

## REFIGHTING THE EUREKA STOCKADE: MANAGING AND MARKETING THE HERITAGE OF A DISSONANT BATTLEFIELD

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### Abstract

On December 3 1854 British troops attacked a group of rebellious miners at a rudimentary stockade on the Ballarat goldfield in Australia. The battle only lasted 15 minutes, but its meaning and significance have been vigorously debated for 150 years. The various interpretations of the Eureka Stockade include it as the birthplace of Australian democracy, a catalyst for republicanism and radicalism, or as minor bourgeois tax revolt. Similarly the Eureka Flag (the Southern Cross) has excited various and conflicting passions.

This paper examines the dissonant, contested and fragmentary nature of the main tourist developments associated with the Eureka Stockade. These include the Eureka Stockade Centre (which aims to provide a 'non-political' interpretation); the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery (which holds the Eureka Flag); the use of Eureka for destination branding of Ballarat and the conflicting interpretations conveyed in the recent 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Festival.

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# REFIGHTING THE EUREKA STOCKADE: MANAGING AND MARKETING THE HERITAGE OF A DISSONANT BATTLEFIELD

## INTRODUCTION

I think it may be called the finest thing in Australasian history. It was a revolution – small in size, but great politically; it was a strike for liberty, a struggle for a principle, a stand against injustice and oppression. It was the Barons and John, over again; it was Hampden and Ship-Money; it was Concord and Lexington; small beginnings, all of them, but all of them great in political results, all of them epoch-making. It is another instance of a victory won by a lost battle (Twain, 1897: 195).

Battlefields signify much more than military conflicts. Wars have their origin in ethnic, social and political contests and these continue well after the fighting of the battle. Accordingly, much of the interest amongst visitors to battlefields is in the continuing meaning and significance of historic battles to modern societies. These meanings depend on the differing perspectives of the visitors. The growing literature on battlefield tourism has been mainly concerned with the difficult issues of managing and interpreting highly contested heritage sites (Chronis, 1995; Gold and Gold, 2003; Henderson, 2000; Lloyd, 1998; Patterson, 1989; Seaton, 1999 & 2000; Slade, 2003; Smith, 1998; Whitacre and Greene, 2005). As such battlefield tourism may be seen as primarily characterised by *heritage dissonance*.

Tunbridge and Ashworth coined the term *heritage dissonance* to describe situations where heritage provoked amongst various stakeholders a 'discordance or a lack of agreement and consistency' (1996: 20). The term dissonance originally denoted music played in contrasting and jarring styles. The analogy is most apt for battlefields, suggesting the differing military bands of the opposing armies. Most importantly, dissonance 'is intrinsic to the nature of heritage ... It is not an unforeseen and unfortunate by-product of the heritage assembly process' (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996: 21). However, Tunbridge and Ashworth paid little attention to battlefields, just noting that they were 'usually rather difficult to ... interpret to visitors' (1996: 116) and 'it is remarkable that very few are in fact commemorated effectively or at all' (1996: 117).

Militarily, Australia's Eureka Stockade was a minor and one-sided affair, hardly deserving much consideration as a battle. Gold miners at Ballarat, protesting at high licence fees and government corruption, took up arms, raised the Eureka Flag (or Southern Cross) and constructed a rudimentary stockade. They were quickly routed by British troops. Their leaders were tried for treason, but were acquitted by juries (Hocking, 2000; Molony, 1984). In contrast to its military insignificance, its broader meaning and importance has been hotly debated for over 150 years. What were the miners trying to achieve? How revolutionary did they intend their protest to be? What was the impact of their stand on Australia's political development? Following Eureka, the British introduced political reforms. Were these the result of Eureka or would they have occurred anyway?

Less openly asked, there are also questions of who are the present-day stakeholders, what are their objectives and how do they influence interpretation and visitor perceptions? For battlefield sites, such stakeholders include (but are not limited to): heritage attraction and site managers, local, state and national governments, destination marketing organisations, local historical and community groups, ethnic and political organisations, historians, filmmakers, artists and descendants groups. Also of great importance is the media, which may provide a forum for competing perspectives, or indeed promotes its own agenda.

The Eureka Stockade provides a valuable case study for examining issues of heritage dissonance. While militarily insignificant, its modern-day battlefield is highly complex. Numerous stakeholder groups hotly contest its meaning. Some claim exclusive ownership of the symbols and values of Eureka. Two main heritage attractions compete for the attention of visitors and for the possession

of the key artefacts. The actual site of the battle is still debated. Media representations vary and often reflect modern concerns.

In examining the contested nature of Eureka this chapter is divided into five parts. The first begins by considering how and why battlefields are typically dissonant tourist sites. The second discusses the utilisation of Eureka for the destination marketing of Ballarat and the contested nature of the resulting branding. The third examines the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, symbolically sited on the British camp, but holder of the rebel's Eureka Flag. The fourth considers the Eureka Stockade Centre. Sited on the battlefield (though this is disputed), its potential as the focal point for tourists is limited by a lack of artefacts and internal disagreements over interpretative themes. The concluding part speculates on the management implications for such a dissonant site.

## BATTLEFIELD DISSONANCE

Much controversy surrounds the management of heritage interpretation. Some are greatly troubled by the subjective choices taken by managers. For Lowenthal, history was factual, 'real' and unchanging. In contrast, he characterised much heritage interpretation as biased and 'bad history', at its worst 'a partisan perversion' (1998: 102-3). For Hewison, heritage was often 'a distortion of the past' which promoted 'fantasies of a world that never was' (1987: 10). Timothy and Boyd described history as 'the recording of the past as accurately as possible', whereas heritage was 'often the re-creation of the selective past' (2003: 4 & 237). For the USA, Loewen (1999) catalogued a large number of historic sites, including battlefields, where the interpretation was so one-sided he considered it lies.

However, there is also an increasing recognition of the validity of diverse perspectives, even if this provokes conflict (Frost, 2005; Howard, 2003; Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996). This dissonance is further amplified by the role of the visitor. Chronis, writing of the Gettysberg battlefield, argued that interpretation was a *co-construction* between visitors and tour guides:

Tourists are not passive readers of the text. Rather, they are actively engaged by using their prior background, negotiating, filling gaps, and imagining. Hence, service providers do not simply teach history and tourists do not only learn about the past (2005: 400).

Eureka Stockade is a striking example of a dissonant battlefield. There is no single historical interpretation which one can say objectively is true. Instead, in a recent historiographical survey David Goodman identified five distinct schools of thought amongst historians as to what Eureka meant (see Figure 1). The wide range of conflicting interpretations about the meaning of Eureka is a common theme in academic and popular writing on the battle (Beggs Sunter, 2001; Blainey, 2004; Button, 2004A & 2004B; Molony, 2004; Wright, 2004).

**Figure 1: Schools of historical thought as to the meaning of Eureka**

<b>Liberal</b>	Birthplace of Australian Democracy. A fight for freedom against oppressive government.
<b>Radical Nationalist</b>	Fight for Australian Nationalism and independence from Britain.
<b>Sceptical Left</b>	Pessimistic view, little long term benefit for workers.
<b>Conservative Revisionist</b>	Democratic reforms were not caused by Eureka, they would have happened anyway.
<b>Capitalist Triumph</b>	The miners were independent small capitalists protesting against bureaucratic government interference.

Source: Goodman, 1998.

It is this complexity of meaning which makes Eureka important. Battlefield sites such as Gettysberg, Culloden and Little Big Horn represent conflicts between two opposing forces, but these forces are clearly identifiable (North versus South, English against Scottish, US Cavalry fighting Native Americans) and their perspectives are therefore more easily understandable to visitors. However, Eureka stands apart. It was not a battle between different ethnic, social or religious groups. Nor was it a revolution or civil war. The dissonance at Eureka arises not from any tangible differences between the opposing forces, but the ease in which visitors may adopt quite differing views as to what the protagonists were fighting for.

To understand this dissonance, it may be useful to consider two examples of seeing Eureka through a North American lens. The first concerns Mark Twain. After the nineteenth century American humourist and travel writer visited Eureka he enthusiastically compared it to the American War of Independence. His glowing appraisal represented not only his genuine admiration for the Eureka rebellion, but also stimulated him to reflect on his own country's pioneering history (Shillingsburg, 1988: 101). Twain's enthusiasm for Eureka may be contrasted to his visit to a New Zealand memorial to British soldiers in the Maori Wars. Reflecting that the British were the aggressors and the Maori were defending their homes, Twain scornfully described it as 'the most comical monument in the whole earth' (quoted in Shillingsburg, 1988: 170).

A second comparison is with the Alamo in Texas (for a coverage of this battle see Davis, 1999). The Alamo has three main similarities with Eureka. The defenders saw themselves as upholders of the constitution. Faced by professional troops they were quickly overwhelmed by a night attack. Despite the one-sided nature of the loss the defenders were ultimately successful in their struggle. However, all similarities are swept aside when we consider that the Alamo was a battle between Spanish-speaking Mexicans and English-speaking Americans. Today, the Alamo may be thought of in terms of ethnicity, imperialism and ongoing inequities. The meaning of Eureka is equally contested, but on differing grounds.

## **THE BATTLEFIELD AS DESTINATION BRAND**

In the period leading up to the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Eureka in 2004, the City of Greater Ballarat adopted a destination brand linked to Eureka. Versions of this destination branding combined Ballarat and Eureka followed by slogans such as 'The city that changed a nation', 'A turning point in the growth of democracy in Australia' and 'Discover the birthplace of the Australian spirit'. The extensive publicity for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was branded 'eureka spirit' (sic) and 'Eureka 150: diversity, dissent, democracy'. Such destination branding is highly unusual, not only in its utilisation of a battlefield, but also in the application of that battlefield's name to an entire destination and its marketing program. Given the dissonance which surrounds Eureka, adopting this brand is contentious and risky.

Choosing Eureka as a destination brand represents a refreshing reversal of current trends in regional destination marketing. Nowadays many Goldfields towns are opting for standardised and sanitised destination brands based on lifestyle and shopping, with cultural heritage more as an ambient setting (Frost, 2006B). Where heritage is retained as the destination image, it is often represented in safe and non-threatening terms. An example of this may be seen at Australia's other nineteenth century battlefield, the site of Ned Kelly's Last Stand (Frost, 2006A). For years the surrounding region was known as Kelly Country. However, in 2006 it has been rebranded as 'Victoria's High Country' and the emphasis shifted to the mountain cattlemen portrayed in the film *The Man from Snowy River*. Ned Kelly - republican, Irish, lawless - has been replaced by the hard-working, respectful Man from Snowy River, even though Kelly was a real person and the Man only fictional.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Comparisons between Ned and the Man are more fully explored in my paper to the TTRA Conference, Dublin, 2006 – which will be released as a working paper in early 2007.

Adapting Eureka to a destination brand and slogans raises questions of what is meant and what image is being promoted to visitors and the community. Where the brand, particularly the idea of a Eureka Spirit, has been elaborated upon it is clear there is a broad diversity of meanings.

For the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the official guide to the event contained a number of quite different interpretations of what these slogans meant. In their introduction, the guide's compilers emphasised nationalism:

Eureka was a defining moment in Australia's history that left a legacy of freedom, social democracy and cultural diversity. It provided many of the foundations on which contemporary Australian society is built. Next to Gallipoli, Eureka is Australia's most talked about armed struggle (Eureka 150, 2004: 2).

A message from Steve Bracks, Labor Premier of Victoria, took a different perspective:

Eureka has become a potent symbol of the right to democratic protest everywhere ...The principles for which the diggers fought are universal-human rights, justice and tolerance. These principles are as relevant today as 150 years ago (Eureka 150, 2004: 4).

The Minister for the Arts focussed on cultural diversity, writing that 'Eureka itself was a true cultural melting pot, where ideas, hopes and histories met. It's that energy and innovation that we want to particularly celebrate' (Eureka 150, 2004: 5). A fourth interpretation came from the Mayor of Ballarat, who wrote that, 'Eureka was the birthplace of the Australian notion of the "fair go"' (Eureka 150, 2004: 6). A fifth perspective came through an omission, the Commonwealth Government not contributing its view.

For the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, a long established promoter of Victorian tourism, turned to the historian Geoffrey Blainey. The politically conservative Blainey took the opportunity to refute the interpretations of the Labor Government and the destination branding strategy for Eureka. He wrote:

Some politicians even argue that Ballarat in 1854 was the birthplace of democracy in Australia. Such an argument is pretty hard to accept. South Australia, with a quiet and law-abiding population and no goldfield worthy of the name, gained what we call democracy at exactly the same time as Victoria (Blainey, 2004: 20).

## **THE FLAG IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP**

Throughout the Goldfields, administrative camps were established on non-gold bearing ground. At Ballarat, the government camp symbolically overlooked the diggings. In 1854 it was the base for the British troops and fears that it would be overrun by the diggers led to the pre-emptive strike on the Eureka Stockade. The centre of urban and civic development, it is today graced by probably the finest grand late nineteenth-century streetscape in the world.

The Ballarat Fine Art Gallery sits atop the site of the government camp. Its main attraction is the Eureka Flag or Southern Cross. When the British troops overran the Stockade, the flag was cut down by a Constable John King. He kept the flag as a souvenir and in 1895 his family donated it to the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery (Button, 2004B: 10). It was kept in a closet for many years, before being put on public display in the 1970s.

The ownership of the flag is highly contested. As the Eureka rebels were acquitted, the flag should have been returned after the trial. John King had no legal claim to the flag and accordingly no right to donate it. With the 1998 opening of the Eureka Stockade Centre (see next section) it was argued that it was far more appropriate to display the flag on the site of the battlefield (Molony, 2004: 2). The counter argument was that the Gallery has been the custodian for over a hundred

years. Commercial considerations also apply. The Eureka Flag is the main reason visitors come to the Gallery, its removal would seriously affect its viability.

There is an intriguing dispute over who designed and made the flag. The commonly held view is that it was sewn by three women and they are increasingly being elevated to a prominent role in discussions of Eureka (Beggs Sunter, 2004; Button, 2004B; Wright, 2004). Less romantically, it is argued that it was sewn by a local tent-maker (Beggs Sunter, 2004; Button, 2004B).

A second issue of contention is the Gallery's organisation of the Dawn Lantern Walk, held annually on the anniversary of Eureka. This commenced in 1993 and follows the circuitous route taken by the soldiers from the camp to the Stockade (Beggs Sunter, 2001). Eureka's Children, a descendants organisation, labelled the walk as, 'offensive in the extreme because it commemorates the march and attack by soldiers on innocent men, women and children' (quoted in Beggs Sunter, 2001: 56). In 2001, Eureka's Children created a rival dawn walk, following the movement of the miners from their earlier meeting place on Bakery Hill to the Eureka Stockade (Button, 2004B). Further controversy erupted in 2004, when the walk organisers asked the father of an Australian prisoner in Guantanamo Bay to lead and address it. In response the Federal and State Governments and the City of Greater Ballarat all distanced themselves from the event (Anon., 2004).

## **QUESTIONS OR ANSWERS? A HOLLOW CENTRE**

The miners held their protest meetings at Bakery Hill, an intimidating location less than a kilometre from the government camp. It was here that they raised their flag and swore an oath to defend their rights and liberties. However, following this defiance of the authorities, the miners retreated a kilometre and a half to a gully known as Eureka and constructed their rudimentary stockade. The stockade's existence was so brief, that in later years there was disagreement amongst veterans as to where it was actually located (Harvey, 1994). Such dissonance over the location of sites is common, as for example in the case of the Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado USA (Whitacre and Greene, 2005: 61).

Over time a series of celebrations and monuments were focussed on a reserve that became known as the Eureka Stockade site. These included a formal stone monument flanked by cannons, a diorama and a reconstructed stockade (Beggs Sunter, 2001). In 1998 the Eureka Stockade Centre was opened on what was held to be the authentic site of the battle. Though still located within the reserve, it was slightly away from previous monuments. The centre was built at a cost of \$4 million provided by government grants. Since then it has struggled financially and has not attracted visit numbers at the planned level.

Its problems are twofold. First, it lacks sufficient authentic and evocative artefacts. In particular, it does not have the Eureka Flag. This leads to the confusing situation that visitors need to be directed to drive over two kilometres away from the battlefield site to see the battle's relics. Without artefacts the displays within the centre lack interest. This incongruity is emphasised by the centre's gift shop selling souvenir copies of the flag and contemporary paintings, even though they are not available for viewing at the centre.

The second issue is that in order to secure government funding, centre management had to promise to provide a 'non-political' interpretation of Eureka. Accordingly the centre provides a straightforward narrative of the events of Eureka, but without any information on its meaning or effects on Australian history. This combined with the lack of artefacts gives an unsatisfactory hollow feeling to the centre.

Moscardo (1996) argued that cultural heritage attractions needed to encourage *mindfulness* amongst visitors. Mindful visitors, she argued, were 'active, interested, questioning and capable of reassessing the way they viewed the world' (Moscardo, 1996: 382). To achieve this, effective

interpretation needed to be 'multisensory ... personally relevant, vivid or affectively charged ... unexpected or surprising; [and] questions are used to create conflict or ambiguity' (Moscardo, 1996: 384). The interpretation at the Eureka Stockade Centre lacks the provocation required to stimulate and satisfy its mindful visitors.

This dissonance is well illustrated by thoughts on its role expressed by dignitaries at the opening of the Eureka Stockade Centre. The centre manager, Jan Penney, was reported as saying that she:

Will make no apologies to visitors who leave the new centre with unanswered questions about the battle and its impact on society. She will actually be pleased if they leave more confused than when they arrived. "I'd like them to go away with a whole lot of questions," Dr Penney said (Anon. 1998).

In turn, the then Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, proceeded down the exact opposite path. He argued that the most important duty of the new centre was that, 'it must leave the visitor with no question unanswered' (Kennett, 1998).

## MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The Eureka Stockade provides a number of management challenges. Significant resources have been invested in developing attractions and adopting Eureka as the destination brand for the city of Ballarat. However, the visitor experience is fragmented. Two attractions claim the visitor's attention. One is on the site of the battlefield, but lacks artefacts. The other, over two kilometres away, holds the major relics but is ironically situated on the site of the British camp.

Furthermore, interpretation of Eureka is profoundly affected by dissonance as to its historical and contemporary meaning. In an ideal world, 'cultural heritage requires a community-based perspective, where the community that 'owns' the cultural attraction collectively decides' (Timothy and Boyd, 2003: 179). However, at Eureka the community stakeholders are fiercely divided, take the concept of ownership quite literally and are unlikely to reach a collective consensus. Nor is the visitor passive. As Chronis (2005) found at Gettysberg, they co-construct interpretation based on their pre-existing values and beliefs.

Three scenarios are possible for the further management and development of this battlefield. The first is that there is a strong possibility of atrophy. The use of the battle in the destination branding of the city is a high-risk strategy. The temptation will always be to abandon this and return to a safer option. The problems associated with the Eureka Stockade Centre may lead to decreased funding from government sources.

The second scenario is for some form of intervention. Advocates of an imposed solution see legal or government action saving the Eureka Stockade Centre by moving the Eureka Flag from the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery (Button, 2004B; Molony, 2004). Such a move, it is argued would re-unite the battlefield site with its iconic symbol. However, given the gallery's reluctance to part with its most important attraction, such a plan is only likely to be achieved through the heavy hand of government and would exacerbate existing divisions. Furthermore, it is difficult to see the value of bolstering one attraction at the expense of another.

The third possibility is for management plans to incorporate and utilise the dissonance which is such a part of Eureka. Rather than opting for a single, supposedly safe, 'non-political' interpretation, the opportunity exists to embrace the variety of perspectives. Interpretation which highlighted dissonance, which was mindful and provocative, could increase visitor numbers and satisfaction. Such a path was tentatively ventured upon during the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, though it did upset some stakeholders. Perhaps it is time to move on from ideas of a homogeneous community *owning* heritage and recognise that communities are heterogeneous and dissonant.

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