Spread of settlement

Gold fever brought people and wealth to country Australia. For the first time, a sizable proportion of the population lived away from the coast. Instant townships grew on goldfields such as Ballarat and Beechworth in Victoria, Gympie in Queensland, and Coolgardie in Western Australia. Agriculture and industry developed to supply the needs of these towns. Roads and railways were built to carry goods and people between them.

Victoria

During the 1850s, Victoria grew much bigger and faster than New South Wales. More new goldfields were established, more wealth uncovered, and famous nuggets found. As a result, by 1861, Victoria's population was more than half as big again as New South Wales' population. Melbourne also replaced Sydney as the largest city in Australia, despite being a city of tents, with unpaved streets, no lighting and few substantial buildings.

In 1852, Ellen Clacy thought Melbourne looked unfinished as:

The gold mines had upset everything and everybody, and put a stop to all improvements about the town.

'Marvellous Melbourne'

By the 1880s, Melbourne was transformed. A visiting English journalist, George Sala, described Melbourne as:

a really astonishing city, with broad streets full of handsome shops, and crowded with bustling, well-dressed people.

People and wealth brought new industries to Melbourne. This inkwell was made in 1865 for the Melbourne biscuit maker, Thomas Guest

Town Hall

Melbourne's new Town Hall (with the clock tower) and Swanston Street in 1889.

Gold towns – Victoria

Ballarat
Ballarat was farming land when gold was first discovered in August 1851. By 1861 it had several cattleyards, banks, hotels, 10 **foundries**, a railway station and the nickname, the 'Golden City'.

Bendigo
Bendigo was equally successful, but it did not give the same appearance of prosperity. The English writer, Anthony Trollope found in contrast to Ballarat, the town was 'crowded, unfinished and uncomfortable'. However, it was very wealthy. At one stage, Bendigo had the deepest goldmine in the world.

Clunes and Chewton
Most goldfields' towns did not enjoy such prosperity. Clunes was the site of Victoria's first gold discovery and thousands panned for gold along its creeks and gullies. Today, there are less than a thousand people living there. Chewton had the richest goldfield in Australia for some years. Thousands of diggers lived and worked in the valley. Today, it is farming land.

This is what the goldfields at Chewton, Victoria look like today

Golden stories
George Lansell
George Lansell was the first goldfields millionaire and was nicknamed 'the quartz king'. He had one mansion in Melbourne and another in Bendigo. One home called 'Fortuna' was surrounded by huge grounds with artificial lakes and lily ponds. Inside, there was a ballroom, billiard room, gymnasium, music room, private chapel and a swimming pool. Lansell had favourite sayings painted onto the windows of his homes such as 'East and West, Home is Best'.

Ballarat postcard

There are two signs of goldfield wealth in this postcard of Ballarat. They are the trams running up the main street and the new Town Hall up the hill on the left. The Town Hall was very expensive to build, and is one of the few in the world to have a full peal or set of bells.

Gold towns – New South Wales

New South Wales did not have the same level of gold discoveries as Victoria. In New South Wales, there were fewer diggers trying their luck and less development of new towns. Although thousands rushed to new fields, they left just as quickly when the most easily found gold ran out. Within 20 years, Sofala and Hill End had almost become ghost towns. At one stage, Hill End had 50 hotels for thirsty diggers. By 1871, only 716 people still lived in the town.

Bathurst

Gold brought prosperity to Bathurst and reinforced its role as a regional centre. It also brought new faces and experiences. Writing to her family from Bathurst in 1861, Rachel Henning remarked on the number of Chinese in the town:

> *We met some the other day, evidently newly arrived from China, with broad flat hats with a little point in the middle … and carrying their property slung at each end of a stick and balanced over their shoulders.*

Snowy Mountains' towns

Gold also took **prospectors** to previously unsettled areas such as the Snowy Mountains. Towns like Kiandra, Adelong and Tumut were the result. But the harsh climate meant that diggers did not stay. About 3000 people prospected at the Kiandra diggings in 1860. By 1866, only 230 remained. The fine buildings constructed at the height of gold fever fell into ruin.

Always looking for gold

Although gold fever faded, some continued to search for gold. These prospectors were photographed in the 1880s, carefully turning over rocks looking for traces of gold.

Harsh winters meant few prospectors stayed long at Kiandra. In this photograph, the Kiandra Hotel has almost completely disappeared under snow. — **Winter in Kiandra**

Gold towns – Queensland

Palmer River

The Queensland gold rush led to the development of many small towns. These quickly became ghost towns when the gold was mined out. In 1875, Maytown was the centre for diggers on the Palmer River. On Sundays, diggers filled the streets, selling their gold and buying supplies. The town had a courthouse, post office, three banks and two newspapers. By 1885, many of the buildings were empty and most of the diggers had gone.

Charters Towers and Gympie

Further south, towns like Charters Towers, and Gympie grew on the prosperity brought by the search for gold. By 1888, Charters Towers had a population of 12 000 and was the second largest town in Queensland. Gympie remains a substantial town, but has never again had 25 000 living and working there as it did in the 1860s.

Mount Morgan and Rockhampton

In the 1890s, Mount Morgan was the richest goldmine in Australia. The workers, equipment and manufacturing industry needed to support the mine led to the development of Rockhampton.

This postcard shows a bustling street in Gympie around 1900
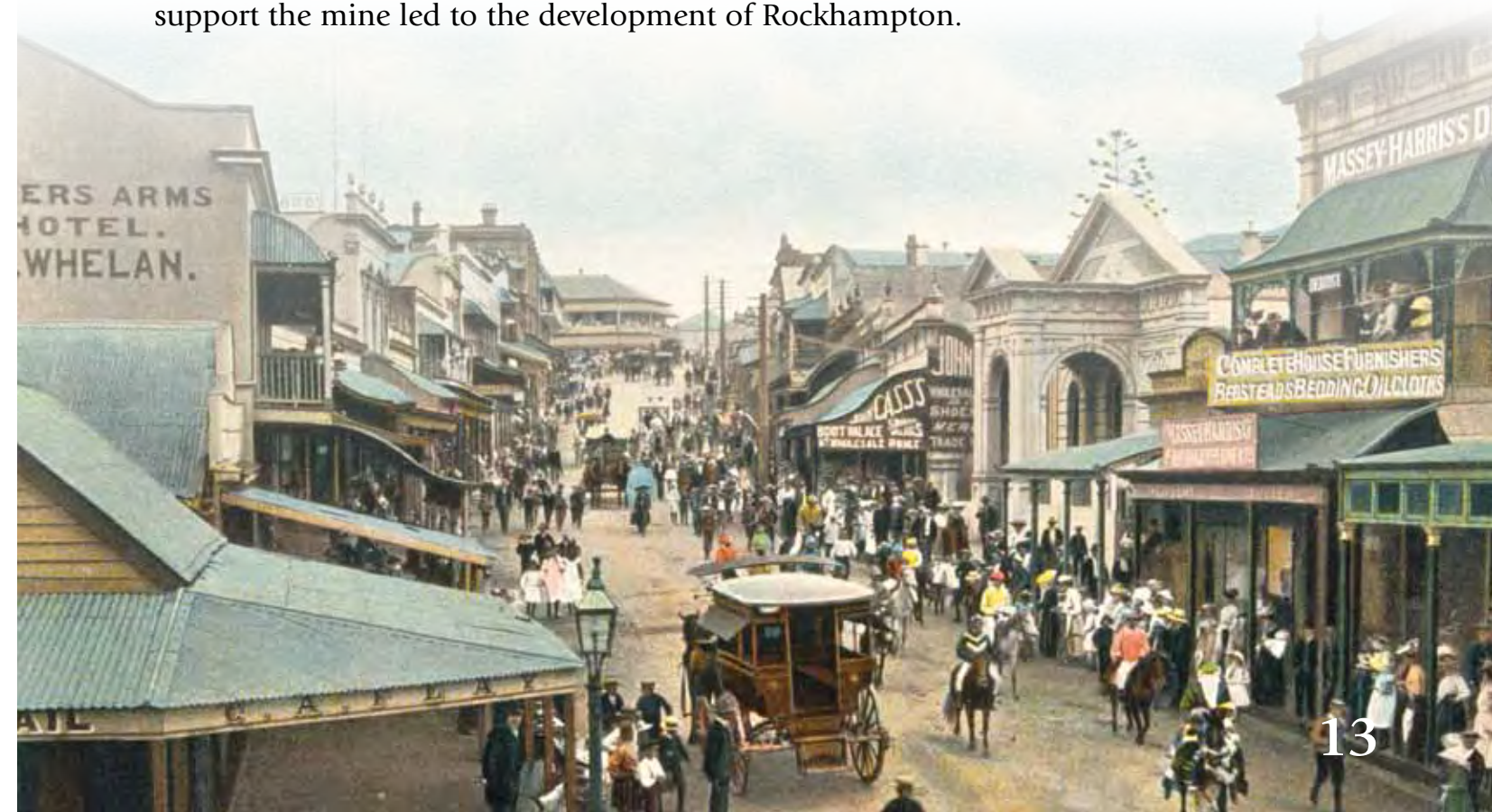
Gold towns

Tasmania

Tasmania did not experience the same level of gold fever as the mainland of Australia. The richest goldfields' town was Beaconsfield, to the north of Launceston. The Tasmanian Gold Mining Company built this town to house its miners and their families. In 1881, 53 companies were working the field, producing about £12 million worth of gold.

Northern Territory

When gold was first discovered in 1871, the main town of Palmerston (now Darwin) was a tiny settlement. Gold fever temporarily brought diggers from the rest of Australia and from overseas to Pine Creek, south of Palmerston. However, the heat, humidity and isolation meant that few Europeans stayed. It was mostly Chinese diggers who persisted.

By 1879, there were 3400 Chinese prospecting in the Northern Territory, seven times the number of Europeans. When the government placed similar restrictions on them to those in Victoria and New South Wales, the number of Chinese in the Territory dwindled.

South Australia

Gold finds were so small in South Australia that they did not lead to long-term settlement. In 1886, Thomas Brady and Thomas Smith found gold at Teetulpa, 360 kilometres north east of Adelaide. Although about 5000 people rushed to the diggings, they quickly found all the gold they could, packed up their tents and moved on to the next rush.

These Chinese children were photographed gathering for the Chinese New Year Festival in Darwin, in 1922

Gold towns – Western Australia

When gold was first discovered in Western Australia in 1886, the colony was very sparsely settled. Perth was just a small town of a few thousand homes. The gold rushes brought people and money to Perth and soon made it a prosperous city.

Coolgardie and Boulder

The south east of Western Australia had the richest gold deposits in Australia. With thousands of diggers arriving to seek their fortune, the towns of Coolgardie and Boulder developed quickly.

Mrs Arthur Garnsey travelled to Coolgardie in the 1890s and later described it as 'a city in a sandy desert':

The town was well laid out … Most of these houses, or shacks, were canvas over a wooden framework … The most original structures were those made entirely of beaten-out kerosene tins, nailed to a wooden framework. There were numbers of these; some were quite large 'restaurants'. One, where coffee and 'hot dogs' were to be had day and night, boasted the grand name of the 'London and Paris Café'.

Kalgoorlie

By 1905, Kalgoorlie was the principal town of the diggings. It had a railway station, six banks, several hundred shops, three breweries, five hospitals and four newspapers. Over the next 30 years, the amount of gold being mined slowly decreased. Kalgoorlie was saved from becoming a ghost town by an increase in the price of gold in the 1930s. By 1934, Kalgoorlie was the largest gold producer in Australia and goldmining continues there today.

Gold brooch

A successful digger on the Western Australian goldfields had this brooch made for his wife or sweetheart. The black swan, the symbol of that state, sits between two gold nuggets.

Camel transport

Camels in the main street of Coolgardie in the late 1800s. Camels were an important form of transport during Western Australia's gold rush era.