INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of a Victorian country newspaper, the Chiltern Standard, during the period 1859-60. Using the Indigo-Chiltern goldfield (discovered in 1858) as a case study, it investigates how the life of the community was expressed through the pages of its local paper.

The idea for a study of a country newspaper arose from noticing, by chance, G.L. Buxton's remark:

One of the more important results of the publication of a country newspaper was the development of a sense of identity in a town or district ....

Similar observations made by other historians suggested a line of inquiry for this investigation.

In a study of Victorian towns in the 1940's, A. and J. McIntyre found that miscellaneous local news - of who did what and when - was the greatest source of interest to subscribers, and it was largely because of local news that the paper was bought. They refer to C.R. Hoffer who, in his pamphlet 'Interests of Rural People as Portrayed by Weekly Papers' (an American study) wrote:

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1 On 23 June 1860 the paper became known as the Federal Standard. See page 81.
By publishing such items the paper tends to reflect and to perpetuate elements which give rural community life cohesiveness and local significance. There is no substitute for the local paper in the performance of this role.  

And, in a more recent study of two Victorian country newspapers in 1888, Elizabeth Morrison noted:

Study of the local news in these papers opens windows on these communities; it also indicates a function for these papers beyond the communication of information. The announcement of forthcoming events conveys information for action; but reporting after the events ... serves less to inform then to recall, to reinforce, to put communal life on record and so to promote a sense of local identity and to foster social cohesion.

This study seeks to determine if these findings also apply to a mid-19th century gold-field settlement and deals with two questions. Firstly, is there any evidence in the contents of the Chiltern paper of an emergent local identity? Secondly, is there any evidence that the paper, in its reporting of local events, promoted social cohesion within the Chiltern community?

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4 Ibid. p.246.
5 Elizabeth Morrison, "Victorian Country Newspapers", Australia 1888, May 1980, No.4. p.43. The two papers examined were the Rupanyup Spectator and the Maffra Spectator.
The investigation started out to look at a five year period, commencing with the establishment of the paper in August 1859. It became apparent, however, that to go beyond a major publication change in November 1860, would have lost an opportunity to use the newspaper as:

the best lens we have for a close-up of the Victorian city [or country town] of its disconnections, intimacies, conflicts, aberrations, incidents - of its whole continuum and style.7

Such a slice approach, used by Alan Atkinson in his study of the early Sydney press,8 seems the best way to understand the distribution of the paper, its range of reporting, the kind of people who bought it and the types it wrote about.

Chiltern was not a one-time rush gold-field. It developed along solid lines and proved its value in its steady production of gold when it was first opened up, and later with the revival of mining in the 1890's.9 Despite its contribution to the mineral wealth of the colony, its has not attracted the

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6 Although the Standard was first published on 24 August 1859, this study has had to commence from the second issue of 27 August. The first issue of the paper is missing from the La Trobe Library set. In 1974, Robert Ashley, an amateur historian and author of a small publication The History of the Shire of Chiltern (Ballarat 1974), quoted on page 21, information taken from the first issue of the Standard. It was hoped that he might have been able to advise where this copy was located, or if he held the original, that he might provide a photocopy - even if only the paper's prospectus. After other investigations failed to locate a copy, two letters were sent to Ashley (one in early December 1985 and another in January 1986). He failed to acknowledge either. It is curious also, that despite extensive searches (see pp. 48-49) other archival material, for example, numerous petitions sent by Chiltern residents, and correspondence received from the Treasury Department and quoted in the Standard have not been able to be located. Because by 1861, the proprietor of the Standard advised that copies of the paper were being sent to his agent in Clements' Lane, Lombard Street, London, and because his family and that of his wife lived in London, it was hoped that a copy of the first issue may have been sent there and found its way into London newspaper collections. However the British Library (15 October 1985) and the Australian Joint Copying Service (4 December 1985) have advised that they have no copies of the Standard.


historical attention enjoyed by other Victorian fields. Familiarity with the area (most of my childhood was spent on the northern side of the Chiltern forest and only a few miles from the site of the first gold discoveries there) directed my attention to Chiltern, and hence its newspaper.

It needs to be emphasised at this point that the focus of this study is specifically the Chiltern Standard and the Chiltern community. Only where it serves to emphasise a point, to substantiate or clarify information in the paper, or to place events in Chiltern in context, is some attention given to other localities and newspapers. The Standard's proprietor's continuing association with the Albury Border Post, for example, has made reference to that journal essential.

William Sprague Holden has also commented that:

There is richness in the colour, drama, struggle for survival in the battles over public issues, in journalism's leading role in the building of a nation. To write the history of Australia's chief journals, past and present, would be, in large part, to write the history of Australia.\(^{10}\)

Despite the potential value of using newspapers to illuminate Australian history, Australian historians have shown little interest in their press. Where newspapers have been the focus of research they have been almost entirely concerned with capital city dailies; emphasising individual newspaper identities, newspaper monopolies, and metropolitan newspaper organisation.\(^{11}\) Country newspaper historiography is even more sparse, although Robin Walker,

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\(^{10}\) Holden, op cit, p.14.

in his valuable work on the press in New South Wales,\textsuperscript{12} has included a chapter on the country press, and a recently published history of the provincial press in Queensland by Rod Kirkpatrick,\textsuperscript{13} is adding to this neglected area.

There is, of course, a considerable literature relating to the press in general, and the country press, in England and the United States. Several studies, in particular, have been helpful in providing a conceptual framework for this study.\textsuperscript{14}

However, the main concern here is mid-19th century colonial country Victoria. Victorian country newspapers are covered in general terms in reference works, newspaper jubilee and centenary issues, trade journals, anecdotal newspaper family histories, and local histories.\textsuperscript{15} They have been used extensively as sources, but they have not been studied for themselves. Usually no attempt is made to describe what factors might have influenced the selection of the news they are using.\textsuperscript{16} And apart from Morrison's work,

\textsuperscript{15} For example, \textit{Australian Encyclopedia} (A.H. Chisholm ed.) (Melbourne 1979), Allan Lockwood, \textit{Ink in His Veins} (Horsham 1985), Margaret Kiddle, \textit{Men of Yesterday} (Melbourne 1961) W.R. Withers, \textit{The History of Ballarat} (first published 1887; Melbourne 1980), and 19th century journals such as the \textit{Critic}, established to encourage debate amongst newspaper men.
\textsuperscript{16} Possibly the only exception is the brief coverage given to Ballarat newspapers by Weston Bate, \textit{Lucky City} (Melbourne 1978), pp.233-4, who not only provides examples of the range of editorial topics covered by the papers, but gives some indication of the personal character and interests of the editors/owners which prompted them to write about the topics they did.
little attempt has been made to undertake a close-up study of an individual paper and its local community.

Some of the most perceptive histories for this study have come not from newspaper histories but from regional studies. Ellen McEwen has remarked that the most interesting studies of small settlements have been those undertaken by social anthropologists and sociologists. Instead of merely asking what happened, emphasis is directed to local needs, social attitudes and social stratification.\(^\text{17}\) Similarly, Dorothy Morgan has shown how, by pin-pointing the conjunction of events, underlying rhythms and character of communities are revealed.\(^\text{18}\) And Eric Irvin’s advice on writing regional histories applies equally to the study of a newspaper.\(^\text{19}\) The facts about the Chiltern Standard, its contents, and the events at Chiltern, are all important, but the essential matter is not what happened, but how and why the newspaper reacted to, and presented local events.

Until the late 18th century newspapers, especially in England, had few aspirations to influence or even reflect local opinion.\(^\text{20}\) But by the early 19th century, the British press was seen in terms of its influence on social and political attitudes; summed up in a famous Times leader:

[The press] is daily and forever appealing to the enlightened force of public opinion—anticipating, if possible, the march of events—standing upon the breach between the present and the future, and extending its survey to the horizon of the world.\(^\text{21}\)


\(^{20}\) Read, op. cit. p.69.

This concept of the press was carried to 19th century Australia where it was widely believed that:
its influence [was] destined to supersede that of the pulpit or parliament as the
means of advancing the material and moral welfare of humanity and spreading the
blessings of civilization ... 22

The voice of the Melbourne Age, after the Symes took control in the mid-
1850’s, is said to have ‘rolled like thunder across the land’.23 Its first editorial
on 17 October 1854 stated: ‘We enter upon our task with a deep sense of
importance and responsibility. The newspaper has become the great teacher
of the age ...’.24

In the country, the Ballarat Star, conducted by S. Irwin and J. Ham, was the
voice of the gold-field, and later in the sixties, it played an important part in
the controversy surrounding parliamentary corruption. The Ballarat Times,
too, is said to have exercised a powerful influence during the Ballarat riots, and
at Camperdown, in the western district, the Hampden Guardian followed the
Age’s militant policies and rendered itself particularly obnoxious to the landed
interests.25

Against this background the Standard newspaper was established.

But what of a newspaper man’s personal background and experiences?
Part 1 of this study looks at some of the factors which moulded the Standard
proprietor’s perception of his role and his reaction to specific events at Chiltern.

September 1882, pp. 534-6.
23 Heritage Publications, The Australian Thunderer: The Age after the Gold-Rush 1854-1859
24 Ibid.
Did he, for example, share a similar motivation to Edward Baines, editor of the English *Leeds Mercury*? Baines set out to improve and advance himself so that he might reach a position where he could improve the character and conditions of others in the new industrial society. His chief weapon in this quest was his newspaper.²⁶

Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind one historian's reminder that '... before we are overwhelmed by all this goodness, all this high-mindedness, we must also admit the press is a profit seeker ...'.²⁷ In other words, a newspaper is, in the first instance, a business operation. It may be used to advance its editor's interests, but ideology does not pay the bills.

The pages of the *Standard* are a rich source of information about newspaper economics; the frequency of publication, price, subscription rates, circulation, and other sources of income such as job printing and advertising. Section 2 notes the manoeuvres the paper took to ensure its survival, and how its editorial reaction to events fluctuated with its own potential success or threatened failure.

A country newspaper proprietor's personal pecuniary interest may, as Walker found,²⁸ partly account for the vigorous editorial promotion of a town's material and social development, but the issues advanced in the editorial column also express those interests which a newspaper perceives are most important to its readers. Whether the issues which were important to Chiltern readers suggest a sense of local identity, and whether the paper's

²⁶ Read, *op. cit.* p.79.
promotion of them forged a sense of social cohesion in the community, are also explored in Section 2.

C.P. Scott, famous editor of the English Manchester Guardian observed that:

The first function of a newspaper is indicated plainly in its name; it is an instrument for the collection and dissemination of news. But what news? ... it is all a question of selection ...29

While certain journalists believe it is the duty of a newspaper to present to its readers as full, accurate and well-balanced picture as possible,30 the news coverage selected by a newspaper will, in part, reflect an editor's and owner's assessment of the interests and attitudes of the majority of his readers.31 The success of the English Daily Mail has been attributed to Lord Northcliffe's ability (like that of other successful editors and proprietors) to know what interested people, which is not necessarily what was important, but what people actually talked about.32 The specialised interests of the early Sydney press have also been noted. The 1838 Australian tended to direct its attention to an established rural population of compact farming establishments, while the Herald concentrated on pastoralism which was the major source of investment for Sydney capital.33

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29 C.P. Scott quoted in Jackson, op. cit. p.61.
31 Jackson, op. cit. p.57.
32 L. Carlyon, Paper Chase - The Press under Examination (Melbourne 1982), p.60. See also, Mayer, op. cit. pp.49-50. During the period 1933–57, many readers, when asked about the policies expressed by Lord Beaverbrook in the English Daily Mail, indicated their disapproval. Nevertheless, it was the news content and general presentation of the paper which appealed to a representative cross-section of the people.
33 Atkinson, loc. cit. p.68.
These observations raise the question – what determined the selection of news in the *Standard*? Section 3 looks at what the *Standard* saw as its readers’ main interests. Mining news was dominant, but several other themes – sport, churches and education – emerge, and evidence of local identity and community cohesion is sought from the reporting of these news items. While the local news column is the focus of attention in this section, other categories of newspaper content – advertising, notices and letters to the editor – are, of course, all complementary to published news items.

Assessing the value of newspapers as historical sources, one journalist has suggested that if, a thousand years hence, an historian should turn to the newspaper for guidance on our life and times, he should find it a rich source of information about the way we live, the way we think, our standards of morality, honesty, culture and so on. In short, it would give him a clear picture of us in all our strengths and weaknesses. But would the mythical historian, he asks, obtain from newspapers a complete picture of our social structure? He thinks not. There are certain deep currents in our social life of which he would learn little or nothing from a newspaper. Certain things would puzzle him greatly. An explanation for why a newspaper can only present a one-dimensional or selective view of its society is sought in this study from the *Standard*’s sources of information. How does it gather its news? Who are its contacts? And how influential are these contacts?

One advantage of a close-up study is the ability partly to overcome the inherent problem of using a major source where the particular source is portrayed from only one angle – through the eyes of the proprietor or editor. Contradictions in the *Standard*’s reporting, for example, often provide clues to alternate perspectives and explanations.

More than twenty years ago William Sprague Holden hoped that the yet-to-be written history of Australian newspapers would include chapters on the growth of capital cities, the change from early penal colonies to free and independent colonial status and thence to eventual union in an independent federated nation. There would be chapters on the gold-rushes, the rise of the wool industry, the fight to unlock the lands, the wars fought for England and for young Australia. There would be a weaving together of two basic themes for such a history: the newspapers' reporting and commenting upon these events and the effect of the press' influence upon these events.\textsuperscript{35} He would probably be disappointed that the historiography has changed little since then, but it is hoped this study will fill in a tiny corner of the Victorian country newspaper history jig-saw.

\textsuperscript{35} Holden, op. cit. p. 14.
Map 1. Victoria - Mining Districts, Mining Divisions and the Gold Fields - showing North Eastern Victoria.
VICTORIA
MINING DISTRICTS, MINING DIVISIONS & THE GOLD FIELDS

The sheet are drawn by Red Line Ediational Services by Blue Line

Scale of Miles

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