

THE MUSE

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MUDGEE GOLD – PART 1

by Peter Johnson



Gold Washing Cradle in Mudgee Museum

The gold rushes marked a turning point in Australia's history for the wealth they brought and the social and political changes they heralded. What was true for the nation's history was particularly true for Mudgee's history. In February 1851 Edward Hargraves found some gold near the junction of Lewis Ponds and Summerhill Creeks north east of Orange (later called Ophir). A rush took place and men from Mudgee, Bathurst, Wellington, Montefiores, Sydney and places further afield joined in. George Henry Cox later told an audience at the Mudgee Mechanics' Institute so great was the exodus, there were only six adult males left in town. According to the 1851 census Mudgee's population was 292 in 1851.

By June 1851 there were 2,000 people at Ophir and diggers were finding gold along the Turon River north of Bathurst. In the same month an aboriginal shepherd named Daniel who was employed by local settler, Dr W J Kerr, found a rock that held a large mass of gold. The discovery was made near Louisa Creek, a tributary of Meroo Creek, about 18 miles from Mudgee. It became known as Kerr's hundredweight and the find was national and international news. Years later the *Sydney Morning Herald* said the discovery "perhaps did more to attract attention to this State from all parts of the mother country than anything that preceded it, or for that matter any occurrence which followed for a considerable time".

In early July George Henry Cox and a group of Mudgee locals found a small amount of gold at World's End on Meroo Creek and miners soon converged on World's End. A Sydney newspaper reported, "Gold has been discovered almost in every direction in and around Mudgee". A town resident discovered it in the bed of the Cudgegong River at the bottom of his garden. Henry Bayly at Beaudesert found gold on his property and had 100 men mining for it. Nicholas P Bayly's property on Lawson's Creek was described as "a vast goldfield". On the Rouse estate at Guntawang the governess and her young pupils amused themselves washing for gold and were successful.

In August 1851 Gold Commissioner John Hardy visited new diggings on Louisa and Meroo Creeks and reported that the tableland about there was “all highly auriferous”. Hundreds of people were travelling from Maitland through Mudgee to the diggings. A township named Sofala was formed on the Turon River as the centre of the Turon fields and by the end of 1851 most of the gold being discovered in the western districts was being consigned from Sofala, then far behind that from the Meroo and Ophir.

The discoveries around Mudgee dramatically changed its destiny. The rushes contributed to a shortage of labour and increased the demand for food supplies. In response to the labour shortage, to improve the return on their land capital and to feed the increasing population, Mudgee’s large landholders decided to lease part of their estates to tenant farmers. By April 1853 gold had been found in the bed of the Cudgegong from Mudgee to the Macquarie River, and in two years the quantity of land under plough had quadrupled.

Mudgee’s population had almost tripled to 803 in 1856 and there were new diggings at Merrendee near the junction of the Meroo and Cudgegong Rivers. As well as the settled population there was a large fluctuating population of diggers, travelers, carriers, and drovers, etc. The diggings were said to offer a large and steady market for every description of farm produce. Nearly 5,000 acres of land was sold by the Government in the two-year period to June 1857.

There were downsides to the rushes. The police court became very busy. A correspondent said Mudgee had become “the rendezvous for successful diggers, and their splees (were) sure to induce evil consequences to some others resident on the spot”. He concluded that three or four years previous Mudgee was “all but unknown”, but now it had its buildings, its institutions, a local newspaper, a “very great share” of the business with the diggings, and a large share of traffic to them.

To be continued

EARLY MUDGEE IDENTITIES

(as recorded in the 1880’s)

ALFRED EMANUAL THOMAS

Alfred Emanuel Thomas, Proprietor of the Australian Tannery and the Mudgee Boot factory, was born in the Hunter District, of New South Wales in 1836, and received his education in West Maitland, where he learnt his trade. For a short period, he was engaged in a store, and subsequently directed his steps towards the goldfield, and where he remained for twelve months, meeting with indifferent success.

In 1859 he settled in Mudgee. Two years later, he purchased from Mr. J. D. Little a small tannery, which found employment for three men. From this time, Mr. Thomas dates his successful career as a manufacturer. He finds constant employment for thirty-five hands and puts through an average of from seventy to ninety hides every week, while the boots manufactured by him find a ready market in the western and north western towns of the colony.

His excellent workmanship has frequently asserted itself at local exhibitions, where numerous awards have been given him. At the International Exhibition held in Sydney in 1879, Mr. Thomas secured a medal and certificate for leather, and a first prize at the Maitland Show. He was married in Mudgee in 1862 and is the father of seven children living.

The Tannery is situated in Lawson Street and is now a B & B called the Tannery.

SERVING MALLET

with acknowledgements to the Australian National Maritime Museum



The above Serving Mallet was donated to the Mudgee Museum recently. The following gives a brief description of its use.

They are mostly made of wood but can also be made from whale-bone. The Mallet was used on the rigging of square-rigged ships to apply to standard rigging a multi-layered protection against chafe and deterioration. It is a technique not usually used on modern small boats but found extensively on traditionally rigged sailing ships.

Heavy rope rigging on a square-rigged ship is protected by: - Worming, parcelling and servicing referred to collectively as “service”.

Worming: running a small rope between the lays of the heavier rope to fill all cracks and keep water out.

The worming is laid in by hand and pulled hand taut. Then a medium sized serving mallet is taken and fitted with a tail or tails. Called “trailors”, which may be either of sinnet (braided cord) or the single strand of a large rope.

Parcelling: the rope is then bandaged with sailcloth and tar. Worming, parcelling and service in standing rigging are always put on with materials well soaked in rigging tar. Parcelling at sea is made of old canvass, preferably cut up in long strips. It is soaked in rigger’s tar and put on snugly in the manner of a bandage, *always with the lay* of the stay.

The whole lot is then **Served** (the rope being pulled tight with the mallet to keep it tight). Service is applied to standing rigging to protect it from wear and weather. For applying service, a tool called a *serving mallet* is required. Service is started by taking two or three turns by hand over the rope and drawing them taut with a *marlingspike* (a pointed iron hand tool that is used in marine ropework to separate strands of rope or cable). The rigger’s mallet then takes over the work.

The sailors’ working rhyme was “Worm and parcel with the lay, turnabout and serve away”.

THE FIRST LAND GRANT

It has often been thought that the early land grants, given in N.S.W. were gifts of fancy or were indiscriminately handed out to all and sundry. Perhaps the following will help clarify this misunderstanding.

If one takes a look at the early parish maps of the area, several portions stand out as being larger than most, one of these north-west of Mudgee is portion 53, parish of Munna, county of Wellington, of 2000 acres in the name of Henry Steel, commonly known as Steel's Grant.

This was the first piece of land allotted in the Mudgee District as a grant from the crown to a white man, the date being 7th June 1823. The deed giving title to his grant was not issued until the 9th April 1835. The deed starts by saying:- "Be it known unto all men by these present, that, in order to promote the due Settlement of the said Territory of New South Wales, and in fulfilment of a promise made on or before the seventh day of June, one thousand eight hundred and twenty three by His Excellency Sir Thomas Brisbane as Governor thereof.....(the original document giving this grant is held by the present owner and is signed Richard Bourke who was the governor at the time the deed was issued).

The grant however is of special interest, it being a grant directed by the British Government for military services whilst most of the other grants were by purchase and given at the option of the Colonial Governor of the day. So, let us take a look at the career of this Capt. Henry Steel and see just what he did to merit a grant of land, with a Quit-Rent of only forty shillings a year.

Henry Steel was born about 1778, the eldest of four sons who served as officers in the regular army. Their father, Colonel Thomas Steel, himself a cadet of a family long established on the borders of Scotland, and officer of the old 117th. Regt, the 79th. (Cameron Highlanders) and the 90th. (Graham's Light Infantry) from 1794 till 1817 when he was posted to Windsor Castle where he died.

It is of interest to note that in 1797 when Col. Steel was a Captain in the old 117th. Regt., among the junior officers was Ensign William Cox, afterwards paymaster of the N.S.W. Corps, road builder, builder, pastoralist and father of Georg and Henry Cox, the first settlers in this district, arriving Feb. 1822.

Henry Steel at the early age of 17 received his commission as an Ensign, without purchase, in the 55th. Westmoreland Regt., becoming a lieutenant three months later. He saw active service in the Mediterranean against the French, later joining the general staff.

In June 1807 he was posted as a captain to the N.S.W. Corps., but before leaving for Australia the unfortunate occurrences in connection with Gov. Bligh took place and the N.S.W. Corps was recalled to England and renamed the 102nd. Regt., serving at various places until the American Wars of 1812-14 when once again the 102nd.Regt., sailed for overseas service in the North American sea-board and Canadian Frontier. In 1817 after five years abroad the Regt., returned home to England where as a result of the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo a general reduction of the forces was carried out. Regiments were amalgamated, many officers being placed on half pay.

It was in these circumstances that Henry Steel in March 1818 retired from the army, by the sale of his commission. During his military service he had made friends with such people as Cpts. Piper and North and Lt. William Cox, all names linked with the early development of N.S.W.

In 1818 at the close of the Napoleonic Wars, Great Britain had one million enrolled in the army and navy. Hence the government was faced with a huge problem of settling such a large number of officers and men who had during the last 22 years fought a world in arms, conquering vast fertile and unsettled parts of the globe. Lord Liverpool's Government supported by the Duke of Wellington determined to settle the men on the vacant spaces they had helped to acquire.

It was in these circumstances that Capt. Henry Steel, a married man with a small family, decided to take advantage of the governments help and head for Australia, sailing in August 1822 arriving six months later at Port Jackson.

Henry Steel brought with him from the Colonial Office an instruction to Governor Brisbane to receive a grant of 2,000 acres of land in any part of Australia. He chose to settle upon as a soldier's grant. He selected a piece of land on the Cudgegong River where Lt. Lawson and the Cox brothers were establishing their outposts of settlement from which Mudgee grew.

Governor Brisbane, himself a distinguished peninsular general, lost no time in approving of Steel's choice as the grant was made only four months after Steel's arrival in the colony.

When this land was granted to Henry Steel it was being used by people for grazing, but they had to move on as they had no title to establish themselves there. As the country was opened up this custom of squatting on vacant land became general practice.

Owing to his wife's health Henry Steel remained in Sydney at Steel's Point (named after him) and from 1825-31 was governor of Sydney Gaol, being relieved of his position for his lenient treatment of the prisoners, a rare virtue in those hard days.

From 1835 till his death he looked after his brother's estate at Rockly near Bathurst. Here he bred some of the earliest horses to be exported to India, carrying the well-known XA brand.

This portion 53 known as Steel's Grant was sold to the Cox family in 1836 and has remained with the family ever since. It was on this property that George Henry Cox of Burrundulla had the first machine operated sheering shed in the district. The property is now called "Burrinah"

MUDGEE GAOL

An excerpt from A History of Mudgee by Ernest Hume 1890 -1950

This edifice (now demolished) was situated in Market Street, West End, next to the Court House on the western side, and was built about the year 1835 or 1836 no reliable data being available.

It was a rather commodious building; the grounds being surrounded by a high brick wall to prevent any escapades.

The old gaol and residence were responsible for many trying experiences for attendants in the form of riots, mutinies, escapes, etc. The gaoler with his wife and family lived in the front portion of the gaol.

In the year 1866 the government decided to erect what they proposed to call The Great Western Gaol, and, as a result asked the various towns to place evidence before them showing the advantage of their respective centres as the place for its erection. Unfortunately for Mudgee, Bathurst was finally selected as the most central position. Mudgee, however, got a smaller gaol as well as a two cell lock up, the first lockup keeper being Sergeant Don Miller. Mr John Dick was the first gaoler and there were about twenty warders under his charge, also a works manager named John Horsford who had control of the prisoner tradesmen who were sent to Mudgee from all parts of the state.

There were some expert saddlers, bookbinders, saddlery, boot repairing, saw setting and sharpening, smithing and other work was carried on, work being done for the general public.

Prisoners were employed on the streets breaking up metal and could be seen in gangs all over town in the charge of one or two warders.

From representations made by Sir John Robertson, then a member for Mudgee Electorate, Mudgee was made a Circuit Court town.

In those days, criminals from as far out as Bourke were hanged at Mudgee and floggings were also carried out.

The gaol was enlarged by prison labour in the seventies and prisoners also planted many trees and shrubs about the town. About the year 1875 several prisoners escaped and made across the river with bullets whizzing all around them. Some were secured and others were never captured.

All hands were suspended and a few dismissed after an inquiry had been held.

There was a great burst of indignation among the local business people as prison labour increased. Roadmaking, saddlery and harness making, coach and buggy building, repairing and painting, smithing, boiler-making, etc. were in full swing.

About sixty prisoners were in the gaol at the time (male and female). Church service was held every Sunday. One prisoner had almost completed a fine organ when the gaol was closed. It has never been known what became of the organ.

The gaol contained a solitary confinement, dark cell, and prisoners often did from twenty-four hours to seven days in it. There was a clock in the gaol tower.

The closing of the gaol and transfer of prisoners and wardens to other towns was a big loss to business people.

Some of the principal warders employed in the early days were M. Kiloran, Pat Quinn, N. Scully, J McFarlane, Smythe, R. Kiran, Drinkwater, Ison and Lawson, C. Graham (afterwards Governor of Darlinghurst Gaol), A. McIntosh, McIntyre and Jenkins who was shot by Governor Dick Ison went to California and is believed to have perished in the Great Earthquake there.

Some other governors were Piper, Beamer and Cotter. Governor Cotter was the grandfather of Mr. Percy Dykes, newspaper agent and book seller of this town.

The governors' wives acted as Matron for female prisoners.

SHOOTING OF WARDER JENKINS

The shooting of Warder Jenkins occurred about the year 1890.

A beautiful two storey residence had been built for Governor Dick in Market Street in front of the gaol. Immensely pleased with his new home he set to work to have it most elaborately furnished and in this, he went far beyond his means. Creditors pressed him which led him to borrow money from various fiends which inly made matters worse for him.

Dick, who very seldom drank, in order to drown his sorrows, took a few more drinks than he could stand on the morning of payday. Instead of paying the warders, he sought out his creditors and paid them instead.

Ten or twelve warders with the exception of Jenkins would have made Dick a present of their salary in order to help him out. Jenkins thought different and his remonstrations nearly cost two men their lives. Jenkins quarrelled with Dick who, in his half drunken state and being naturally highly strung, drew his revolver and wounded Jenkins in the face.

Mrs. McIntosh, wardress, got between the two and prevented further trouble, the men being too scared to interfere. Dick was found guilty of attempted manslaughter, but in view of all the circumstances, was let out on a bond on his agreeing to leave the Colony. He made his home in England.

Dick was of a very kindly disposition and a wonderful organiser of concerts, etc. He raised considerable sums of money to finance a band which he put on a sound footing when he raised £100 (\$200) for band instruments and £50 (\$100) for bandsmen's suits.

WHAT IS HAPPENING AT THE MUSEUM?

DISABLED TOILET

The D. A. for the Disabled Toilet is in the hands of the council. We have had two members of Council Staff down to check the site. Everything is going ahead now so we should soon have approval. Next thing is to raise the money to build it.

MUSEUM FAIR

We have set the date for the Museum Fair, on the Sunday of the long weekend in October, (6th October, 2019).

NAME CHANGE

We have now registered the name Mudgee Museum and in due course the signs will be changed on the building to Mudgee Museum.

OPEN SHED

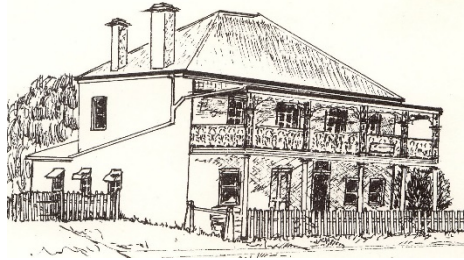
The concreting of the floor in the shed where we want to put the Ambulance and Austin Ute is finished. The mesh screen has been made and put up along the side of the shed, so it is now ready to organize the exhibits.

SENIOR'S MORNING TEA

We were pleased to be able to have a Senior's Morning Tea at the Museum again this year. It was a lovely day under the trees. Those present said that they enjoyed the morning and especially the food which was prepared by the volunteers at the Museum.

GARDENING

The dry weather has played havoc with the lawns as they are too big to water so they are looking very dead. The gardeners are doing a good job to keep the gardens looking respectable in the circumstances.



COLONIAL INN MUSEUM

126 Market Street, Mudgee
Headquarters of the
Mudgee Historical Society Inc

PO Box 217, Mudgee, NSW, 2850
Tel. 02.6372 7395

Opening Times

Mon. to Fri: 10am to 3pm
Sat: 10am to 5pm
Sun & Public Holidays: 10am to 2pm
Groups by appointment

Admission

Adults: \$8
Concession: \$5

Children: \$2

The Mudgee Historical Society meets on the **THIRD** Tuesday morning of every month, except December, at the Colonial Inn Museum at 9.00 a.m.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Membership of the Mudgee Historical Society Inc is due for renewal on the 1st July of each year. Is your membership overdue?

Membership: \$15 Families \$30

NAME:

ADDRESS:

.....

TEL./EMAIL:

Return to: The Secretary, Mudgee Historical Society Inc, PO Box 217, Mudgee, NSW, 2850

