

Introduction to Mount Pleasant's history

Mount Pleasant was already known by that name in 1851 when it was identified as a potential gold field that October. Fourteen years earlier, in 1837, the Wadawurrung country around here was taken by pastoralists and the area eventually became part of the Yuille sheep run that reached as far as Lake Wendouree. During those early years a small number of shepherds and woodcutters lived on the White Horse Range and at the small station homestead on the Yarrowee.

Despite the promise of gold, Mount Pleasant was left undug for several years while all around other diggings rapidly progressed. The pristine quality of the area made it attractive as a refuge for Cornish miners who in 1853 and 1854 began to pitch their tents here and bring their families with them. Because of this unusual beginning Mount Pleasant can lay claim to being the oldest residential suburb of Ballarat.

As devoted Wesleyans, the new arrivals soon established a chapel, a Sunday School and then a day school. In 1856, the discovery of alluvial gold at the southern end of Mount Pleasant caused a rush to the area quickly named Miner's Right. This influx changed the character and the shape of the emerging suburb, shifting the commercial centre from around the church in Morton Street to the Prest Street bridge precinct where several hotels and other businesses sprang up.

As the alluvial rush subsided at the end of the 1860s deeper quartz mines opened along the top of the range and some leads were chased down the western slope until they disappeared under the basalt escarpment. While other gold communities often declined, the big Redan mines offered regular employment to Mount Pleasant men and helped consolidate the suburb as other industries developed.

The distinctive geographical position of the suburb, caught between the basalt shelf to the west and the steep White Horse Range to the east, meant it was somewhat isolated from the developing city of Ballarat. When the tram was introduced in 1906, Mount Pleasant was the terminus. The only adjoining suburb is Golden Point. Expansion to the south was blocked by the construction of a sewerage treatment works in the early 1920s.

With larger blocks than many suburbs and a considerable amount of open land, Mount Pleasant retained a rural aspect with farms, livestock, orchards and market gardens. It was also a centre of the tanning and woollen industries. From the mid-19th century the physical separation from the city and the continuing Wesleyan dominance combined to create a strong sense of community. Local shops allowed it to remain self-sufficient for daily needs until the shift to supermarket shopping in the 1970s. While the character of the suburb has changed the past remains visible in the many old structures still in place and through the stories that attach to them.