

Proposed Exhibition Details

Title: *Love, Blood and Gold: Chinese and Irish on the Australian Goldfields.*

Opening Date: Exhibition opening date to be confirmed by the museum. However, I strongly recommend opening on *6 July 2023*, to coincide with the wedding anniversary of Katherine McKenna and Sam Hyson: an Irish-Chinese couple who were married in 1875. See report for further details.

Closing Date: I would strongly recommend this exhibit be set up as a *permanent display*. If this is not practical for the museum, I would suggest closing no earlier than *twelve months* after the opening date. This will give as many people as possible a chance to learn about the importance of interactions in these locations, and alter for the better the public's perception of the Australian goldfields.

Report Summary

Australian history in the nineteenth century is dominated by the goldfields of Victoria and New South Wales, where thousands upon thousands came to seek their fortune. Until very recently, much of this history has focused on the experience of the European miners, especially the predominantly Irish “rebels” of the Eureka Stockade in Ballarat. However, no history of the Australian goldfields would be complete without including the experiences of Chinese gold miners, or the ways in which they laid the groundwork for modern, multicultural Australian society.

On the surface, it would seem that the Irish and the Chinese had much in common: many came from large, impoverished families, many were fleeing conflict and both groups of people maintained strong cultural ties to their homelands^{1 2}. Despite this, the experiences of the Chinese and Irish in Australia could not have been more different. While the Irish suffered some persecution at the hands of the British colonial government in Australia, they had more freedoms here than in their homeland; the Chinese, on the other hand, were subject to racial persecution, systematic exclusion, constant government harassment and interference, and policies designed to isolate them or drive them out.

The attitudes of white Europeans towards the Chinese in Australia has much in common with English attitudes towards the Irish in Ireland. As many miners in Victoria and New South Wales were Irish immigrants, or the children of such people, they might have been expected to be empathetic towards the Chinese, but (as this report will demonstrate), such attitudes were far from the norm. In two locations discussed in this report, Bakery Hill and The

¹ Victorian Collections, 'Many Roads: Stories of Chinese on the Goldfields', *Victorian Collections*, Victoria, 2017, <<https://victoriancollections.net.au/stories/many-roads-stories-of-the-chinese-on-the-goldfields#story-info>>, (accessed 20 October 2022).

² Sovereign Hill, 'The Irish Influence on Ballarat', *Sovereign Hill Education Blog*, Victoria, 2014, <<https://sovereignhilledblog.com/2014/07/09/goldfields-immigration-3/>>, (accessed 20 October 2022).

Cosmopolitan Hotel, the Irish went out of their way to exclude and (in the case of the latter) violently harass and even murder the Chinese. However, there were exceptions and the third location discussed here, St. Mary's Cathedral, gives us a glimpse at the love lives of those Chinese men who partnered with Irish wives.

The locations I have recommended for *Love, Blood and Gold* cover the whole spectrum of human emotion and experience: love, hate, passion, desire, ambition, disappointment and determination. These are the ideas I would suggest the exhibit focus on, the human experience of people struggling to survive far from home in a harsh land. All were drawn by the lure of gold, but, as each location demonstrates in its own way, having a common aim was not enough to prevent human nature, in all its strength and frailty, from running its course.



Golden Point Ballarat, and flat, with part of Black Hill as in July 1853, Eugene von Guérard, 1874

Bakery Hill

“We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties.”

- Peter Lalor and the miners at Bakery Hill

In 1854, Ballarat was still a booming gold town, although it was simmering with tensions between the miners and the goldfields administrators. The exorbitant licence fee brutality of the goldfields police (not to mention the lack of public facilities) was bringing many long-standing grievances to a head.³ It erupted in violence following the death of a Scottish miner and culminated in a bloody battle between a small group of miners and heavy armed British soldiers on 3 December 1854 that would later become known as the Eureka Stockade.⁴ This event would go down in Australian history as the day democracy was born on our shores.⁵ But this simplistic take of the affair leaves out something very important. Ballarat was a multicultural place and nearly “every country of Europe and America”⁶ was represented at the Bakery Hill monster meeting on 29 November 1854 that kicked off the building of the infamous stockade. Every nationality *except* the Chinese.

Unlike the other two locations in this report, there was no interaction between the Chinese and the Irish at Bakery Hill in 1854; none of the Chinese at Ballarat ever came close to the Eureka Stockade or were involved in the monster meetings that preceded it.⁷ However, I believe Bakery Hill *is* a significant location for Chinese/Irish interaction on the goldfields, precisely for the fact that it *didn't* happen when it *should* have happened.

All the major complaints of the Ballarat miners who met at Bakery Hill were also complaints made by the Chinese. These were “laws which excluded [miners] from [owning] land, being represented in the Legislative Council, and imposed upon them an odious tax.”⁸ Despite these words having been said by Irishman Peter Lalor, they could have come from the lips of any Chinese miner. Indeed, between 1856 - 1858 they *would* come from the Chinese, when they addressed multiple petitions to Governor Henry Barkly asking him to abolish the Immigrant Tax and the Resident Tax.⁹

³ Peter Lalor, ‘To the Colonists of Victoria’, *The Argus* (Melbourne), 10 April 1855, p. 7

⁴ Peter Fitzsimons, *Eureka: The Unfinished Revolution*, William Heinemann, Australia, 2012, p. 456 - 480

⁵ Nathan Spielvogel, ‘Pages From Our Past: The Affair At Eureka’, *The Lone Hand*, vol. 10, no. 58, (1912), p. 321

⁶ Nathan Spielvogel, ‘Pages From Our Past: The Affair At Eureka’, *The Lone Hand*, vol. 10, no. 57, (1912), p. 185

⁷ Spielvogel, ‘Pages From Our Past’, no.58, p. 317

⁸ *The Argus*, 10 April 1855, p. 7

⁹ Anna Kyi, ‘Finding the Chinese perspective: Locating Chinese petitions against anti-Chinese legislation during the mid to late 1850s’, *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, vol. 8, (2009).

Interestingly, despite having been unwelcome at Bakery Hill, by 1857 they would (briefly) be supported in this campaign by Lalor himself. By 1857, Lalor was an elected representative of the Legislative Council and opposed taxes on the Chinese as they “would affirm the principle of slavery, with the imposition of a license tax on [a] class of people.”¹⁰ However, while he opposed the taxes, Lalor’s support for the Chinese went no further and his colourful promises of freedom from tyranny came with a particular caveat: for white men only!¹¹

So, while Bakery Hill was not a site of direct interaction, it demonstrated the racial chasms between both groups. Despite having the same grievances, the same enemy and the same desire to fight back against the injustices they were subjected to, Lalor and his white allies at Bakery Hill were unable to overcome their own prejudices (latent and overt) and recognise a common ally. Bakery Hill was a moment when racial hatred *could* have been overcome, but the men instead fell back on old principals they claimed to abhor. This is what makes Bakery Hill an integral site in Irish/Chinese colonial history and I recommend using it to explore the themes of racism, injustice and colonial attitudes towards immigration if it is included in the exhibit.

¹⁰ ‘Legislative Assembly 25 September 1857, Chinese Resolution’, *Bendigo Advertiser* (Bendigo), 28 September 1857, p. 2

¹¹ Fitzsimons, *Eureka*, p. 589 - 591

St. Mary's Cathedral

“One can see at a glance that there has been a blending of Caucasian and Mongolian blood - the former asserting its natural superiority.”

- The *Empire* newspaper describes the daughter of an Australian woman and a Chinese man, 1861

For the next two locations in this report, we leave Victoria and travel instead to the goldfields of New South Wales. Like in Victoria, New South Wales saw an influx of immigration from all over the world following the discovery of gold in Bathurst in 1851¹². Among these were many Chinese miners who were often subject to racism, prejudice and frequent violence. However, while Bakery Hill was a story of exclusion, and the Cosmopolitan Hotel (explored below) one of outright violence, St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney was the scene of some of the most poignant interactions between Irish and Chinese anywhere in Australia.

This was because, for many years, it was the closest Catholic Church to the goldfields that would marry interracial couples.¹³ This is significant for Irish/Chinese relations as many Irish on the goldfields were Catholics and their religion was a central part of their lives and identities. It is not surprising, therefore, that they tended to marry other Catholics in Catholic ceremonies. The Chinese, for the most part, worshipped a wide pantheon of gods drawn from ancient traditions and more recent Buddhist teachings.¹⁴ However, those Chinese men who married Irish Catholic women at St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney universally converted to Catholicism.

Unfortunately, due to the stigma and prejudice against interracial couples and their children present in Australia at the time, many families chose to hide their Chinese heritage¹⁵ and those records that exist tend to be patchy and full of racist and sexist stereotypes which do more to illustrate the fears of the colonial elite than to give us a glimpse into the lives of Chinese men and their European wives.¹⁶ However, it is through the story of Catherine McKenna and Sam Hyson (Hy-Sung?), who were married at St. Mary's Cathedral in 1875, that I feel we can gain the most insight into these relationships and is the primary reason I have recommended St. Mary's as site for the exhibition.

Hyson was McKenna's second husband and he converted to Catholicism less than an hour before marrying McKenna in 1875. Despite this hasty conversion, the pair had been living together for at least nineteen years before their marriage, as Hyson was helping McKenna

¹² 'Gold Discovery in New South Wales', *The Cornwall Chronicle*, 25 June 1851, p.394

¹³ St. Mary's Cathedral, 'History of the Cathedral', *St. Mary's Cathedral Sydney*, Sydney, St. Mary's Cathedral, www.stmaryscathedral.org.au, (accessed 15 October 2022)

¹⁴ Museum of Chinese Australian History, *Finding Gold*, permanent exhibition, visited 11 October 2022

¹⁵ Kate Bagnall, *Golden Shadows on a White Land: An exploration of the lives of white women who partnered Chinese men and their children in southern Australia, 1855-1915*, Ph.D., Sydney, Australia, 2006, p. 11

¹⁶ Bagnall, *Golden Shadows*, p. 4 - 6

raise the three children she'd had to her first husband and the third of these children was born while McKenna and Hyson were known to be living together. They had four children between 1859 - 1868 and McKenna remained legally married to her Irish husband until his death in 1869.¹⁷

Given St. Mary's was prepared to marry such storied characters as Hyson and McKenna, and was known to be tolerant of interracial couples, I feel it is the perfect location to discuss the nature of sexual and romantic relationships between Chinese men and Irish women on the goldfields. These relationships formed for many reasons and, while the newspapers and official documents tend to record them with something approaching horror, disgust and a touch of malicious delight, many more of the recorded interracial marriages lasted than fell apart in New South Wales according to census data¹⁸ seeming to disprove the racist colonial myth of the helpless white woman seduced by the wicked Chinese man. It is an excellent location to bring to light this often overlooked part of Irish/Chinese history.

¹⁷ Bagnall, *Golden Shadows*, p.94

¹⁸ Bagnall, *Golden Shadows*, p.311

The Cosmopolitan Hotel

“The accusations of ‘inciting people to sedition’ and of feloniously destroying Chinese property, I confess rather amuse me.”

- James Torpy, 1861

The final location I propose the exhibition explore is the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Young, New South Wales. The Cosmopolitan Hotel, owned by Irish-born miner turned businessman James Torpy, was the setting in which many of the meetings which later led to the infamous Lambing Flat riots took place.¹⁹ Torpy’s heritage ensures that this location remains within the remit of the exhibit’s focus on Irish/Chinese interactions.

The Cosmopolitan served as something of a community centre for the town of Lambing Flat and Torpy was well-known. Unlike the other Irishmen and women discussed in this report, Torpy was a Protestant and a very wealthy man. He had been a successful miner and opened the pub with money he had made from gold.²⁰ He was stridently anti-Chinese and was a founding member of the Miner’s Protective League, an anti-Chinese group which attempted to persuade the then Premier Charles Cowper to remove the Chinese from Lambing Flat.²¹ This was one of the many anti-Chinese interactions that took place either in Torpy’s pub or between Torpy and other members of the community regarding the Chinese at Lambing Flat.

Following a particularly bloody clash between Europeans and Chinese at Lambing Flat in July 1861, in which one European and an unknown number of Chinese were killed²², Torpy was selected by the Miners’ Protective League to go to Sydney and present to the governor of New South Wales the men’s perceptions of the Chinese, “of the evils entailed on the hard-working population by their presence... the unsuitableness of the intermingling with the European population; their filthy and abominable ways [and] the curse they were in general.”²³ Instead, Torpy was arrested in connection with the riot he had helped start, although charges were later dropped with the prosecution’s witness (a Chinese man) could not be found. Torpy returned to his hotel and continued to whip up hatred and incite violence until it was discovered in 1862 that he had sold £3000 worth of shares in a mining claim to a

¹⁹ Deirdre Morris, 'Torpy, James (1832–1903)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/torpy-james-4736/text7863>, published first in hardcopy 1976, (accessed 21 October 2022).

²⁰ Brian James, 'History of Young with Brian James: Torpy, Gold Miner and Publican', *The Young Witness* (Young), 18 June 2018.

²¹ 'Lambing Flat', *Goulburn Herald* (Goulburn), 9 March 1861, p.2

²² 'Lambing Flat', *Empire* (Sydney), 25 July 1861, p.4

²³ 'Memorial Meeting at the New Rush', *Examiner* (Kiama), 6 August 1861, p.3

Chinese company.²⁴ He lost much of his credibility among the miners after this, and chose to sell his hotel and leave Lambing Flat.

In my opinion, the Cosmopolitan Hotel serves as the perfect backdrop for examining European violence against Chinese miners. As discussed in the report summary, many Irish had a lot in common with the Chinese and might have been empathetic to them, but Torpy did not just exclude them like those at Bakery Hill, but openly despised them and could have been an accessory to mass murder. His pub was the place where the riots against the Chinese were planned, where the men formed committees whose sole purpose was to drive the Chinese out of Lambing Flat by any means, and violence was not only discussed here, but obviously encouraged.²⁵ I believe it is perhaps the best location in Australia to use to showcase how anti-Chinese sentiment formed on the goldfields, and combat the notion that these events often erupted spontaneously.

²⁴ Deirdre Morris, 'Torpy, James (1832–1903)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/torpy-james-4736/text7863>, published first in hardcopy 1976, (accessed 21 October 2022).

²⁵ James Torpy, 'The Chinese Question', *Empire* (Sydney), 10 August 1861, p.8

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