

Existing Evidence of the Gold Commissioner's Camp

Little remains of the camp, however, there are five privately owned houses and one public building which have been identified as dating back to the period when the camp was the administrative centre of goldfields.

1. Camp Reserve: Temporarily gazetted for the Volunteers as a parade ground it was later gazetted for public purposes in 1895.

2. Burke's Cottage: 31 Gingell Street. Built 1854 as a military hospital. It was never used as such, but occupied by Police Sergeants, Robert O'Hara Burke and Francis A. S. Reid.

3. J.E.N. Bull's Cottage: 5 Yandell Street. Assistant Gold Commissioner Bull and his family were early residents of the Camp.

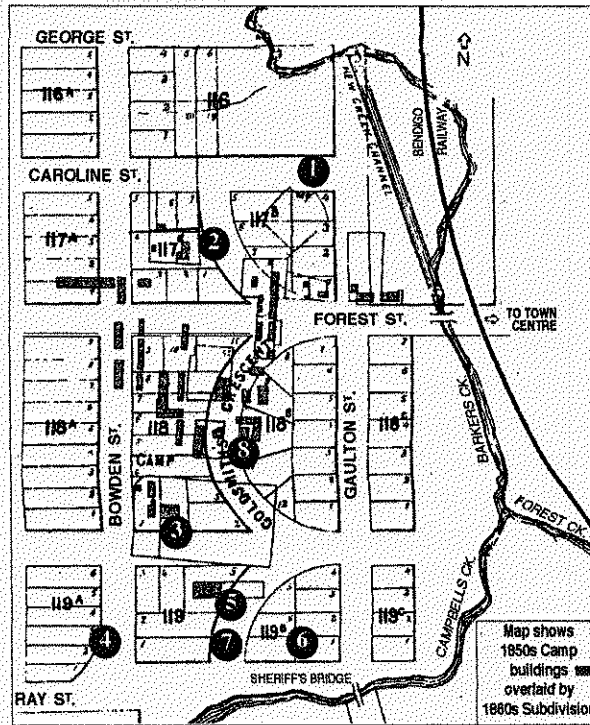
4. James Ah Coy's Cottage: 5 Bowden Street. A Chinese Government Interpreter, he was dismissed after a dubious trial, on conviction of fraud. Family lived there until the 1950s.

5. Military House: 4 Camp Crescent. Built 1854 for Military and occupied by Captain Blythe. It was used by Police Magistrate, Captain Harrison and then Sergeant Acton.

6. Sheriff's Cottage: 1 Yandell Street. Built 1854 for Sheriff Kingdom and later occupied by Sheriff Colles and family.

7. Camp Crescent: Named after 'The Camp'

8. Former Court House: Built in 1852 as a Police Office, it was converted to house the first sitting of the Supreme Court on the Victorian Goldfields in December 1852.



References: VCMHS 2002 20

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Gold Commissioner's Camp (Sublime Porte)



Conducted walks of 'The Camp' can be arranged by contacting:

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Gold Commissioner's Camp, Castlemaine

Gold was found at Specimen Gully in 1851. This was the beginning of the Mount Alexander Goldfields, Forest Creek Diggings and Castlemaine. Dja Dja Wurrung lands and the pastoral district of central Victoria were radically altered when mass immigration occurred. The Government established a camp at the junction of Forest and Barkers Creeks.

Establishment of the Camp

In January 1852, Lieutenant Governor of Victoria, Charles J. LaTrobe, declared the junction of Barkers and Forest Creeks, Mount Alexander to be a place for holding Courts of Petty Sessions. This was the site Gold Commissioner William Wright had established his camp.

Name of Castlemaine

In the early 1850s, this area was variously called; Forest Creek, Barkers Creek, Campbells Creek and Castlemaine.

Buildings

A tent city developed, but was quickly replaced with timber and brick buildings. These were erected to accommodate all Government Departments including Gold Commissioners, Police (foot and mounted), Military (40th & 99th Regiments), Gaol, Sheriff, Crown Lands, Postal and Roads Board. Court sittings were held for Petty Sessions, County and Supreme Courts and later the Mining Court.

Officials

The Camp officials were responsible for the Victoria Goldfields administration. Originally all goldfields reports were sent to Castlemaine then forwarded to Melbourne. Assistant Commissioner Bull's district included Ballarat, Ovens and Sandhurst (Bendigo), while Sheriff Colles' district extended to the Murray River.

Services

Services operated by the Camp officials included issuing of all licences (gold, storekeepers and auctioneers), controlling Gold and Gold Escort offices, church and hospital facilities and maintenance of law and order. By the end of March 1852, the Forest Creek Post Office was centrally located, having been built at the Camp, near the Forest Street ford.

'Sublime Porte'

The Camp however, was the bane of the district residents, storekeepers and miners who were forced to use the official services. All stores and tents erected on the land before the Camp was established were ordered to be removed. This area was to be used solely for officers and barracks.

The *Argus* newspaper ironically used the term 'Sublime Porte' in reports about the Camp. This was the official name for the Turkish government, derived from the high gate giving access to the offices of the principal state department in Constantinople.

Municipality of Castlemaine

Land sales were held in 1853 and the municipality of Castlemaine formed. The new

town developed on the east side of Barkers Creek. The creek separated the general public, the Townites from the officials, the Campites.

End of Commissioners and the Camp

After Eureka and the 1855 Act for the Better Management of the Goldfields, the Gold Commissioners lost their positions. Captain J.E. N. Bull was appointed Warden for the district.

Land and Buildings Sales

The fate of the Gold Commissioner's Camp was in the hands of the Government. Cr Gingell was very vocal on matters pertaining to the camp. He was strongly in favour of dismantling the Camp and reserving the area as a Botanical Gardens. In the 1860s, after years of controversy, the land and buildings (with the exception of numbers 2, 3, 5, 6 & 8) were sold and Camp Reserve created for the use of the Volunteers as a parade and drill ground.

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The Former Gold Commissioner's Camp is of local, state and national heritage significance.

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This brochure is the result of primary research conducted by CHSI members at various repositories in Melbourne. It is part of their contribution to the Celebration of 150th Anniversary of the Discovery of Gold in Victoria.

Research files and a data base are available at the Family and Local Research Centre located at the Former Court House, 7 Goldsmith Crescent, Castlemaine. Open on Tuesdays 9am - 3pm.