Rumours of gold

The first gold discoverers were shepherds, surveyors and clergymen. As early as 1823, surveyor James McBrien noticed gold particles by the Fish River east of Bathurst.

Shepherds searching for grazing lands travelled westwards over the Blue Mountains and moved onto land which revealed gold-bearing quartz reefs.

An ex-convict and shepherd named McGregor found many pieces of gold in the Wellington region and chipped parts off to take to Sydney where it was displayed in jewellery shop windows.

However it wasn’t until the 1840s that gold exploration was seriously discussed by geologists such as the Reverend William Branwhite Clarke. Anglican clergyman and geologist, Rev. Clarke was principal at the King’s School, Parramatta and later the rector at St Thomas’, North Sydney. His passion was geology and in 1841, while exploring the Blue Mountains for fossils, he examined granite slabs near Hartley and discovered particles of gold.

Clarke wrote that the country would be found ‘abundantly rich in gold’. He continued to collect specimens and in April 1844 he informed Governor Gipps of his finds and later claimed that the governor directed him to ‘Put it away, Mr. Clarke, or we shall all have our throats cut’.

The ruling elite feared that a predominantly convict population striking it rich would lead to greater crimes or result in a convict rebellion brought on by greed for gold.

A gold rush in the bush, away from the main population centre could upset the status quo of the ordered convict society.
Reverend William Branwhite Clark from the Scott family collection of studio portrait photographs, ca. 1865-1921

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Edward Hammond Hargraves

Edward Hammond Hargraves was a shrewd gold promoter, credited with discovering the first payable goldfields near Bathurst, New South Wales.

Returning unsuccessfully from the Californian goldfields, Hargraves decided to travel west to Wellington in search of Australian gold during the summer of 1851. Visiting an inn at Guyong owned by the Lister family, he changed his travel plans and relied upon local knowledge of the area.

With the son of the innkeeper, John Lister and the Tom brothers, William and James, he started panning for gold at Lewis Ponds Creek. Hargraves taught the young men how to make a Californian cradle which he had seen on the Californian goldfields. This wooden contraption could be rocked from side to side so that the heavy gold particles were retained when the lighter gravel was sifted through.

On February 12, 1851 Hargraves, along with his assistants, discovered flecks of gold in the Lewis Ponds Creek. Hargraves wrote to William Northwood, a Sydney business man, announcing his gold discovery. His letters are...
cross-hatched, a common method of conserving paper at the time.
Mr E.H. Hargraves returning the salute of the gold miners [5th] of the ensuing May
Wellington Inn Goyong
11th February 1851
Dear Sir,

I arrived here last evening the weather was exceedingly hot indeed nearly as much so as in California I am scarcely 250 miles from Sydney. The horse is the greatest brute I ever rode after the first days journey he would stumble twenty times in one mile – I am obliged to hold him up and by the end of the day my arms are tired however I hope to get him along after a days rest. His pedigree is as follows. Bred by Mr. Collett's Mount York sold by him to Mr. Kendall at Fish River who sold him to Raper in consequence of his buckjumping propensities. He nearly killed Mr Kendall who is a native and an excellent horseman – Mr Raper sold him to a hackney coachman and after a while bought him again he had got the character of being a good horse if not allowed to be idle but his stumbling is a bad thing Mr. Kendall says if he is stabled for 10 days no man can sit on his back but as feed is exceedingly scarce and dear and in some places not to be got at all I hope to keep him under. Indeed he will be a pretty object if you ever see him again. I am now going to the “McQuarie River” and trace up the source of the “Bell”

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and Tooron Rivers a distance of 150 miles I strike the Macquarie 20 miles from Wellington at Bunnalong I have got hopes of success but the scarcity of water will prevent my making such a research as I should wish you will not hear from me for 3 weeks or a month. It is superfluous for me to say that my most undivided energies will be directed towards the object in view. I have been over a country of 30 to 40 miles abounding with copper – the resources of this country are little known it is no doubt a rich mining country and new discoveries will be made every day.

You had better send 200lbs. flour up to the house in a fortnight and write me about the same time giving me what news you can “address Post Office Bathurst” – I shall then know how things are going on – I am now at the world’s end and am going nearly 200 miles beyond it a little news will be acceptable. When I come into the world again – I met Mr.Icely as I was coming up from Sydney He was going down and gave me a very pressing invitation to go to his house at “Coombring” – I did not go. I may call coming back if I want to rest the horse Don’t forget to
speak to Mr. Suttor as I shall be regularly stumped by the time I get to Bathurst
In haste
Yours truly
E.H.Hargraves
P.S. I have got the horse fresh shod the Blacksmith tells me the brute will not stumble so much when his feet are shorter. EHH Mr W Northwood Agent Market St at Sydney
Letter to William Northwood, 11 February, 1851, page 2 1851
Edward Hammond Hargraves
Call # MLMSS 139/55 [9]
Digital ID: a1841017
View collection item detail [12]

Transcript:
Prima Castra Arouya
Goyong Die Saturni
16th/2/AD/49
My Dear Sir

In my last dated 22th inst you were informed I was about to proceed into the wilderness on my mission. The
following day I did so and be it remembered on the memorable day To Wit on the 12th day of February in the year
of our Lord – one thousand eight hundred and fifty one I did at my “Prima Castra” on Arouya  Goyong in the very
first bowl bowl of earth washed – discover “Gold” amalgamated with the earth precisely in the same way in which
it is in California - Mexico –Chilli – Peru and South America hence I claim the right of discovery You will of course
keep this letter as an important document – I knew I was in gold country 70 miles before I made this discovery but
being no water I could not try the earth and being near a sheep station expecting the sheep to drink I did not further
disturb the earth but carefully put up my 5 little specks or grains away – I am now perfectly
Letter to William Northwood, 16 February, 1851, page 1 1851
Edward Hammond Hargraves
Call # MLMSS 139/55 [9]
Digital ID: a1841010
View collection item detail [14]
Transcript:
satisfied of its existence and shall launch out to a remote place to try for a rich place and when I can do that I shall return to Bathurst and take across the mountains to Gundagai. I shall then have travelled over a country in extent 600 miles – I do not hesitate to say that I have now been over at least 80 miles of a gold region but the want of water precludes me from making such a research as I could wish. Therefore in this my present communication I wish you distinctly to understand that I cannot for the want of water make at all a satisfactory research indeed such is the scarcity of water that I have had great difficulty to get water for self and horse. Where I am going now to the Toroon River there is water but no grass – I have got bran and hay but in all probability I shall be able to get Mr. Kendall to keep the horse alive for a few days – Mr Sutters will be out of my way and 20 miles for a tired man and horse is a great deal – You had therefore better therefore enclose me a five pound note. Address to Through the post to Bathurst as I shall not have a feather to fly with on my arrival there. My opinion is that the Gold Mines of New South Wales are more extensive than those of California, the richness of which I cannot as yet form the most remote idea.

Yours very truly
E.H.Hargraves

Post paid
Mr William Northwood
Agent
Market Street West
Sydney
E.H.H.
Letter to William Northwood, 16 February, 1851, page 3 1851
Edward Hammond Hargraves
Call # MLMSS 139/55 [9]
Digital ID: a1841012
View collection item detail [18]
John Lister and the Tom Brothers

Edward Hargraves travelled to Sydney to negotiate with the Colonial Secretary regarding his reward for finding gold. His assistants, John Lister and William and James Tom continued working their cradle and located four ounces of gold further downstream from Hargraves' first find, including a two-ounce nugget that William Tom noticed in a rock crevice. Hargraves purchased these nuggets and sent some by mail to the Colonial Secretary. Announcing that it was he who had discovered payable gold in the district, Hargraves began a publicity campaign, generating much discussion in the region and naming the part of the creek which yielded gold the FitzRoy Bar after the Governor and the area Ophir, after the biblical city of gold.

Hargraves was feted as a hero and was rewarded by the government with £10,000 and an annual pension of £250
and was given the position of Commissioner of Crown Lands for the gold districts. He received many valuable gifts and was the subject of many triumphant portraits.

It was a number of decades before John Lister and the Tom brothers received formal recognition of their part in the discovery of gold, finally being acknowledged by a select committee of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in 1890.

William Tom wrote an account of meeting Hargraves and the work these men undertook in prospecting for gold as part of their evidence to the NSW Legislative Assembly.
[Silver tea and coffee service] Presented to Edward H. Hargraves Esq. the discoverer of the Gold fields of Australia, by the inhabitants of Bathurst ... 1853, 1851

View collection item detail [22]a720001
The following evidence touching the first gold discovery in Australia was prepared by us in 1856:

First Gold Discovery

22 July 1856

To a Committee of the New South Wales Parliament,

But having heard all legitimate means to obtain a hearing by that August body without success we now adopt the Res (the only alternative left to us) in view that the public mind may be convinced of its error in supposing Mr. Fargraves to be the sole discoverer of the first payable gold, or in supposing that he ever did more to the discovery than introducing the two dish system and finding something less than a farthing's worth of gold to which he was taken by John Foster and James Som. We can assign no reason whatever for why the public mind should not receive the truth and be undeceived. Certainly, we not being able to obtain a hearing by Parliament, can be considered on proper reason. We wish readers of the following to consider well the letter to us and the circumstances under which it was written. If this letter under the circumstances it was written does not show most clearly to the reader the unjust, cruel, and unjustifying character of Mr. Fargraves whom we have had to contend with we have no idea of anything that will show from. We think it will show the full extent of Mr. Fargraves' honor to the Government, to the public, and to us in 1847. It will show most clearly how he wished to hoodwink the Government, to deceive the public, and bamboozle us and Mr. James Som, on all of which he has gloriously well succeeded.

It may not be out of place to remark here that our petition through the last twenty years has been presented to and received by various Parliaments of New South Wales and on one occasion the members of a select...
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William Tom and John Lister: papers on the discovery of gold
Call # MLMSS 1149  [24]
Digital ID: a1842001
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a1842002h.jpg  [26]
Rumours of gold
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William Tom papers on the discovery of gold, 1867-1884 Call # MLMSS 1149 [24]
Digital ID: a1842002
View collection item detail [27]

This story has been developed with the support of the State Library of NSW Foundation.

We would like to acknowledge the generosity of St Barbara Ltd.
