

AUSTRALIA'S VICTORIAN GOLDFIELDS' WORLD HERITAGE BID: STRONG LINKS WITH CORNWALL – WEST DEVON

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The miners and their wives posing with a replica of the nugget. (Photo: State of Victoria Museum Collection)
www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cornwall-47041314

Fifteen Councils from across the Goldfields in the state of Victoria, Australia are collaborating to put forward a nomination for World Heritage listing. The nomination is similar to the Cornwall – West Devon World Heritage listing, in that it will be for a cultural landscape with a serial listing of about ten sites. Barry Gamble, who played a key role in the successful Cornwall – West Devon nomination in 2005, is working with the Victorian Goldfields team. The team includes staff from Heritage Victoria and the Cities of Ballarat and Greater Bendigo, the two largest local governments, each with about 120,000 residents. The Victorian Goldfields region embraces an area with over half a million people. The extent of the area covered by the nomination is very large; it stretches about 350 kilometres east to west and 200 kilometres north to south.

The links with Cornwall – West Devon are strong. Those putting together the Victorian Goldfields bid have sought advice from people such as Deborah Boden and Ainsley Cocks who have been associated with the Cornwall – West Devon listing for many years. A group including the Mayor of the City of Ballarat travelled a few years ago to Cornwall to hold a series of meetings to learn about World Heritage. In early 2023 I was able to visit many sites in Cornwall and West Devon and meet with key persons. As well as these links, the reminders of the role that Cornish miners played are scattered throughout the Victorian Goldfields. This article highlights many of these links.

In Australia an application for World Heritage listing must first be made by a state or territory government to the Australian government. The 2023/24 Victorian state government budget provided a sum of \$3.8 million over three years to support two World Heritage projects including the preparation of an application for the Victorian Goldfields. The first stage in the process for the Victorian Goldfields will

be a submission by the Victorian government to the Australian government for Tentative Listing. It is anticipated that this submission will be made in 2024. Assuming the Australian government supports Tentative Listing, the Victorian Goldfields could be added to Australia's Tentative List in early 2025 with a full application to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre possible by 2026/2027.

Victoria's Goldfields were fabulously rich. Victoria had the world's largest gold nuggets and by the 1870s the deepest gold mines – over 1500 metres deep. The scale of mining and the amount of gold found captured everyone's imagination. Victoria's goldfields brought hundreds of thousands of people from around the globe, including Cornwall, to try their luck, many became wealthy almost overnight.

In the nineteenth century gold was found in many places around the world, and it built grand cities and new communities. This period of human history has been described as transformative. *"Nothing set the world in motion like gold.... the global rush.... inspired a dramatic burst of movement and energy, affecting the course of world history.... capital, people, and raw materials connected distant areas of the world in a spontaneous, contagious search for gold."*¹

Victoria's historic goldfields now stand in stark contrast to all those other places around the world. We are the only ones still largely intact. As Barry Gamble writes,

*'Victoria's goldfields are quite simply the most expansive and extensive representation of a nineteenth century goldrush landscape anywhere.'*²

Scores of historic cities, towns, and settlements with their grand architecture are scattered across a landscape of gold mining sites and relics; there is nothing else in the world to match it. As well, the whole region displays important Indigenous heritage, together with

¹ Mountford, B., and Tuffnell, S., (2018) *Seeking a Global History of Gold*, in Mountford, B., and Tuffnell, S., (eds.) *A Global History of Gold Rushes*, University of California Press, p.1

² Barry Gamble (2023), *Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value*

THE WHOLE OF THE VICTORIAN GOLDFIELDS IS DOTTED WITH MINING RELICS, ALLUVIAL FIELDS, OPEN CUTS, AND DEEP LEAD MINES

the varied impacts and features from a frenetic period of settlement. A period when gold was literally found lying just beneath the surface and dug up in vast quantities.

The whole of the Victorian Goldfields is dotted with mining relics, alluvial fields, open cuts, and deep lead mines. These together with grand dwellings, and large, out of scale, public buildings and works, were built on the back of the wealth from gold. This amazing urban and rural landscape demonstrates the interplay between diverse cultures; from the Traditional Owners who were displaced from their ancient lands to those Aboriginal People who actively participated in Victoria's gold economy, and the new inhabitants, from places as diverse as Cornwall, California, and China, who had travelled around the world in search of their fortune.

All the components of this region play their distinctive part. But it is the sheer size and scale of the Victorian goldfields, the sum of the parts, the totality of the collection, the diversity of the experiences, which establishes our global importance and prominence. It's a living heritage that commands universal interest and attention and will endlessly reward the visitor.

This extraordinary history and landscape are now being extensively documented. A regionally initiated campaign has gained state government backing for the nomination of the Victorian Goldfields for World Heritage listing. The Victorian Goldfields group of Councils and the Victorian Goldfields Tourism Executive, together with funding from Regional Development Victoria, have commissioned a Sustainable Tourism Masterplan to support such a momentous step. It sets out a comprehensive plan for the inevitable increase in visitors and demands on the region's infrastructure, together with the actions that will realise the opportunities for our communities that global recognition will bring.

Mining in Australia has long been associated with the Cornish, not only in respect to gold. The South Australian government is supporting the nomination of the townships and copper mining relics of Burra and Moonta for World Heritage listing. Part of their proposed listing will be that they are exceptional evidence of Australia's Cornish mining heritage and are a pre-eminent example in the world of the transfer of Cornish culture to another country. Barry Gamble is also working with those preparing that nomination.



The statue commemorating the role of Cornish miners located between the Bendigo Town Hall and the City Library (Photo: Trevor Budge)

Examples of the impact of Cornish miners, technology and culture also abound across the Victorian Goldfields, probably no more so than in Bendigo. Indeed, outside the Bendigo Town Hall stands the monument to Cornish miners, a strong recognition of the role they played and that we owe a huge debt for the knowledge and skills they brought. The plaque reads:

'Erected in appreciation of the endeavours of all underground miners of Bendigo and District who created the economy from which grew a beautiful city, thus leading to further developments and helping to provide



Bendigo Former Fuse Factory in Wattle Street. (Photo: Bendigo Advertiser)

www.bendigoadvertiser.com.au/story/5917329/out-about-in-bendigo-at-easter-is-a-pretty-special-time/

the base for Victoria to become an industrial state. Cornishmen and their descendants form the majority of these miners.

Erected by the City of Greater Bendigo on behalf of its Citizens and the Cornish Association of Bendigo and District 1996'.

Technology transfer from Cornwall is evidenced throughout the Victorian Goldfields. Perhaps nowhere better exemplified than with the former fuse works in Wattle Street Bendigo which was established on its current site around 1878. The Cornish fuse makers, Bickford, Smith and Company bought the business in 1889 and enlarged the factory. The heritage citation states in part.

"The Former Fuse Factory is of historical and architectural importance to the State of Victoria. The Former Fuse Factory is of historical importance as the site of the major 19th century manufacturer of safety fuses for the mining industry ... [it] is of architectural significance as an unusual and prominently located factory building erected and extended over a period of some 30 years. The unusual incorporation of the twin towers and their elaborated mansard roofs over what were once courtyard entries, architecturally distinguish the external appearance of this industrial complex".³

The strength of the Cornish miner presence on the Victorian Goldfields has been well documented by the historian Dr. Charles Fahey who has written extensively on the role of Cornish miners and families in Bendigo.⁴ Through detailed examination of early census records he has identified that in 1881 about one in four households in Bendigo were occupied by Cornish people. Remnants of Cornish settlement can be seen at Harvey Town, a heritage precinct in Eaglehawk part of the broader Bendigo urban area, where several of the houses were built of rubble stone and

the fences were dry stone walled, showing the specific building practices that Cornish settlers brought with them to the goldfields.

Extrapolating from birth registrations, Fahey has identified that of the total population recorded in the census of 1871, there were probably more than 15,000 Cousin Jacks and Cousin Jennys on the central goldfields at this date. By 1881 many native-born Australians had begun to appear as mothers and fathers in goldfields registration returns. Yet the Cornish presence was still high in the major quartz reefing and deep lead towns and cities.⁵

Our best account of this later stream of migration comes from the diaries of Richard Pope (researched by Charles Fahey), who settled at St Just Point on the northern edge of Victoria Hill in 1871. Born at Breage in Cornwall in 1835, Pope migrated for the first time when he turned 21 and mined in the Virginia coal mines, the Illinois silver mines and at the great copper mines of Michigan. The day after his marriage in 1858 he journeyed once again to the US; then, on returning to the British Isles, he joined his father, a mine manager, in Ireland. In 1868, after his father died, he once again migrated, this time to Australia and not as a bachelor sojourner but as a married settler with his wife Mary Anne and family of five young children. His brother Joseph had preceded him, and a sister also settled in the copper triangle in South Australia. After working in the deep lead mines of Ballarat and district, Pope grew tired of erratic employment resulting from the failure of the Ballarat leads. He was never fond of deep lead mining with its dank atmosphere and creaking timbers, so he returned to hard rock mining at Bendigo in 1870. His story was a common one during the boom of the early 1870s.⁶

³ <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/5237/download-report>

⁴ See for example, Fahey, C., (2010) *Peopling the Victorian Goldfields: From Boom to Bust 1851-1901*, *Australian Economic History Review*, 50, (2)

⁵ Fahey, C., (2007) *From St. Just to St. Just Point: Cornish Migration in Nineteenth-century Victoria*, *Cornish Studies* 15(1) pp. 117 - 114

⁶ Charles Fahey (2019) *Happy Valley Road and the Victoria Hill District: A Microhistory of a Victorian Gold-mining Community, 1854-1913* *Victorian Historical Journal*, 90 (2), December, pp. 271-300

Expert John Tully, with a replica of the nugget, says the Welcome Stranger's appeal still resonates today. (Photo: Rachel Buckley)
www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cornwall-47041314



Other researchers such as Dr. Susan Lawrence have focused on the distinctive Cornish mining practices seen on the central Victorian goldfields including the tribute system.

"Cornish tools and techniques also included the use of single pointed picks, bucket pumps, the 'hammer and tap' method of drilling holes in a rock face, the 'Cousin Jack' wheelbarrow and Cornish-designed whims. Cornish skills of shaft sinking, 'stopping', which was the practice of removing ore from underground and leaving behind an open space, and pumping water were also in demand in gold mines."

Discussing the extent of Cornish influence, Lawrences records.

"Victoria was the primary destination for Cornish emigrants in the 1850s. All of Victoria's goldfields had a significant Cornish presence, including a Cornish Town in Ballarat and a Little Cornwall in Bendigo. Early in the rush some 4,000 Cornish miners went to Mount Alexander (Castlemaine), and by the late 1850s up to 17% of the mining population in Bendigo were Cornish. Their expertise in underground mining was highly influential, leading to the widespread adoption of practices such as tributing, where parties of miners bid to work sections of the mine, and the cost book system for structuring investment in mining. Cornish mining engineering was also widely respected and Cornish beam pumping engines were frequently used to drain mines, Tangye engines were used to power machinery and Cornish stamps provided early models of stamp batteries for crushing quartz."⁷

About 50 kilometres west of Bendigo, at a place called Moliagul, two Cornish miners; John Deason, born in 1829 on the island of Tresco, Isles of Scilly, and Richard Oates, born about

1827 at Pendeen, discovered the World's largest gold nugget ever found, only 3 centimetres below the surface! It weighed 110 kilograms and on today's gold price would be worth over US\$3 million. It was named the 'Welcome Stranger'. At the time of discovery there were no scales capable of weighing a nugget this large, so it was broken into three pieces on an anvil. In 2019 the BBC news ran a story about the 150th year celebration-re-enactment of the event where descendants of the two miners celebrated the find. An obelisk commemorating the discovery of the "Welcome Stranger" was erected near the spot in 1897.⁸ A replica of the "Welcome Stranger" is in the Old Treasury Building, Treasury Place, Melbourne. Another is digitally on display at the Central Goldfields Visitor Centre at the nearby Maryborough Railway Station. Another replica is owned by descendants of John Deason and is now on display at the nearby Dunolly Rural Transaction Centre.

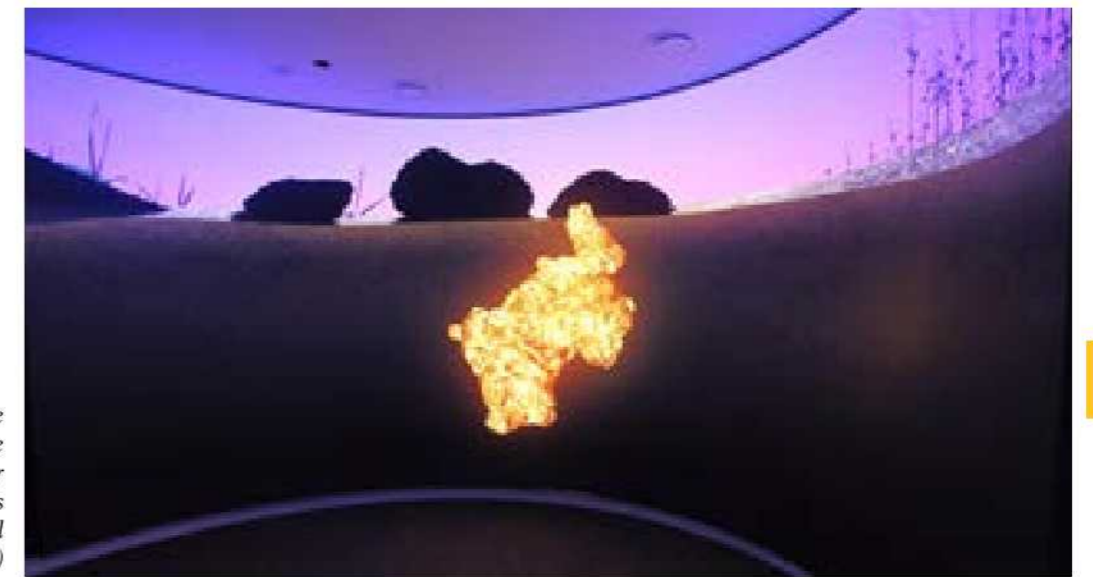
Suzie Deason, is a great-great-great-granddaughter of John Deason and still lives in the area.

She said: "When people hear my name, they always ask me where the gold is, or if I am rich. Unfortunately, I am not, and we haven't even got any jewellery made from the Welcome Stranger."

In the 1850s and 1860s, Moliagul - where the nugget was found lodged in the roots of a tree,



The Welcome Stranger commemorative obelisk at Moliagul. (Photo: Peterdownunder CC BY-SA 3.0)



Virtual Image of the 'Welcome Stranger' on display at the Central Goldfields Visitor Information Centre (Photos supplied by the Central Goldfields Shire Council)

was a booming gold rush town with 11 pubs. Nowadays it is largely a farming community, no shop, no hotel and a handful of houses, but gold speculators are still drawn to the area, known as the Golden Triangle.

There is a statue at Redruth in Cornwall, celebrating the amazing find of the Welcome Stranger nugget.

The town of Maryborough, which is the administrative centre of the Central Goldfields Shire, has recently developed a high-quality Visitor Information Centre at their Railway Station. The Welcome Stranger digital animation has been developed in partnership with the Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners. It tells the story of the discovery of the Welcome Stranger at Moliagul as well as the impact that the gold rush had on Country and Traditional Owners in the region.

The Maryborough Railway Station is by far the most impressive railway station in the Victorian Goldfields. The size and grandeur of

the station is so far out of scale with the town that the famous American writer Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) is reported to have said, when he visited in 1895, that "Maryborough was a railway station with a town attached." An alternative version is that he said, "You can put the whole population of Maryborough into it with a sofa apiece and have room for more".⁹ In some sources Mark Twain was reputed to be of Cornish origins. The family name Clemens is often sourced to Looe. But the Looe Museum disputes this on their website.¹⁰

The Maryborough Railway Station is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. Its citation includes that it is "symmetrical in plan, with flanking pavilions featuring richly decorated gable ends and a balustraded balcony above the entrance portico. The grand booking lobby has a trussed timber ceiling tiled floor, iron gates and ticket windows. The platform veranda incorporates a hipped roof, with continuous louvred lantern along its ridge."¹¹

⁷ Lawrence, S. and Davies, P. (2015) *Cornish tin-streamers and the Australian gold rush: technology transfer in alluvial mining*, in *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 49/1 99-113 p.104

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cornwall-47041314>
<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/from-the-archives-1944-the-welcome-stranger-nugget-20200203-p53x62.html>
<https://www.goldfieldsguide.com.au/blog/14/the-welcome-stranger-gold-nugget>

⁹ <https://yelpar.blogspot.com/2015/07/a-railway-station-with-town-attached.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.looemuseum.co.uk/blogs/was-mark-twain-cornish>

¹¹ <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/692/download-report>

THE MARYBOROUGH RAILWAY STATION IS BY FAR THE MOST IMPRESSIVE RAILWAY STATION IN THE VICTORIAN GOLDFIELDS



Above: Maryborough's impressive railway station. (Photo: Getty Images Christopher Groenhout)



A monument marks the spot where the Welcome Stranger was found. (Photo: <https://monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/technology/industry/display/32657-welcome-stranger-obelisk>)



Right: A replica of the Welcome Stranger in the Dunolly Museum. (Photo: Dunolly Museum) www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cornwall-47041314

The Bendigo Cornish Association was founded in 1913 by Sir John Quick (1852-1932), who was born in St Ives, Cornwall. Perhaps there is no better example than his story of how a young Cornish born lad made it in a big way because of gold. His story has been well documented.

"The family arrived in Victoria in October 1854 and headed for the Bendigo goldfields ... [after the early death of his father] young John attended various schools until he was 10. A series of manual jobs followed—in an iron foundry, battery-feeding in a mine, in the printing room of the Bendigo Evening News before, having taught himself shorthand, he became a junior reporter on the Bendigo Independent and later the Bendigo Advertiser. He moved to Melbourne and in 1874 matriculated. With the aid of scholarships at the university, he graduated LL.B. in 1877 and in June 1878 was called to

the Victorian Bar. Quick played an important role in the federation of the Australian colonies... Elected to the 1897-98 Convention, he was a prominent and vocal member of the Constitutional Committee. Quick was knighted for his outstanding contribution to federation on 1 January 1901. In 1901 Quick was elected unopposed to the House of Representatives for the federal seat of Bendigo. ... [He] was Postmaster-General in the Australian government Deakin ministry of 1909-10."¹²

Sir John Quick continues to be celebrated in Bendigo.

"A self-made man, Quick rose from poverty and obscurity to become one of the 'Founding Fathers' of Bendigo, where he was a legendary hero, erected a bronze bust of him in 1934 in the Queen Victoria Gardens, bearing the motto 'Qui Patitur Vincit' (He who perseveres conquers)."¹³

There is a statue at Redruth in Cornwall, celebrating the amazing find of the Welcome Stranger nugget. (Photo: Angela Crump) <https://min-eng.blogspot.com/2019/05/monster-gold-nuggets.html>



¹² <http://exhibitions.senate.gov.au/pogg/members/quick.htm>

¹³ <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/quick-sir-john-8140>

THE WORLD HERITAGE BID IS SEEKING TO SUPPORT THE CONSERVATION OF THE IMPORTANT HERITAGE OF THAT PERIOD.

The author lived only a few doors away from his former Bendigo home 'Edelweiss' in Hamlet Street in the Bendigo suburb of Quarry Hill for many years and often walked past the small plaque outside the house commemorating that he once lived there.

In the mid-19th century, the Victorian Goldfields was part of a major global mass migration with unprecedented numbers of



Sir John Quick's bust in the Queen Victoria Gardens, Bendigo. (Photo: Trevor Budge)

people coming to the region from around the world. The World Heritage bid is seeking to support the conservation of the important heritage of that period. A major motivation for World Heritage listing is to reap the economic, social, and cultural benefits from a significant increase in tourism that will flow from World Heritage listing plus targeted tourism investment. To support the application a Victorian Goldfields Sustainable Tourism Masterplan is being drafted. The Masterplan includes establishing 'World Heritage Journeys', these are designed to ensure that visitors to the region will be able to explore all the region's heritage and experiences, and that all communities can share the benefits of greater visitor expenditure and generate sustainable local jobs.

The World Heritage bid for the Victorian Goldfields is using a cultural landscape serial listing model approach which provides for recognition and listing of a series of component parts or places that embody the attributes of the Victorian Goldfields. Each of the attributes contribute to a 'Statement of Outstanding Universal Value' - what makes the Victorian Goldfields globally significant. The following is an extract from the draft OUV statement that has been drafted by Barry Gamble.

"The Victorian Goldfields represent the most extensive, coherent, and best-surviving landscape, anywhere, that illustrates the global gold rush phenomenon of the second half of the nineteenth century in all its technological, social, and environmental character and consequences [and] the Victorian Goldfields stands out as exceptional among global goldrushes, and pre-eminent in the context of potential for the World Heritage listing of a representative cultural landscape. Quite simply, it is unparalleled."

A rigorous independent process is being used to identify the possible component parts that would comprise the nominated World Heritage sites. It is anticipated that some of these component parts will recognise the contribution of Cornish miners. For sites to be listed their component parts must be authentic, intact and have a management plan in place which ensures their conservation. An extensive community engagement and consultation process will be undertaken for any proposed sites following the Victorian government's application for Tentative Listing. The World Heritage bid process includes extensive engagement with Registered Aboriginal Parties and Traditional Owners who see World Heritage listing, not only as an opportunity to tell the story of Country but to ensure truth telling and the story of their resilience is told on a global stage.

Ultimately the World Heritage Committee will decide whether the Victorian Goldfields will be listed.

You can find more information about the Victorian Goldfields World Heritage bid at - <https://goldfieldsworldheritage.com.au/>



A RIGOROUS INDEPENDENT PROCESS IS BEING USED TO IDENTIFY THE POSSIBLE COMPONENT PARTS THAT WOULD COMPRISE THE NOMINATED WORLD HERITAGE SITES.