

Cultural Landscapes Study of

Creswick Goldfields Area

for

AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**We can think therefore we are able to see an entity called "landscape"**

**YF Tuan**

The study

**The purpose of this study is to**

(1) Examine aspects of the heritage value of the Creswick gold fields area. The particular aspects to be examined are those which can be illuminated by the notion of " a cultural landscape"

(2) The second aspect of the study is to establish guidelines by which cultural landscapes can be employed in recommending places for Listing on the Register of the National Estate

The study was prepared for the Australian Heritage Commission and is not intended to be a complete conservation study of the Creswick area. Its first purpose is generally to examine the idea of cultural landscapes. It is concerned with documenting sites within the Creswick area, but is restricted in interest to sites which fit a broad notion

of cultural landscapes. As a result many important historical sites in the Shire will not fall within the terms of reference of the study. Individual buildings, and individual remnants of mining and farming activity have not been considered in the course of the study.

**The report has three parts ;**

(1) it deals first of all with the abstract notion of a cultural landscape and processes of identification and assessment

(2) It secondly applies this process to Creswick and identifies areas within the Creswick gold fields area which can be understood as cultural landscapes and assesses these for Listing on the Register of the National Estate

(3) As a result of this process and its application the report suggests general guidelines by which other areas could be examined employing the notion of a cultural landscape.

## Part One

### The idea of cultural landscapes

#### Introduction

The old gold fields of Victoria extend in a great arc to the north and west of Melbourne. The two best-known towns in this region are Bendigo in the north and Ballarat in the west. Yet for much of the period during which gold was mined, the real work of mining went on in a sprinkle of smaller townships. Many of these have now vanished, leaving behind little more than an empty street plan, here and there a church or school or heaps of tailings from a worked-out mine.

A few of these smaller mining settlements have been able to survive by finding a new local industry or because they are near to a large provincial town. One such place is Creswick.

The town of Creswick lies 130 kilometres west of Melbourne. The township runs in a long line down between forested hills; unlike other old gold towns it has few closed shops or derelict houses. Instead its buildings and open spaces are cared for and there is a lot of movement about the streets. Creswick now supports more than 2000 people. Smaller hamlets within the Creswick Shire fit more closely with the common image of a dying gold town. At Allendale the wide streets run past empty blocks and straggling rows of trees, overgrown hedges but few houses. The gold rush in the twentieth century has moved on beyond Allendale and other little towns like Broomfield, Rocklyn or Bullengarook.

The miners may have gone but the remnants of their work remain. Near to Allendale are rows of giant mounds running along a wide valley. These mounds mark the shafts of the Berry mines, for a short time the richest mining field in Australia. To the south of Creswick, in what is now forest, a walker will stumble on round excavations, like a doughnut; the circles left by the puddling machines of miners. Even the forest itself has been made by people. The miners scythed down trees like a gardener cutting grass. From the end of the nineteenth century foresters have made the forest anew. In the towns

botanists have laid out gardens, shop-keepers and government architects put up attractive buildings like the forestry school at Creswick or the shire hall and hotel at Kingston. And right through the shire at several stages in the past, Europeans have trapped water in creeks, to dam gullies or redirect the flow down winding races so that the water could drive a mill or mining machinery. Even through the comfortable farmland of Creswick the hawthorn hedges which run up hills, the turns and abrupt endings of pine tree rows or fences reflect the way in which farmers cut up the land after sales in the 1850s.

These signs on the surface don't capture our attention immediately; they only appear to us once we know something of the history of the shire. Once we do, we can set out to "read" the landscape; to interpret the layers of human action which create the world around us. Such a reading of the environment is sometimes called "identifying cultural landscapes". Since Creswick is an area which has had an intensive and varied land use from the initial white invasion onwards, it makes a good starting point for exploring this idea of cultural landscapes and identifying ways we can use this idea.

### Historical background

While Creswick is best known as a gold town, it has played a part in many other aspects of Victorian history. Ten years before gold was discovered, the Creswick brothers took up a squatting run which spread across the present shire. To the north of the shire, John Smeaton followed the "Major's Line" (the route of Major Mitchell) after taking a south-easterly course from Mount Macedon to settle near Melbourne. After returning to Sydney he pushed further west to discover the Coghill brothers had squatted on land at Glendaruel and the Learmonths had a hold on grazing country and lakes to the west. John and Charles Creswick grabbed land to the south in forested country around a fast-flowing stream. <sup>1</sup>This was renamed Creswick's Creek and once gold diggers rushed to Ballarat in the 1850s a few

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<sup>1</sup>CE Sayers, ed., Letters from Victorian pioneers, Melbourne 1983 reprint, pp. 57-83.

broke off and crossed the Great Dividing Range to this creek valley. On this Creswick's Creek run, gold was discovered in 1852.

Between 1852 and 1854, Creswick was rushed by thousands of miners and at one stage the town's population reached 25000 people. Most of the gold sought by these miners was located quite close to the surface - usually at a depth of 20 metres. The town straggled along the valley of the creek where two leads were joined, the government camp stood at the northern end of this town and the Chinese camp at the southern limit. Shops, pubs and mine workings were jumbled in between.<sup>1</sup> A formal town plan followed the establishment of courts, police station and other trappings of civil order.

The instant wealth of gold quickly disappeared and miners deserted the town, taking off to new rushes at Stawell, at Beaufort or further north at Avoca, Maryborough or Dunolly. Chinese miners followed Europeans and alongside the fossickers who stayed in Creswick, they puddled through the heaps of earth left by the first diggers.

During this time, miners in nearby Ballarat had tunnelled deep into quartz rock in search of gold. The small miners found themselves ousted by companies with expensive equipment and a paid work force. These firms exploited gold from the deep leads - the old river beds at several thousand feet beneath the surface of the land. By the 1870s even these mines showed smaller profits - in Ballarat at least. In 1870, 1871 and 1872 yields of gold in the Ballarat region averaged more than 150000 ounces.<sup>2</sup> Production fell by more than half in the years that followed. When mining revived in the 1880s it was largely due to new fields opened up in the Creswick area.

In 1872, miners found gold at Broomfield near Creswick. This began a new phase of deep-lead mining in the area. During the 1870s and 1880s miners tested for gold between Creswick and Kingston. Along one of Creswick's rich farming valleys, miners began sinking shafts and throwing up the huge mounds which are still to be seen - the last remnants of this search for gold at a great depth below the surface.

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<sup>1</sup> John Graham, *Early Creswick*, first published 1942, reprint Creswick 1987, pp. 49-66.

<sup>2</sup> W. Bate, *Lucky City*, Melbourne 1978, p. 193.



These mines - the Berry Deep Lead System - produced astonishing yields. The Berry system ran north from Creswick towards Smeaton in two arcs. Thirteen of these mines produced more than 2000 lbs. of gold in their brief existence in the 1870s and 1880s. Richest of all was the Madame Berry mine from which miners took more than 12000 ounces of gold.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century even these mines had become uneconomic. During the 1890s a new phase in local mining commenced with dredges and sluices used to wash out the last specks of gold.<sup>2</sup> In recent years miners with new techniques have sought to extract wealth once again from the mines of the area.

As gold production slowed, so the town of Creswick stagnated. The valleys around the towns had been recognised as rich farmland from the time that the first pastoralists arrived. Because they lay close to rich mining fields, Creswick's pastoral runs were a ready target for miners intent on becoming small farmers. Much of the lowlands of the Shire of Creswick were taken up by small farmers during the 1860s so that the Shire now bears the marks of generations of small farmers. Land sales here predated those the selection acts, so that the farmlands around Dean and Kingston are amongst some of the earliest small farms in Victoria. As well since much of the shire was auriferous, land tended to be taken up on occupational licenses. The southern sections of Creswick shire in the 1860s was largely given over to men who tried to keep up mining while they ran a few cows and chooks on twenty acres. They might as well have tried a bit of wood cutting and timber gathering on the side.<sup>3</sup> Lines of trees, fences and the remains of houses and sheds are reminders of these generations of farmer-miners. They and their families often sought to combine small farming with occasional work on a mill or down a shaft or even odd jobs in Ballarat.

Creswick's close links to Ballarat extended back to the 1850s - gold diggers had marched into Ballarat to join the men of the Eureka

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Fahey, The Berry Deep Leads: an historical assessment, Historic Places Branch, Conservation, Forests and Lands 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Graham, Early Creswick, p.66.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Richmond, Phd thesis, ANU, pp.217-219.

Stockade. In later years the deep lead mines drew investors and working miners from Ballarat. But Creswick was tied more closely to the fortunes of Ballarat by the expanding railway system of the 1870s and 1880s. During 1873 the Ballarat railway reached Creswick. In the following decade a second line ran east from Creswick to Daylesford and on to meet the Bendigo line at Kyneton. A later branch line ran from just south of Creswick to the town of Waubra.<sup>1</sup>

Ballarat had become a great railway centre by the turn of the century. The railway allowed solid industrial expansion in the 1880s in Ballarat, especially in those industries which could put the metal-working skills of miners to another use. Creswick was a part of this changing provincial economy. The railway lines drew Creswick into the orbit of Ballarat. They also tied the town into a web of other small towns, easily reached by one of the three lines through the Shire of Creswick. Through the railway, Creswick ceased to be a largely independent centre and became what it has remained to date - one amongst a string of satellites which depended on Ballarat for their life.

To some extent though, Creswick has retained a streak of independence. Much of the Shire remained wild and unused forest well into the twentieth century. The enormous destruction of the forest through mining struck observers as early as the 1870s. In 1871 for example a commentator in the Creswick Advertiser warned that Creswick would soon be treeless since "the young timber is constantly destroyed for firewood and farming purposes and also by wood-cutters who supply the town within".<sup>2</sup> By August of that year the Ballarat Council had taken up the same refrain and in September the Commissioner of Crown Lands recommended that 9000 acres be set aside for a forest reserve and placed under the management of the Creswick Shire Council.<sup>3</sup> The Ballarat and Creswick state forest was gazetted soon afterwards (April 1872). The forest didn't please everyone and the drifting crowd of fossickers and wood-cutters saw

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp.259-266. and M Osborne, Timber, spuds and spa: a descriptive history and lineside guide of the railways in the Daylesford district, 188-1978, Melbourne 1978

<sup>2</sup> Creswick Advertiser, 7 March 1871.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4 September 1871.