

Adam Johns: Prospector, Miner & Explorer of the Northern Territory 1840-1896

By TIMOTHY G. JONES

For over twenty years Adam Johns was a prospector, miner and explorer in the Northern Territory and for somewhat lesser periods in Western Australia. Each was a high-risk occupation and like many others, he had his ups and downs. Soon after his arrival he became a highly respected Northern Territory identity. The paper will highlight his extremely active life as a prospector and miner and will endeavour to set out his achievements and tribulations.

Adam Johns was the son of Isaac and Agnes Johns of Adelaide. According to Cathie Clements in *Kimberley Scenes*,¹ at 16 years of age he went exploring with Phil Saunders, using camels and packhorses to travel between Brisbane and Cape York, on an expedition lasting nine months. From then on Johns and Saunders were inseparable and throughout their association had a joint bank account. In the early 1870s, attracted by reports that workers on the Overland Telegraph Line had found traces of gold, the two men and some of their close associates, Alexander Grant, Thomas McBride and Sam Meaker, all in their early thirties, travelled by horse from Queensland to the Northern Territory to try their luck. Harry Readford, an expert bushman was engaged to pilot them. In October 1873, the party arrived at the small township of Pine Creek and immediately set about prospecting. It is not recorded who actually found a substantial gold deposit but it was popularly believed that it was Adam Johns. Nevertheless, ownership was that of the Prospectors Company of which the five were members. On 1st December 1873 the five registered a quartz and alluvial prospecting claim located about 10 miles [16km] north north west of Pine Creek, which became known as Union Reefs.² The find, coming at a time when most of the early mining companies were either about to, or had run out of money, was to have a significant affect on mining in the Territory.

John Lewis, father of Essington Lewis of BHP fame, an entrepreneur with interests in mining, steam launches and general trading in the Northern Territory, heard of the Union Reefs discovery and hurried from Pine Creek by horse to inspect it and recorded:

The Union Reef was discovered by Queenslanders and fine men they were – Saunders and Johns were good bushmen, as straight as possible and as hard as nails. They struck alluvial gold and washed 600 ounces in a few days. Of the shedding reef he said You could see the gold in the stone 60 or 70 yards from the reef. It was the most magnificent sight I ever saw. I bought a one-sixth share for a thousand pounds. We sank the shaft ten feet [3.5m] and carted ten tons of stone (all that came without picking it) to the Telegraph battery and it gave us 77 ounces to the ton. We then made a dam to conserve water, put up a temporary battery and sank the shaft 100 feet [30.5m]. It looked as well at the bottom as at the top. We crushed for a fortnight and paid a dividend of 700 pounds a share carrying 2000 pounds forward and then we did another fortnight's crushing and paid, I think, 500 pounds a man and carried 1000 pounds forward.³

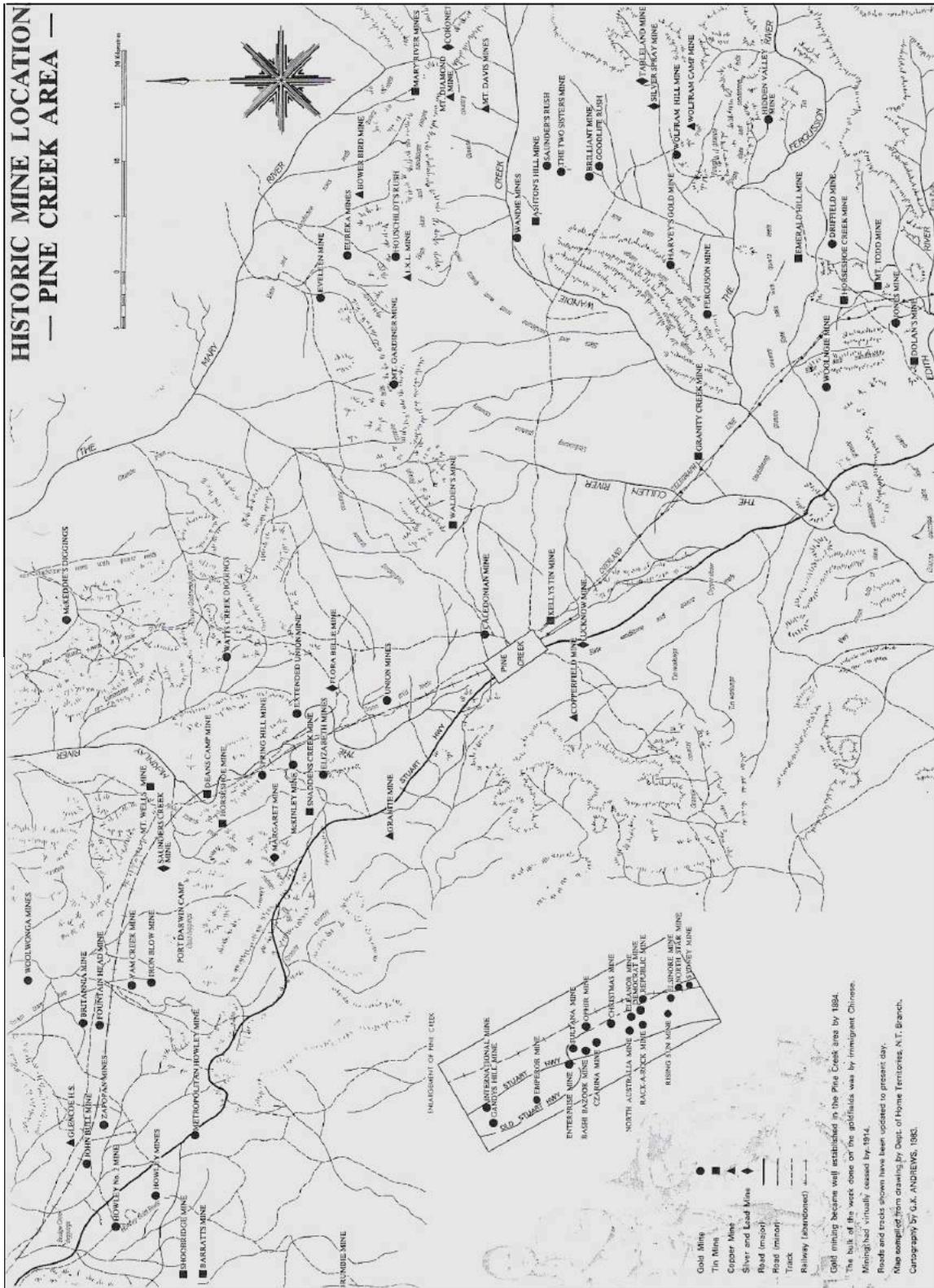
After several months it was found that the mine was not meeting working expenses and the company went into liquidation, two of the partners having withdrawn. The remaining three carried on prospecting their leases and as the Union Reefs find had put new life into other miners' prospecting they decided that it would be profitable to establish a battery which would crush for the public as well as themselves. A battery was ordered to replace the small temporary one. It arrived in August 1874 and became known as the Prospectors Battery. While it was being erected substantial apartments were constructed for the accommodation of employees.⁴

At some stage Johns went south for a period, returning on 19 April 1875 on the *Claude Hamilton*. A fellow passenger was Ping Que, later to emerge as a powerful mining magnate.⁵ He and Johns as well as several other passengers signed and published a letter of thanks to the captain of their ship.⁶ Johns and Ping Que established a friendship that lasted until the death of the latter. Both men went to the Union and it was there that Ping Que established his headquarters.

A report in April 1876 indicated that the Prospectors Battery was crushing for the public whilst the Prospectors claim had struck a tolerably rich vein a few yards south of a large quartz blow cropping out near the old workings. It went on to say that as soon as the dry weather set in and more hands could be obtained the battery would probably operate on two shifts.⁷

Johns' friendship with the Mining Warden, J.G. Knight resulted in his conducting some services for the Warden's Court such as in 1874 when he was asked to check a markout claim at the Union.⁸ In responding to a request from Knight for a report on his operations, Johns indicated that he now had his main shaft at the Union 80 feet [24.4m] deep, No. 3 shaft being 35 feet [10.7m] and No. 2 at 120 feet [36.6m] and sinking, and that he had employed a large number of men.⁹

Map 1: Pine Creek area Northern Territory.



Source: *Northern Territory Times*, 28 May 1881.

In July 1876 Knight reported that the leading prospectors at the mine were becoming disheartened, as the Union Prospectors Company had won very little gold.¹⁰

Their disappointment was evident early in September 1876 as Johns advertised for tenders to lease Union Reefs Prospecting Co. and battery, as well as Gold Mining lease No 73 on tribute, with surplus stores at valuation.¹¹ At the time, the intention of the three mates was to depart by the next steamer. Indeed, a week or so later, all their horses were auctioned, a report stating that said animals were in splendid condition. Of this situation, the *Northern Territory Times* correspondent said:

I shall look upon the departure of this trio as a serious loss to the Northern Territory. There has been no nonsense about them from first to last. Steady, persevering and hopeful, they have slogged away in prosperity and adversity alike unswerving and undaunted but even the camel can be so loaded that the weight of one more straw may break its stalwart back and so I fear it is with my friends. They have weighed the Union in the balance and found it wanting – in gold and still the place, judged by Victorian standards has not been tried. It has been merely surfaced. ... I have often been to the Union and always found my three friends to realize the idea of nature's gentlemen - kind, hospitable unaffected and without "blow".¹²

It was not only for his mining activities that Johns' departure was regretted, and indicating his standing in the mining community was his appointment as honorary Postmaster at Union Reefs. When he relinquished the post duties, the government, rather than pay someone £30 a year, removed the post office, leaving residents to rely on services at The Shackle, a considerable distance away.¹³

However, for whatever reason, but probably because there had been no satisfactory response to the advertisement, the trio decided to stay on in the Territory, though Saunders subsequently went exploring in the lower Katherine and Daly River area and then returned to Queensland. Johns returned to manage their battery at the Union, crushing for the public at £1 a ton. In September 1876, for example, Ping Que, who was by now well established, and his party, had 70 tons crushed with the battery working two shifts for 10 days. Johns also supervised work on his own claims and his joint ventures. Some of these were in association with Ping Que, and at one stage they jointly held four South Union leases and one at Lady Alice South.¹⁴

The Prospectors Battery was steam powered and consumed enormous quantities of firewood, as is evident from an advertisement signed by John Adams in May 1877:

WANTED 100 to 300 tons firewood for Union Prospectors Battery to be cut to 3' [0.9metres] lengths and at rate not less than 25 tons a week; 50 cubic feet [1.4 cubic metres] a ton.¹⁵

The Union was now quite a busy place. In mid 1878 there were 14 whites and 22 Chinese raising stone. The battery was temporarily closed and 300 tons of ore awaited crushing. At about the same time the death occurred of Samuel Meaker, leaving Adam Johns as the sole member of the original Prospectors party to remain in the Territory. Saunders, although absent in Queensland, retained his interest in the company.

Busy as he was with his mining interests Johns accepted the government's offer to make him a Justice of the Peace, which required him to preside over the local magistrate's court. Of this the *Northern Territory Times* correspondent noted:

Very pleased to learn Adam Johns made a JP. My friend Adam is a sterling straightforward white man. I don't think a better man could be found on the goldfields. He may not be profound in law but he has good commonsense and in exerting this his law is not likely to be far wrong.¹⁶

Along with Messrs Johnston, Griffiths, G.P. Morgan and H.J. Masson, Johns also found time to be a member of a committee to organize a presentation to Mr J.G. Knight that was supported by an additional 55 persons, including Ping Que and three other Chinese merchants. This was to acknowledge Knight's services in connection with the arrangement of the Miners Hospital at the Shackle. In the address following a presentation of 23 ounces of gold samples, the Chairman said, *inter alia*:

I merely spoke the sentiments of the entire mining and up-country community when he said they were all deeply indebted to the Warden for the unceasing pains, patience and trouble he had uniformly taken to lessen the sufferings of the sick. ... The little hospital at the Shackle was a great boon to the diggers and was thoroughly appreciated by them. ... The Warden did not limit his attention to the wants of Europeans but extended it to sick Chinamen and he was happy to say that the names of many of the better class of Chinese were appended to the address,¹⁷

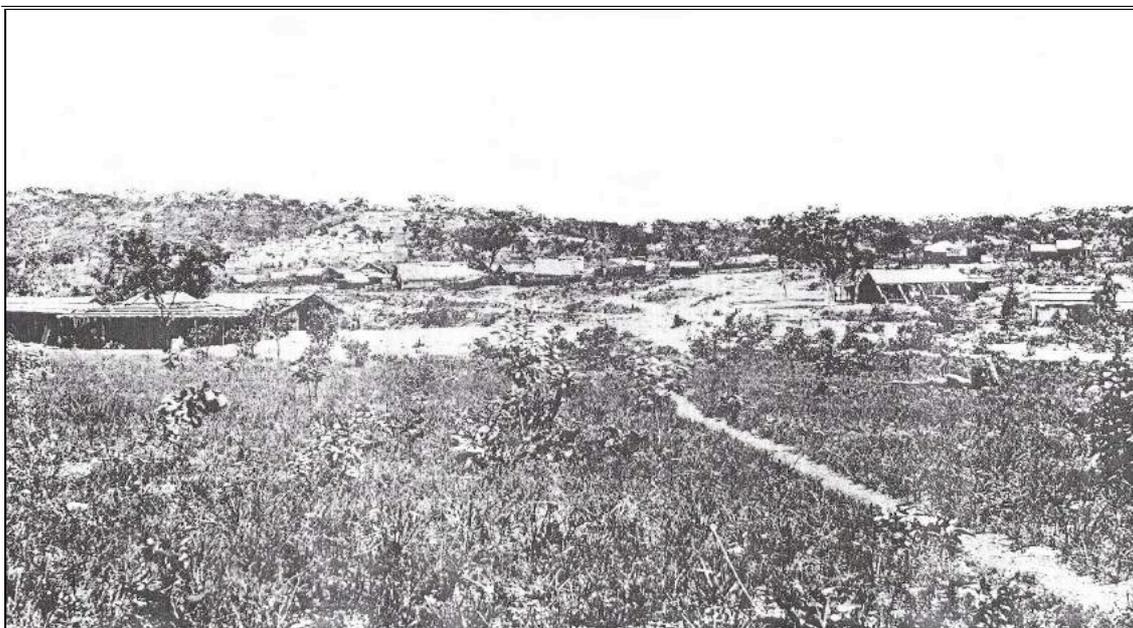
In mid 1879 Saunders, having heard from renowned explorer A.C. Gregory, that certain areas of Western Australia were auriferous, returned to the Territory with a view to persuading Johns to go to that State on a prospecting expedition. Johns agreed to go and placed the following advertisement:

Wanted. Tenders for the Purchase Of the Union Reef Prospectors Company's claim, battery, dam etc and Lease of 20 acres [8.1 hectares] on which battery is Situated; also Team of Six Horses, and Waggon. Tender for battery to be separate From tender for horses. Tenders to be sent In by the 14th October, to the Manager.

Adam Johns
Union Reef 6th September 1879.¹⁸

No buyers appeared, so Johns continued with the company's interests at the Union, whilst Saunders went on two prospecting trips to the Alligator River area but without success.

Photo 1: *Union Reefs 1879*



Source: Photo in possession of author.

There are few mentions of Johns in the *Northern Territory Times* between 1879 and early 1881 but he appears to have remained at the Union until the end of the former year, as is evident from a report of a court case in December of that year:

Adam Johns was presiding magistrate when a short ungainly looking coolie, one of the old Singapore hands that came out in the Vidar four years ago was charged with the theft of a copper plate with 70 ounces of amalgam from the Extended Union battery. After a lengthy hearing the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. There was a suggestion outside the court that the word of a respectable European should be taken over that of a Chinaman but the court was clearly not satisfied. Decision not popular with the mine owner.¹⁹

In January 1880, Johns and compatriot Marker sailed for Singapore, their battery at the Union being hung up for the wet season. Presumably this was a holiday. In March 1881, Johns' associate Saunders found a place 50 miles [80km] east of the Union that was very rich. Presumably he worked the ground to his satisfaction, led 100 Chinese there and all did well. The find was named Saunders Rush.²⁰

Hearing of a substantial reward for the discovery of gold in Western Australia, Johns and Saunders decided to leave the Union and go on a prospecting expedition

there, in an area not far from the Northern Territory border. This meant leaving the Union Reefs, so they once more advertised their holdings for sale:

SALE BY AUCTION.

On Saturday, June 4th, at 10 a.m

**To Mining Speculators and
Capitalists.**

V. L. SOLOMON and CO. will sell by
auction, at their Rooms, Mitchell-st.

**Valuable Mining Plant, Engine,
Battery. &c.**

V. L. SOLOMON and CO. have been
favored with instructions from Mr. A. Johns.
to sell by public auction as above specified,
on Saturday, the 4th of June, at 10 a.m., at
their Rooms, Palmerston.

All that valuable property known as the
"Union Prospectors' Plant," consisting
of One Ten-horse power Portable
Engine, One Ten-head Battery, Twenty
acre Lease with dam and battery erected
thereon; the Lease of the Quartz Claim
known as the "Union Prospectors'
Claim," Buildings, Tools, Sheds, and
everything complete as it now stands at
the Union, the whole of which will be
offered in one line, without any reserve.

The auctioneers consider it almost unnec-
essary to enlarge upon the value of this
property. The battery, engine, and dam are
about the most complete in the Territory,
and the claim has been proved one of the
richest yet discovered. The auctioneer can
with confidence recommend the property to
the notice of speculators as one of the best
investments in the market.

Source: *Northern Territory Times*, 28 May 1881.

In an interview, the *Northern Territory Times* correspondent said that no-one had done more than Johns and Saunders to push themselves and the Territory ahead but they had become disheartened. The half crown per ounce gold duty had determined them to seek new country. In conversation they said that the export duty on gold could not be maintained for any length of time and if it was not abolished very many of the European population would leave. Returns on the Union gold was poor, not averaging £3 an ounce, for the charges in remitting to town, in addition to assay and export duty charges, averaged 6s 2d an ounce. So when the average of most claims was under an ounce to the ton, where was the profit?²¹

The auction of the Union property was without reserve and in the event it realised only £400, a very small fraction of its value and a great disappointment to the owners. Nevertheless, it seems that the partners had a considerable amount of money available, as they were about to embark on a lengthy exploration/prospecting trip to Western Australia, to be financed entirely from their own funds.

In the traditional farewell dinner given to them by some twenty old residents of the Territory, chairman J.G. Knight, in proposing the toast referred to them as ‘a pair of the finest fellows who ever trod the lands of Australia’ - he had never heard a single word said of them except in their praise and honour.²² In his opinion:

Two more modest unassuming straightforward and sterling men could not be found in any part of the world. They were the fathers of the Union and furnished the motive power by which so much gold was gathered from the reef. They have fought the uphill game fundamental to pioneering like a brace of tigers and are I may say reluctantly leaving us, not because they think all the gold has gone but because they feel there is not sufficient inducements for men of their skill and intelligence to sacrifice their time and energy any longer. They have done their share of prospecting, not the least important being the opening up of the new alluvial field called Saunders Rush which I am led to believe will carry thousands of Chinese diggers during the coming wet season. Of the personal hospitality and liberality of our guests all who had ever need to visit the Union must have appreciated it as well as myself. I am sure that no decent person who called at their camp went away hungry or thirsty either. Our guests have chartered a vessel and are going to hunt for gold on the northwest coast of Western Australia. May good luck attend their enterprise.²³

The party, comprising Johns, Saunders, J.W. Quinn and Crawford, referred to as ‘a Darwin black boy’, departed on 12 August 1881 on a chartered vessel the *Prospect*. The expedition was to last some 14 months and traverse some thousands of miles of country. A full description of the expedition, written by Saunders, appeared in the *South*

Australian Advertiser of 14 April 1883. As reported: 17 days after leaving Port Darwin the *Prospect* reached Port Walcott. The party then looked as far west as Asburton (sic) River and followed its course for 250 miles [402km], finding no indications of gold in this river or its tributaries. They then tried east of Roebourne as far as the Yalo River, noting the presence of signs of copper. Leaving Roebourne with 20 horses and provisions for eight months, and following the seacoast, the party reached Fitzroy on 21 May, where they had to wait six weeks for the vessel bringing their provisions. In the meantime they checked the surrounding country and obtained some stores from the Kimberley Pastoral Company camp. They then followed the Fitzroy River down to Stokes Bay until the mouth of the Leonard River was reached and followed up to its source in the King Leopold Range, crossing some very rugged country. Saunders climbed up one of the highest peaks and saw that the range was too rugged to cross. Saunders said that Johns was very ill all through the rough country and on leaving the Fitzroy he was almost blind and could barely walk, but he never complained.

Skirting the range east by south they crossed the Fitzroy, following up one of its branches. The summit of the Leopold Range was reached but precipitous cliffs prevented descent on the north side. This was the head of the Ord River and auriferous country was found on the Ord watershed. No water was found near the head of the Ord but downriver for some 40 miles [64km] there were strong colours of gold - the only gold discovered in the entire journey. After crossing the Ord the party went to the head of Wickham River and followed it down for 120 miles [193km], then crossing over to the Victoria River which was followed down for 60 miles [97km], thence to Delamere cattle station, Katherine and Pine Creek, where they stayed a day before arriving at Yam Creek on 28 October 1882.²⁴

On 4 November a kindly welcome at the Shackle was given to the prospectors by their old friends in the form of a banquet at the British and Foreign Hotel, the Chair being taken by C.W. Nash, the Warden and the Vice-Chair by W.K. Griffiths. In responding to the address of welcome Saunders said *inter alia*:

Any little hardships and disappointments they had experienced were completely obliterated by the unprecedented acts of kindness which they had received from everybody they had met. ... In giving a brief outline of their trip he would say that although they had not met with the success they had hoped for he still believed gold would be found in Western Australia and he hoped he would be the successful prospector.²⁵

Johns was advised to go south for a change of air and departed by steamer for Adelaide late in November 1882. He had been suffering from an infection of the spleen for some time past and this was not improved by his recent tough life.

On reading of the Johns/Saunders expedition, James Shakes wrote to the *South Australian Register* stating:

My object in writing is to call the attention of the South Australian Government to this plucky party who, at their own cost, have done more real exploration in the Northern Territory than any other men who ever went there. I well remember their arrival at Pine Creek in 1873 overland from Queensland and a few days after, their discovery of the celebrated Union Reefs. They then gave us lots of evidence of their value to the country by repeated trips in different directions exploring for gold and subsequently Saunders, in company with G R McMinn, on a trip to the Daly and Fitzmaurice Rivers, then got credit for being one of the best allround horsemen that ever crossed a horse and from a personal acquaintance with Mr Johns and Mr Saunders I can say that although bushmen, they are men of whom you can say I wish for no better companions; steady, kind, brave, humane men, an acquisition to any colony. I believe it to be the rule that when men patriotically do anything for the benefit of others they get rewarded by the State, either with honour or money and I would very much like to see the efforts of these two men meet with some kind of recognition at the hands of Parliament. I feel sure that the above testimony can be well and truly corroborated by every Territorian from 1873 to the present time.²⁶

In the event, no formal recognition was given.

Johns returned to the Territory in April 1883 on the *S S Bowen* from Sydney. As verified on 11 June 1883 by his signature on a memorial presented by Ping Que when applying for naturalization, he appears to have gone back to the Union. The next information on Johns was that on 4 August 1883 he went on a three week prospecting trip, starting at The Shackle, going round the head of the Adelaide River as far as Charlott near Fog Bay. Traces of tin were found but they were not payable and there were no signs of gold whatever. The return trip on the east side of the telegraph line was through likely looking country but no water was available to prospect.

It seems that the partners were running short of money, as in December 1883 Johns was manager of the Arnheim Company at the Hongkong claim near Spring Hill where a large, well-defined reef carrying good gold had been discovered. Construction of a shute to reduce the cost of moving stone to the battery, previously difficult because of inaccessible access to the mine by road was in hand and Johns was also reported to be constructing a tramway on top of the shute to carry up timber for the mines on the hill to save horse labour.²⁷ It is not clear what happened to this mine as the following

year (1884) Johns took over management of the Spring Hill Goldmining Company.²⁸ As he found the battery to be two miles [3.2km] distant from the shaft he built a shute 400 feet long [122metres] to reduce the enormous costs of cartage. All hoisting was done with a horse whim and from January to August that year, 2,267 tons of ore was raised, yielding 2,911 ounces of gold. Chinese labour was used at the mine and battery. In July 1885 it was reported that the company had paid a handsome dividend and that more returns were expected, as the mill was then still busy with about two months water in hand. The stone continued to average a little over an ounce to the ton.

There is a reference to Johns having to visit Palmerston for his health in mid-1885 when he appears to have still been manager of the Spring Hill Company and in 1887 a letter to the editor mentioned he was residing there. He still had interests in other claims: an advertisement in December 1887 indicated that if renewal fees were not paid, five leases of 80 acres [32.4 hectares] each at McKinlay River, jointly held by Johns, R. Cruikshanks and T. Nelson, would be declared 'waste lands'; in March 1888 Johns sold his interest in claim No. 11 South Union for £400 to John Harvey of Adelaide, who had recently visited the Territory.

Johns continued to sit on the Bench, sometimes alone, at other times with Inspector Foelsche, Cruikshanks and Nash. He was also a committee member of the Northern Territory Goldfields Racing Club, which had a racecourse at Port Darwin Camp. One of its meetings was held on 26 December 1884, with six races, the last being one for 'all horses owned and ridden by Chinamen'.²⁹ Johns was also a member of a committee to plan the Melbourne Centennial Northern Territory Exhibition. Saunders, the other member of the partnership, visited Sydney in September 1883 and then returned to the Territory to prospect outlying areas for gold and tin over the next two years.

In September 1888, Johns returned from a prospecting trip west of the Adelaide River. He found good tin country with good surface shows, about 30 miles [48km] east of the Adelaide crossing. Five claims over a total area of 400 acres [162 hectares] were pegged out in the joint names of Johns, P. Saunders, P.S. Robinson and D. Deleroy.³⁰ Johns thought that the claims were portion of a belt of tin country that he believed to extend from Bynoe Harbour through the Finnis River and Mt Shoobridge to Mt Todd. He proceeded to Adelaide to order a concentrating plant constructed by May Bros of Gawler, returning to the Territory in June 1889 on the *Catterhan*. The crusher was to be on the roller pattern but as the ore was very similar to that at Mt Shoobridge and easy to

treat, the partners did not anticipate such damage to the rollers as had occurred at Mt Wells. The plant arrived by the steamer *Changsha* in August 1889 and was transported to the Daly River Landing by the steamer *Maggie* and then some 30 miles [48km] over a fairly good dray track to the mine.

It is not clear how long Saunders stayed with Johns at the mine; in October 1889 he was reported as having two leases at Mt Shoobridge. In the following year he was in the Burrundie area and in June took over management of the South Union Company's mine.

Johns and party's first load of 30 tons of tin concentrates was carted from Mt Tolmer to the Daly Landing by J. Auld's teams in June 1890.³¹ The latter had tin leases not far from Johns and his party and in April 1890 he had 5 tons of concentrates ready for export, so presumably he had availed himself of the services of Johns' concentrating plant. Johns said at the time that he proposed to make a track to Bynoe Harbour but the boggy nature of the country in the district made this impossible at that time, for the rainy season in his district had been the wettest he had experienced for years in any part of the Territory.³² In succeeding months, further cargoes of tin concentrates were transported to Palmerston in the steamer *Maggie*. Items in the *Northern Territory Times* indicated that there were further shipments of tin ore during the remainder of the year. In 12 months the partners treated 800 tons of ore for a return of 46 tons of concentrates and this covered the cost of the machinery and the Chinese labour employed at the mine. J.V. Parkes, the Government Geologist, visited Mt Tolmer a short time before October 1891 when he found the plant idle. Of the mining operation he said:

I saw two beautiful lodes on this tin claim that I am positive would give 3% of oxide. You can see the tin lying about. And yet the machine there is lying idle. I will undertake to say that I could go and break up the stuff by hand and make a pound a day at it. It is a shame to see such a property lying idle. I think the owners will be incited by what I have said to them to go to work this wet season. There's nothing to stop them – plenty of water and tin staring you in the face wherever you like to look.³³

Johns' first love was prospecting and between June 1891 and September 1892, he left his plant at Mt Tolmer and went with A. Candy and D. Deloury on a prospecting trip in the Alligator River district and the country about the Waterhouse, a tributary of the Katherine. Although they subjected any likely spots to careful scrutiny, they found nothing better in the way of gold than bare colours and some silver and copper shows.

Because of several reports made by drovers suggesting the existence of goldbearing country along the Waterhouse and Wilton Rivers the party visited those neighbourhoods but not even a trace of colour was obtained. With the Alligator district they were more satisfied for about 100 miles [161km] up from the head of navigation they came across some nice-looking mineral belts but unfortunately the area was so short of grass that to save their horses they had to leave it after a few days. Silver and copper lodes were found close together and though their specimens of galena did not assay well, the copper ores were stated to give excellent returns. On the lower part of the country towards the coast a former group of prospectors found colours of gold wherever they tried but Johns and Co. did not go there; instead they stuck to the Tablelands and on leaving the Alligator they struck direct across to the Katherine and followed it down to the Waterhouse. This expedition was financed entirely by the members of the party.³⁴

In September 1892 the Mt Tolmer plant was advertised for sale by auction without reserve. The reasons given were that the track into the mine was trafficable for only a few months of the year and that consequently, the cost of financing several months of stores was beyond the resources of the owners.³⁵ The machinery, purchased for £400 by the Rev. D. McKillop of the Roman Catholic Mission at Daly River,³⁶ represented a considerable loss for Johns and his partners. It lay idle until bought in 1900 by a local syndicate that set up a company to mine tin at Bynoe Harbour where they erected the plant.

In June 1892, Johns' partner, Saunders, called for tenders for the whole of the North Australian Mining Company's machinery, plant and buildings at the Union but there was no mention of Johns in the local press until early 1894, when Saunders received a good offer from a Melbourne Syndicate³⁷ to lead a prospecting party in Western Australia. Johns was to accompany him. The *Northern Territory Times* expressed regret at their departure, saying that for 20 years they had struggled together to acquire a fortune in the Territory's mineral areas but Dame Fortune had not been prolific in her favours, adding that it was very doubtful if they went away with as much as they had on arrival in 1873.³⁸ The two left the Territory in April 1894 by the *Changshah*, bound for Coolgardie. Saunders did not return to the Territory. He found gold at Mt Idaand and managed the Copperfield leases until his death in 1931. He was then 90 years of age.³⁹

Johns returned to the Territory in March 1885 on the *Menmuir*. A few months later the *London Truth* reported that English interests had purchased the Zapopan mine

from the Brocks Creek Mining Company and that Johns after a thorough investigation recommended the immediate erection of a 20 head stamp battery which he expected to acquire locally.⁴⁰ There was a suggestion in the *Sydney Bulletin* that in floating the company in London a false impression had been created that the mine was located in Western Australia, when in fact it was in the Northern Territory.⁴¹ The company secured batteries from the McKinlay and Mt Shoobridge plants, reportedly at bargain rates. Johns as Mining Overseer planned and directed the erection of the Zapopan Company's entire plant. Having completed this phase he then dewatered and deepened the shaft.⁴² Then, under instructions from London, his services were dispensed with on the sole grounds of economy.

Photo 2: *Zapopan Mine 1891.*



Source: Photo in possession of the author.

Shortly afterwards Johns was returning from Fountainhead where he had gone to meet the train and transact some business. At the time some old acquaintances remarked that he had not looked so well for years (a correspondent noted that Johns had been at death's door many times within the previous few years.) On the return trip to the Zapopan, the buggy capsized in a creek and Johns was killed instantly. His obituary in the *Northern Territory Times* recorded that:

Associated with Phil Saunders the name of Adam Johns has been known and respected for more than 20 years, nay, almost from the beginning of our gold mining era. The two were mates in the best sense of the word though not always together. ... Fortune was fickle and it is within the mark to say that the mates seldom had much cash at the end of each year from their mining labours.⁴³

Adam Johns was buried near the Fountainhead Road about half a mile from the Zapopan on good high ground and some distance from any known reefs.⁴⁴ At the end of his life Johns' possessions were few. The Public Trustee's Schedule of Possessions listed the following items under the control of Mr St Aubyn, the manager of the Zapopan Mine:

4 inches [10,2cm] of books. Templtons workshop receipts. One book on Mineralogy. One assay scales in glass case. One gold watch and chain. One gold ring. Two boxes. One handbag. Two pack saddles and bags. One set studs. One box crucibles. One set stocks and dies.⁴⁵

His joint bank account with P Saunders amounted to £120.4.4d but after administration costs and payment of debts (including remission of half of the ultimate balance to Saunders) the final balance of £22.9.5d was remitted to John Johns of Adelaide, the only living relative.⁴⁶ Perhaps a sad end for one of the Territory's best known and respected miners after such effort over many years.

Endnotes

¹ C. Clements; *Kimberley Scenes*, Hesperian Press Victoria Park, WA, 1991.

² *Ibid.*

³ J. Lewis, *Fought and Won*, W.K. Thomas, Adelaide, 1922.

⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 15 August 1874.

⁵ See Timothy Jones, 'Ping Que – Mining Magnate of the Northern Territory', *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 2003, pp. 188-98.

⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 April 1875.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 April 1876.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24 July 1874.

⁹ Warden's Report, 14 April 1876, South Australian State Records, file in Government Record Series 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1876.

¹¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 2 September 1876.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16 September 1876.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17 June 1876.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 May 1877.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 March 1878.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16 September 1876.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 April 1879.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20 December 1879.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21 May 1881.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25 June 1881.

²² *Ibid.*, 16 July 1881.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 October 1882.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 November 1882.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 December 1882.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 January 1884.

²⁸ South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 53B/1884.

²⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 15 November 1884.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 September 1888.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 25 April 1890.

³² *Ibid.*, 13 June 1890.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9 October 1891.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11 September 1891.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 September 1892.

³⁶ T.G. Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, Government Printer, Darwin, 1987.

³⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 26 January 1894.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 March 1894.

³⁹ Clements, *Kimberley Scenes*.

⁴⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 12 July 1895.

⁴¹ Quoted in *London Truth*, 9 May 1895.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6 September 1895.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25 September 1896.

⁴⁴ Government Resident of the Northern Territory (South Australia), Inwards correspondence 1870-1912, NTRS 790, 21 September 1896, Northern Territory Archives Service [NTAS].

⁴⁵ Public Trustee (South Australia), Intestacy files, NTRS 2025, file no. 126, NTAS.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*