

RIOT OR REVOLUTION

A **STUDYGUIDE** BY ROBERT LEWIS

ffc australia
Film Finance Corporation

www.metromagazine.com.au



www.theeducationshop.com.au



Overview

Riot or Revolution (Don Parham, 2005) is a documentary film about the Eureka Stockade — the only time in Australian history when armed forces have clashed violently under opposing flags.

In the battle on the 3 December 1854, the rebel leader Peter Lalor lost his arm and the stockaders lost their fight. But within a year, Lalor proudly took his place in the Victorian Parliament and Governor Hotham was dead. This turnaround symbolizes the death of the colonial era in Australia and the birth of something new.

Most of us are familiar with the solemn oath sworn by 500 armed diggers and their leader, Peter Lalor, as they unfurled the rebel flag at Bakery Hill – ‘We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties.’ The original rebel flag now hangs proudly in the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery. It has become a holy relic, housed behind special glass in a darkened chamber. Thousands file past it with an air of solemnity, reinforcing the sense that Eureka is more than a great story, it is a sacred site.

Riot or Revolution looks at the real causes of Eureka and asks what its meanings and messages are for us today.

Some say Eureka was the birthplace of Australian democracy; others, that it was no more than a glorified riot. Perhaps it was a battle between rationalism and romanticism, constitutional reform versus revolution. While debate about Eureka will go on, most would agree about one thing — that Eureka defined how we would resolve our differences, and in that sense, what sort of society we would become.

Curriculum Applicability

Riot or Revolution is appropriate for students at middle-upper secondary levels in:

- Australian history
- English
- Society and Environment (Time, change and continuity)
- Media studies
- Australian studies

Note: The answer to question 43 is:

- I. The Government of Victoria at the request of the citizens of Ballarat, 1889: Memorial C.
- II. James Leggat for the people of Ballarat, no date: Memorial A.
- III. The Eureka Improvement Committee, 1923: Memorial B.

Historical Overview

Since 1835 Victoria had been a small pastoral district governed from Sydney. It had only become a separate colony in July 1851, with Melbourne its capital. In the same month gold was discovered turning this sleepy outpost of empire upside down. The lure of gold was a magnet, drawing people from all over the world to the Victorian goldfields.





The influx brought people of different races, religion and politics. Nothing like this had been seen in the previous sixty years of white settlement in Australia.

Within a few years, however, euphoria had turned to disappointment and anger. At first gold was easily found on or near the surface but by 1854 miners had to dig deep holes, sometimes up to fifty metres down, in order to find gold. This meant that diggers often had to put in months of hard labour with little or no return. As more found it harder to survive, discontent grew.



The biggest grievance was against the gold licence which all miners had to purchase, whether they found gold or not. The brutal methods often used by the authorities to collect the licence fees further provoked the diggers.

In June 1854 a new Governor of Victoria arrived. His name was Sir Charles Hotham and he had been warned that the chaos of the gold rush had taken the young colony to the edge of bankruptcy.

In just three years the population of Victoria had gone from 80,000 to 300,000. Everyone wanted more spending on services and infrastructure but no-one wanted to pay for it. Victoria was full of seasoned political brawlers. The merchants and squatters controlled the unrepresentative legislature and used their power to resist much needed reforms. The colonial bureaucracy was bloated and untouchable. The diggers growing list of grievances were only one of many problems the new Governor would have to deal with. In short, his job was to sort out the mess.



Soon after his arrival Hotham went on a fact-finding and goodwill tour of the goldfields. Some of his advisors referred to gold-diggers as 'wandering vagabonds' – a transient and dangerous population with no stake in the future of the colony. But Hotham was pleasantly surprised by what he saw on the goldfields. He said, 'The mass of the diggers here ... are true hearted and loyal, and men who, if well treated, may be thoroughly depended upon.' Hotham's trip was a great success. He saw honest, hard working men and women and, everywhere he went, the diggers enthusiastically welcomed him. They thought they had met a man who was listening.



After Hotham's tour of the goldfields, expectations were raised that he would abolish the gold licence. He did the opposite, ordering licence checks up from once a month to twice a week. Hotham was responding to the fact that increasing numbers of diggers were avoiding paying the licence, exacerbating the colony's financial problems. His decision made economic sense, but politically it was a terrible error of judgement.

It's a reminder to us of how the course of history can be altered by very human things like misunderstanding. Just as misunderstanding and poor communication can have dire conse-





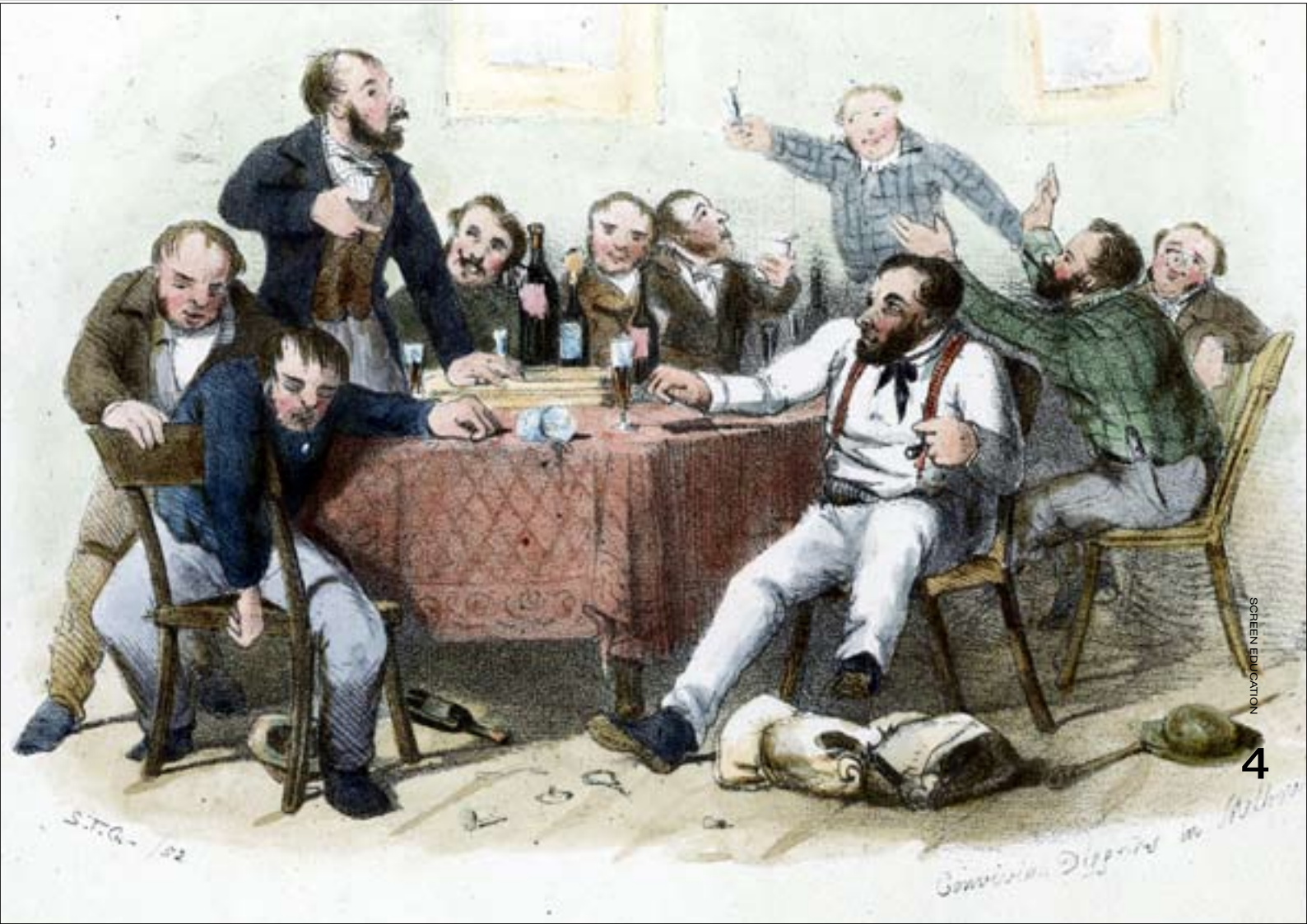
quences in personal relationships, so it can in history. Because his tour of the goldfields had been such a success Hotham misunderstood the extent of the diggers' underlying sense of grievance. It was like a modern politician swinging by a shopping centre at election time to 'press the flesh'. The personal touch works a treat but, in Hotham's case, it just raised the diggers' expectations to the point where they could only feel betrayal when he didn't deliver the changes they wanted.

What makes the Eureka story more tragic is that Hotham knew the whole goldfields administration and gold licence system needed reforming. It wasn't rocket science to understand that taxing miners who weren't finding any gold, or were only finding very little, was not sustainable. The people in the government who understood these things knew that the answer was to introduce an export duty on gold. This would preserve the revenue flows the government needed to do its job but only those who found gold would pay. It would have been the beginning of what we know today as the progressive tax system, that is, those who earn more, pay more tax.



The previous governor, Charles La Trobe, had tried to introduce an export duty on gold but the squatters and merchants who dominated the undemocratic legislature saw it as the thin edge of the wedge and killed it off. For them, all tax was bad tax. In response to growing protest, La Trobe had halved the licence fee. The cost became two pounds for three months – about the price of a pair of diggers' boots – and not a punitive amount unless, of course, you were down on your luck.

The real problem of the gold licence was not so much the cost of the licence but the manner in which it was collected. Mounted police would suddenly descend on an otherwise peaceful digging demanding, at the point of a



bayonet, that diggers show a current licence. Anyone who didn't have one was arrested, locked up and fined. The policy was harsh and open to abuse and corruption. Diggers would flee as the shout of 'Joe' rang out warning of an impending 'digger hunt' by the authorities.

What made matters worse was that the digger hunts were mostly carried out by the newly formed police forces which included many ex-convicts from Tasmania (which had recently changed its name from 'Van Dieman's Land'). The proud free settlers and adventurers attracted to the goldfields were horrified at being hounded and degraded by men who they saw as inferiors. They expressed their disgust by calling them 'Vandemonians' – devils in uniform.

This was the system the new Governor, Sir Charles Hotham, inherited. He knew it needed fixing but that would take time, and time was running out. The reaction to his appalling decision to increase the frequency of licence checks was so bad that the atmosphere on the goldfields was tense, especially at Ballarat. It only needed a spark for things to explode. That spark came on 7 October 1854.

A young Scottish digger, James Scobie, and his mate were staggering home after a night of 'merriment'. They passed by the Eureka Hotel, which was closed, and demanded the publican open for them to have one last drink. All the evidence is circumstantial, but it seems that when he refused a window was smashed and the men went on their way. The enraged publican, James Bentley, ran out and a fight



ensued that left Scobie dead and his mate fleeing for his life.

There had been other murders on the goldfields but this one took on a special significance. The hotel owner, James Bentley was one of the despised Vandemonians and his hotel was seen as a hangout for corrupt officials and police. He was arrested and brought to trial but was acquitted by a police magistrate who the miners believed was corrupt. On 17 October a large crowd of angry diggers gathered outside Bentley's Eureka Hotel. Troops arrived but did nothing as the crowd set fire to the hotel.

The riot was a wake up call to Hotham. For the first time, the diggers had used physical force and got away with it. The colourful Italian digger, Raffaello Carboni, described the feeling amongst the diggers that day – 'The diggers are lords and masters of Ballarat. And the prestige of the Camp is gone forever!'

Hotham established an Inquiry into the affair which confirmed suspicions about the relationship between the police magistrate and Bentley. Hotham sacked the magistrate and ordered a new trial for Bentley. A number of rioters were also arrested and sent to trial.

Events were now moving fast. Within weeks of the burning down of Bentley's Hotel, a large protest meeting was held on Bakery Hill. The Ballarat Reform League was born.

A charter of claims was drawn up that went beyond the abolition of the gold licence. The diggers wanted access to the farming lands controlled by the squatters. And they wanted the vote. Echoing the American Declaration of Independence, the Charter states:

That it is the inalienable right of every citizen to have a voice in making the laws that he is called on to obey, that taxation without representation is tyranny.

Hotham was under increasing pressure to act. He set up a Commission of Inquiry to look into all aspects of the goldfields administration. Bentley was found guilty of the manslaughter of James Scobie and sentenced to three years hard labour. Three alleged ringleaders of the riot were also found guilty, and given minimum sentences ranging from three to six months. The Reform League was incensed. A deputation was set up to meet the Governor. They debated a crucial issue – would they 'petition', or 'demand' the release of the prisoners? They chose to 'demand' – carried by a single vote.

The deputation from the Ballarat Reform League met with Hotham on Monday 27 November. They were a week away from insurrection. It was the last chance for peace. But demanding the release of the prisoners was a stumbling block. Hotham said that he could not go against the finding of a jury. The deputation pressed Hotham on a range of other grievances, the most important being the issue of representation.

The new Victorian Constitution, which would give the



diggers the vote, had in fact been sent to London eight months earlier. Its passage through the British parliament had been delayed by the Crimean War. Hotham told the deputation they should be patient, that the new constitution was only four or five months away and that when it was implemented in Victoria, they would all see that 'a new state of things exists here'. But Hotham's promises about the future fell on deaf ears. The diggers just wanted their mates out of jail. From their point of view they were going back to Ballarat empty handed.

Hotham ordered more reinforcements to be sent. Skirmishes broke out as they arrived at dusk on Tuesday 28 November and some shots were fired but no-one was killed.

The next day the deputation addressed a so called 'monster meeting' of up to 10,000 people on Bakery Hill. On one side were the moderates, the 'moral force' faction, led by the Welsh lawyer and Chartist, John Humffray. Humffray was a member of the deputation that met with Hotham and he urged the crowd to be patient explaining that he believed Hotham 'was with us and was determined to put an end to our grievances'. On the other side were the supporters of men like Timothy Hayes, an Irishman who rejected 'moral force' in favour of 'physical force'. He got up at the meeting and swayed the crowd back the other way, climaxing his fiery speech with the question - 'Are you ready to die?'

When the speeches were over, a bonfire was lit and the



crowd was called upon to burn their gold licences. All of this was being watched by the Gold Commissioner at Ballarat, Robert Rede, who was now communicating directly with Hotham in secret code. Rede was still smarting from his humiliation at the riot at Bentley's Hotel where his troops stood by passively as the hotel was burnt down. He was determined to make amends by confronting the growing lawlessness. He ordered a provocative licence hunt for the next day, saying 'this will test the feelings of the people'.

Rede's licence hunt got the desired result. Shots were fired, prisoners were taken, and the goldfields were left in uproar. About 500 armed men gathered under the flag of the Southern Cross. At the vital moment the leadership mysteriously went missing. The actions of men like Timothy Hayes did not match the fiery rhetoric and the previously unknown Peter Lalor stepped forward. Lalor was a recent immigrant who came from an Irish Catholic family steeped in the nationalist struggle. His father had opposed the payment of land taxes and his oldest brother fought in the failed Irish uprising of 1848. Lalor led the men gathered under the flag in the swearing of an oath – 'We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties'. After the swearing of the oath the rebels marched off to the Eureka diggings where they built a stockade. They started drilling and preparing military plans.

Once the stockade was built life on the Ballarat goldfields was paralysed. All work ceased. Food was running out. Law and order was breaking down. By the evening of Sat 2 December, there were 1500 armed men in the stockade but during the night, most of them left. Some believed the government would not attack on the Sabbath. Others had a change of heart, some just got drunk. There were only about 120 left in the stockade when, on Sunday 3 December 1854, a force of nearly 300 soldiers and police launched a pre-dawn attack.

The fighting was vicious but brief. It was all over in about twenty minutes although some of the worst brutality by the government forces was committed during the mopping up operations. About thirty diggers had been killed and many more wounded. The exact numbers are not known because no official list of the dead and wounded was ever compiled. Peter Lalor had managed to escape and was in hiding. Seriously wounded in the shoulder, his arm was later amputated. Five soldiers were killed and twelve wounded. About 120 people were taken prisoner but most were soon released.

Within days, 6000 citizens of Melbourne gathered outside St Paul's cathedral to protest against Hotham and the government. Similar demonstrations sprang up all around the colony.

Hotham ignored advice and pushed ahead with charges of high treason against thirteen 'ringleaders'. The juries were persuaded that Eureka had been more a 'riot' than a 'revolution' and refused to convict. With public opinion turning against him, Hotham was forced to grant a general amnesty to all the other Eureka rebels in hiding.

In March 1855, Hotham's Commission of Inquiry into the goldfields, handed down its findings. The hated licence was replaced by a 'miner's right', costing only one pound a year.

Revenue lost would be made up through an export duty on gold. If passed earlier, this reform may have prevented Eureka. The Inquiry also recommended that the Goldfields Commission should be entirely abolished.

In November 1855, two giant steps towards democracy were taken. Victoria's new constitution had finally arrived and was officially proclaimed. But it would take another year to organize the elections for the new parliament. So an interim government was formed.

Diggers holding a 'miner's right' were now qualified to vote and they jumped at the chance. They elected John Humffray and Peter Lalor. Lalor went on to a glittering political career, holding several ministries and later becoming Speaker.

On the day the new constitution was proclaimed, Hotham returned from the celebrations and wrote a despatch to the Colonial Office. He said that his health was suffering and he wished to hand in his resignation. On 31st December 1855, Hotham sank into a coma and died. It was two weeks before his fiftieth birthday and barely a year after the Eureka Stockade.

Before Watching the Film

The Eureka Stockade is about people opposing authority. What does that mean? Read this diary extract, and answer the questions that follow.

1) What happened to Brianna?

Dear Diary,

What a day! It started as a normal day in class, but will go down in history now as 'The Day Brianna snapped'!

The lesson was about to start. Mr Vittori was checking homework. Here's what was said, as I recall it.

- Mr V 'OK class, homework handed up, thanks. Brianna, where's yours?
- B Sorry sir, I didn't do it.
- Mr V Brianna, what do you mean, you didn't do it? That's the second time this week you've not done it. I bet you got your other work done, though, didn't you?
- B No, sir. Sorry.
- Mr V Sorry's not good enough. There are too many people taking this attitude. This subject is as important as any other, and you will all get your work done on time! Brianna, you'll do extra to make up for this.
- B That's not fair—you haven't given Jack any punishment, and he never does it! That's just not fair!
- Mr V Enough! You do as you're told, young lady, or else.
- B (In tears now). No! That's not fair. I won't do it! I can't do it!
- Mr V You will! I will not have students telling me what they will and will not do. You do it, or else you'll go to the Principal!

Elements	Brianna's case	Eureka Stockade
Grievances exist		
Nature of the people involved		
Key ideas or values		
Response of followers		
Nature of immediate causes		
Nature of responses to immediate causes		

TABLE 1: WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF A REBELLION?

B You can't do that, it's not fair!
 Mr V Don't you tell me what's fair and what's not. Get out of here and wait outside the Principal's office.
 B But ...
 Mr V Don't answer back – get out! Get out! Or I'll make sure you are expelled!
 B Expel me then, get the Principal, see if I care!

And Brianna stormed out, in tears, slamming the door so hard the glass pane broke!

Well, we were all just stunned. Nobody spoke – we just stared goggle-eyed. Maybe we should have spoken up, maybe we should have helped her or told her to settle down. But we didn't. If she gets expelled, what will happen to her? Poor Brianna. All this trouble at home with her mother, and now this. Goodness knows what will happen to her now. This is really serious.

(Robert Lewis, Tim Gurry and David Arnold, 'The Eureka Rebellion', *Australian History Mysteries*, National Museum of Australia and Ryebuck Media, 2004)

- 1 Why did Brianna 'snap'?
- 2 Was her behaviour reasonable? Was Mr Vittori's?
- 3 Why do you think she reached the point of not caring what the consequences for her actions would be?
- 4 Are there any points at which either person might have changed the way this confrontation was going?
- 5 Who or what caused this rebellion?
- 6 Have you ever been in a situation when you wanted to do something, regardless of the consequences? What did you do? How did you feel?

Looking at a specific example like the one above is a good way to start to think about the concept of rebellion. Look at **Table 1: What Are The Elements Of A Rebellion?** for some

of the key elements that might exist for a rebellion to occur. Fill in your thoughts in the middle column. Then, after you have watched *Riot or Revolution* fill in the final column.

2) Eureka Rebellion – Six Key Moments

We know that on 3 December 1854 troops attacked diggers in the Eureka Stockade at Ballarat. Six soldiers were killed, and at least twenty-two diggers.

Why did it happen? And was it inevitable?

Eureka happened because of decisions people made. What decisions would you have made? Do you think you could have avoided armed conflict? Let's see.

- 7 For each of the next six situations look at the options, and select what you think should have been done. Then watch the film *Riot or Revolution* and decide what the participants at the time actually did, and why they made those decisions that led to death and destruction.

SITUATION 1: THE SETTING

It is August 1854, and you are on the Ballarat goldfields. It is crowded, there are people of many nationalities who have recently come to the area, all trying to strike it rich. Most of the diggers are British, and have a loyalty to Britain rather than to this colony. There are exceptions – especially large groups of Irish, many of whom have no great love of England, and foreign nationals such as Americans and Germans. Many of the immigrants are well-educated, respectable, middle-class people who have ideas about democracy that are ahead of the political system of the settlement they are now in. A small minority of these people have also been influenced by the failed revolutions of 1848 in Europe and

		Your choice	What actually happened
A	Keep your head down and work, and stay away from any trouble.		
B	Keep working, but be prepared to stand up and speak out when you see something wrong happening.		
C	Take advantage of the unrest to organize others to help create your vision of a better society.		

		Your choice	What actually happened
A	Listen to the complaints of the diggers and abolish the licence fees.		
B	Turn a blind eye to the fact that increasing numbers of diggers are avoiding paying the licence and instead put pressure on the Commission of Inquiry to recommend reforms as soon as possible.		
C	Increase the licence searches to make more diggers take out licences or be fined for not having them.		

FROM TOP: TABLE 2; TABLE 3

see this far flung British colony as ripe for revolution. The Ballarat area is a ‘deep lead’ – meaning that diggers have to tunnel down before they strike gold – if indeed they do at all. This means that the population on this field is more stable than on most, and more services and shops have been set up. However, deep sinking means that for long periods the diggers have no money coming in until they strike the gold, but lots of living expenses.

A digger has to have a licence to mine – renewable every one, three, six or twelve months. They are required to have the licence on them at all times, even though mining is very dirty, muddy and wet work, and the diggers are often a long way down the mine shafts.

There are police to maintain order on the goldfields – though many of them are actually ex-convicts, and are known for their brutality and openness to bribes.

The administration of the field is carried out by the Goldfields Commission. The Commissioners often treat the diggers with contempt.

- You are a digger at Ballarat in late 1854 – what do you do? (See Table 2)

SITUATION 2 GOVERNOR HOTHAM

The new Governor of Victoria, Sir Charles Hotham, arrives in the colony in June 1854. He has been told before he leaves London that ‘there is an enormously extravagant expenditure going on in that colony which, if not arrested,

will cause its ruin.’ He goes on a fact-finding and goodwill tour of the goldfields.

During his visit he is warmly greeted by the diggers, who see in him a chance to change some of the rules and regulations of mining that are causing problems. In particular, the diggers hate the licence fees and the way they are checked up on by the police, and they want this system abolished.

In a speech to 8,000 diggers at Bendigo, Hotham says:

You ask me to do a very serious thing – to do away with a large portion of public revenue. All must pay for liberty and freedom in some shape or other ... We must all pay something and I will endeavour to make the taxes as light as possible. I will give the subject every consideration but having made up my mind as to what is right, I am just the boy to stick to it.

Hotham set up a Commission of Inquiry to look into all aspects of the goldfields administration including the issue of gold licences. Reform of the system was possible but it would take time. In the meantime Hotham expected diggers to obey the law and purchase licences.

- You are Governor Hotham – what do you do? (See Table 3)

SITUATION 3 GOLDFIELDS CHIEF COMMISSIONER ROBERT REDE

Discontent is increasing on the goldfields. This is because

		Your choice	What actually happened
A	Order more licence hunts to catch the trouble makers		
B	Have fewer licence hunts, let things settle and cool down		
C	Keep the same number of licence hunts, but change the manner in which they are conducted by ordering the police to be civil and restrained.		

		Your choice	What actually happened
A	Nothing. Keep working and make that your sole priority.		
B	Follow the 'moral force' leaders and protest, but without any violence.		
C	Follow the 'physical force' leaders who say that nothing will change unless the administration can see that the diggers mean business.		

		Your choice	What actually happened
A	Do nothing and hope it all blows over.		
B	Dig in, make your position stronger as a defensible area.		
C	Attack and bring the situation to a head while you have the advantage.		

FROM TOP: TABLE 4; TABLE 5; TABLE 6

of specific incidents such as the frequency of licence hunts, the mistreatment of diggers by authorities, and the corruption of some goldfields administrators.

The Goldfields Commissioner, Robert Rede, has spies and informers on the goldfields. These informers tell him that most diggers are loyal and peaceful citizens, but a few, mainly 'foreigners' and 'Irish', would use the discontent to overthrow the system.

- You are Chief Commissioner Robert Rede – what do you do? (See Table 4)

SITUATION 4 THE DIGGERS

The leaders of the diggers on the goldfield are divided. Some want to use force to achieve reforms. Others want to use persuasion to bring about change. Who do you follow?

- You are a digger at Ballarat – what do you do? (See

Table 5)

SITUATION 5 THE MILITARY LEADER

The officer in charge of the military forces brought to Ballarat as a response to the agitation sees that his camp is in a vulnerable position, and could be overrun by militant diggers.

- You are the officer in charge of the military – what do you do? (See Table 6)

SITUATION 6 THE JURY

The jury hears all the evidence against the accused. The evidence shows that the accused were present during the fighting. The jurors have also lived through the events, and have read about them. They have lived through the rumours of widespread revolt on the goldfields and fears of armed diggers attacking Melbourne. On the other hand they can see that public opinion is swinging against the Governor

		Your choice	What actually happened
A	Convict all.		
B	Acquit all.		
C	Convict some, but acquit others.		

TABLE 7

and they just want life to return to normal. Many also have a natural sympathy for the diggers and the grievances that brought them to the stockade.

- You are a juror at the trial of the Eureka rebels – what do you do? (See Table 7)

You have made your decisions.

Perhaps you could have avoided Eureka – but that can never be known. The key thing is to understand why people made the decisions they did at the time, and why they made those decisions in the circumstances that existed.

Now watch *Riot or Revolution* to understand why things happened the way they did. At the end, record in the last column for each of the situations above the decision that people actually made at the time, and which caused the conflict at Eureka.

Exploring the Film

Understanding the sequence of events

To understand Eureka you must be able to follow the sequence of main events. Answer the questions below to explain what happened at each of the main stages, and why.

The nature of the goldfields

Gold had been discovered in Victoria in 1851. By 1854 the population and wealth of the colony had increased greatly. There had been great changes as a result.

- The film places stress on the idea that this was a society that had been disrupted. Why is this idea of disruption important?
- Gold means riches – but why was the economy of the colony a problem? Why was expenditure not matched by government income

Hotham's arrival and goldfields tour

- What was Hotham's main instruction about governing the colony?
- How was Hotham received on the goldfields?

- Hotham's main source of income for paying for the cost of the Gold Commission was from the licence fee. Why was the licence fee such a problem on a 'deep sinking' field such as Ballarat?

Goldfields Commission

There was a visible class divide on the goldfields between the administration and the diggers. The Goldfields Commission was full of privileged gentlemen who felt superior to the diggers.

- Explain how this was a problem for most diggers.

Specific incidents: Murder of Scobie, Bentley's acquittal Riot and Bentley's Hotel and Rede

- Why did the diggers become agitated about the acquittal of Bentley for the murder of Scobie?
- Why did the arrest and jailing of several diggers during the burning of Bentley's hotel cause problems?

Bakery Hill meeting and the Ballarat Reform League

- The meeting at Bakery Hill led to the formation of the Ballarat Reform League. Why would the formation of such a political organisation be significant?
- How might the authorities see it?

Different ideas to deal with the situation now began to emerge.

- What were the attitudes of Humffray and Hayes?
- What was the attitude of Hotham to the situation?
- What was the attitude of Rede to it? How did his behaviour at the burning of Bentley's Hotel influence this?

Burning of licences, flag, oath and stockade

- Sometimes an act has more meaning to it than it seems to have on the surface. Sometimes small acts have great symbolism for the participants. Explain the symbolism of:
 - Burning the licences
 - Swearing an oath to the flag and each other
 - Flying a new flag
 - Building a stockade.
- Why do you think that, when Eureka is remembered, the

focus has been more on those who chose the ‘physical force’ path rather than those who advocated ‘moral force’?

Attack

23 Do you think alternatives to an attack were available to the authorities? Explain your ideas.

Trial of rebels

24 Why do you think the jury acquitted all the accused, even though there was clear evidence that many of them had been involved in the fighting?

Outcomes

25 What was the significance of:

- The report of the Commission of Inquiry?
- The adoption of the Victorian Constitution?

Coming to conclusions

26 Go back to **Table 1: What are the elements of a rebellion?**, and fill in the right hand column for the Eureka Rebellion.

27 Go back to the set of six events in question 7 and decide what the people at the time decided for each, and why.

28 Why did Eureka occur?

There are three words that are used by different people to describe Eureka: riot, rebellion and revolution. Each has a different meaning:

Riot: A wild or violent disturbance of the peace by a group of people

Rebellion: Open, organized and armed resistance to a government or authority

Revolution: An overthrow of an existing system, to replace it with something different.

29 Do you think that Eureka was a riot, a rebellion or a revolution? Explain your answer.

Eureka has different meanings for different people. In the film, historian Weston Bate describes it as the birth of social democracy in Australia. Another historian, Geoffrey Blainey, says rather that we should not be too keen on commemorating an event that put the emphasis on change by force.

30 Why can historians, working from the same information, differ over the meaning and significance of an event?

31 What does Eureka mean to you? Explain your answer.

32 Some people say that Eureka should be celebrated as Australia’s national day. They point to its multicultural element, the fact that great principles of freedom and democracy were involved, that the event was a declaration of breaking away from British colonial control, and that the event provided its own indigenous symbol – the Southern Cross flag.

People on the other side say that the violence at Eureka was unnecessary, that although there were legitimate grievances, the reforms that followed not long after Eureka would have happened anyway. Hotham’s Commission of Inquiry was doing a thorough review of things and the new Constitution which would have introduced universal male suffrage was on the way. At best Eureka sped things up a bit but were the deaths of thirty or more men worth it?

Prepare an argument for or against this idea that Eureka Day ought to be Australia’s national day.

Comparing representations of history

Riot or Revolution is a representation of history. That is, it is essentially the filmmaker’s view of what happened. He has chosen what to include and what to leave out, what to emphasize, and how to present the elements of the story.

Indeed, every book or article you read about Eureka, every film you see, even this study guide and the links to various websites at the end are representations, that is, they will have an angle on Eureka that the authors want to emphasize.

This is the ‘subjective’ aspect of studying history. This doesn’t mean, of course, that the study of history is just the study of ‘spin’. History becomes more ‘objective’ the more you do research into the topic, the more facts you unearth, the more you look at primary sources.

Riot or Revolution opens with a caption that says – ‘the lines spoken by actors in this film are the documented words of the historical characters’. By saying this, the filmmaker is making a claim upfront that what you are about to see is a more objective history, in a sense, because the actors’ lines have not been written by a script writer but are taken from actual documents that the historical characters wrote – they are the real words of the historical characters.

Not all history-telling is equal – some books, articles, films are more fully researched than others, some have an axe to grind, others seem more detached. In the end you, as the ‘consumer’ of a piece of history-telling, have to make your own mind up about the quality and degree of objectivity and veracity of the information you are receiving.

33 Discuss what you think might be some of the differences between a well researched and authoritative history and a piece of spin or propaganda? Try to think of examples you may have seen.

The two memorials shown in the film are also representations of history. Let’s examine them in more detail.

34 Imagine that you have been commissioned by the police to create a memorial to the troops and police who died at Eureka. What information would you include? What images would you use in the memorial?

35 Now imagine that you have been commissioned by the descendants of the diggers at Eureka. What would you

Stylistic element	Your assessment of it
Monologues using historical texts	
Three contrasting perspectives	
Use of experts	
Styling the film as a stage with actors	
Use of contemporary paintings and photographs	
Absence of dramatic reconstructions	
Use of two real locations	
Final 'observational' shots of Ballarat today	

TABLE 8

include? How is this memorial different from the police one?

36 Finally, imagine a third one – one that expresses your own view. How is it similar and different to the others?

There are three memorials to Eureka in the Ballarat area. Look at the wording of each, and answer the questions that follow.

- A Sacred to the memory of those who fell on the memorable 3rd Dec, 1854 in resisting the unconstitutional proceedings of the Victorian Government.
- B To the honoured memory of the heroic pioneers who fought and fell on this sacred spot in the cause of liberty, and the soldiers who fell at duty's call.
- C In this place with other soldiers and civilians of the military camp then in Ballarat were buried the remains of the British soldiers who fell dead or fatally wounded at the Eureka Stockade in brave devotion to duty on Sunday 3rd December 1854 whilst attacking a band of aggrieved diggers in arms against what they regarded as a tyrannous administration. Not far west from this spot lie the remains of some of the diggers who fell in their courageous but misdirected endeavour to secure the freedom which soon afterwards came in the form of manhood suffrage and constitutional government.

37 Which representation is most favourable to the diggers?

38 Which is most favourable to the police and troops?

39 What attitude do all three have in common?

40 Why do you think none of the three contains any criticism of diggers/police/troops?

41 If you did not know anything about Eureka, what impression would these monuments give?

42 Do you think these monuments give an adequate and accurate impression? Explain your reasons.

43 Here are the three donors of these memorials. Decide which donor created which memorial:

I. The Government of Victoria at the request of the citizens of Ballarat, 1889: memorial ____.

II. James Leggat for the people of Ballarat, no date: Memorial ____.

III. The Eureka Improvement Committee, 1923: Memorial ____.



Exploring *Riot or Revolution* as a documentary film

Analysing key elements

Riot or Revolution has several key stylistic elements to it. They are listed in Table 8.

43 Consider these, read the comments of the filmmaker about them, and then decide if you think they help create an effective documentary.

Comments from the filmmaker

A major structural element of *Riot or Revolution* is that it tells the story of the Eureka Stockade through the eyes of three main characters – the Governor, Sir Charles Hotham, Raffaello Carboni, an Italian gold digger who became one of the Eureka leaders, and Douglas Huyghue, a civil servant in the gold-fields administration at Ballarat.

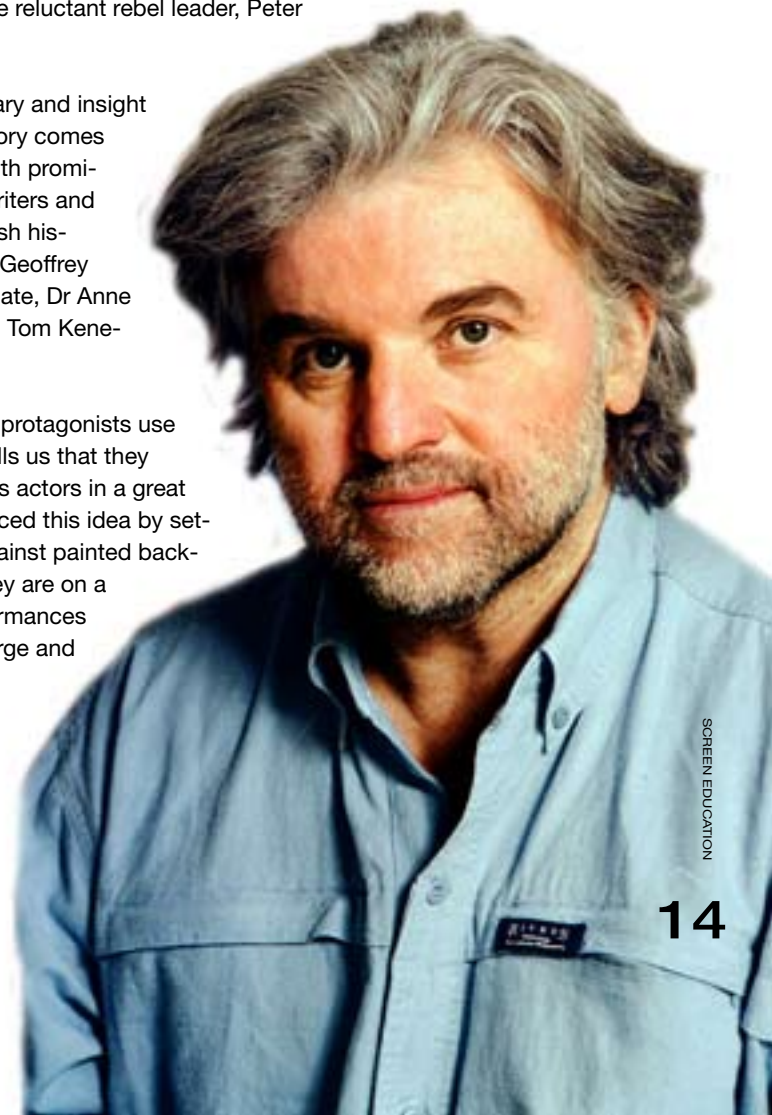
As the caption at the start of the film says – ‘the lines spoken by actors in this film are the documented words of the historical characters’. This is history grounded in original texts. It is a very different use of the historical record than a script which only claims to be ‘based upon’ real events or original documents.

Hotham, Carboni and Huyghue provide three contrasting perspectives on the Eureka story. We see things from the government side, the rebel side and, through Huyghue, the detached observer’s point of view. It is a balanced and, in some ways, fresh take on an old story. Other characters help to flesh out the story. There is Celeste de Chabrilan, wife of the French Consul and, of course, the reluctant rebel leader, Peter Lalor.

Further commentary and insight into the Eureka story comes from interviews with prominent historians, writers and experts on goldrush history, namely, Prof Geoffrey Blainey, Weston Bate, Dr Anne Beggs Sunter and Tom Kenally.

The language our protagonists use in their writings tells us that they saw themselves as actors in a great drama. We reinforced this idea by setting our actors against painted backdrops. It is like they are on a stage. Their performances are deliberately large and theatrical.

Photographs are few at the time of Eureka so we have largely gone to the non-photographic record of the period.



People made pictures of their world, they used the materials that were available to them, mostly pencil and watercolour. Later some of their pictures went to press and we've made use of engravings and lithographs.

Aside from the actor monologues, the film doesn't have many 'dramatic reconstructions'. Although partly driven by budgetary constraints, it was nevertheless a deliberate choice to rely so heavily on the use of colonial art rather than dramatic reconstructions. It seems so much truer to the spirit of the documentary form to, as far as possible, use the means which people who were living then chose to record their world. It is a way of honouring them and the effort they put in to leave us this precious visual record.

The two main locations we used for filming dramatic reconstructions were at Ballarat and 'Toorac House' in Melbourne.

'Toorac' was an exciting discovery. It was the house provided for Governor Hotham on his arrival and was a much grander house than the one used by the previous Governor La Trobe. It still stands proudly on a large garden block in Melbourne's wealthiest suburb, Toorak. The current owners, the Swedish Church in Melbourne, kindly gave us access and it was a very special feeling to film our actor, Brian Lipson, playing Hotham on the very site where the real Hotham walked.

Ballarat is an amazing town, the spirit of the goldrush era is in the air, it's palpable. It would not have been right to make this doco without filming there. Inevitably, we ended up shooting a number of dramatic reconstructions at Sovereign Hill – it was such a ready made set.

Another wonderful location was the Old Ballarat Cemetery which houses the two original memorials erected for the stockaders and the soldiers killed in the battle. The two memorials stand about 100 metres apart still flying their opposing flags. The location of these memorials becomes the highlight of the closing sequence of the film where we see the caretaker take down the Union Jack and Eureka flag to store them away for the night in his shed. This is his normal daily ritual which we discovered by accident when we were filming. It is one of few 'observational' moments in this otherwise highly constructed documentary and provides a fitting visual close as we put the epic story to bed. No-one should read too much into the fact that, as he puts the flags down on the table next to the microwave, the Union Jack sits on top of the Eureka flag.

This 'observational' moment is part of the closing sequence that contains the only other 'observational' shots in the film, namely footage showing the way in which the town of Ballarat now acknowledges Eureka. Shots of the Peter Lalor pub and the Eureka Pizza, are followed by the lamp post that has a bit both ways – one sign says 'Eureka St' this way, the other says 'Queen St' that way. It is a metaphor for a town, indeed a country, that still can't make up its mind about republicanism.

Finally, if you're still a bit puzzled about who 'won' at Eureka perhaps we need look no further than the next iconic image in the closing sequence – McDonalds on Bakery Hill!

Further Resources

Eureka Centre: <http://www.eurekaballarat.com>

Eureka on Trial: <http://eureka.imagineering.net.au/www/site/>

Blood on the Southern Cross (Sovereign Hill): <http://www.sovereignhill.com>

State Library of Victoria publications: <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan//41736/20040505/www.statelibrary.vic.gov.au/slv/educate/publications/eureka/index.html>

Life on the Goldfields: http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/41739/20040505/www.statelibrary.vic.gov.au/slv_exhibitions/goldfields/index.html

Ballarat Fine Art Gallery: <http://www.amol.org.au/eureka/gallery2/index.htm>

Australian Gold – The Rush To Riches Exhibition: <http://www.anmm.gov.au/gold150/exhibit.htm>

Victorian Museum: <http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/windows/gold/>

SBS – The Story of Gold: <http://www.sbs.com.au/gold/story.html?storyid=81>

The Age article: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/02/03/1075776042279.html>

Website of the producer of *Riot or Revolution*: http://www.parham-media.com/docos/riotorror_index.htm



This study guide was produced
by **ATOM**

damned@netspace.net.au

For more information on

SCREEN EDUCATION

magazine, or to download other
free study guides, visit

www.metromagazine.com.au

For hundreds of articles
on Media Studies, Screen
Literacy, Multiliteracy and
Film Studies, visit

www.theeducationshop.com.au

Notice: An educational institution may make copies of all or part of this Study Guide, provided that it only makes and uses copies as reasonably required for its own educational, non-commercial, classroom purposes and does not sell or lend such copies.