

## GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (August 1998)

By Rob Upson

GOLD FEVER and VANDEMONIANS

*“.....a medical friend informs us that the prevailing epidemic somewhat resembles ordinary fever at its commencement, as the premonitory symptoms are restlessness, anxiety, and a disinclination to follow one’s ordinary avocations. During the first stage of the attack, a sufferer may be known by an unshorn beard, a dirty face, and an embryo bandit appearance. As the disease advances, the patient sticks a short pipe in his mouth, and assumes a red shirt and a pair of moleskin trousers. If the symptoms are unchecked by a rise in salary, all objects he views appear of a golden hue - excitement terminates in delirium - one morn we miss him from the custom’d spot - and the answer to all the anxious inquiries by his friends, is that he was last seen on a loaded bullock dray, provided with a straw mattress, a tin pannikin, a shovel and a cradle.”*

The foregoing account was from the Melbourne *Argus* on 6th October 1851.

Question : Who was the sufferer of these unusual symptoms and what was this strange affliction ?

Answer : A Digger with an attack of Gold Fever, a new disease that spread through the Colony of Victoria (and other parts of Australia) like a plague in the 1850s.

Another Question : Who or what was a Vandemonian ?

Answer : A somewhat derogatory term that was often used on the goldfields to describe a convict or ex-convict from Van Diemen’s Land. The word became synonymous with a criminal, ruffian or an unsavoury character. The word was successfully suppressed when transportation to Van Diemen’s Land ceased in 1853 and the word would have had no meaning, when, in 1856 the colony’s name was changed to Tasmania.

Now, of course, we know them as Tasmaniacs, oops, sorry, I mean Taswegians, or should that be Tasmanians.