THE STORY OF GOLD IN TASMANIA

There is some obscurity about the history of the discovery of gold in Tasmania. Most writers place the discovery of payable gold as being in the year 1852 but whereas this may be true it is claimed by Petterd that gold was known in the Georgetown district at an earlier date for he states that "it is beyond doubt that its existence was known as far back as between the years 1840 and 1845, small quantities being obtained in the Georgetown district on either side of the River Tamar" and he records that the first payable discovery was in 1852 on the estate of Mr. James Grant at Tullochgorum in the Fingal district. More correctly the discovery was on ground about a mile north of Mr. Grant's property and was probably on or near the site of the present township of Mangana. The discovery of gold in 1852 resulted from the impetus given to the search for the metal by the return in 1851 of gold diggers from the alluvial fields of Victoria and other mainland states where they had gained experience in the treatment of alluvial material and the recovery of gold therefrom.

As in all other states the production of gold has arisen from several sources as follows:-

(1) Alluvial
  (a) Shallow
  (b) Deep
(2) Quartz reefs
(3) As bye products from the treatment of ores of copper, as at Mount Lyell, and of zinc-lead ores as at Rosebery.

Though there were no spectacular "gold rushes" in Tasmania and the discovery of nuggets was not a common occurrence it is on record that the alluvial diggings of the Fingal district gave employment to upwards

of 500 men and at one time more than 2,500 men were employed at Lisle.

The alluvial drifts from which the earliest gold was won were widespread in occurrence and ranged over the King River, Pieman, River, Long Plains, Lefroy, Lisle, Beaconsfield, Bell Mountain and Mathinna districts. At some of these sites, Beaconsfield, Lefroy, and Mathinna, the gold mining industry was maintained, after the exhaustion of the drifts, by the discovery of reef gold.

Some nuggets of gold were discovered in the alluvial drifts the most important of which are as follows:-

(1) Long Plains, weight - 9 ounces obtained by Bruchner in 1882.

(2) Rocky River, weight - 243 ounces obtained by McGinty and party in 1883.

(3) Rocky River, weight - 143 ounces obtained by Griffin and party in 1883.

Less spectacular than the discovery of nuggets but of more concrete importance to the gold mining industry was the production of gold from alluvial sources, practically all of which came from the shallow alluvial deposits of the State. The recorded production from the Lisle field, though far from complete, is 85,000 ounces of gold which was all won from shallow alluvial drifts and although Beaconsfield and Mathinna fields were essentially reefing propositions their contributions towards the output of alluvial gold was considerable.

Small quantities of gold will continue to be produced from shallow alluvial goldfields and from alluvial tin deposits with which gold is associated but the known shallow alluvial goldfields have been exhausted in so far as major operations are concerned. The future of alluvial gold is related to the discovery of new fields or operations on the deeper alluvials.

Deep leads are known to occur in the Lefroy and Pieman River regions. The former leads have been covered by basalt for a distance of several miles and operations, up to the present, have treated only the shallow wash in the tributary streams. The fact that these tributaries have been worked until the mantling basalt prevented further progress suggests probable continuation of gold-bearing wash under cover of the basalt. Prior to 1894 some diamond drilling was carried out to determine the persistence and grade of the basalt covered drifts but the evidence inclines to the fact that a tributary lead and not the main lead was entered. The results were, therefore, indefinite and discouraging.

In the year 1894 Montgomery, then Government Geological Surveyor, criticised the boring as follows:-

"Neither of these two series of bores has, to my mind, been well located, - the endeavour seemingly having been to drop on the gutters by random shot instead of by carrying out a systematic search. As seen on the plan, both sets of bores are on branch leads running into the main Back Creek Valley lead; and there can be no doubt that the basalt indicates approximately the position of the old valley into which it flowed. Had a survey been made of the boundaries of the deep ground, it would have been seen at a glance that there are narrow parts of the old valleys lying a little to the east of both sets of bores. where a complete cross-section of the leads could have been made with the same amount of boring, or even less. It should be remembered that the proper use of a diamond drill in searching for deep leads is to locate the deepest gro nd, not to find gold, - the sample of gravel taken by the drill being

so small that richness or otherwise of the wash cannot be correctly judged by it..... In boring for a lead the holes should be put down in regular lines across its supposed course, and the dip of the bottom from bore to bore noticed, so that it can be found between which pair of bores the deepest ground must lie".

A deep lead in the locality of Corinna, in the Pieman River region, was referred to by Reid as covering a large area and ranging in depth from 30 to 110 feet. The wash contained fine gold of a recorded low content.

Of recent years a fresh source of alluvial gold has arisen where dredging operations in the Dorset Flats area near the township of Pioneer in the north-east of the State produces as a by-product some 220 ounces of gold per year from the tin-bearing gravels of the Ringarooma River.

Although the discovery of alluvial gold gave to the industry the necessary impetus to assure its continuation until the lodes were found from which the alluvial gold was shed the lode mining for gold was of much more lasting value to the State. The reefs of Beaconsfield and the Mathinna district were discovered soon after alluvial mining commenced and development of the reefs resulted in establishing the mining industry. Of the many shafts and mines opened up two at least enjoyed an extended period of operations. These two mines were the Tasmania mine of Beaconsfield and the Golden Gate mine of Mathinna.

The Tasmania mine during its 42 years of operations from 1877 and 1919 produced a total of 849,913 ounces of fine gold. The mine reached a total depth of 1,600 feet with the high grade ore terminating at the 1,500 feet level. In the case of the Golden Gate Mine its greatest depth was 1,800 feet but little if any

gold was won below the 1,500 feet level. During its life-time a total of 257,000 ounces of fine gold were won.

Active mining operations ceased at these mines a few years prior to their final closing and operations over the last years were directed to recovery of gold by cyaniding the sand and slime dumps from the ore previously milled.

Of the mines which produce gold as a by-product from the treatment of ores of copper and zinc-lead the Mount Lyell Mine at Queenstown and the Electrolytic Zinc Company's Mine at Rosebery are the principal ones. These two mines are responsible for the greater part of the total present gold production of the State.

From its inception to the present time the Mount Lyell Company has produced 511,907 ounces with a present yearly production of approximately 3,000 ounces. The mine at Rosebery had produced a total of 138,000 ounces approximately with a yearly total at present of approximately 9,000 ounces.

The total recorded production of gold for the State as at 31st December last (1951) was 2,317,784.470 ounces of fine gold of an assessed value of £s10,399,078 and although the yearly output has fallen considerably from the yield of former years it is still an important contribution to the total output of the mining industry. During the last decade approximately 160,000 ounces have been produced of a total value of £s1,374,000.

There are no lode mines, of moment, at present in operation for the sole production of gold, the major portion of the output accruing as by-products from other forms of mining. Whilst such mines exist the production of gold will continue. Any improvement must result from the re-opening of new closed mines, the development of known alluvial fields previously considered too low grade

to be worked, the location and development of ore bodies from which gold may be recovered as a by-product, the location of payable zones within the compass of known reefing series or the discovery of new fields either alluvial or lode in parts of the State not yet explored.

(Signed)

H.G.W.Keid

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