

## **Songs from the Australian Goldfields, Part 2: Life on the Goldfields**

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**S**ongs from anonymous writers as well as the entertainers are a valuable contribution to our impressions of life on the Australian goldfields in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The most popular entertainer of all was Charles Thatcher (Fig. 1), a colourful and controversial figure on the Victorian goldfields, who wrote and sang comic and satirical parodies – new words to popular tunes. In these songs he described ‘the troubles of the new chums, the excitement of rushes, fisticuffs, horse-racing, cricket, the nuisance of dogs around the township and other topical events’.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1:** *Concert room, Charlie Napier Hotel, Ballarat. S.T. Gill, June 1855. The singer is most likely Charles Thatcher as he was performing there in June 1855.*



Source: Courtesy, National Library of Australia, pic-an2376957-v

In April 1854, only a few months after Thatcher began performing on the goldfields, a report on his concert in Bendigo observed that

[His songs] are all humorous, abounding in local allusions, ... and if circulated in England, would give a much better idea of life at the gold fields than most of the elaborately written works do.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps it was this report that prompted Thatcher's satirical song *A New Chum's Letter* which purports to be from a new arrival to his father at home, praising the orderly and civilised nature of life in Melbourne and on the goldfields, as shown in the following extracts.<sup>4</sup>

The grog shops are all done away,  
The diggers drink nothing but cider;

A sticking-up case is unknown  
'Tis a fine peaceful state of society;  
The police when required are "all there",  
And noted for rigid sobriety.

And no bullock drivers you'll meet  
That are vulgar or given to swearing

Musquitoes [sic] and flies are unknown-  
The few dogs here are not vicious;  
And none are allowed to go loose,  
A walk after dark is delicious.

### **New Chums**

Songs about the experiences of new chums are many and varied. On their arrival in Australia after a long and dangerous sea voyage, they would have been unprepared for the way of life on the diggings; so Thatcher offered words of encouragement in *Getting Colonized*.<sup>5</sup>

At many things you see out here,  
I have no doubt you feel surprised,  
And if you do it's pretty clear  
At present you're not colonized.

I know the new chum instantly,  
I've seen him pull up short and stare,  
And then quite horror-stricken be,  
When ribald bullock-drivers swear;  
And shocked by curses loud and deep,  
With Strawberry he's sympathised,  
And at each stroke I've seen him weep –  
Poor new chum he ain't colonized.

Cheer up new chums and don't be sad,  
Keep up your peckers, cease to fret,  
Although affairs seem very bad,  
The gold-fields ain't quite worked out yet;  
A nugget soon may make you smile,  
Let all your powers be exercised –  
When you've been here a little while,  
You'll jolly soon get colonized.

Not all new chums were successful in getting colonized. *The New Chum's Lament* tells of one who had 'joined with two chaps ... who were very good hands at gold digging' but who took advantage of him, leaving him in dire straits and regretting having emigrated to Australia.<sup>6</sup>

I'm out in Australia at last,  
But heartily wish I was back again;  
My cash is now running out fast,  
Or else I'd be off in a crack again.  
Since the day I left home to come here,  
Misfortune has always attended me;  
And if I stay longer I fear  
This country will soon put an end to me.

When we'd been on the diggings a week,  
We put down a twenty foot shicer,  
Provisions were dear on the creek,  
And my tin was run out in a trice, sir.  
Then seeing that my cash was all spent,  
Perhaps you may doubt my sad story.  
They sold both my tools and my tent  
And left me alone in my glory.

Some new chums came from privileged backgrounds, unprepared for the hard physical labour involved in mining, and were mocked by Thatcher in *The Bond Street Swell*.<sup>7</sup>

I'll sing you just a little song,  
For you must understand,  
'Tis of a fine young gentleman  
That left his native land –  
And started brave and bold,  
In a ship of fourteen hundred tons,  
To come and dig for gold.

With five pounds in his pocket,  
He went to Bendigo;  
But when he saw the diggin's  
They filled his heart with woe –  
"What! Must I venture down a hole,  
And throw up filthy clay?  
If my mother could but see me now,  
Whatever would she say?"

He went and bought a shovel  
And pick and dish as well  
But to every ten minutes' work,  
He took an hours' spell.  
The skin from his fair white hands  
In blisters peeled away –  
And thus he worked and sunk about  
Twelve inches every day.

When off the bottom just a foot  
He got quite out of heart,  
And threw his pick down in a rage.  
And off he did depart;

### Yearning for Home

One of the worst aspects of emigration was the separation from family and the ever-present dream of returning home after striking it rich on the goldfields. It is not surprising that homesickness is the subject of several sentimental songs; *The Coolgardie Miner* is one example.<sup>8</sup>

The scene was at Coolgardie,  
And in the tent one night  
Sat an English miner  
Beneath the pale moonlight.  
A thousand thoughts in memory  
Came before him to unfold  
As he pictured dear old England,  
The land he'd left for gold.

He thought of his dear old mother,  
His father growing old,

It's just one year today  
Since he sailed across the foam,  
To earn some mortgage money  
That was owed his childhood home.  
Thank God his luck has changed at last  
And before a week is o'er  
He'll sail back to old England  
To leave it never more.

Even the roughest of miners were not immune to homesickness when reminded of home; in this case by *The Song of the Thrush*.<sup>9</sup>

Years ago out in the wilds of Australia  
Out in the minefields there once stood a camp  
The miners were made up of all sorts of classes  
Many a scapegoat and many a scamp  
When into their midst came a young man from England  
And with him he brought a small thrush in a cage  
To hear the bird sing they would flock 'round in dozens  
That dear little songster became all the rage.

The miners, although rough and fierce looking fellows  
Were human and idolised, worshipped that bird;  
In the midst of a quarrel they'd leave off and listen  
To the voice of their favourite, their charmer was heard.  
The bird from old England at last got quite famous.  
On Sundays the miners would come from afar  
And many declared they preferred the bird's singing -  
To the cards and the dice at the rough liquor bar.

It made them all think of the cornfields and meadows.  
Of many a shady and quiet little lane;  
And hearts ached and yearned as they thought of some village,  
And some they had dearly loved, but all in vain.

Why would a thrush have been brought from England to the Australian goldfields? Canaries were widely used for detection of carbon monoxide in coalmines, but there is no evidence of thrushes having been used in mines (R. Vernon, *pers. comm.*). Presumably then, if the song has a factual basis, the thrush was brought out as a tangible reminder of home.

### **Goldfields Towns**

Towns on the goldfields began as rambling tent settlements, which must have been a confronting sight for a new chum. In *First Impressions of the Goldfields* Joe Small, another of the entertainers, described the chaotic scene that greeted a new chum on arrival at an unnamed Victorian goldfield.<sup>10</sup>

A waving forest all round  
This impromptu camping ground;  
Ten thousand tents or more  
Grog shops by many a score,  
Round holes without number,  
With piles of slabs and lumber

Bullocks bellowing, dogs barking,  
Dancing, singing and skylarking;  
All is revelry by night,  
Everyone mad with delight

In the morning all is life –  
Like an army ere the strife –  
Men working with a will  
On each gully, flat and hill;  
Others off with madden'd speed  
To discover some new lead

As a goldfield prospered, facilities improved; tents gave way to more substantial dwellings, impressive public buildings were erected and shops sold imported goods to satisfy the demands of the newly rich. Bendigo reflected this increasing prosperity, as recorded by Thatcher in *Changes on Bendigo*.<sup>11</sup>

Dear me! How this place is advancing,  
What it will come to I'm sure I don't know,  
The way folks are building is truly entrancing –  
They've altered the fashion of old Bendigo,  
Land's advertised every day for selection,  
Quartz reefs still keep up their fabulous yield,  
Brick houses spring up in every direction,  
And canvas is beaten quite out of the field.  
Fine handsome shops everywhere are erected,

Where goods from London and Paris you'll see.  
But of course that is only what would be expected,  
For ladies will go it to get finery,  
Jackson will tempt 'em as much as he's able,  
Tries hard to sell them a splendid silk dress,  
And Francis allures them with his shilling tables,  
Walking into their purses with splendid success.

A sense of the rivalry between the Victorian goldfields can be gained from Coxon's *The Ballarat Man*.<sup>12</sup>

There's a place that bears a well-known name,  
It has a township and a flat,  
It's first of all in colonial fame  
And called old Ballarat.  
There are other gold-fields, Castlemaine,  
The Ovens, Bendigo,  
But Ballarat it's quite plain  
They by its side can't show.  
It's a thing to be proud of, deny it who can,  
If you're able to say I'm a Ballarat man.

In the good old times its Jewellers' shops  
Made the Bendigo folks stare,  
Though now their blowing never stops  
About the quartz reefs there;  
But though they have a reef or two,  
Which their conceit so feeds,  
I'm sure we them completely slew  
With our Ballarat deep leads.  
And the Bendigo digger, try as hard as he can,  
Is no use at deep sinking with a Ballarat man.

The Castlemaine so neat and clean,  
But upstart, poor and slow,  
Its diggings no good (now I mean),  
Being worked out long ago;

Thatcher also understood that the fortunes of mining towns ebb and flow, and urged the residents in a town in decline to be patient, as their luck was bound to change for the better *By-and-By*.<sup>13</sup>

Times are bad, there's no denying,  
'Tis difficult on now to rub;  
And some of their best have to be trying,  
To earn their allowance of grub.  
But still what's the use of regretting,  
Or heaving for past days a sigh?  
To the winds with our fuming and fretting,  
For things will improve by-and-by. ...  
Storekeeper, a word with you, brother,  
Your trade may be sunk very low;

You did well once, but now 'tis more 'tother  
Not like 'twas a few years ago.  
Your flour in stock long may have rested,  
On the shelf, too, your sardines may lie;  
Your pickles may be unmolested,  
But things will improve by-and-by.

### **Life of a Digger**

In 1872 *The Australian Town and Country Journal* published a series of articles on 'Colonial Reminiscences'; one of these, *Another Digger's Story*, relates how a group of diggers on the Forbes goldfield in southern New South Wales decided to start a 'concert hall or singing room' to provide entertainment as an alternative to the drinking and fighting that was commonplace. They thought it would be at least as profitable as gold-digging and 'a desperate sight more easy'. The venue proved popular and the author of the article recalled the words of *The Digger's Song* which extolled the carefree life of the digger.<sup>14</sup>

The rock of the cradle sounds constant and clear,  
'Tis music indeed to the gold-seeker's ear;  
For when fortune favours, it makes their hearts bold,  
Contented and happy, though toiling for gold.

Ah, what can compare with the life that they lead,  
Unvex'd by those cares of which others take heed;  
And when with their pile they visit the town,  
Repine not in finding they've knocked it all down.

In a similar vein, the "idyllic" life of a digger, unfettered by family responsibilities, is saluted in *The Digger's Chaunt*.<sup>15</sup>

Of all the various games of life,  
The diggers' life is best, boys:  
No father, mother, child, or wife,  
Comes twixt us and our rest, boys.  
The pick and cradle are our friends,  
Our home is in the tent, boys:  
And Government a license sends,  
To yield us cent per cent, boys.

The difficulty of predicting the course of a buried alluvial lead, particularly a deep lead in the ancient drainage system, gave rise to the practice of "shepherding" at Ballarat, whereby men might only do the legal minimum of work on their claim while watching and waiting to see the results from shafts on adjacent claims. Men working hard at sinking shafts on their claims cursed the "shepherders" who occupied promising ground and were often mainly interested in selling it at great profit should nearby claims prove successful. Thatcher voiced this feeling in *Shepherding*, the final lines pointing out that the shepherd was not always successful.<sup>16</sup>

I'll endeavour to describe to you in this my humble rhyme  
The way we jolly shepherds used to pass away the time:  
The first thing we'd pitch out about four shovelful of soil,  
Then all knock off and have a spell from this laborious toil.

At ten o'clock we'd then toss up to see who was to shout,  
And if there were but three of us, we did it "odd man out":

To the grog-shop then we would repair, and drink with other chaps;  
And if they were out for licences we'd stand and joe the traps;  
And when we'd had our nobblers, to the holes away we'd cut  
With a pack of cards to have a game of cribbage, whist or put.

But often in shepherding for many and many a day,  
We'd find the blessed line had slewed, and gone the other way.

Puddling machines were used at Bendigo to wash the gold from the clay, sand and gravel, but the resulting sludge released from the hundreds of machines choked Bendigo Creek and inundated low-lying land both within Bendigo and downstream.<sup>17</sup> It was a controversial issue, but Thatcher supported the practice of puddling with his song *The Jolly Puddlers* in which he made the point that banning puddling would have a severe impact on the economy of Bendigo.<sup>18</sup>

They want to stop our puddling, as many of you know.  
Contractors say that of our slush there is an overflow,  
But if they stop us they'll be sure to injure Bendigo.

These blessed road contractors are trying us to crush,  
They say that they're impeded by our muddy dirty slush,  
They want to make us knock off but they'll find it is no go.

If you crush the puddling interest and stay the puddler's hand,  
What becomes of your fine buildings that hereon the township stand?  
The commerce of this district then would sink down precious low.

As mining underwent a transition from alluvial to quartz reefs, so the life of the digger also changed, as noted by Thatcher in *Who would'nt be a Digger*. He observed that mining was now a harder life but encouraged diggers to remain as there were still good prospects for anyone prepared for hard work.<sup>19</sup>

*Pintpots* were once filled from rich ground,  
And in gold bags they *sacked* it,  
Now strange to say in *quartz* 'tis found  
But it's harder to extract it;  
To *pick* it up's the work of weeks,  
And it requires great vigour,  
And *blasting* rocks and *damming* creeks  
Is done by every digger.

No one out here need toil in vain  
If his mind to work he's giving,  
In spite of hardships, it's quite plain,

Each one may get a living;  
So in Australia stay a while,  
And work away with vigour,  
For many a one will make his pile  
That's now a hard-up digger.

### **Women on the Goldfields**

In his *History of Ballarat*, William Withers stated that '... there flocked to these shores men - young and wifeless men for the most part – eager to engage in the hunt for gold and fortune',<sup>20</sup> but in *The Colonial Widow* Coxon tells of a young woman who followed her sweetheart to Melbourne where they married before departing for the diggings. She quickly became disillusioned with her husband and felt no regret at becoming a widow!<sup>21</sup>

About two years ago I left England behind me  
And came to my sweetheart across the wide sea,  
Who told me a beautiful home he could find me,  
If I'd come out here, and his darling wife be.

We stayed one week in Melbourne and then off we started,  
And by coach to the diggings we went,  
But at our journey's end I was quite broken-hearted  
To find my *home* was a rotten old tent.

And he'd go with these mates to a grog tent close handy  
And drinking and fighting all day there remain,  
Then reel home at night with a bottle of brandy,  
And beat me if ever I dared to complain.

One night this kind husband of mine not returning,  
I thought his career had received some slight check,  
But imagine my joy next morning when learning  
He'd fallen down an *old hole* and broken his neck.

As more and more women began to arrive on the goldfields (Fig. 2) young men would undoubtedly have echoed the sentiments expressed by Thatcher in *Scrumptious young gals*.<sup>22</sup> The song includes a tribute to the role played by Caroline Chisholm in assisting female emigration to Australia.

Scrumptious young gals, oh, you're togged out so finely,  
Adorning the digging so charming and gay;  
With your beautiful smiles, oh, you look so divinely,  
While lovers crowd round you their homage to pay.  
Australia may yield her profuse golden treasure,  
And her bright sunny skies shine with radiance too;  
But woman alone can afford us real pleasure –  
Say what would the gold-fields be without you.

Scrumptious young gals, thanks to free emigration,  
Out to this country for husbands you fly;

Mrs Chisholm we look on with great veneration,  
Because she's kept up such a constant supply.  
Five years ago and how dull was this quarter,  
And how monotonous too was the life;  
The sight of a female then made our mouths water,  
And only rich diggers could pick up a wife.

**Figure 2:** *Alarming Prospect. The Single Ladies off to the Diggings.* John Leech 1853.



Source: Courtesy State Library of Victoria. Image H81.35; H29787.

Thatcher, well-known for his satirical verses, contrasted courting customs on the goldfields with those “at home” in *Colonial courtship or love on The Diggings*.<sup>23</sup>

What a rum lot the gals are out here.  
They jolly soon get colonized, sirs, ...

But things are far different here,  
The girls don't consult their relations,  
What's father or mother to them,  
They follow their own inclinations;

The best of this colony is,  
The brides have no fine affectation.  
In saying “I will” they're “all there”,  
And they don't faint upon the occasion.

Some brides upon their wedding night,  
In colonial parlance get “tight”, sirs,  
And then in that state they evince  
A strong inclination to fight, sirs,

### **Sly Grog and Out on the Spree**

Concerned that over-indulgence of alcohol by the diggers would lead to social chaos, the Victorian authorities tried for two years to ban its sale in towns on the Victorian

goldfields; a proliferation of sly grog shops was the inevitable outcome.<sup>24</sup> Coxon's song *The Grog Tent we got tipsy in* describes a typical scene.<sup>25</sup>

The Grog Tent we got tipsy in, in old Bendigo,  
Was certainly the queerest place it's been my lot to know;  
'Twas in the gully where we worked, and on my word it's true,  
Could our ounce a man a day, and ten feet sinking too.  
We'd then of course no fine Hotels, but thought quite great you know  
That grog tent we got tipsy in on old Bendigo –  
That grog tent we got tipsy in about four years ago.

It wasn't more than 12 by 8, no window had or door,  
The table, seats – were all bush made, and fixed into the floor;  
We nobblers drank in pannikins, two shillings for them paid,  
For to knock down a note or two we then were not afraid.

*Poll the Grog-seller* was one of Thatcher's best-known songs; as well as an account of the sly-grog outlet we have an attempt by the authorities to catch Polly at her trade.<sup>26</sup>

Big Poll the Grog-seller gets up each day,  
And her small rowdy tent sweeps out;  
She's turning in plenty of tin people say,  
For she knows what she's about.  
Polly's good-looking, and Polly is young,  
And Polly's possessed of a smooth oily tongue;  
She's an innocent face and a good head of hair,  
And a lot of young fellows will often go there;  
And they keep dropping in handsome Polly to court,  
And she smiles and supplies them with brandy and port,

Two sly-grog detectives have come up from town,  
And they both roam about in disguise;  
And several retailers of grog are done brown,  
And have reason to open their eyes:  
Of her small rowdy crib they are soon on the scent;  
But Polly's prepared when they enter her tent;  
They call for some brandy – "We don't sell it here,  
But," says Poll, "I can give you some nice ginger beer,"

Unlike Polly, not all grog-sellers were able to avoid being caught by the law; another of Coxon's songs, *The death of Sly Grog*, tells how "Glen" was eventually tricked by a shrewdly disguised 'trap'.<sup>27</sup>

Detectives by the score  
Tried to *stick up* that store,  
But were *bowled out right away*,  
For that store the Vict'ry named  
For selling Grog was famed  
In a most extensive way.  
But one fine morning they were caught,  
And a charge of *sly Grog* selling brought,

By a *trap* that they called Booty,  
A *trap* that they called Booty,  
Who hit upon the funny plan  
Of dressing like a “Chinaman,”  
To do “Glen” and *his duty*.

Diggers on the Victorian goldfields were notorious for their wild celebrations in Melbourne after making a rich strike (Fig. 3); *When we’re out upon the spree* was an obvious topic for a Thatcher song.<sup>28</sup>

When we’re out upon the spree,  
Oh, what jolly dogs are we,  
We spend our tin, and shout for young and old;  
The liquor we enjoy,  
Our mirth has no alloy,  
And merrily we flash about our gold.  
We drink to all the gals,  
And, seated with our pals,  
We enjoy ourselves like Britons, free from care;  
And we make the whole place ring  
With our voices as we sing –  
Oh, jolly is the digger when the gold’s all there.

**Figure 3:** *Convivial Diggers in Melbourne. S.T. Gill, 1852-3.*



Source: Courtesy State Library of Victoria. Image H86.7/37

But the good times could not last forever, as Thatcher tells in *Two years ago* of a Bendigo miner looking back on his past extravagant sprees in Melbourne and hoping those times might come again.<sup>29</sup>

Two years ago, my lads, we used  
To take our nuggets down,  
Sell the lot, and go and have  
A spree in Melbourne town;  
We rode about in two-horse cabs,  
And made the champagne flow,  
And ate bank notes in sandwiches  
About two years ago.

A sweetheart, then, on either arm  
About the town we'd range,  
And buy the dear things cashmere shawls,  
And refuse to take the change;  
Then to dancers at the theatre  
Our nuggets we did throw,  
These were the glorious times, no lies,  
About two years ago.

And when we'd quite run out of cash  
We'd tramp back every mile,  
And go to work again and get  
Another tidy pile;  
I ask you, can we do it now?  
But, echo answers no;  
Ah! times ai'nt what they used to was  
About two years ago.

### **Racial Tensions**

The hostility shown by diggers towards Chinese flocking to the goldfields became a popular theme for songs by Thatcher, Small and Chanson, all of whom wrote songs with blatantly racist sentiments. In *Chinese Immigration*, one of many of Thatcher's songs about the Chinese "problem", he warned that the entire system of government in Australia was in danger of being overthrown by the 'the Celestial nation'.<sup>30</sup>

Now some of you, perhaps, may laugh,  
But 'tis my firm opinion,  
This colony some day will be  
Under Chinese dominion.  
They'll upset the Australian government,  
The place will be their own;  
And an Emperor with a long pigtail.  
Will sit upon the throne.

Melbourne will be the seat of power,  
And then 'tis my impression,  
Of the stations up the country  
They'll quickly take possession.  
The squatters will be used as slaves,  
By the Celestial nation;  
And growing tea and rice will be  
Their only compensation.

Chanson also warned of the ‘evil of this mighty rush’, with outrageous claims of their eating habits in *Chinese Emigration*.<sup>31</sup>

There John has got his signboard up of “lodging for the nation”,  
He charges you quite moderate, it’s all through emigration.

Oh glorious feeds he’ll give you then, fat poodles rich and racy,  
Rat sausages and cat’s meat pies, a Chinese delicacy;  
And bullocks which have been worked out upon some neighbouring station,  
You get your share of for two bob, it’s all through emigration.

Another unpleasant song is *John Chinaman’s Marriage*, which Thatcher claimed had been ‘sung by him for 400 nights’.<sup>32</sup> In it, he mocks ‘poor Ching Chong ... [who at] digging saved a lot of gold’, but had been unable to find wife until

...  
At length a girl named Cock-eyed Fan,  
Took pity on the Chinaman.

To look at her ‘twas hard to say,  
Exactly where her beauty lay;  
Her complexion was a dirty brown,  
And she’d lately come from Hobart Town;  
Small-pox had left big traces there,  
She’d a snub nose and deep red hair,  
But finding fault was not his plan,  
She was just the girl for the Chinaman,

They went to church, and John with pride,  
Surveyed his fat and blooming bride;

But as soon as they were married “Cock-eyed Fan” immediately began taking advantage of her unfortunate husband.

And then she came out very flash,  
Like winking spent her husband’s cash;  
She brought tears into his eye,  
Whilst “no sabby” was poor John’s reply;

She put poor John in quite a fright,  
For often she’d stop out all night;  
And in the morning home she’d come,  
Smelling delightfully of rum.  
She then repudiated rice,  
And swore such scran would not suffice,  
At length from him clean off she ran,  
And left her faithful Chinaman.

However, Thatcher also wrote songs that were less critical of the Chinese and even some that were sympathetic, an example being *The Chinaman* in which Thatcher suggests that the Chinese were not so bad after all.<sup>33</sup> Thatcher knew what his audiences wanted to hear but perhaps he may also have regretted some of his more racist contributions?

The Chinaman traverses the wide world through,  
On the diggings him you'll find,  
Staggering under a big bamboo,  
While his pigtail hangs behind:  
Should a stranger be inquisitive,  
And ask him questions try,  
A vacant stare then John will give,  
And "no sabby" he'll reply.  
He's a peaceable fellow, deny who can,  
And there's many worse than a Chinaman.

### **Law and Disorder**

Although Blainey described the Australian goldfields as 'probably more orderly than California's',<sup>34</sup> fighting and thieving were nevertheless commonplace, as Sherer observed on the Fryer's Creek diggings.

Quarrelling was as common as breakfasting; and thieving both by day and night, amongst the tents and workings, where the auriferous earth remained unremoved for washing, was also common either amongst some ill-associated parties themselves, or by the professed plunderers and thieves.<sup>35</sup>

Thatcher too found reason to complain about lawlessness in *The Rowdy Mob*.<sup>36</sup>

This Ballarat's a curious spot,  
At least I'm sure I've found it so,  
Bad luck is sure to be my lot,  
No matter to what part I go.  
I really do feel quite unnerved,  
In fact it nearly makes me sob,  
To think how shamefully I'm served,  
By that disgraceful rowdy mob.

I got acquainted with a gal  
That kept a little sly grog tent,  
She had dark eyes, her name was Sal,  
To visit her I often went,  
Whilst there one day, to my surprise,  
An ugly fellow she called Bob,  
Slipped into me and blacked my eyes,  
Of course one of the rowdy mob.

If to the theatre I go,  
Or to the "Charlie" for a dance,  
A fight begins, and then I know  
I don't stand even half a chance.  
Although I try to walk away,  
I'm sure to get one for my nob,  
"That's him" some cove is sure to say,  
So I'm mauled by the rowdy mob.

Handing out justice could be a haphazard procedure according to *Justice on the Mines* by an anonymous satirist.<sup>37</sup>

The courthouse was a shanty and Constable Lanty  
Had the prisoner chained to a tree.  
“What’s the case?” asked his worship, as backward he leant,  
While his pipe he was comfortably lighting,  
“Is it murder, or robbing with dire intent?”  
“No, your worship, the cove has been fighting”.  
  
“What! Fighting indeed, to make men’s noses bleed?  
This is indeed a trifle too frisky;  
But Lanty just go to the pub down below  
And bring me a good nip of whisky.”

On getting his whisky the magistrate decided that the misdemeanour warranted a drastic penalty.

“You see the mail-coach has just come to town,  
Take the prisoner and into it bang him,  
From this place where he stands, mind, obey my commands,  
And then from the coach take him and hang him.”

When the constable protested “But Your Worship! The case is assault at the most ...” the magistrate took umbrage at having his judgement questioned and attacked the constable.

A scuffle ensued twixt the trap and the beak,  
The diggers came round them delighted,  
They’d have seen the thing through if it lasted a week,  
‘Til the quarrel was properly righted.  
At length it was over, and thoroughly sober  
His worship to put them a fright in  
Set the prisoner free, who was chained to a tree,  
On paying two guineas for fighting.

As the rush to the Ophir goldfield began in May 1851 Governor FitzRoy attempted to control the rush and discourage men from joining it by introducing a licence fee of 30 shillings per month for each digger. The fee was later extended to goldfields tradesmen and servants and doubled for foreigners,<sup>38</sup> leading to a protest in the form of *The Foreign Digger’s Song*.<sup>39</sup>

Though Wentworth may bluster, and Thomson look glum,  
I care not for either one crack of my thumb;  
But this I can tell them, their new licence fee  
Will never be paid, though an alien, by me.  
In peace I arrived, and in peace I’ll depart,  
Should the land I have sought be no home of my heart.  
But here while I’m one of a stout-hearted throng,  
I’ll submit to privations, but never to wrong.

A similar licence system operating on the Victorian goldfields was detested by the diggers, particularly at Ballarat, where they sank shafts in search of gold in the “deep leads”. Diggers were required to pay the licence regardless of whether they struck gold or not and, as pointed out by Blainey, the difficulty in predicting the course of the deep leads made mining at Ballarat ‘more of a gamble than any other branch of gold mining’.<sup>40</sup> Thatcher devoted several songs in supporting the diggers on this issue and *Where’s your license* became one of his most popular songs.<sup>41</sup>

The morning was fine,  
The sun brightly did shine,  
The diggers were working away;  
When the inspector of traps,  
Said now, my fine chaps,  
We’ll go licence hunting today!  
Some went this way, some that,  
Some to Bendigo Flat,  
And a lot to the White Hills did tramp;  
Whilst others did bear,  
Up toward Golden Square,  
And the rest of them kept round the camp.

Now a tall, ugly trap,  
He espied a young chap,  
Up the gully a cutting like fun;  
So he quickly gave chase,  
But ‘twas a hard race,  
For, mind you, the digger could run.  
Down a hole he did pop,  
While the bobby up top,  
Says – “Just come up”, shaking his staff -  
Young man of the crown,  
If yer wants me come down,  
For I’m not to be caught with such chaff.

The licence system and the heavy-handed way in which the “traps” carried out the inspections eventually led to the armed Eureka rebellion at Ballarat in the early hours of 3 December 1854.<sup>42</sup> For such a momentous event in the history of Australia, there is a curious dearth of songs dating from the time. Even Thatcher made no mention of it, in spite of being then on the Victorian goldfields. He was never reluctant to lampoon local authorities and one might have anticipated a song defending the actions of the rebels and criticising the brutality of the troops in crushing the rebellion. But he was well aware of what his audiences wanted to hear, so perhaps the explanation lies in Anderson’s observation that ‘Thatcher’s songs dealt with the larger historical events as well as local issues but the latter were more popular’.<sup>43</sup> Or it may have been that as Eureka had generated such intense emotions amongst the diggers he felt it best not to comment in song.

This does not mean that songs of Eureka were not created and circulated – but they have not survived. The only contemporary example known to the authors is

Rafaello Carboni's *Victoria's Southern Cross* (the chorus is included here as the leader of the rebels, Peter Lalor, is not mentioned in any of the verses).<sup>44</sup>

When Ballarat unfurled the "Southern Cross",  
Of joy a shout ascended to the heavens;  
The bearer was Toronto's Captain Ross;  
All frightened into fits red-taped ravens.

*Chorus* :       For brave Lalor –  
                  Was found "all there",  
                  With dauntless dare:  
                  His men inspiring:  
                  To wolf or bear,  
                  Defiance bidding,  
                  He made them swear –  
                  Be faithful to the Standard, for victory or death.

Bloodhounds were soon let loose, with grog imbued,  
And murder stained that Sunday! Sunday morning;  
The Southern Cross in digger's gore imbrued,  
Was torn away, and left the diggers mourning!

Victoria men, to scare, stifle or tame,  
Ye quarter-deck monsters are too impotent;  
The Southern Cross will float again the same,  
*United Britons, ye are omnipotent.*

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia bushranging was widespread and gold escorts on their way from the goldfields were obvious targets. The most spectacular attack was that by Frank Christie (*alias* Frank Gardiner) and his gang at Eugowra Rocks in June 1862 when they robbed the Forbes gold escort of 2,700 ozs of gold and £3,700 in cash.<sup>45</sup> *The Bail-up at Eugowra Rocks* is a modified version of an earlier song *The morning of the fray*, attributed to Gardiner himself.<sup>46</sup>

It's all about bold Frank Gardiner with the devil in his eye,  
He said "We've work before us lads we've got to do or die.

We'll stop the Orange escort with powder and with ball.  
We'll shoot the coach to pieces and we'll down the peelers all.  
We'll lift the diggers' money we'll collar all their gold,  
So mind your guns are killers now my comrades true and bold"

So now off go the rifles the battle has begun.  
The escort started running boys all in the setting sun.  
The robbers seized their plunder so saucy and so bold,  
And they're riding from Eugowra Rocks encumbered with their gold.

As noted by Ward, '... bushrangers found it easier to rob the diggers than to dig for themselves'<sup>47</sup> and *Going to The Diggings* recalls the experiences of a man and 'an old chum called Higgings' who were robbed by the notorious Ben Hall on the road from the Forbes goldfield.<sup>48</sup>

And next to Forbes we diggers went,  
And on the South Lead struck it;  
A golden hole, and no mistake,  
Two pounds weight to the bucket.  
I saw we'd made a tidy haul,  
So sold our tent and riggings;  
And left – though soon we met Ben Hall,  
When coming from the diggings.

Resistance being no avail,  
I felt uncommon funny;  
A pistol was held to my head,  
And made me yield my money.  
My situation was as bad  
As that of poor old Higgings;  
For I was totally clean'd out,  
When coming from the diggings.

The exploits of a miner who turned to bushranging are related in *The Maryborough Miner*<sup>49</sup> but Australian folklorists have long questioned the provenance of the song.<sup>50</sup>

### **Conclusions**

Songs found in newspapers, broadsides and entertainers' songbooks provide a vivid picture of life on the Australian goldfields in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The role of newspapers, particularly regional ones, should not be overlooked in any history of songs and poetry being published about gold mining. During the goldrush era, newspapers sprang up faster than churches and second only to grog shanties. Miners thirsted for news of home and particularly news of lucky strikes. Most newspapers were privately owned and operated and the owner was usually the journalist, advertising manager, printer and retailer. As mining communities grew, so did the number of pages in a newspaper. Rival newspapers also set up offering stiff competition. It seems many of these independent editors encouraged verse, with some newspapers carrying verse in nearly every issue. Miners liked to read verse about miners, and professional songwriters like Thatcher and Small stood alongside often clumsy contributions that could well have been written in the proverbial "thumbnail dipped in tar". It should also be observed that the songs and verse often offered a different perspective of mining - the emotional history through songs of remorse, frustration and, sometimes, anger. Satire of colonial figures, especially those responsible for mining edicts, police and local politicians, were also welcome; one imagines the newspaper owners made a few enemies through such verse.

The anti-authoritarian character of the diggers is reflected in song and it is interesting to speculate whether our convict past played a role in how miners viewed the police; distrust and defiance being the spirit of the day. The songs also had a role in camaraderie and early development of the mateship ethos. Miners had to work in pairs - one down the hole and the other working the winch and bucket. There was also the need to watch each other's back in case of attack or their tent supplies being raided - mining

towns were rough and dangerous places. Singing, especially community singing, created a safe atmosphere and so-called “singing rooms”, often attached to a hotel, were popular. The miners must have known their limits in such establishments and troublemakers were probably shown the door, thus depriving them of entertainment. Miners also sang as they worked or passed the time resting in their tents. Singing was a natural entertainment, even when alone. The songs also provided a link with ‘home’ and family, and many a grizzled old miner would find himself with teary eyes on listening to some old ballad he recalled from his mother or sister.

Many of the goldfields songs were written for performance and, had they not been written down by the likes of Thatcher and Small in their songbooks or published in newspapers, would have disappeared. Unlike shearing, droving and bushranging songs, few mining songs entered the popular oral tradition. Perhaps excitement over the ‘new gold’ of wool, wheat and beef obliterated the gold mania or, more likely, people saw it, like the convict era, as something that had passed.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> As in Part 1 of this paper, the selection of songs presented here are examples to illustrate life on the Australian goldfields. Because of space limitations, songs are not reproduced in full and choruses are omitted; complete texts can be found in the appropriate references.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Anderson, in Noel Bede Nairn (ed.), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 6, 1851-1890, R-Z, Melbourne University Press, 1976, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> *The Argus*, 7 April 1854, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs: forming a complete comic history of the early diggings*, 1864, pp. 73-75. Facsimile edition, Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>6</sup> *The Colonial Songster containing several new Irish Colonial Songs written by Mr. J. Small and a choice selection of popular songs of the day*, A.T Hodgson, Castlemaine, c.1880, pp. 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Anderson, *Goldfield songs by Charles Thatcher*, Red Rooster Press, Hotham Hill, 2001, pp. 61-62.

<sup>8</sup> John Meredith and Hugh Anderson, *Folk Songs of Australia and the men and women who sang them*, New South Wales University Press, 1985, p. 180. This song was collected by the folklorist John Meredith from Mrs. Sally Sloane. Several fragments of a similar song were collected by Warren Fahey as *Castles in the Air*.

<sup>9</sup> This version is an amalgamation of fragments from several sources. See, Warren Fahey, *The World Turned Upside-down: The Australian Gold Rush told through songs, stories & reminiscences*, Published as an e-book by Bodgie Books, Sydney, 2013, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Joe Small, *The New Zealand and Australian Songster*, Tribe, Mosley & Cargill, Christchurch, 1866, pp. 11-13.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, *Goldfield songs by Charles Thatcher*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>12</sup> William Coxon, *Coxon's Comic Songster*, W.M. Brown, Ballarat, c.1859, pp. 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs*, 1864, pp. 58-59.

<sup>14</sup> *The Australian Town and Country Journal*, 27 July 1872, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> *Bell's Sydney Life and Sporting Reviewer*, 2 October 1852, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, *Goldfield songs by Charles Thatcher*, pp. 33-34.

- <sup>17</sup> Lynnette Peterson, 'Reading the Landscape: documentation and analysis of a relict feature of land degradation in the Bendigo District, Victoria', *Monash Publications in Geography*, no. 48, 1996, pp. 14, 43, 53, 96. Peterson has shown that downstream from Bendigo over 700 km<sup>2</sup> of land is capped by a hard-setting 'clay sludge' layer ranging in thickness from a few cm up to 3 m – an environmental legacy of puddling.
- <sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Goldfield songs by Charles Thatcher*, 2001, pp. 35-36.
- <sup>19</sup> Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs*, 1864, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>20</sup> William Withers, *History of Ballarat: from the first pastoral settlement to the present time*, F.W. Niven & Co, 2<sup>nd</sup> edtn, 1887, p. 46. Clare Wright has pointed out that Withers' statement about the men being wifeless is only valid for the early part of the goldrush, viz. late 1851 and early 1852. See, *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2013, p. xi.
- <sup>21</sup> Coxon, *Coxon's Comic Songster*, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>22</sup> Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs*, 1864, p. 48.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
- <sup>24</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended, A History of Australian Mining*, Melbourne University Press, Parkville, 1964, p. 41; Wright, *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, pp. 257-258.
- <sup>25</sup> Coxon, *Coxon's Comic Songster*, p. 35.
- <sup>26</sup> Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs*, 1864, p. 75.
- <sup>27</sup> Coxon, *Coxon's Comic Songster*, p. 22.
- <sup>28</sup> Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs*, 1864, p. 76.
- <sup>29</sup> *Two Years Ago*, 'New Original Song, Written and Sung by Mr. Thatcher at the Bendigo Theatre', Victoria Press, J.N. Sayers, Printer, Melbourne, 1854, 1p.
- <sup>30</sup> Charles Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songster*, Charlwood & Son, Melbourne, 1857, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>31</sup> George Chanson, *The Sydney Songster, No. 1: a collection of new original, local and comic songs*, D. Roberts, Sydney, c.1869, p. 14.
- <sup>32</sup> Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songster*, 1857, pp. 20-21.
- <sup>33</sup> Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs*, 1864, pp. 56-57.
- <sup>34</sup> Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, p. 42.
- <sup>35</sup> John Sherer, *The Gold-Finder in Australia: how he went, how he fared, how he made his fortune*, Penguin Colonial Facsimile, Dominion Press, Blackburn, Victoria, 1973, p. 165. First published by Clarke, Beeton & Co, London, 1853.
- <sup>36</sup> Thatcher, *Thatcher's Colonial Songs*, 1864, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>37</sup> Ron Edwards, *The Big Book of Australian Folk Song*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1976, pp. 195-196.
- <sup>38</sup> Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, p. 52.
- <sup>39</sup> *Empire* (Sydney), 12 February 1853, p. 3. The 'Wentworth' mentioned refers to William Charles Wentworth and 'Thomson' to Deas Thomson, the Colonial Secretary.
- <sup>40</sup> Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, p. 46.
- <sup>41</sup> *Where's your license: a new parody on the Gay Cavalier*, 'Sung with deafening applause by Mr. Thatcher at the Bendigo Theatre', Victoria Press, J.N. Sayers, Printer, Melbourne, 1854, 1p.
- <sup>42</sup> The background to, and consequences of, the Eureka rebellion have been documented in detail by many historians: see for example, Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, pp. 46-58, and Wright, *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, pp. 401-432.
- <sup>43</sup> Hugh Anderson, *The Colonial Minstrel: a biography of Charles Robert Thatcher*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1960, p. 85.
- <sup>44</sup> Raffaello Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade*, The Author, Melbourne, 1855, pp. 104-105, Australian Facsimile Editions, no. 3, 1962.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Golden Age* (Queanbeyan), 21 June 1862, p. 3.
- <sup>46</sup> Charles MacAlister, *Old Pioneering Days in the Sunny South*, Chas MacAlister Book Publication, Goulburn, 1907, pp. 267-268. *The Bail-up at Eugowra Rocks* was reworked from *The morning of the fray* by the English folk singer A.L. Lloyd for his recording of *The Great Australian Legend*, Topic Records, 1971. For the words, see Warren Fahey, *Eureka - the songs that made Australia*, Omnibus Press, 1984, pp. 84-85.
- <sup>47</sup> Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edtn, 1966, p. 153.
- <sup>48</sup> Chanson, *The Sydney Songster*, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>49</sup> Warren Fahey, *Eureka - the songs that made Australia*, Omnibus Press, 1984, p. 78.
- <sup>50</sup> Several Australian folklorists have pointed to the similarity of this song with *The Murrumbidgee Shearer* which appeared in A.B. Paterson (ed.), *The Old Bush Songs: composed and sung in the bushranging, digging and overlanding days*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1905, pp. 93-94. The English folklorist A.L. Lloyd claimed to have learnt *The Maryborough Miner* from Bob Bell, of Condobolin,

NSW, in 1934 (when he, Lloyd, as a young man was working as a station hand in NSW), but from a detailed examination of Lloyd's papers, Graham Seal concluded that Lloyd had reworked *The Murrumbidgee Shearer* '... firstly into a transitional text that he called *The Murrumbidgee Miner*, and finally into *The Maryborough Miner*'. See, Graham Seal, 'A.L. Lloyd in Australia: Some Conclusions', *Folk Music Journal*, vol. 9, 2006, pp. 66-67.