



Andrew Swift, 'Prisoners'  
Source: Parks Victoria

## Law and Order on the Goldfields

### Student Activity Booklet

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***New Diggers, Welcome!***

*Welcome to the eGold website, an electronic Encyclopedia dedicated to telling the story of gold in Australia. The exercises available on eGold will take you through some of the features of the website and show you how to access the site's facts, images, stories and multimedia for your research.*



Lieutenant-Governor Charles Joseph La Trobe  
Source: State Library of Victoria

**Law and Order on the Goldfields**

As gold fever swept through Victoria in the early 1850s, a key concern for the new Lieutenant-Governor, Charles La Trobe, and many other contemporary observers was how to maintain law and order in the fledgling colony. Not only did the government have to contend with the unprecedented upheaval in established centres as thousands of men left for the diggings, it also suddenly found it had to expand its control over a much larger area as makeshift settlements sprang up in previously isolated parts of the colony.

## Part A

Using the navigation tabs or the search engine on the eGold website, answer the following questions about Law and Order on the Goldfields.

### Crime

There appears to have been a dramatic rise in crime and lawlessness in the colony of Victoria during the first few years of the gold rushes. With makeshift settlements popping up overnight and floods of new diggers moving in from all over the world, it was difficult just to identify offenders, let alone to maintain law and order.



Frederick Grosse, 1828-1894 (engraver), Nicholas Chevalier, 1828-1902 (artist)  
Bushranger stealthily robbing a traveller sleeping in the bush  
Source: State Library of Victoria

1. **In 1851, how many people were committed for trial in the colony of Victoria?**

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2. **How many more people were committed to trial in the next year, 1852?**

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3. **What was the real name of the place on the diggings with the worst reputation for crime?**

i) \_\_\_\_\_

**What were its nicknames?**

ii) \_\_\_\_\_

**What did the digger Watkins find on these diggings?**

iii) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Take a look at the S.T. Gill painting 'Attacking the Mail' (you can find it in his 'Australian Views' on the Message Tree or the S.T. Gill entry). Imagine you are riding back to Melbourne from the goldfields. You have with you a case full of the gold you have collected, all your clothes and possessions, an almost full water bag, a large amount of cash, a rifle and some food and tobacco. As you move through the Black Forest you and your companions are ambushed by a gang of bushrangers...

4. **What do you think are the first three things the bushrangers will try and take from you?**

i) \_\_\_\_\_

ii) \_\_\_\_\_

iii) \_\_\_\_\_

5. **What three things would you be most desperate to keep from the bushrangers?**

i) \_\_\_\_\_

ii) \_\_\_\_\_

iii) \_\_\_\_\_

6. **Briefly explain your choices for questions 5 & 6.**

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**The Police**

In frontier societies like Australia and America, the police had to take on a much broader role than in more established societies. On the Victorian goldfields, police were responsible for frequent licence inspections and collecting fines and thus from the outset were focused on managing and regulating the digger population, rather than the criminal one. This led to a situation where many diggers felt they were not being protected from crime and were themselves being treated like criminals.

1. **How many police officers in Melbourne quit in 1851 to go to the gold rush?**

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2. **Where were policemen recruited from?**

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3. **What were the two styles of law enforcement used by the Melbourne police force?**

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**Part C: Extension Activity – Castlemaine Courthouse**

John T. Collins, 1907-2001 (photographer)  
The Former Castlemaine Courthouse  
Source: State Library of Victoria

1. In groups of four or five, prepare a short courtroom drama based on the events described in the letter you have just read.
2. Assign roles to each member of the group. As well as the accused, the magistrate and the letter writer, you might like to include a court reporter, a policeman, members of the public, other defendants waiting to be tried or other victims of crime present in the courtroom.
3. Once everyone has their character, work together to write a short script which you will act out for the class. Your performance should last at least five minutes when performed and should involve some of the concerns about law and order on the goldfields which we have examined in previous exercises.