

## **Populating the Victorian Goldfields, 1852-1901**

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### **Abstract**

In the 1850s the great alluvial gold rushes to the British colony of Victoria were a major destination of migrants from the British Isles. In the two decades 1850 to 1870 the demography of the colony of Victoria was transformed by migrants who came first seeking shallow alluvial gold and later to work as wage earning miners in deep lead alluvial and quartz gold mines. Unfortunately Australian colonial officials destroyed most of the original census returns, and historians must turn to vital records for information on the origin of settlers. During the gold rushes the young self-governing colony established a sophisticated system for the registration of births, deaths and marriages. In the process of recording birth, deaths and marriages, Victorian officials recorded much ancillary information. Death certificates, for example, not only record ages and cause of death, but occupation of the deceased, the deceased's father's occupation, place of birth, years in the colony, date of marriage, name of partner and issue of the marriage. These records will be used to examine the origins of goldfields settlers and their demographic experience in the half century after the great gold rushes. The paper will chart the emergence of goldfields cities and towns in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s. By the 1880s population growth had given way to decline and the paper will also explore the impact of population and economic decline on the demography of the goldfields.