

The LampLight

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALLARAT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

VOLUME 12 No. 1

JANUARY—FEBRUARY 2022



Lloyd Jenkins on the history of Ballarat's flooding problems

The Australasian Mine Disaster

The Intriguing Story of the Jewish Synagogue

The President's Word



Welcome to 2022. I hope everyone had a joyous and safe Christmas and, fingers crossed, we trust the worst of this pandemic is at last behind us.

The Society ended 2021 on a high note with our Christmas breakup at Creswick. It was a wonderful day with perfect weather and after visiting the sites associated with the terrible 1882 mining disaster, we all had a lovely time catching up at the picnic area at Calembeen Park. For those who missed this outing I have summarised my notes for the day which you will find on page 9.

The positive feedback we received after this event has led us to schedule another outdoor activity to conclude this year. We plan to end 2022 on Sunday 4th December with a tour of the Union Jack Lead near Buninyong followed by a picnic at the Buninyong Botanic Gardens. Of course, before this, we have some exciting guest speakers lined up for our regular monthly meetings, we will hold another Christmas in July event and I am most excited to announce that the well-known author Robyn Annear has agreed to be the guest speaker for our annual Spielvogel Oration in May.

The Committee is forging ahead with the production of our picture book. We have invited Tricia Curry to join the production team to write captions and provide editing expertise. Tricia will

be a valuable asset to our team.

Donations to help cover costs have begun to roll in and can I extend a huge thankyou to members who have already generously donated. We will soon formally approach leading Ballarat businesses for assistance. All sponsors and donors will be acknowledged in the book and listed on our website. Donations will be recognised under separate categories – Platinum - \$5000+, Gold - \$2000-\$5000, Silver \$1000-\$2000, Bronze \$500-\$1000.

Remember, this will be a photographic record of the past ninety years of Ballarat's history so the very best way members can help is by providing photos we can use.

I am looking forward to meeting you all during the year. Our first event will be a walk around central Ballarat searching for evidence of our mining history. We will begin in the umbrella lane behind the George Hotel at 7.00 pm on Tuesday 4th February and finish at the Pioneer Miners' Monument on the corner of Sturt and Albert Streets.

From March our meetings will be held at the Ballarat North Community Centre at 7.00 pm on the second Tuesday of each month.

Marion.



Society members at the miners memorial at the Creswick cemetery.

Image courtesy of Kevin Williams

Water, Water, Everywhere..

Many people will recall the New Years Eve flooding events of 1992 and 2000 which created havoc and caused tens of thousands of dollars damage. Ballarat has a long history of flooding, and as Lloyd Jenkins recounts in this story from the Courier in 1992 a little planning would have made a big difference.



Cars bob in the floodwater behind SF Motors in Lydiard St Nth. December 10 1988.

Photo The Ballarat Courier

Because Ballarat is placed just a few kilometres south from the Dividing Range, no large rivers are found in the district. Most of the rain that falls in the city and surrounds finds its way into a modest stream known as the Yarrowee Creek.

Having left the Ballarat area, the creek goes upmarket and takes upon itself a more sophisticated title: the Leigh River. It joins the Barwon River at Inverleigh.

A portion of Ballarat North and most of Wendouree sends water in another direction. After passing through Lake Burrumbeet, those waters travel via Baillies Creek, Mount Emu Creek, Hopkins River, to fall into the Southern Ocean near Warrnambool. It is a minor oddity of nature that rainfall from the same basic area can end up at two places so widely separated as Barwon Heads and Warrnambool. At several points around Wendouree, ground water can be seen to hesitate before moving in one direction or the other in street gutters.

The streams that make up the Ballarat drainage network were put there by nature. The adjustments since the arrival of Europeans have been in the main, cosmetic — confining — tidying. The shape of the system remains the same as the Yuille's and their settler colleagues found it in 1838 when they arrived to establish their sheep stations.

It is possible to jump across any of the local streams in off-peak seasons, so modest are they in size. Yet, a sudden storm will turn those same mild streams into surging torrents in a matter of minutes. When that happens, certain pressure points in the network sometimes cannot carry the sudden increase. The result is described as flash flooding, an overflow at the pressure points. The whole thing is usually over in an hour or two, but for those who suffer the direct impact, the disaster and the associated cost is no passing incident. It is soul destroying.

It can be seen in hindsight that certain localities should not have been built upon, but citizens who fall victim to the historical problem take no comfort or satisfaction from that belated wisdom. Mining towns like Ballarat developed swiftly under the all-powerful persuasion of "get the gold and hang the consequences". Houses and shops took their place where convenience dictated and before long it was too late to change it all. A long line of engineers has wrestled with the difficulties ever since. The engineers and their associated councils have borne the brunt of criticism down through the years, criticism that wells up when the system reveals its inbuilt weakness — an inclination towards flash flooding.

In the built-up city area, the Yarrowee Creek and the Gnarr Creek are the culprits. Both have their sources in the high land to the north and north east. The Yarrowee finds its way through Brown Hill, passes across the foot of Black Hill, skirts the Eastern Oval, and disappears under the railway embankment. It emerges for a quick breath of air at Mair St and is not seen again until it has searched out its underground path beneath Curtis St — Bridge Mall — Senior Citizens Club — Eastwood St. A short distance from there, it meets the road channel that has collected water from Ballarat East and Mt Clear. On then past White Flat, the old Woollen Mills and Sebastopol, always with the intention of emptying its load at Barwon Heads.

The other culprit — Gnarr Creek — enters Ballarat North from the area beyond the New Cemetery. It finds its way past the Ballarat North Primary School, crosses Macarthur St near the railway gates, dodges behind the Courier building and meets a friend beneath "Coltmans Chimney". The friend is in fact the overflow from Lake Wendouree. Embarrassed by its tiny size, this stream kept changing its name on the early maps. Swamp Creek, Yuilles Creek, Wendouree Creek, all had a turn.

It is sometimes referred to as Gnarr Creek, an error encouraged by the fact that a street of that name is located not far from the lake outlet.

Coltmans Chimney dates from 1883 when it was built as a breather vent for the two underground creeks at their intersection. The Gnarr Creek was a nasty obstacle as it crossed Lydiard St. until the authorities were able to build a culvert, to eliminate the traffic hazard. The creek channel remained open west of Lydiard St and as recently as 1934, a Courier correspondent found reason to complain about the unsightly piece of land adjacent to the Provincial Hotel where willow trees occupied the vacant banks and channel of the Gnarr Creek. A motor garage was then built in the old watercourse. It stands as evidence to prove that not all of the unwise decisions belong to the previous century. Cars floated there on the last day of 1991.

It is also worth noting that the original plans by architect P. S. Richards for the present Provincial Hotel — built in 1909 — show that the intention was to eventually continue the building across the land referred to above. A portico stood above the south entrance until the 1960s, the idea being that the portico would have become the central focus for the completed structure.

Some plausible stories emerged in the aftermath of this year's New Year weekend floods in that same area. Claims were made that the warehouse buildings, like Dunns (ex MacLeods, ex La Scala), were built prior to the road level being raised thus taking their original footpath level down to a basement type arrangement. Hence the flooding of the present basement areas.

It is an incorrect theory. The present basements always were basements. The present road level was created before the buildings went up (Dunns 1861). Casual observers are misled when they view the vaulting of the basement ceilings immediately beneath the footpath area. The construction allowed for goods deliveries via iron grates in the footpath

above. A few hotels continue that tradition today as beer barrels are delivered. Viewed from inside, the basement vaulting can give the impression of a shop window arrangement and a faulty conclusion about street levels results. An equally convincing, yet equally incorrect judgement could be reached at the Mechanics Institute in Sturt St.

The Gnarr is underground beyond Lydiard St, travels past Reids Coffee Palace (Tawana) and the Railway Station to emerge at the intersection of Mair St and Grenville St. There, a spectator can view the merging of the Gnarr and the Yarrowee. It is a good spot to contemplate the spectacular use of bluestone and brickwork in the Ballarat drainage system. The Gnarr spills its contents from a keyhole shaped aperture that looks rather like the rear entrance to Hades.

The bridge balustrade is a handy grandstand from which to watch action after the big storms as the two torrents attack each other in fury. After a few rounds, they agree upon a truce, join forces, and race off in search of further excitement. Not all streams are named, others are well known such as: Canadian, Specimen, Redan, Woolshed, Bonshaw and Burra Burra. Amongst those, the Redan Creek is the worst trouble maker as it travels through Ballarat South, into Redan in the Talbot St area, to join the Yarrowee beyond Skipton St.

Around the McCallum House locality, the Burra Burra creates problems before it spills over the escarpment when the storms are at their worst. In 1863, a tragic landslide buried a house at the foot of that steep slope. A mother and three small children died. Only the father survived the night-time disaster brought on by a series of storms after midnight. It was 7am before he was found covered to the shoulders in mud and rocks. Very early surveyor plan of the Grenville St area indicates that the site of Whites the Florist, stands squarely in the original bed of the Yarrowee Creek.



Market St traders watch a lone box float down their street. December 31 1992. Image courtesy of the Ballarat Courier.

The plan is quite clear about that and the information was confirmed in the 1930's when an excavation during renovation work on White's building revealed the creek bed. A workman from the renovations who lives today at Delacombe and recalls the details. The firm of S.J. Weir did the work. Many references describe the manner in which the creek regularly spilled its banks to form a shallow swamp "more than one hundred yards wide", along the future Grenville St.

One of the first engineering projects when the municipalities were formed in 1856 and 1857 was to redirect the creek through a timber-lined channel because a commercial hub had centred itself on the most vulnerable flood plain in the whole district. Public tenders were called in 1857 for the cutting of the channel which survives today, upgraded in stone and brick, passing underground alongside the Messer and Opie store.

Gold mining activities created havoc with the natural drainage pattern as the alluvial leads were followed and plundered. The mining communities of that era were conditioned to the messy nature of mining and turned a blind eye to actions which would now create a furore. Mining debris and sludge accumulated here, there and everywhere, inevitably blocking the streams around the diggings. A section of Main Road, near the present Ballarat Building Supplies, was flooded so often it became known in jocular terms as Lake Como.

In Bridge St a rowing boat was kept tied at the side wall of a shop, ready for emergency use. Time after time, mining parties watched helplessly as flash floods swept through the diggings carrying away equipment and destroying weeks and weeks of hard work.



The meeting of the Yarrowee and the Canadian creeks in flood in 2010.

Photo courtesy of Kevin Williams

It took generations of effort and expense to restore the original pattern of drainage. Soon after the turn of the century, the task was, to a large extent, complete and the network of stone and brick channels around Ballarat can be seen as a monument to the craftsmen who put them there. The work is really quite magnificent. Something as hidden and seemingly insignificant as a culvert arch will demonstrate stonemasonry of a quality sufficient to fit the entrance to a cathedral.

However, just as it was with nature's layout, the worst pressure points still bring on great distress in known neighbourhoods. The weaknesses are historic. One recent difference though is the compacted sequence of floods in recent years, that is, less time between, the severest storms year by year.

So unusual is the recent close sequence, explanations are demanded and blame is laid. Councillors are one easy target. Another easy target is a vague entity known as "development". Somebody claims that a certain development in a certain locality brought on a problem. Somebody else finds a different development somewhere else and blames that. Rarely is any solid evidence presented to back-up the theory and when the records are examined, we usually find that the developments changed nothing. The problem pre-existed the development.

The frequency of flash flooding in recent times can be seen as an example of nature's unpredictable behaviour and timing. Flood victims will take no consolation from a statement as clinical as that. They ask for solutions, and we now reach a new dimension in this essay, a distressing one, because the question that confronts the Ballarat population is absolutely basic: "How much will it cost to build a system that will never fail, and where will the money come from?" Scores of towns across the nation ask the same question. Ballarat's dilemma is not an isolated one.



The Anderson St section of the Yarrowee Creek in 2010.

Photo courtesy of Kevin Williams

Therefore it seems unrealistic to expect funding from the Federal level. At the State level, the coffers seem embarrassingly empty, which returns the problem to the local scene, and a slightly different question emerges: "Could that sort of money (amount unknown, but breathtaking probably), be afforded by the citizens of Ballarat?"

On that note, our review of a matter of real concern must end. Local history sheds an amount of light on the subject, but leaves the problem unresolved. Good fortune might cause a longer delay before any recurrence of flash flooding of a severe kind. Such things are unpredictable of course.

In the meantime, the most affected residents will be looking for signs that the subject is being addressed. Those whose responsibility that it is deserve the goodwill and support of the whole population in an extremely difficult task in straitened circumstances. Affordable upgrading in stages would make a lot of sense.

Ron McLean's

Tales from the Goldfields

My first story concerns a rascal, William Derrincourt. He had a lengthy criminal history in England and was sentenced to 10 years transportation which he put down to bad luck rather than guilt. After his arrival in Australia he was convicted of robbing a mail coach and served a sentence of 5 to 6 years on Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour. After his release he decided to try his luck on the gold fields.

While working a cradle one day near the top of a hole, suddenly over the rise appeared a trooper together with the Clerk of the Court. "Have you a miner's right?" He answered "Yes". "Show it to me" "It's down the hole in my waistcoat pocket." "Go and fetch it" Fastening a rope to the windlass he descended, crept into the tunnel and whispered to his mate, "Lend me your miner's right."

As he was ascending the thought struck him "What if he asks me my name as I can't read and I don't know my mate's name, I will be in a fix!" The first question he was asked when he reached the surface was "What's your name?" He answered "I sha'n't tell you my name or show you my right as by your dress I don't believe you have any authority" He was handcuffed and put on the chain and marched back to the camp. The trooper said to the Commissioner "This man refuses to give his name or show his right" In order to get out of the trap and avoid giving a direct answer I said "He doesn't look like a Commissioner, look at his hat" The Commissioner replied "Hat or no hat, if I send someone around to inspect rights, and I find you or anyone defies him, I'll give you the chain my bold Bill Day."

Thus by the Commissioners own words I found out my mate's name on the borrowed right and wriggled out of the scrape. For years after I went by that name.

The second story concerns C.D.Ferguson who took part in the Eureka Rebellion. He was born in Ohio and spent a number of years in Australia. He was among a party of Americans who were at Eureka, and this was causing them a dilemma. They were at the meeting at Bakery Hill when the



licences were burned and were in sympathy with the miners but did not want to play any active part until a blow had been struck. They regarded themselves as foreigners and had no right to be foremost in an attack against the government. This caused much hard feeling against the Americans, the diggers contending it was everyone's affair.

Lalor at last came to the Americans and expressed the desire that they hold themselves in readiness and had no doubt when the time came they would respond with alacrity. After the interview they formed themselves into a company calling themselves the California Rangers with the distinct understanding that they were independent of the others and not under their control.

About 1am in the morning of Dec 3 word had come that some arms had been secreted in a house at Bakery Hill and a detachment was sent out to seize them. They had barely made their way back to the stockade and the alarm was sounded "To Arms!" The first order received was "California Rangers to the front!" The Fortieth regiment were advancing. "We could plainly see the officer and hear his orders when one of our men, Captain Burnette elevated his rifle, took aim and fired. The officer fell. Captain Wise was his name".

This was the first shot in the Ballarat war. It was said by many that the soldiers fired the first shot, but that is not true. W.Hall now living in Sydney was standing alongside of me and next to Burnette when the fatal shot was fired that killed Captain Wise. No sooner did the officer fall when the soldiers were ordered to fire on us, which they did, and then charged. It was now the most exciting time I have ever witnessed.

It was a hand to hand fight. The soldiers were in among us. Lalor was shot in the arm, and Hall pulled off his necktie and wound it around his arm. He was bleeding profusely and before we were through he had fainted from loss of blood. We put him in a shallow hole and covered it with slabs."

Ferguson was an interesting person, he survived Eureka and ended up being hobbled in prison to Raffaello Carboni who confirmed much of his story. He was also a long time friend of Robert O'Hara Burke who invited him to join the ill fated Burke and Wills expedition. He initially joined but decided the expedition was incompetent and resigned and turned back at Cooper's Creek.

Above Image from BHS collection.



Ballarat Historical Society 90th Anniversary Book update

With the success of the City of Ballarat community impact grant of \$10,000 it is full steam ahead on the design and production of our 90th anniversary book, provisionally titled "Ballarat - 90 Years of Memories". As Marion mentioned in her Presidents Report we will soon be seeking donations from selected Ballarat businesses to be partners in the project. Just as importantly, we are also asking members to submit photos from their own collections for consideration and we have included some of the images received so far. If you would like to contribute to this exciting and unique project, please contact the project coordinator Andrew Wallace or any member of the committee.



The Origins of the Ballarat East Town Hall and the Present Synagogue

By Peter Berlyn



Image from BHS collection.

In the address by Doug Bradby at the Mechanics Institute last May, he spoke about the petty and foolish jealousies of the East and West Councils.

This prompted me to remember the story of how the Ballarat East Town Council Town Hall came to be in Barkly Street in the first instance, given that it was the original location of Ballarat's first Hebrew synagogue, built in 1855.

In 1856 the East Town Council wrote to the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation and told it to vacate the site to allow the Town Hall to be built. The honorary secretary, David Benjamin, replied that the Congregation was not moving away for anyone.

The census of 1857 evidenced that the Jewish population of Ballarat was over 300 people, mainly males.

Over the next three years Council wrote again many times and the correspondence was either ignored or David Benjamin replied that 'possession was nine points of the law'.

In June 1859 the Council sent a cheque for 225 pounds as compensation for the building used as a synagogue and Secretary David Benjamin initially refused to bank it.

In September 1859 the Council sold the building for removal for ten pounds and again the Congregation stayed put until the first day of Passover later that year at which time the last meeting was held in the building.

In late 1859 the Government granted the site on the corner of Princes and Barkly Street for the purpose of constructing a synagogue but it came with two miner brothers, Benjamin and Frederick Lloyd as occupiers living in tents whilst they worked their fossicking site across the road.

The brothers refused to leave so in September 1859, Messrs Dyte, Levison and Steinfeld, acting on behalf of the Congregation, took the brothers to Court where the brothers were fined ten shillings each in default a month in gaol. They took the gaol option and upon

release they resumed the site so were taken back to court to be fined five pounds or 14 days in gaol. Public outrage was being applied against the Jews and there was wide spread sympathy for the brothers because they had paid rates and taxes on the site. Eventually a letter from the Department of Lands was produced that expressed that the brothers were entitled to use the land until the Congregation paid them 'reasonable' compensation. There then became another argument as to what each of the parties regarded as an amount that was 'satisfactory'.

Eventually the Trustees of the Congregation paid firstly 20 pounds, then another seven and finally another five. Then it was found that the brothers had sold the land under the Congregation to a Joseph Pope. The Congregation then sued Pope for trespass for which he was fined four shillings and sixpence plus costs. The final cost of the litigation was 42 pounds, eleven shillings and six pence.

The Congregation then called a tender for the construction of the new synagogue using drawings and specifications from an architect. The successful builder was William Barker for twelve hundred pounds.

On the 21st of January 1861 the President of the Congregation, Charles Dyte laid the foundation stone. On the first day of Passover 5621, the building was consecrated.

In a display of equality, Charles Dyte was the first Chairman of the Ballarat East Borough Municipality which was formed in 1855. One can only wonder how he managed the obvious conflicts of interest between his Jewish and Municipal affairs. I suspect the making of an interesting story in itself.

(David Benjamin was my great grandfather and I acknowledge the writings of Newman Rothenthal for this story).

The Creswick Mine Disaster

After the recent visit to the site of the Australasian Mine in December, President Marion Littlejohn has researched the story of the tragedy in which 22 men lost their lives.

(Adapted from *Diary of Disaster, The New Australasian Mine Tragedy Creswick, 1882.* by Leonard Murton Williams)

By 1882, Creswick, had developed into a thriving mining community of 27,000 people. The town was linked to the outside world by rough dirt roads, electric telegraph and the railway from Ballarat and Melbourne.

Rich deep leads ⁽¹⁾ ran to the north of the town but the gold was expensive to extract so large companies were formed. In 1866, the Australasian Company began work but the problem of pumping the underground water out of its mine became so great it closed after ten years.

In 1876 the New Australasian Mining Company was formed and the decision was made to abandon the existing shaft and move the mine 2,000 feet to the north-west. All the equipment, was removed to the new mine site and the old workings filled with water. The mine manager, George Douglas, supervised this move. Douglas was very aware of the problems of water flooding the mine and ordered work to stop at the south end of the new mine when he felt it was getting too close to the old flooded workings.

Unfortunately, George Douglas died suddenly in April 1882 and a new, manager, William Nicholas, was appointed. Nicholas decided it was safe to extend the south drive and contractors began work extending the tunnel.

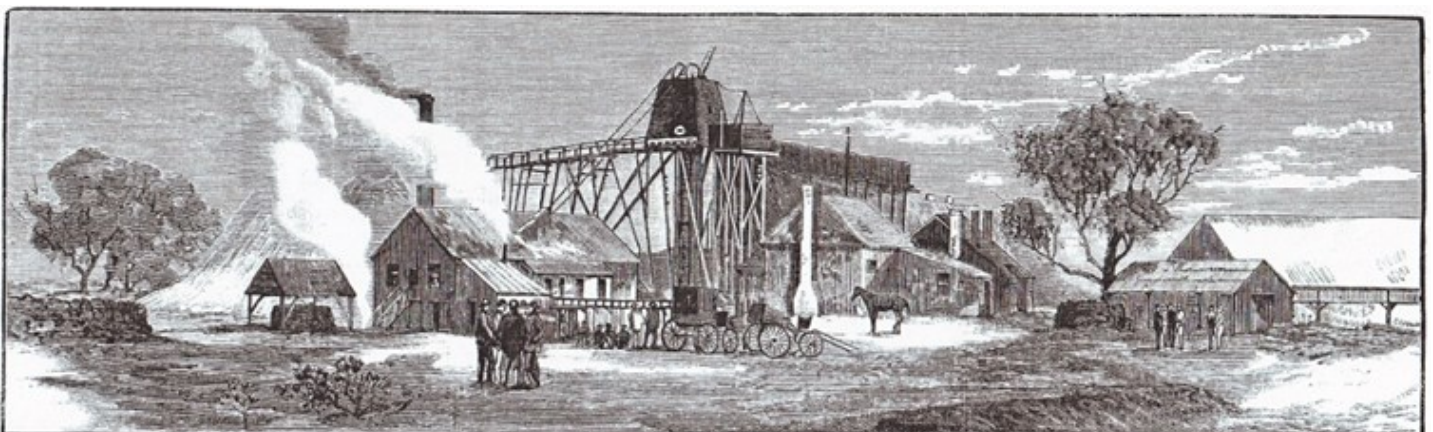
At midnight on 11 December 1882, the men working the night shift at the New Australasian mine descended 250 feet in the cage and walked 2000 to 2500 feet north along the main drive to begin work. At the same time, two contractors Henry Reeve

and William Mason headed in the opposite direction, to begin drilling into the southern rock face. At about 5.30 am with a tremendous sound like the blast from a canon, water burst through where Reeve and Mason were working and poured into the mine. Fearfully they raced back along the tunnel chased by an ever-growing wave of water and mud as they yelled a warning. They only just managed to reach the ladder and climb to safety.

Carmody, the Platman, with huge disregard for his own safety, ran along the main north drive to warn the others, knocking on the air pipes to signal danger. On the way he met John Hodge senior, the captain of the shift, and both men began trying to rescue their mates.

At this point Jabez Bellingham had a chance to escape up the Number 5 rise but instead he pushed his way back, with water up to his chest, to where he knew his brother was working. He reached the trapped men but was unable to return with them to safety.

John Hodge, after giving the alarm ran back towards the main shaft but to his horror saw a five-foot-high wall of water coming from the south drive pushing ore trucks and timbers in front of it. He quickly called to the men to make for the number 5 rise which led up to the next level and safety. By the time Hodge reached the ladder leading up the number 5 rise the water was chest deep and the lights were out.



Shaft No 2, New Australasian Mine – Creswick, 1882 ⁽²⁾

Clinging to the ladder and calling to his men in darkness, Hodge managed to pull six men from the swirling water, before he was forced to leave. One other miner managed to find the number 5 rise in the dark by swimming and pulling himself along the roof of the drive and climbed out unassisted - but he was the last to escape.



Gallant rescue of six miners by John Hodge, senior. Captain of the shift. (3)

Of the forty-one miners working underground that morning 27 were still trapped below including John Hodge's eighteen-year-old son, John junior. Their plight now looked grim. These men struggled through the surging water and debris to the number 11 rise. There they were imprisoned by the rising foul-smelling water. They clung to the roofing timbers in complete darkness realizing that lighting candles would use up the limited available oxygen.

Comforting each other, they prayed, sang hymns, and some scratched farewell messages to their families on their tin billies. With only their heads above water they waited for help to arrive.

Above ground, the noise of the water breaking into the mine was heard and quickly it was realized what had happened. The engineers turned the pumps to full pressure and began frantically pumping water out of the mine, but the water level below ground continued to rise.

As news reached town people converged on the mine and soon thousands gathered around the poppet head anxiously waiting for news.

No one could reach the trapped men, so it was decided to send for navy deep sea divers to take breathing apparatus down to the trapped miners. A special train left Melbourne and hurtled

down the tracks to Creswick. However, due to a series of administrative bungles the divers arrived without enough hose.

A telegram was dispatched for more hose and stronger pumps and this time the train drivers broke all records racing the equipment to the mine. However, the new hose was still too short and it was discovered that there was no more hose anywhere in Melbourne. This whole episode made the government look very foolish and incompetent and drew a lot of public criticism

As the pumps gradually lowered the water level in the main drive, rescue crews, constantly driven back by foul air, worked feverishly to repair the broken air pipes and clear the drive. After two days and nights they reached the number 9 rise but found no bodies or no survivors. It was hoped the trapped men were in one of the other rises but the way was blocked with flood debris and a tumble of ore trucks.

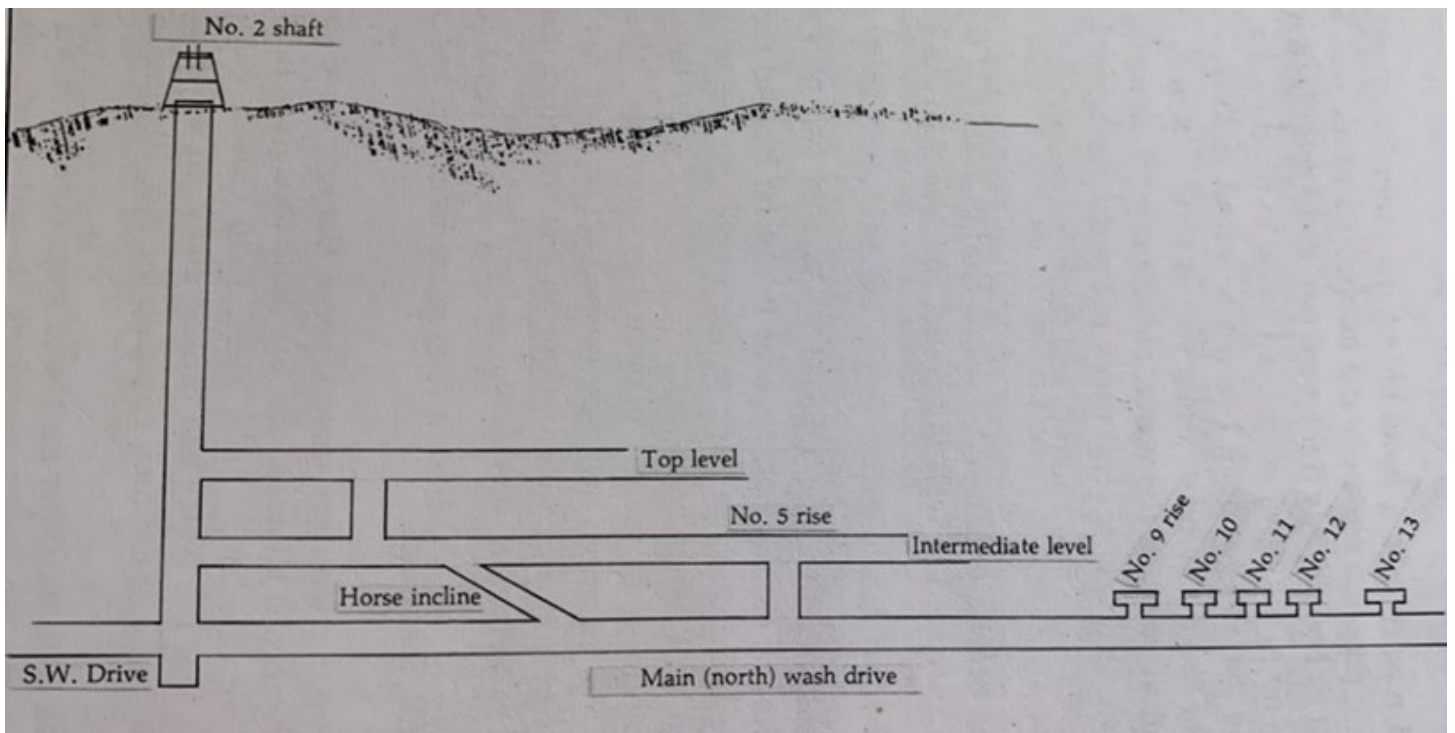
Early on Thursday morning the rescuers reached the number 11 rise and found several men still alive. Word mistakenly reached the surface that all had survived and jubilation spread through the waiting crowd. In Creswick church bells rang and flags were flown on the town hall. But alas, only five men were alive. Twenty-two miners were dead. The two Bellingham brothers were found tied together in each other's arms and the body of William Curtis was still warm, he had died minutes before the rescuers arrived.

Creswick went into mourning and at the funeral 15,000 people lined both sides of the road from the mine to the cemetery. Later a monument for the victims was erected in the Creswick cemetery.

In 1882, W. G. Spence was secretary of the recently formed Australasian Miners Association in Creswick and he believed unions should provide benefits for their members including accident relief. Spence was among the crowd waiting above ground for news. Once the worst was confirmed he visited all the widows handing each of them a cheque for £20 from the union funds. Spence and his fellow unionists helped organize the funeral for the miners and continued to support the bereaved families for many years.

In March 1883 an inquest concluded a mistake in surveying had led to the accident. As a result, better safety provisions in mines, including better signalling and more escape routes became law in 1883.

The tragedy had provoked a huge debate over whether or not the state was responsible for the dependants of victims of disasters or workplace accidents. The deceased miners left 18 widows and 63 orphans. A huge sum of money was donated by the public and a trust fund was created which paid a weekly allowance to the widows and each child until they turned 17.



Longitudinal sketch (not to scale) of No 2 shaft and drives of New Australasian Mine, 1882.

Ref. Williams, L.M., *Diary of Disaster*.

The control of this fund became controversial as not all money donated went to the surviving families and a large sum remained when the fund was wound up. The remaining money was eventually distributed to the Ballarat, Bendigo and Creswick hospitals. In 1949 workers' compensation legislation finally acknowledged the states responsibility in such areas.

For three days the whole nation had held its breath and watched a series of mistakes, administrative blunders, and individual acts of amazing heroism as first hope and then heartbreaking despair overwhelmed the Creswick community.

The tragedy is still the worst gold mining disaster in Australia's history.

Footnotes;

1. Deep Leads; A deep lead is the bed of an ancient river system that has been buried over time by centuries of erosion and volcanic activity. These buried watercourses are still heavy with water and in the Ballarat and Creswick area contain rich deposits of gold.

2. Image courtesy State Library of Victoria

3. Image courtesy State Library of Victoria



Front Cover images

Top left: A downpour on the corner of Bridge and Peel Sts c. 1960's. Kevin Williams image.

Top right: The Yarrowee creek near Anderson St East. 2016 Kevin Williams image

Bottom right: The infamous 1991 New Years Eve flood in Lydiard St Nth. Ballarat Courier image.

Left: The Ballarat Courier front page on January 1 1992.

Jim Wallace collection.

Future Meetings

Tuesday February 8th, 7pm

Walking Tour

Under the Basalt

A walking tour conducted by Marion Littlejohn and Doug Bradby focusing on the Lydiard St Nth area and its fabulous story of gold. Meet at the front of the Umbrella Lane next to the George Hotel.

Tuesday March 8th, 7.30pm BNCC Walker St Ballarat Nth

The Mine Chasers

Raymo Shaw and friends are the Mine Chasers - a group of thrill seekers who climb into abandoned gold mines "just for a look". They take nothing but photographs so as a result they have an incredible series of images of hidden unseen areas. Some of their images show artefacts and equipment left behind after the gold ran out.

The LampLight

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Ballarat Historical Society Inc.

Reg. No. A0007322F

ABN 57 934 755 725

ISSN 1838 6814

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The Lamplight is issued bi-monthly

Membership subscriptions (annual)

Single \$40, Family \$50

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