

St Alipius Tour

Inquiry Questions

- What role did the church play on the diggings?
- Why would the church become a school?
- What catholic symbols of faith do we see and how is this different to your church?

St Alipius Parish (MAP 15)

The Irish were the second largest population on the Ballarat Goldfields, and most were Catholics who quickly sought a place to continue their worship. Many Irish people migrated to Australia's goldfields because food was scarce at home thanks to the British occupation of Ireland. Some historians argue that the Eureka Rebellion was a continuation of the conflict between the English and Irish that had long raged on the other side of the planet. This conflict over land ownership and religious differences (most English people were Anglicans, while most Irish were Catholics at this time in history), still impacts the relationship between England and Ireland (now split into two countries: Northern Ireland [currently part of the UK] and the Republic of Ireland). Many of the people involved in the Eureka Rebellion were Irish Catholics including the leader of the rebels, Peter Lalor (pronounced Lawlor). This recreated building is a copy of a Catholic church and school that existed in the Ballarat gold rush. Many of the Irish who arrived were illiterate, so establishing a school was high on the list of priorities for Father Downing, who saw children running wild as they were too young for work, but did not have a school to attend. The school was opened in 1852, only a year after gold was announced in Ballarat.

Q. Why do you think different cultural groups were quick to build churches and temples on Victoria's goldfields? A. To pray to their god/s for protection and success. When they first arrived on the goldfields, many people found themselves in an entirely new environment, having left behind their friends, family and community. Churches quickly stepped in to fill the gap that this created. They were not just there to hold Mass, but instead to improve people, provide education, and even help with basic needs such as food, shelter or medical care. As well as supporting these needs, being a member of the parish community presented social opportunities which were otherwise missing from the lives of new arrivals.

Altar (MAP 15)

Just as in modern churches, the altar was the centrepiece of the church, providing a place for the parish priest to conduct Mass. Even in a tent church such as St Alipius, the altar was constructed with reverence. However, when Bishop Goold made a missionary visit to see the church in 1853, he recorded that "everything is satisfactory except the altar. All things connected with it exceed in filth anything I have seen previously". He asked ladies of the parish to contribute altar clothes and vestments to improve the condition, and they generously obliged.

Q. Who is in the picture on the left of the altar? Pope Pius the IX, who was the reigning Pope at this time. He was ordained as a priest in 1819 and was Pope from 1846 until his death in 1878. He is the second-longest reigning Pope in papal history.

Q. Who is in the picture to the right of the altar? This is St Alipius. He lived more than 1500 years ago and was the Bishop of Tagaste in North Africa. His feast day is August the 15th.

St Alipius Flag (MAP 15)

Flags could be seen all over the goldfields, and were used to direct people to stores, tents and churches. Without street names, it was the easiest way to find someone! The flag flown outside St Alipius could be seen from around the diggings, due to the location of the church. It was raised to full mast half an hour before mass began, and lowered when mass started. This reminded the congregation to make their way to the service. The flag flying behind St Alipius' Parish is the flag of Saint Alipius. He lived more than 1500 years ago and studied law before establishing the first monastery in North Africa.

Q. What other famous flag does this flag remind you of? A. It is similar in colour and design to the Eureka Flag. Anastasia Hayes, who was a teacher at St Alipius is one of the three women said to have sewn the original Eureka Flag.

Building (MAP 15)

The St Alipius chapel, when constructed in 1853, was the largest building on the goldfields and could be seen for miles around! It was made from rough hewn slabs and canvas, and as well as a church for more than 1000 parishioners, it had 250 students enrolled within its school by mid 1853. The artist Eugene von Guerard visited the site and presented a sketch of it to Father Downing. During the week, St Alipius operates as the school for classes visiting Sovereign Hill just like it did in 1853 and the "real" school is in operation in Victoria Street Ballarat.

Q. What differences do you notice about this school and the school you go to? Students were required to sit in straight rows, facing the front and the classroom did not have room for group work or other activities. Students were separated into boys and girls, because they were expected to learn different things. Students spent a lot of time repeating what the teacher told them, and copying things from the blackboard.

Q. Why does the sign at the front of St Alipius mention the school hours, but not a school principal or teacher? While the parish priest, who in 1854 was Father Downing, was still an essential part of the school community, there was no Principal and Teachers could be selected by Bishop Goold and did not need specific qualifications.

Q: Why would fees be a deterrent for families to send their children to school? Until 1872, school was not compulsory or free for children in Victoria. If a family could not afford to send their children to school, they would instead keep them at home to help with chores or learn skills to help with trades or housekeeping. This was especially true for girls, whose education was seen as less important. This attitude was difficult for the teachers of St Alipius, who might have several hundred children enrolled, but much fewer in attendance each week and this made it very hard to write to the board for grants towards materials and extra teaching support.

SOVEREIGN HILL LEARNING



VISIT THE PRECINCTS

THE DIGGINGS

1851 - 1854: Daily life in a tent city, including housing, mining, business, law and order as gold seekers searched for a better life. **Why was gold so valuable, and how did it change peoples lives?**

SPEEDWELL STREET

1856 - 1861: Aligned to Main Street, highlighting the change in living conditions, business and technology that improved daily life. **How do we measure change? Were we more sustainable in the past?**

MAIN STREET

1855 - 1861: Ballarat as a town with the building of permanent structures and amenities to service the needs and wants of the community, economically and socially. **How did the gold rush shape modern Australia?**

STEAM, MINING INDUSTRY

1861 - 1914: Showcasing technology and innovation that contributed to the rapid development of Ballarat and the broader region. **How does technology shape and change lives?**

CHINESE VILLAGE

1857 - 1860: The cultural and social living conditions of Chinese immigrants within the larger narrative of the gold rush, exploring their struggles and successes. **Why do people risk everything in search for a better life?**

WADAWURRUNG CULTURAL

First Nations artists share their reflections of culture, history, and heritage. **What creates a sense of belonging and connection to the place you call home?**

VISITOR SERVICES

- Information
- Food & Drink
- Toilets
- All Gender Toilets
- First Aid Kit
- Beware of Horses
- Suggested Stroller & Wheelchair Route
- Accessible Toilet
- Parenting Room
- Water Tap
- Post Office
- Gift Shop
- Ramps

Emergency Evacuation Point

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR OUR INTERACTIVE MAP



We acknowledge the First Nations of the land upon which Sovereign Hill and Narmbool sit, the Wadawurrung, and their ongoing connection to this land and pay respect to their culture and their Elders past, present and future.