

# Life, Death & Gold in the Whipstick

A story of Raywood and surrounds - retold in 2015



## PAINTING

An Australian Gold Diggings 1855 by Edwin Stockqueler (1829-1900)

Some short descriptions, obituaries and stories,  
written in the 1860s and later,  
by the correspondents of the day,  
describing life in the goldfields of Bendigo's Whipstick,  
centred on Raywood, Neilborough, Sebastian, and Myers Creek.

Ian Belmont 2015

A note from the author.

For a small cemetery in a little town, my booklet did grow somewhat large.

For this I am sorry for the poor reader.

These few stories and obituaries I have detailed show how our early pioneers lived - muddled and stumbled, sustained families and overcame the hurdles that life threw at them.

While not all their decisions and processes were great, we only have today what they made and left for us. And for this, I am grateful to them.

There are 3 accounts of road trips included in the booklet, written by the Bendigo Advertiser's correspondents.

- In 1863 to see the Sebastian field when the conflict with Hugh Glass was in full swing.
- In 1865 just after Raywood became a new borough with the account about the hard times hitting the area.
- In 1874 with a trip to Raywood and continuing on to the land selection area of Terricks.

These 3 examples paint a small picture of what life was like during these times, great examples of the hurdles of the day.

Ian Belmont

9 September 2015

## Life, Death & Gold in the Whipstick:

Some short descriptions, obituaries and stories, written in the 1860s and later, by the correspondents of the day, describing life in the goldfields of Bendigo's Whipstick, centred on Raywood, Neilborough, Sebastian, and Myers Creek.

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## Preface

Raywood was rushed in 1863 and while the discovery of gold was the catalyst for the arrival of thousands of diggers, it was the lack of water which saw the majority of those same fossickers, become disheartened and move on to more viable fields. Some families remained and they formed the nexus of what is today, a close knit, rural community.

Local government commenced with the proclamation of the Borough of Raywood on January 3, 1865. The borough was forced to amalgamate with the Shire of Marong on October 1, 1915, as it was no longer financially viable. I had the pleasure of representing the Raywood and surrounding community, as a councillor with the Rural City of Marong in 1993/94.

It was at my request that Ian Belmont undertook the task of photographing the Raywood cemetery and this work, in both the photographic format, and the accompanying booklet, will prove invaluable to locals, researchers and students of history in general.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Ian, his wife, Pat and colleagues, Tom & Libby Luke, for some years. I have used their earlier works on the cemeteries of the Bendigo region, time and time again, both as a historian and also in my role as a researcher with the former Bendigo Cemeteries Trust, now Remembrance Parks Central Victoria.

It is impossible to stroll through any burial ground and not be touched by sadness as you read the inscriptions on the weathered memorials. Your curiosity is also often aroused, as you wonder –

'who were these people and what did their lives entail?'

A favourite poem of mine is the Dash. This talks about a person's lifespan, the years between their date of birth and date of death.

As he photographed the memorials at Raywood, Ian began to wonder about those dashes and so undertook research to learn more about the residents of Raywood and district. As any genealogist knows, once you start researching, there is no end, and so Ian's small booklet has grown to be much larger than he envisaged, but in doing so provides us the reader with more fascinating data.

I congratulate Ian on a job well done and have no hesitation in commending this work to anyone with an interest in Raywood and the surrounding area.

Bev Hanson

12 September 2015

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## **A Story of Raywood and Surrounding Communities Retold in 2015**

This booklet commenced with the compilation of the Raywood Cemetery burial list project. The notes describe the story of Raywood and the surrounding small townships through the obituaries and stories of the men and women of the time, some of whom are buried in the Raywood Cemetery.

The obituaries and stories were mainly sourced from TROVE, a National Library of Australia project that among its many activities include the digitising of newspapers co-ordinated through the Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program.

The surrounding areas, centred on Raywood, are just to the north of Eaglehawk in Bendigo (but south of Pyramid Hill) and they include:

Auchmore, Calivil, Dingee, Drummartin, Kamarooka, Koondrook, Mitiamo, Mologa, Myers Creek, Neilborough, Sebastian, Summerfield, Sydney Flat, Tandarra, Terrick Terrick, Woodvale, Yallock and Yarraberb.

Some names have been changed over the years and there are other small cemeteries in this area as well. Like Calivil-Pompapriel Cemetery, Durham Ox Cemetery, Mitiamo Cemetery, Pine Grove Cemetery and Yarrayne Cemetery.

Area name changes:

- Sydney Flat to Woodvale
- Seven Mile Flat to Sebastian
- Elysian Flat to Neilborough
- Summerfield to Neilborough North in 1901 but reverted back in 1924.

The cemetery records detail many people who lived in these areas and were buried in the Raywood Cemetery. Their stories tell the history of the development of these communities which commenced with the pastoral/agricultural activities during the 1840's. Then mining activities with gold the main driver of European migration to Bendigo and other gold-field areas of Victoria in the 1850's and 1860's. This growth in numbers saw the region develop transport and communications links to service the people.

### **The First People**

Prior to European settlement it was open forest country occupied by the Yulowil balug clan of the Barababaraba. They had an estimated population of 50-150. By 1869 there was only one remaining. One of their place names was Nerring now used as a parish name. It means green mallee.

### **Pastoral Origins of the Region**

#### **Weddikar**

Campbell's Forest was named after Donald and Roderick Campbell, the first squatters on the Bullock Creek P.R. They had taken up the 'Weddikar Run' before 1845, after which it was taken on by Messrs Nicholson and Thomas Myers. This partnership was dissolved on 23 July 1849, when the run was transferred to William and Thomas Myers. The large land owner Hugh Glass had land holdings of up to 30,000 acres over many parts of Victoria. His freehold title of land in 1863 in an area called Seven Mile Flat would cause many problems and delay to gold exploration at that time.

*(Note: what does **P.R.** mean? In 1842 regulations made under an Imperial Act of Parliament (UK) came into force and the land squatters with leases could at any time purchase (at £1 per acre) the freehold title of any or all leased land of up to 640 acres. This was called a **Pre-emptive Right** or **P.R.**)*

#### **Auchmore Estate**

The Auchmore Estate was north of Raywood and was first settled by the Campbells.

This well known Estate was also licenced to John Aitkin from 1846 who became a very large landowner. It was later licenced to G & J Mouat and others.

The following was owned by John Aitkin: Ravenswood and Auchmore, both extending out of the Marong Shire, Terrick Terrick West in the Mitiamo district and Barwon Leigh 18 miles from Geelong.



Figure 1 Auchmore Estate

This estate comprised 20,000 acres and was excellent grazing and wheat growing land. Major Mitchell of historical fame passed through this Estate in 1836, camping in the vicinity on July 8th of that year.

### Yarraberb (The Yarraberb Estate)

The original Station of Yarraberb was taken up by Mr George Mouat (and licenced to his son James Mouat from 1846), and consisted of some 60,000 acres. He became an Australian wool King and his son James wrote the famous book "The Rise and Fall of the Australian Wool King".

With two successive drought years in 1854 and 1855 and owing to a lawsuit in 1859 with Mr Govitt, holder of the Tandarra run, about a dividing fence, James's large fortune dwindled down till he was obliged to sell his station. James Mouat was the first Chairman of the Municipality of Eaglehawk (1862–1863). While James Mouat's cemetery plaque uses the term 'President', the title name was 'Chairman'.



Figure 2 The Eaglehawk Cemetery plaque on the grave of James Mouat

Mr Gavin Duffy purchased the land from James Mouat and, in turn, the Wilson Bros (Charles and Alexander) bought from him in the early sixties. A son, Mr Harold Charles Wilson (1860-1940), who lived in England owned 20,000 acres of the old station. His brother Mr Aubyn Wilson was in occupation for a few years before his early and regrettable death in 1934. He died in Raywood, was cremated and his ashes taken home to Scotland to be interred at the Moulin Churchyard, Balnakeilly Estate, a part of the Wilson/Stewart family for several hundred years.



Figure 3 Yarraberb Station in 1895

Mr G S Douglas was a Manager of Yarraberb which was noted for the Merino wool produced and the excellent crops of cereals grown chiefly by share farming.

A story told by Mr John Robertson, 82 years old and a resident in the locality. He describes the day "a remarkable procession of 20 camels with Indian drivers piled high with packages, coming down the road." This was the famous Burke and Wills expedition of 1860. This same track was used by Cobb's Coaches to run between Swan Hill and Bendigo and all the wool from the Northern part of Victoria was dragged over it by bullock teams where often the wagons were wheel deep in mud.

### **Interview with the widow of pastoralist William Myers**

A good reference to the pastoral properties and the origin of the name for Bendigo is found in an interview in the *Bendigo Independent newspaper* printed in 16 April 1887.

The Local Dawn of Civilization - A pre-auriferous pioneer

A lady is at present on a visit to Sandhurst as the guest of Mr And Mrs Stamp of Long Gully, who was beyond doubt the first European woman to reside in the district now called Bendigo, and who possesses also a better understanding, because personal knowledge, of the neighbourhood during the few years preceding the discovery of gold than any person we know at present alive.

We refer to Mrs Catherine Hayward, of 'Charleville', Royal Park Brunswick. There is nothing in the lady's [sic] present name to arouse the immediate attention of old or young Bendigonians, but when we explain that Mrs Catherine Hayward's first husband was Mr William Myers, from whom Myer's Flat and Myer's Creek derived their titles, it will be apparent that in pre-auriferous days the venerable lady and her family filled no small space in the society of the district, such as it was. They were in those days, monarchs indeed of all they surveyed, their flocks of sheep and their cattle and horses wandering over an extent of country limited only by the necessity of keeping up communication with their water supply, which of course was the Myer's creek.

As it is not often that one can hold communication in Sandhurst with a colonist whose experiences with those of her first husband go back for nearly 47 years, a member of our staff yesterday did himself the pleasure of interviewing the lady. As is customary with ladies in general, Mrs Hayward was not anxious that her name should attain prominence in a public journal. But on her friend, Mr Stamp, assuring her that anything which might appear in the *Bendigo Independent* would not contravene the laws of good taste, and would be read with interest by very many throughout the district, she courteously consented to be 'interviewed'.

Briefly the story of the settlement of Bendigo, as gathered from the wife of our earliest settler, is that two brothers, named William and Thomas Myers, natives of Bootle, in Cumberland, left England early in 1839. The late Mr Grice [of Grice, Summer and Co.], another of the earliest Victorian settlers, was from the same town, and was an intimate friend of the two brothers. Mr Thomas Myers, after landing in Port Philip, was the first to proceed to the interior and take up the tract of country afterwards known as Myer's station.

Shortly he was followed by Mr William Myers, and in the first of the 40's they were safely established amongst the early squatters. It was not, however, till a few years before the discovery of gold that Mrs Myers joined her husband on the station. Prior to her arrival she states that the blacks were both numerous and dangerous, in one fight with them Mr Grice receiving three spear wounds to his body. That was however, the most serious of the quarrels with the blacks, for on her arrival in 1850 they were most friendly, and to the number of about 200 - men, woman and piccaninnies - treated her to a complimentary corroboree by way of welcome to the homestead over which she was to be presiding mistress.

Though not at all lonely in regard to the aboriginal visitors to the station, there was in those days a great dearth of European neighbours. The nearest neighbour was Mr Campbell, of the Bullock Creek hotel and station, four miles away, and the next nearest was Mr John Catto, of the Loddon, whose homestead was 15 miles distant. The Mouat Bros., then held the Yarraberb station, but Mrs Hayward does not appear to have been well acquainted with them. There were some settlers along the Campaspe, but as the country was a wilderness between, she knew none of them personally until later years.

There was a squatter, named McIntyre, who seems to have been in possession of the country about Kangaroo Flat and Big Hill. In those early days [1839 to 1850] the country was all open as far as Swan Hill and beyond, and where every inch of it is now selected in small holdings of 320 acres, great stations were to be taken up by anyone who had the capital and the courage to face solitary life and the blacks.

The Messrs Myers seem to have prospered excellently well until the breaking out of the goldfields. Theirs was a sheep station, and the headquarters were about the site now known as Buzza's paddock, some distance below the Sydney Flat police station. The grazing land was excellent, and over 40 years the Messrs Myers cultivated wheat, oats, and barley with success. They had three separate paddocks of those cereals, which they cropped for several years, and were thus the first who put a plough in the soil of Bendigo.

Touching on the origin of the present name of the county of Bendigo, Mrs Hayward - it will be read with pleasure by those who do not quite relish the idea of our district having been christened after the famous or notorious pugilist, is positive that it had nothing whatever to do with that celebrity. There is a tradition amongst us that the Messrs Myers had in their employ a hut keeper who was continually, and whenever travellers came in his way, talking of the victories of the pugilist. He became known far and wide for this propensity [so the legend says], and eventually was himself nicknamed 'Bendigo', and through him the whole district. But Mrs Hayward takes the romance out of this tradition by asserting that there was no such man on the station.

She explains that the term originated thus wise: The best grass was in the bends of the creek and in directing the aboriginal shepherds it was customary for her husband and brother-in-law to tell them to 'bendy-go', meaning of course that they were to go to the bends. 'Bendy-go' thus became a standing order on the station, and when the first diggers arrived they soon seized it as the name of the goldfield, but adopted the orthography of the English pugilists name. It is, therefore to such an accident as this that the district owes its name, a name which will probably survive when the present century has become a period of ancient history for future generations of the hundreds of millions, who according to Mr Hayter, are to compose the Australian nation.

Early in 1851 gold was found near Ballarat, then at Forest Creek. The country was aflame, but as yet the Messrs Myers were able to carry on their station work without difficulty, as their men did not care to leave, until they were certain that the real metal was to be got in abundance. However, in a very few months they were in the thick of the gold fever.

One day in November 1851, two men rode up to the homestead, enquiring of the road to Melbourne. Mr William Myers put them on the track, and in conversing with him the travellers informed him that they had just found gold down the creek. At first Mr Myers would not credit it, but next morning, on the advice of Mrs Myers, he rose out to see if there was anything in it. He was

disagreeably astonished after traversing the creek for some distance, to come upon a party of about fifty diggers.

Where they had come from, or how the news had spread so rapidly, he could not tell. But there were the diggers, and as the days went past, swelled to thousands, and before the end of the next year there were about 50,000 or 60,00 stalwart men on the station, and it's neighbourhood, digging for gold with more or less success - principally with success.

The station property was ruined. Wages for ordinary station hands went up to a pound a day, but as sheep also rose in proportion, this might have been borne had the army of diggers left any water for the sheep to drink. It was summer time when the first diggers appeared, and in the following summer of 1852 water in the creek was so scarce that the police, under Superintendent Gilbert, had to be called on to prevent the diggers leaving the station without a drop of water, Besides this, sheep stealing and horse and cattle lifting was prevalent, so much so that in 1852 the brothers were compelled to abandon the station and return to Melbourne.

Amongst Mrs Hayward's reminiscences is a visit which in 1852 the late Dr Backhaus paid to the station shortly after he came to Sandhurst. Young Bendigo had already begun to make its presence noticed; there were several infants whom the Rev gentleman had to baptise.

The good lady's memories of these early times is almost as clear as if she had recently left the district, instead of 35 years [a whole generation] having passed since the struggle between the diggers and the sheep for water, when the general overturning and upsetting of affairs led to the abandonment of their homestead at Myer's Creek.

## Roads

The earliest roads were the tracks linking the pastoral head stations with their out stations and shepherds' huts. The discovery of gold precipitated an urgent need for better roads and bridges, leading to the formation of the Marong Roads Board at Lockwood in 1861. The Raywood rush of 1863 created a need for adequate roads through the Whipstick. The drainage and formation of Raywood's streets commenced in the following year along with a road through the Whipstick via Sydney Flat. The road was surveyed in 1854 and it was one of the earliest roads, forming part of the Bendigo to Murray Road.

Tolls were collected at Big Hill although the earlier and more circuitous route via Crusoe Road was also available to Bendigo Traffic. At Ravenswood, the police paddock was a changing place for the Cobb & Co. coaches and a stopping place for the gold escorts.



Figure 4 Pall Mall Sandhurst 1857 - Photo by Alexander Fox

This photo shows the Cobb & Co booking office in Pall Mall Sandhurst in 1857, looking towards McCrae Street with Abbots Hotel among the buildings on the right. The Cobb & Co sign is on the top right side of the photo, above the Tobacconist sign.

Before the construction of railways, Bendigo was serviced by a network of coach lines. At Raywood, in 1864, the Cobb & Co's daily was run from Bendigo via Huntly and Elysian Flat, returning via Sebastian to Bendigo. By 1908 Shelbourne and Maldon were still linked with Laanecoorie and Tarnagulla by coach and there was a second route from Bendigo to Tarnagulla.

From about 1864, government subsidies were directed to the Kangaroo Flat-Newbridge via Woodstock and Lockwood road, at the expense of the Eaglehawk to Bridgewater road. Much of the Road Board's (early name for the Shire of Marong) funds were committed to bridge construction.

### Communications

The Electric Telegraph was a communications break through, upgrading the communication network (the mail run) supplied by Cobb & Coach (Cobb & Co stage) travel.

Bendigo was connected to Melbourne by telegraph in 1857 and it was from Sandhurst that the first message reporting the deaths of Burke and Wills was sent on 29 June 1861.

By telegram, Electric Telegraph, Submarine Cable or cablegram was a common by-line used in the newspapers of the day. The photo of the coach and horses bogged in a creek was taken just after the first telegraph was strung from Melbourne to the Bendigo Goldfield, but was later than the Cobb and Co era. Nevertheless, it reflects the conditions of the bush track from Melbourne with the four horses floundering in the small creek between Kangaroo Flat and Big Hill.



Figure 5 Goldfields coach. Photo from 'The Gold Mines of Bendigo' circa 1862

### What was "The Whipstick"?

The Whipstick is the name applied to the low hills stretching north from Eaglehawk to Raywood in the west and Kamarooka in the east. The hills are covered by a low dense Mallee Scrub which formed an impenetrable barrier to prospectors when gold was discovered at Eaglehawk in 1852. It was the southern boundary to a great flat land spreading north to the Murray River called Thunder Plains but there was very little natural water which restricted its development. In the spring time, the barren Whipstick is a place of great beauty with a great variety of wild flowers and wattle. Myers Creek and Bendigo Creek were the only main watercourses for the northerly flow of water.

The back cover page of William Perry's book "Tales of the Whipstick" in 1975 gives the following description.

*The Whipstick — the scrub covered solitude a few miles north of Bendigo in Central Victoria, remains almost unchanged since the days of gold when it echoed the sounds of many a rush. In the 1850s its famous White Horse Gully yielded some of the biggest nuggets of the day. Through the Whipstick, diggers poured to the Myers Creek, Elysian Flat and Sebastian Diggings that were opened on its outskirts. Later again, gold seekers were attracted to its richly studded reefs.*

*Shanty towns sprang up and as quickly disappeared. It was cruel, inhospitable country regarded with awe by the diggers and as a place of mystery. As might be expected, it generated many a strange tale:*

*— stories of hidden reefs, of robbery and violence, of death by thirst and famine, of quaint characters such as Whipstick Bob, Black George, Louis the Dane and others.*

### **Gold discoveries in the Whipstick**

The gullies in the immediate vicinity of Eaglehawk were found to be extremely rich. Workings quickly spread to Sailors Gully and to the north:

Sydney Flat, Wellington, Fiddlers and Napoleon Gullies. There, the Whipstick forest slowed the diggers.

It was another twelve years before miners cut their way through the scrub to begin prospecting at Kamarooka, 22 km to the northeast. The lack of water in the area, and the difficulty in penetrating the scrub led to considerable loss of life and hardship. The stories of the determination of the diggers and their suffering are now local legend.

Numerous large nuggets were found in the Whipstick, and the discovery of rich reefs also attracted considerable attention, these were not worked to any great depth however.

#### **Rushes and gullies in the Whipstick.**

##### **Lightning Hill**

Produced numerous large nuggets, in particular the largest ever found in the Whipstick. This nugget came from White Horse Gully, weighed 573 oz and was found only a few centimetres from the surface.

##### **Flagstaff Hill**

It is situated near the Neilborough Road 1.5 km north of Scotchmans Gully. The hill was extensively worked, being very rich. A stone hut ruin can still be seen north of the hill.

##### **Adelaide Hill**

Much of this hill has now been removed for road gravel. It was once quite intensively worked, despite its extremely hard cemented conglomerate. Rushes occurred in 1858 and 1880. A shallow lead was found on the northern side of the hill, and consequently a small settlement sprang up to service the diggers.

##### **Beelzebub Gully**

This was one of the first areas to be prospected in the Whipstick. It was originally called Wetington Gully, now this name only refers to a tributary gully. The gully was found on the sides of the rises, rather than on the flats. Many old ruins remain, including an old Chinese camp located where Beelzebub Gully joins the head of Sydney Flat.

##### **Napoleon Gully**

Here a puddler named Jordan found a 28 oz nugget in his machine.

##### **Nuggety Gully**

Amongst the many nuggets found here was one weighing 116 oz.

##### **Red Jacket Gully**

Eight of Red Jacket Gully's nuggets weighed between 27 and 176 oz. The area was worked from 1855 to 1864.

Some other gullies were Blue Jacket, German Gully and One Eye, where a one eyed man got twenty seven ounces of gold in a patch. In May 1856 surfacing at Canadian Hill was opened up and a few weeks later Dead Horse Gully, Centipede and Sydney Flat depopulated the other places round