories of the people who lived at the time. The Bendigo goldfields were, like others, a melting pot of people of different cultures and nations who were living lives that ranged from luxurious opulence through moderate discomfort to extreme distress, and often without the support of family, friends or even others of a similar culture. The nineteenth century newspapers provide insight into some of these stories through reporting that was generally untrammelled by the ethical requirements, privacy concerns or the necessity of avoiding litigation of modern day newspapers. In this paper we have attempted to capture a picture of life on the goldfields for those who saw their hopes and dreams of making a fortune dashed, or dwindle away, or disappear quickly like magic, or who suffered too much from the harsh culture and environment in which they found themselves and who became trapped in a life that was too difficult to bear.

As is often the case when we examine the past, we find that in some aspects the more things change, the more they stay the same. The newspaper descriptions about suicide were different, but much remains the same. Reading the nineteenth century reports gives us a sense of having been there because the speculation in *The Bendigo Advertiser* reflects the speculation in the modern community when a suicide occurs. Little has changed in the stigma attached to suicide events and the devastating effect on the community. Men, particularly young men, are still more at risk of suicide than women. Methods, apart from cutting throats (we have learnt about slashing wrists) remain fairly similar. Also familiar to some extent is the debate about the part that mental illness plays in the carrying out of suicide. Most of all, the ‘triggers’ to suicide - alcohol /drugs, depression, poverty, shame, broken relationships and so on are still part of the human condition.

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## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Frank Cusack, *Bendigo: A History*, Rev. edtn, James Lerk and D. McClure, Bendigo, 2002, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> James Lerk, *Bendigo's Mining History 1851-1954*, The Bendigo Trust, Bendigo, 1991, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> George Mackay, *History of Bendigo*, McKay and Co, Bendigo, 1891 (reprinted by J. Lerk and D. McClure), p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> *The Bendigo Advertiser* (hereafter BA), 20 January 1872, p. 2, c.3.

<sup>5</sup> BA, 10 November 1864, p. 2, c.4.

<sup>6</sup> BA, 9 August 1864, p. 2, c.6.

<sup>7</sup> BA, 17 January 1861, p. 2 c.3.

<sup>8</sup> BA, 24 October 1863, p. 2, c.5.

<sup>9</sup> Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death: A social and cultural history*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2002, p. 259.

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- <sup>10</sup> Edward Leonard, 'Confidential death to prevent suicide contagion: An accepted, but never implemented, nineteenth century idea', *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour*, vol. 31, issue 4, 2001, pp. 460-66.
- <sup>11</sup> J. Pirkis, R. Blood, A. Beautrais, P. Burgess & J. Skehan, 'Media guidelines on the reporting of suicide', *Crisis*, vol. 27, issue 2, 2006, pp. 82-87.
- <sup>12</sup> As a follow up, one of the authors is planning to investigate some of the areas mentioned in this paragraph.
- <sup>13</sup> Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, p. 88.
- <sup>14</sup> Michael MacDonald, 'The medicalisation of suicide in England: Laymen, physicians and cultural change, 1500-1870', in C. Rosenberg and J. Golden (eds), *Framing Disease: Studies in cultural history*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1992, p. 86.
- <sup>15</sup> M. MacDonald & T. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in early modern England*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990.
- <sup>16</sup> Stephen Garton, *Medicine and Madness: A social history of insanity in New South Wales 1880-1940*, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 1988.
- <sup>17</sup> *Dangerous Lunatics Act*, Victoria, Act No. 14, 1843.
- <sup>18</sup> Garton, *Medicine and Madness*, p. 36.
- <sup>19</sup> MacDonald, 'The medicalisation of suicide in England', p. 86.
- <sup>20</sup> BA, 7 January 1873, p. 2, c.6.
- <sup>21</sup> BA, 13 November 1876, p. 3, c.1.
- <sup>22</sup> BA, 7 September 1875, p. 2, c.3.
- <sup>23</sup> BA, 27 July 1874, p. 2, c.4.
- <sup>24</sup> R. Kippen, 'Death in Tasmania: Using civil death registers to measure nineteenth-century cause-specific mortality', *PhD Thesis*, ANU, 2001.
- <sup>25</sup> BA, 18 August 1870, p. 2, c.1.
- <sup>26</sup> BA, 19 November 1860, p. 2, c.5.
- <sup>27</sup> BA, 4 June 1868, p. 2, c.1.
- <sup>28</sup> BA, 23 February 1870, p. 2, c.3.
- <sup>29</sup> BA, 29 December 1870, p. 3, c.2.
- <sup>30</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush that never ended*, Melbourne University Press, Parkerville, 1963, p. 193.
- <sup>31</sup> I. Kushner, 'Suicide, gender, and the fear of the modernity in nineteenth-century medical and social thought', *Journal of Social History*, 26, no.3, 1993, pp. 461-91.
- <sup>32</sup> Kushner, 'Suicide, gender, and the fear of the modernity'; B. Gates, 'Suicidal Women: Fact or fiction?', in *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories*, Princeton University Press, 1988, ch. 7. Available at: <http://www.victorianweb.org/books/suicide/07.html> [accessed 2 August 2009]
- <sup>33</sup> BA, 23 February 1870, p. 2, c.3.
- <sup>34</sup> The official Census Figures of 1871 show a population of 1,266 Chinese in Bendigo district.
- <sup>35</sup> Kathryn Cronin, *Colonial Casualties: Chinese in early Victoria*, MUP, Melbourne, 1982, pp. 42-43.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> Sing Lee; Adley Tsang; Xian-Yun Li; Michael Robert Phillips; Arthur Kleinman, 'Attitudes Toward Suicide Among Chinese People in Hong Kong', *Suicide & Life - Threatening Behavior*; vol. 37, no. 5, October 2007; pp. 565-75.
- <sup>39</sup> BA, 2 December 1875, p. 2, c.4.
- <sup>40</sup> BA, 18 November 1862, p. 2, c.4.
- <sup>41</sup> BA, 20 October 1871, p. 2, c.3.
- <sup>42</sup> BA, 20 October 1871, p. 2, c.3.
- <sup>43</sup> BA, 4 January 1861, p. 2, c.3.
- <sup>44</sup> BA, 14 December 1860, p. 2, c.4.
- <sup>45</sup> BA, 19 November 1864, p. 2, c.4.
- <sup>46</sup> Frank Cusack, *Bendigo A History*, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1973, p. 55.
- <sup>47</sup> BA, 21 November 1871, p. 2, c.3.
- <sup>48</sup> BA, 16 February 1864, p. 2, c.3.
- <sup>49</sup> BA, 29 September 1875, p. 2, c.6.
- <sup>50</sup> BA, 7 July 1874, p. 2, c.7.