

Ernie Bond: market gardener for a mining town

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In 1934 a giant, bearded, middle-aged osmiridium miner (see Fig. 1) from the mining town of Adamsfield in the southern Tasmanian highlands selected an even more remote abode. In the glacial Vale of Rasselas on the upper Gordon River, nearly 500 metres above sea level, Ernie Bond settled down as the market gardener for Adamsfield, a mere 20 kilometres away by pack track. It was a symbiotic relationship originally steeped in the struggles of the Great Depression. Farming gave Bond a living during tough times, and he relied on the osmiridium diggers of Adamsfield to provide not only a market, but labour. Isolated Adamsfield needed the relatively cheap, fresh food Bond provided, as well as the supplementary employment he offered on his farm. During World War Two (1939–45) the osmiridium trade almost disappeared, as did Bond's labour supply, but the interdependent settlements of Gordon Vale and Adamsfield struggled along together for eighteen years in all until Bond's retirement in 1952 at the age of 61.¹

Figure 1: *Ernie Bond amidst the button grass in the Vale of Rasselas.*



Source: Jack Thwaites photo, NS3251/1/1380, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office.

Bond came upon the site of Gordon Vale, picturesquely sheltered in bush beneath the Denison Range, during a prospecting expedition in the early 1930s, but his decision to establish a farm there was more than simply surrender to the delights of nature, as it has sometimes been depicted.² It appears that Bond had a problem with alcohol that prevented him returning to Hobart, where it was more freely available.³ His move probably also reflected the common digger realisation that servicing a mining field is generally more profitable than trying to find minerals. His life at Gordon Vale was a variation on the hunter-pro prospector model of earning a living in the bush which other mineral prospectors had

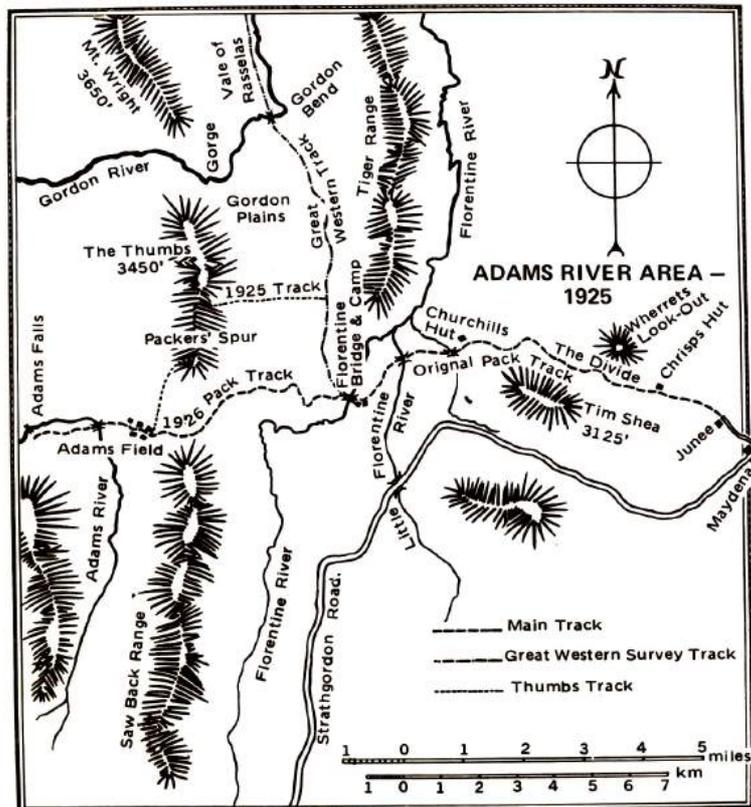
explored, enabling Bond, like them, to live sustainably through all seasons of the year. Given the little research that appears to have been conducted on European (as opposed to Chinese) market gardens on Australasian mining fields, the story of Bond and Gordon Vale is worthy of examination.

Osmiridium mining in Tasmania

Hobart-born, Ernie Bond (1891–1962) was the youngest of the four sons of well-to-do, self-made businessman and parliamentarian Frank Bond (c.1856–1931), and Sarah Bond, née Cowburn (c1863–1934).⁴ Frank Bond was probably Tasmania’s leading mining investor, eventually buying one of the state’s major silver producers, the North Mount Farrell mine, where he employed about 130 men.⁵ He is said to have been so astute financially that he even profited from the collapse of the Bank of Van Diemen’s Land in 1891 by buying scrip at a low price, then doubling his money when it declared a dividend.⁶

The osmiridium that won the attention of Ernie Bond did not figure in his father’s investment portfolio. Initially, at least, investors were not needed. The alloy of precious metals osmium and iridium was usually won in streams by men with pans and sluice-boxes, just like with alluvial gold. In the years 1918–26, before cheaper substitutes were found, Tasmania had a virtual world monopoly on ‘point metal’ (granular) osmiridium used to tip the nibs of fountain pens. It won favour because of its durability. The best Tasmanian ‘point metal’ came from the Nineteen Mile Creek near latter-day Savage River in the north-western highlands and later from Adamsfield, at the head waters of the Gordon River. Having travelled only a short distance from its host rock, serpentine, the metal at these places was coarse or ‘shotty’, perfectly sized to be glued onto a nib in a New York, London or Berlin fountain pen factory. In October 1919 osmiridium reached £42 per oz., making it far more attractive to prospectors than gold.⁷

Map 1: Showing the locations of Gordon Vale and Adamsfield, southern Tasmania.



Source: courtesy of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (Tas.).

The alluvial osmiridium of the north-western fields was worked out by the mid-1920s, but the Adams River (Adamsfield) osmiridium rush about 120 kilometres west of Hobart (see Map 1 and Fig. 2) in the spring of 1925 was a sensation, with several prospecting partnerships initially returning about £1,000 per month.⁸ Even though many diggers only made a subsistence wage at Adamsfield, the rush was seen as something of a godsend, because Tasmania's mining industry, like its agricultural sector, was in dire straits.

Figure 2: *Main Street, Adamsfield, 1926.*



Source: Fred Smithies photo courtesy of the Tasmanian Archive

Subsistence living for osmiridium prospectors

Some of the osmiridium diggers, men like William Aylett and Paddy Hartnett, developed marginal bush livelihoods as hunter-prospectors. At a time when farming was unprofitable for many people, these men from rural areas of Tasmania earned a subsistence living in the bush all year round. Highland mineral prospecting was generally a summer occupation, when the weather was friendlier and the rivers lower. Hunting for furs (Bennett's wallaby, pademelon, brush and ringtail possum) for the European market was legally confined to winter,

when pelts were thick— although some men snared illegally in and out of season, avoiding prosecution by tanning the skins and selling them locally. If there was no open season on 'native furs', Aylett would instead earn a winter wage trapping rabbits.⁹ Aylett and Hartnett also took advantage of Tasmanian government incentives to prospecting and mining, such as the reward lease (a lease granted at a peppercorn rental for making the first discovery of a particular mineral in a new area), financial rewards for gold and tin discoveries leading to the establishment of payable mining fields, and grants to aid 'sinking' on deep leads (mineral-bearing former river beds).¹⁰ A prospector might also live by being grub-staked, that is, being provisioned in return for a small percentage of the profits of any discovery he made; and by cutting tracks to facilitate mining, usually on a government contract. Hartnett had another string to his bow, nature

tourism, setting up a highland tourism regime centred on the Pelion Plain–Du Cane Range–Lake St Clair region in central Tasmania.

In the 1920s and 1930s prospectors also received the sustenance allowance—effectively a mining fields employment initiative—paid at the rate of £8 per month per man to prospect approved locations.¹¹ The Commonwealth *Precious Metals Prospecting Act* (1926) was another help to osmiridium diggers, with £3,500 being allocated to extend the search for osmiridium in south-western Tasmania.¹² With Adamsfield as their base, prospectors fanned out into the ranges, cutting new tracks, sometimes on government contract, as they went.

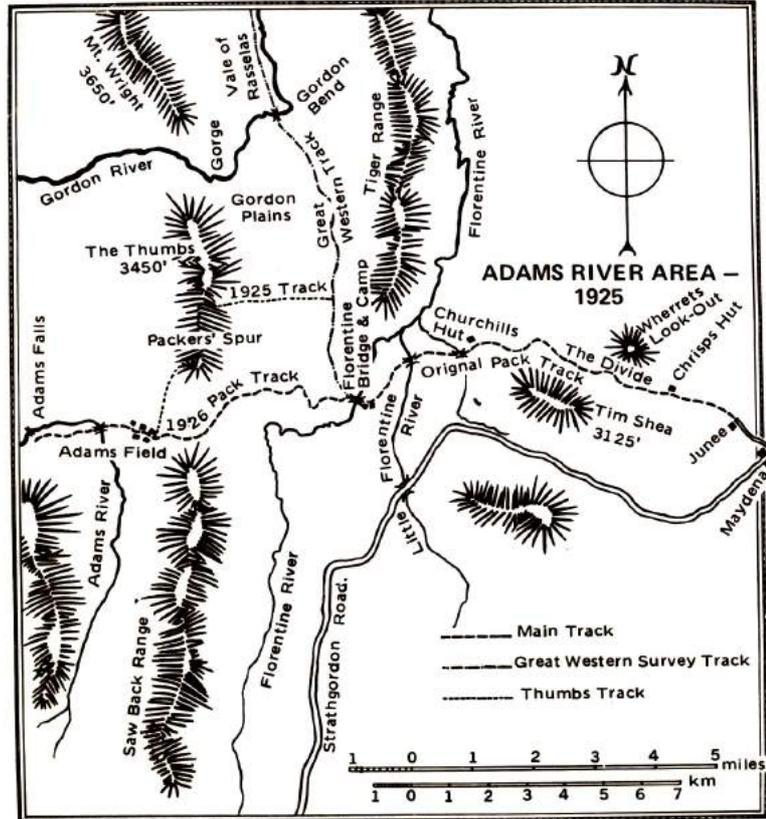
Figure 3: *Ernie Bond (left) operating the puddling machine on his claim at Adamsfield c.1930.*



Source: Jack Thwaites photo, NS3251/1/1133, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office.

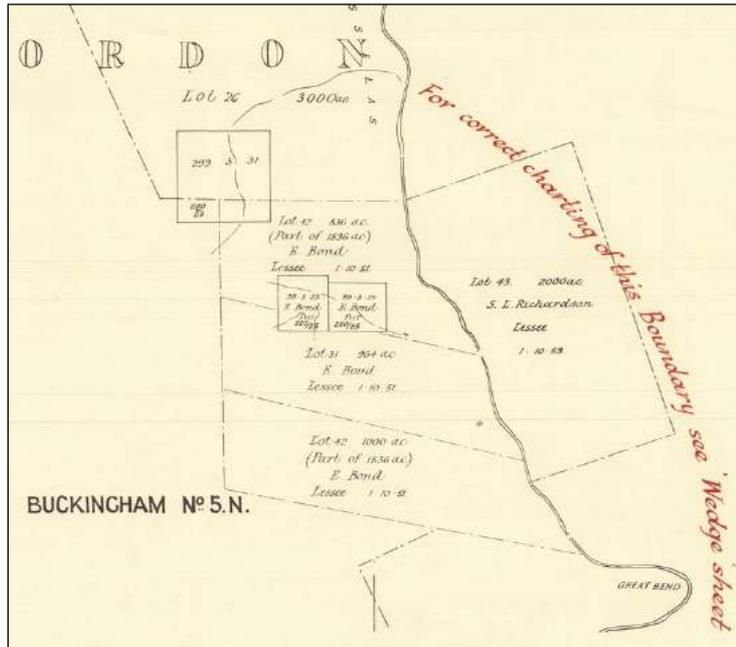
Did Bond know anything about mining? Given his father's leanings, he probably knew something about mining investment, but when it came to the nuts and bolts of it he would have been a 'new chum'. Acting as an osmiridium buyer at Adamsfield would not have helped him much, given the low demand. The price dipped dramatically to below £9 per oz. during 1932.¹³ 'The diggers are desperate and starving at Adamsfield', the old digger J.S. Fenton told Phil Kelly M.H.A. in May 1934. 'The storekeepers with there [sic] cunning can get all the metal for food alone ...' Only the government, Fenton believed, could save the miners from the colluding forces of shopkeepers and precious metal dealers who oppressed them.¹⁴

Map 2: Map showing the locations of Adamsfield (left), the Vale of Rasselas (top left), the pack-track to Adamsfield from the east and the additional pack-track over the Thumbs.



Source: Horace 'Jimmy' Lane's book *I Had a Quid to Get*.

Map 3: Ernie Bond's freehold and leasehold in the southern part of the Vale of Rasselas, above the Great Bend of the Gordon River.



Source: crop from Buckingham 5N map, AF720/1/83, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office.

Establishing Gordon Vale in the Vale of Rasselas

So much for the revival at Adamsfield! These were the circumstances in which Ernie Bond abandoned mining at Adamsfield and established Gordon Vale (see Maps 2 and 3), his highland breadbasket on the western side of the Gordon River in a sheltered part of the Vale of Rasselas. In the wake of the Adamsfield rush, prospectors including Jack Goyen and Bond had pushed through the ranges beyond the Rasselas in search of further osmiridium fields.¹⁵ This was Bond's introduction to the button-grassed glacial highland valley, which had been grazed intermittently since the 1850s when men such as J.B. Blyth and J.F. Sharland had stocked the area.¹⁶ More recently, another pastoralist, Henry Dennison 'Dick' Reed had seized the opportunity to supply meat to Adamsfield by grazing the Rasselas, driving sheep in from the Derwent Valley. However, in 1927, after the Adamsfield rush had finished, Reed had shifted his focus from Tasmania to a property in New South Wales, abandoning the Rasselas.¹⁷ A hut and the name Reeds Creek remained from that venture. More importantly, Reed had bridged the tempestuous Gordon River, enabling the easy movement of stock and pack-horses into the vale. Without a bridge connecting him to Adamsfield and Hobart, Bond may not have even considered establishing his farming outpost. However, the bridge was a double-edged sword. Since the government would not take responsibility for private infrastructure, he knew that if the bridge was destroyed, his livelihood would likely disappear with it.¹⁸

It seems a very bold move for a novice farmer to establish one of the few permanent settlements on Tasmania's button grass country in the Vale of Rasselas. The economic potential of this vegetation had been debated for decades.¹⁹ However, while Bond ran stock on button grass, which they were presumably able to eat, his agricultural plots were on fertile soil covered with the less coarse poa grass. Financial desperation may have been the principal driver. His father Frank Bond had died in 1931. In his will, he appointed as his executors and trustees bank manager Howard Buchanan and accountant Charles Edward Hamilton Ferguson, of the firm Wise, Lord and Ferguson in Hobart. Ernie was not forgotten in the will, being devised £1,000. On top of that, Frank Bond directed the trustees to invest £10,000 on Ernie's behalf, he (Ernie) being paid 'the income therefrom' until his death, when his wife would become the recipient. The income payments to Ernie were to be made 'half-yearly when practicable'.²⁰ The scheduled half-yearly payments—or *non-payments*, as the case may be—from his father's £10,000 investment seem to have become the bane of Bond's life. His diary entries refer to periodic battles with Charles Ferguson over money.²¹

Through 1934 and 1935 Bond fought and eventually won a court battle against an alleged £2,500 debt to his father's estate, that is, the money he believed his father gave him to bail him out of his business failure.²² When his mother died in October 1934, Bond had lost all his siblings and both his parents in the space of five years, cutting some of his ties to Hobart. In her will Sarah Bond provided £250 for educating Ernie junior while he attended the private Hutchins School, to be expended at a maximum of £30 per year. Bond was to receive half the balance of that £250 if any remained when his son left school, plus half her trust fund.²³ He owned some shares, but his only other

income appears to have been rent received for his former marital home after his wife and child vacated it.²⁴ Whether he was paying maintenance to Birdie Bond is unknown.

While squelching in the mud and snow as an Adamsfield digger, Bond would have noticed the more lucrative support services operating around him. The Quinn brothers were not miners. Hop, berry and dairy farmers, they supplemented their incomes by hunting in winter, so they knew the back country and supply routes well and were already equipped with a team of horses. Merv and Jim Quinn packed supplies to the osmiridium field and operated a store, first at the Florentine River, then at Adamsfield itself.²⁵ However, the Quinns were unenterprising compared to the sly-grog merchants, Ralph Langdon and Elias Churchill, who both earned enough money on the field to advance to keeping legitimate, licensed premises in Hobart.²⁶ In 1934 Langdon had the Wheatsheaf Hotel and Churchill the Duke of York.²⁷ Perhaps they wowed the licensing board with their osmiridium field testimonials! There was no bank at Adamsfield, that is, unless you count the vast deposit of shattered glass among the bracken ferns near the site of the sly-grog shop. The greatest bottle dump in the Tasmanian highlands attests to the diggers' habit of pissing their winnings away.

Perhaps Bond was also stung into action by mining field prices. One miner bought £3 worth of potatoes and onions at Fitzgerald, which cost him £28 by the time they were delivered to Adamsfield, 42 kilometres away.²⁸ Gordon Vale was half the distance from Adamsfield, probably enabling Bond to undercut his competitors.

Figure 4: *Gordon Vale and the Denison Range, Vale of Rasselas.*



Source: courtesy of Roger Nutting.

However, there is no doubt that Bond's move, like that of the grazier Dick Reed before him, was also partly motivated by his love of the natural beauty of the Vale of Rasselas. While living there, immersed in nature, he became an amateur naturalist. Bond's

contributions about flora and fauna were published by the *Mercury* newspaper's nature columnist Michael Sharland ('Peregrine').²⁹

Bond's new regime of earning a living by market gardening, plus hunting in winter, along with a little prospecting, was a variation on the models of the bushman adopted by Aylett and Hartnett and that of the Quinn brothers.³⁰ Gordon Vale became a staging post not just for prospectors headed for the Denison Range or the Boyes River on the sustenance register, but winter hunters and bushwalkers who shared his passion for the highlands. However, despite his popularity as a host, gregarious nature and prime location for nature tourism, he appears to have taken no steps to promote himself as a highland tour guide like Hartnett.³¹

Bond's reliance upon Adamsfield for employees was apparent at the outset. The initial work parties at Gordon Vale included osmiridium diggers Jack Goyen, Paddy Hartnett, Gordon Moore and Bill Powell. Hartnett and another Bond employee, Barney Callaghan, were among Adamsfield osmiridium miners named as candidates for unemployment relief work in February 1934.³² Bond, Hartnett and Powell split timber from a single large tree, building a three-room house that featured a giant, walk-in hearth. Moore, Callaghan and Powell later returned to Adamsfield, where Powell succeeded Langdon and Churchill as the town's resident sly-grog merchant, and Hartnett joined the small-scale Jane River gold rush in July 1935.³³ Goyen stayed on as the mainstay of Bond's workforce until 1938.³⁴ Bond employed 34 people over the course of the ten years of his surviving Gordon Vale diaries, including his son Ernie Bond junior, from whom he was often separated but never estranged.

Figure 5: *Osmiridium* miner Jack Goyen ploughing at Gordon Vale with the bullock team introduced in 1937.



Source: Ernie Bond's photo album, courtesy of Roger Nutting.

Clearing the land for agriculture was the next task at Gordon Vale. Cropping commenced in August 1937 after Goyen returned from Hobart with working bullocks and a plough (see Fig. 5).³⁵ The first Gordon Vale gooseberries and cherries were harvested in mid-November of that year.³⁶ Growing crops in a place subject to snow and teeming with wildlife was difficult, but an open season on hunting game served the triple purpose of reducing pests while bringing in extra meat and additional income from skin sales. Many Adamsfield miners hunted in winter as part of their annual regime. Provisions under the *Animals and Birds Protection Act* (1928) also enabled farmers like Bond to secure a temporary licence to snare game on their own land out of season, the skins earned in this manner being submitted to and sold by the police on behalf of the licence-holder.³⁷

Bond's seasonal production regime

Bond soon had a seasonal routine going. Late spring and early summer was the planting season. Carrots, cabbages, cauliflowers, green peas, potatoes, radishes, silver beet and raspberry canes were sown or planted. In November and/or December he bottled honeymeade, bottled and cooked gooseberries and raspberries for jam and planted silver beet. He also washed and shored sheep at this time. January was picking, jam making and bottling time: black and red currants, strawberries and raspberries. Pea pod beer was brewed: however, there is no evidence that Bond joined the sly-grog brigade. In February he picked and bottled peas and broad beans, cut hay, made strawberry, red currant and cherry plum jam, and he planted onions. From March through to July potatoes and swedes were harvested and packed to Adamsfield for sale. In autumn or winter the raspberry canes were pruned and, in open season, he hunted wallabies, pademelons, brush and ringtail possum. In spring, at hunting season's end, when skins were submitted to a registered skin buyer, Bond took a holiday in Hobart, bought his supplies for the year ahead—and binged on the remainder of his savings in a manner characteristic of miners and bushmen temporarily unleashed in the big smoke.³⁸ While on holiday in October 1937 he bet £187 at Elwick Racecourse, but ended up £63 in credit, suggesting that occasionally the binges were profitable.³⁹

For the other eleven months of the year Bond was on a strict monthly trading regime, packing a load of goods, often including skins, fruit, vegetables and meat, out to Adamsfield for sale. Vegetables and much of the fruit and raspberry syrup were sold through Harold 'Gumboot' Smith's store at Adamsfield, although potatoes were also sold directly to particular miners.⁴¹ Bond only had a pack horse, Ginger, in the years 1940–45. Before and after that, he relied on contractors such as Arthur Story from Fitzgerald to bring in supplies and take out produce to Adamsfield. Often the return trip from Adamsfield to Gordon Vale brought an equal weight of goods to the one he had despatched, including bags of flour, sugar, super phosphate, chaff and lime.⁴²

During the course of a few weeks during 1939, 1,345 kilograms of goods were delivered to Gordon Vale on horseback without loss or damage, the transport costing Bond £21 10s 2d.⁴³ Importantly, along with his radio, the Adamsfield Post Office enabled him to keep in touch with the world, posting letters to friends and orders to

businesses, also receiving news of loved ones and world events. Usually Bond took the long route to Adamsfield via the Florentine River and the Sawback Range. While quicker, the route over the Thumbs was steep and hazardous, as he discovered in a July 1938 crossing when he experienced blizzard-like conditions:

It rained and blew a gale and the track down the Thumbs was covered with small trees and the young leatherwoods completely covered the track having been flattened down by the recent snow. The telephone [at Adamsfield] has been out of order for a week ...⁴⁴

Almost nothing was wasted at Gordon Vale. Sheep and cow dung, for example, were turned into liquid fertiliser for his crops, while the hides of dead sheep were sold. Having arrived in the Vale of Rasselas as a comparative novice land manager, Bond learnt by trial and error when conditions were right to burn off the paddocks and surrounding plains in order to renew the grass for his stock and game. The main error came in December 1938 when a wind change sent one of his fires racing towards the farm, with only a call to all hands staving off disaster.⁴⁵

Bond also gambled with animal husbandry. While some graziers used the region only for summer stock agistment, novice pastoralist Bond tried to follow the example of the much more experienced Dick Reed by running sheep all year round, enabling him, like Reed, to keep Adamsfield supplied with fresh cuts of veal and mutton—a welcome relief from the ‘badger’ (wombat) and tinned meat.⁴⁶ Although Bond occasionally found thylacine (Tasmanian tiger) tracks and once snared a thylacine, he had no trouble with predators, and wool gave him a supplementary income.⁴⁷ However, Bond’s grazing was not a total success. The sheep were often a nuisance, attacking his crops and disappearing into the mountains, where they had to be chased down, and by 1943 only nine could be found to be shorn.⁴⁸ Perhaps the new-born lambs also coped poorly with the snow and hail.

While living 20 kilometres away at Gordon Vale, Bond remained a community leader at Adamsfield. For years he was a member of the Adamsfield Vigilance Committee, the only moral authority in a town with no police, no church and no licensed premises. It was this ersatz council, appointed by the residents themselves, who petitioned the government for track repairs, better hospital facilities—and even intervention in the osmiridium price. Descriptions of polka evenings at Adamsfield during the 1930s give the impression of an enclave of eccentric garage musicians generating a perpetual state of surreal jollity, when in fact every dance was a fund-raising effort staged by the Vigilance Committee to keep a bush nurse in town.⁴⁹

Restricted manpower during World War Two (1939–45)

During World War Two, Bond did his duty, both as a primary producer and a citizen, donating vegetables for sale by the Red Cross and reporting one Gordon Vale visitor to the authorities as a fifth columnist (enemy agent).⁵⁰ The labour shortage hit him hard. Soon after helping to stretcher stroke victim Paddy Hartnett out about 15 kilometres to medical care, Bond was left alone at Gordon Vale.⁵¹ In May 1940 the game came right up to the house, eating all the feed, while he was laid up with lumbago, and in

December of that year he laboured alone for twelve hours a day for weeks on end in the summer heat, hoeing potatoes, planting lettuces and cabbages, feeding stock, churning butter, even having to teach himself how to milk a cow.⁵² Adamsfield was like a retirement ghetto, with only seventeen wizened diehards retaining the corporate memory of the rush of 1925. Without Bond and bush nurse Nancy Roach the settlement might not have survived. They were still hungry. Bond packed more than 180 kilograms of potatoes and 100 kilograms of swedes into Adamsfield over three months during 1940.⁵³ Later deliveries included potatoes to be raffled in support of the Adamsfield Hospital and old clothes for the old-timers.⁵⁴

Bond continued to spruik the potential of the prospecting field beyond his home at the Boyes River, ensuring the Secretary for Mines that only its isolation had prevented the discovery there of profitable osmiridium:

I would be only too pleased to allow any prospectors going to the Boyes River to make my place their depot which would be of great assistance to them as I am situated within three hours walking time of the river ... Should you, or any other officer of your department care to look over the district in question, I would gladly provide you with accommodation & you would not need to burden yourselves with anything.⁵⁵

Given that Bond was well placed to supply the Boyes River in the event of a rush, he spoke with an element of self-interest.

However, the biggest challenge for the osmiridium industry lay further afield than the Boyes River. Spreading across the world from America, the latest Parker '51' fountain pen was tipped not with Tasmanian osmiridium but with a new man-made alloy, plathenium, which combined ruthenium and platinum.⁵⁶ Writing technology was leaving osmiridium behind. The war turned some fountain pen makers into manufacturers of bomb sights, stifling pen production and creating a void in the market which the ball point would be launched to fill at the cessation of hostilities.⁵⁷

The opportunity to try to find another market for the Tasmanian metal came in 1943, when America courted frontier Tasmania for the final time. Osmiridium was required for unspecified defence purposes. Goldsmith & Co of Chicago gained a contract with the United States Metals Reserve Corporation to supply 500 oz. of osmiridium by 31 December 1943 at US \$98 (£28 5s 8d) per oz.—all of which excepting expenses would be handed on as an incentive to producers. This was about £3 above the ruling price for osmiridium offered at Adamsfield.⁵⁸

Five hundred ounces was a tall order for an industry now producing little more than a quarter of that annually and with restricted manpower. The Tasmanian Department of Mines tried to stimulate production by militarily exempting ex-diggers who could work the various underground and hydraulic claims.⁵⁹

Not even a summons by an atomic-powered Allied war machine shifted osmiridium diggers too old and crusty to be intimidated. At Adamsfield the sudden demand for metal excited old grievances. Flushed with power, the seventeen resident miners, including a returned Hartnett, announced that £40 per oz., not £28, was the stimulus they needed to increase production.⁶⁰ While it was probably true that £40

represented a subsistence wage, it was a fairyland price at a time when patriotic self-sacrifice was considered obligatory.

The last days of Adamsfield and Gordon Vale

This thumbing of collective noses at the marketplace was the beginning of the end for the village of Adamsfield. Osmiridium's durability and resistance to heat still commanded the attention of some manufacturers, but in Tasmania it was now very scarce, with production remaining at a negligible level. Bond and the remaining Adamsfield residents suffered a great loss in May 1944 when Harold and Florence Smith left, prompting closure of the money order and Commonwealth Savings Bank facilities and reduction of the telephone service to three hours per day.⁶¹ The war years took a further toll on the osmiridium diggers: Gordon Moore died in battle in New Guinea; Fred Jans and Bill Powell succumbed at Adamsfield; Paddy Hartnett in Hobart.

A bent-over old-timer named Stan Gerny took over the role of Adamsfield postmaster and storekeeper after the Smiths' departure. In March 1950 Bond wrote asking him to post a tin of Gordon Vale honey to Wales as a gift. Primary production was continuing in the Vale of Rasselas, it seems, but by this time Adamsfield had ceased to function as a market for Bond, which was just as well, as the Gordon River Bridge had been burnt, leaving him to cross the river by flying fox.⁶² For the moment, at least, the genial host of Gordon Vale retained the strength to fight economic reality and the elements, enjoying his celebrity among bushwalking folk and the scientific community. Zoologists wanted to dissect native animal specimens from his snares, hikers wanted to partake of his legendary feasts of strawberries and cream. As Bond told Gerny,

I was a very busy man from Christmas to the end of February, as I had no less than 56 visitors in 8 weeks, but only one has been here this month. A very big crowd are coming for Easter ... I had hopes of getting to the Field [Adamsfield] during this month but pressure of toil was too great. If there is any whisky, gin or rum handy I would like you to send me two bottles.⁶³

Australian Newsprint Mills was now pushing a logging road deep into the Florentine Valley, bringing Gordon Vale closer to transport with each passing year.⁶⁴ Durable motor vehicles even crossed the Sawback Range into the virtual ghost town of Adamsfield.⁶⁵ However, after a period of illness, and with little further prospect of having a market in the future or a new Gordon River Bridge, Bond left Gordon Vale in March 1952. He let his property for cattle grazing, while Gordon Vale house and its ancillary buildings which could accommodate 20 people were leased as a hostel by the Hobart and Launceston Walking Clubs.⁶⁶

Bond 'retired from active life' by taking up a fruit stall on the main road at Austins Ferry near Hobart, swapping a wide vista of mountains for a room in a suburban guest house.⁶⁷ From his new home he attacked government neglect of south-western prospecting tracks and the resulting lost revenue in the mining, fur and tourism industries.⁶⁸ Bond died in 1962 at the age of 71, barely outlasting the 'Count of Adamsfield', Stan Gerny, who was the last man 'standing' in the mining village.⁶⁹ The

frail Gerny was removed from his Adamsfield shop not long after postal services were withdrawn in 1960, dying in hospital soon after.⁷⁰

By the 1970s both their houses were ruins. Today the rhododendron planted beside Ernie Bond's highland home still thrives. The bracken fern that often reclaims scenes of human activity in the bush presides over the paddocks, post-and-rail fences, rotting timber, scattered farm implements and the sheep dip that denote Gordon Vale. More than half a century after Bond left the farm, his huge wooden bread trough, which was hauled out of the Vale of Rasselas by hand in 1998, survives intact in Hobart.⁷¹ In 2013 the Tasmanian Land Conservancy undertook a public fund-raising campaign which enabled it to acquire Bond's former 80.87-hectare freehold. It is now managed as part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.⁷²

Conclusion

Research on market gardens and farms established on Australasian mining fields has generally centred on Chinese camps, the social and commercial structures within Chinese communities and the interdependence that developed between Europeans and Asians on these fields.⁷³ The story of the interdependence between supplier and customer at Gordon Vale and Adamsfield has fewer cultural nuances. Bond developed a farm on what was probably the closest fertile ground to his market, thereby giving him a competitive edge over more distant rival suppliers. On the other hand, his physical isolation made it difficult for him to attract labour, leaving him dependent on the availability and suitability of Adamsfield labourers. The small collection of diggers who bought his produce were all European Australians and all well known to him. The parable of the canny miner who saves his money in order to start a business supplying those foolish enough to keep digging has been told on most mining fields. However, given the circumstances of supplying a depleted mining village through the Great Depression years, Bond was never likely to make a fortune at Gordon Vale. It is possible that his decisions to mine and then to farm in the highlands were partly a response to expectations that he would follow in his father's footsteps as a business tycoon—expectations that had already brought him financial collapse. There is something humbling about a failed produce merchant who sets out to 'get his hands dirty' by learning how to actually grow produce, just as, perhaps, he saw becoming a miner as a rebuke to his father, the razor-sharp mining investor who probably never once plunged his dish into the wash dirt. The gregarious Bond suffered loneliness and physical hardship operating his highland farm, but at other times he revelled in being immersed in the natural realm and in the company of good friends. In different circumstances this charismatic personality might have operated a nature tourism resort in the manner of his friend Paddy Hartnett. As it was, as a supplier he became an integral part of the mining village of Adamsfield, and although his days were spent hoeing potatoes rather than forking a sluice box, he lived in the 'boom and bust' mode of many miners. Hartnett, a fellow alcoholic, was always at risk near the pub or the sly-grog shop. Similarly, Bond, as his mate Bill Mollison explained, showed little restraint when he holidayed in Hobart:

If we were ‘out’ for months ...and had a lot of money, we would get a lot of people into trouble; money does that ... People who work too hard, in isolated jobs, relax too hard in town. Hence the legendary binges of trappers, miners, wood-cutters, fishermen and bushmen generally. We don’t know how to relax ... Town is a dangerous place for bushmen.⁷⁴

Inevitably, as he aged, the bush also became a dangerous place for Bond. He could not keep up the laborious lifestyle, and any medical emergency would have been exaggerated by the river haulage and 20 kilometres separating him from the nearest telephone. His final years were spent plotting his return to his mountain farm where the wallabies and possums now reigned, a man lost in the past.⁷⁵

Endnotes

¹ See Nic Haygarth, *On the Ossie: Tasmanian Osmiridium and the Fountain Pen Industry*, Forty South Publishing, Hobart, 2017.

² See, for example, Keith Lancaster, ‘With the Hermit of Gordon Vale’, 1947: <http://dveltkamp.s3.amazonaws.com/KeithLancaster/071HermitofGordonVale.htm>, accessed 6 April 2018.

³ Norman Laird, ‘Thylacine reports—Queen Victoria Museum—Launceston: Ernie Bond ...’, NS463/1/1 (Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, afterwards TAHO).

⁴ ‘Births’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 31 July 1891, p. 1.

⁵ ‘North Mt. Farrell’, *Mercury*, 10 April 1931, p. 6; ‘Obituary’, *Mercury*, 16 December 1931, p. 7.

⁶ Joe Cowburn; interviewed by David Bannear, 27 August 1990, in *What’s the Land For?: People’s Experience of Tasmania’s Central Plateau Region*, Central Plateau Oral History Project, Hobart, 1991, vol. 3, p. 1.

⁷ Secretary of Mines (Tasmania), *Annual Report*, 1919, p. 36. For the Tasmanian osmiridium industry generally, see Haygarth, *On the Ossie*.

⁸ ‘Register of osmiridium buyers’ returns of purchases, September 1922–October 1925’, MIN150/1/1 (TAHO).

⁹ See Simon Cubit and Nic Haygarth, *Mountain Men: Stories from the Tasmanian High Country*, Forty South Publishing, Hobart, 2015, p. 53.

¹⁰ See Glyn Roberts, *Metal Mining in Tasmania 1804 to 1914: How the Government Helped Shape the Mining Industry*, Bokprint and Fullers Bookshop, Launceston, 2007.

¹¹ Sustenance Allowance Register, AB966/1/1 (TAHO).

¹² ‘Aid to Mining: Advances to Prospectors’, *Examiner* (Launceston), 19 July 1926, p. 6.

¹³ Ernie Bond offered diggers £8 5s. per oz. in November 1932, in which year the average price paid in Tasmania was £11 5s. 6d. In 1933 the average price was £8 8s. 4d. See ‘Osmiridium Slight Rise in Price’, *Mercury*, 2 November 1932, p. 4.

¹⁴ J.S. Fenton to Phil Kelly M.H.A., 22 May 1934, MIN2/1/585–87 (TAHO).

¹⁵ See Sustenance Allowance Register for 1925 and 1926, AB966/1/1 (TAHO); ‘K.E.L.’ (Keith Lancaster), ‘Our Hostel, Gordon Vale’, *Skyline* (journal of the Launceston Walking Club), no. 3, September 1952, p. 42; plus Ernest Bond diary, 4 April 1937, NS1331/1/1 (TAHO), in which he speaks of sinking ‘a couple of holes [at the Boyes River] and obtained metal above where Jack and I found it five years ago’.

¹⁶ See, for example, ‘Men of the ‘60s: Hardier Constitutions’, *Advocate* (Burnie), 31 October 1925, p. 14.

¹⁷ See Cubit and Haygarth, *Mountain Men*, pp. 186–88.

¹⁸ The Public Works Department had refused Reed’s request to build a Gordon River bridge for him in 1925, forcing him to provide one himself. In 1934 the department initially refused to repair or replace Reed’s privately-built bridge after it was damaged (Memorandum to Department of Public Works, 1 September 1934, PWD24/1/6 [TAHO]). See also M., R. and E. Quinn, ‘Gordon River Bridge’, *Mercury*, 11 December 1934, p. 8.

¹⁹ Button grass (*Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus*) is a coarse native Tasmanian sedgeland plant so named because of its button-like seed heads. It grows on poor soils. For the debate about the farming

potential of button grass see, for example, 'Observer', 'Gardening in Button Grass Country', *Launceston Examiner*, 4 January 1893, p. 8.

²⁰ Will of Frank Bond, no. 18967, 1932, p. 507, AD960/1/56 (TAHO), https://librariestas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/all/search/results?qu=frank&qu=bond, accessed 17 August 2018.

²¹ See, for example, Ernest Bond diary, 23 September 1940 and 25 December 1940, NS1331/1/4 (TAHO).

²² See, for example, 'Son's Claim Upheld', *Examiner*, 14 December 1934, p. 9.

²³ Will of Sarah Emma Bond, no. 20402, AD960/1/59 (TAHO), https://lincas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/all/search/results?qu=sarah&qu=emma&qu=bond, accessed 2 July 2017.

²⁴ Electoral Roll for the seat of Denison, Subdivision of Hobart South for 1937, p. 6; Ernest Bond diary, 15 January 1937, NS1331/1/1 (TAHO).

²⁵ See Haygarth, *On the Ossie*, pp. 131 and 143.

²⁶ 'Sly-grog' in this case does not refer to the illegal distillation of spirits, but to the illegal sale of bottled alcohol from unlicensed premises. There was no licensed public house at Adamsfield.

²⁷ 'Whose Property?', *Mercury*, 1 December 1933, p. 6; 'Licensing Courts', *Mercury*, 29 October 1934, p. 2.

²⁸ Percy O. Lennon, 'The Adams River Osmiridium Field and the Surrounding Country', *Illustrated Tasmanian Mail* (Hobart), Christmas number, 1 December 1926, p. 105.

²⁹ In December 1944, for example, Bond recalled the prospector Syd Gall finding yellow waratah at the Florentine River three miles above the bridge on the Adamsfield Track, and claimed to have seen some himself on the Pokana River, see Ernest Bond, 'Waratah Species', *Mercury*, 26 December 1944, p. 3.

³⁰ Bond continued to make occasional prospecting trips to the Boyes River, see, for example, 'Adamsfield', *Mercury*, 29 December 1932, p. 3, and in 1941 prospected the old Reward Claim at Adamsfield without success, see Ernest Bond diary, 10 July 1941, NS1331/1/5 [TAHO].

³¹ The many bushwalker accounts of visits to Bond at Gordon Vale include Jeanette Cox, 'To the Denison Range and Adamsfield', *Tasmanian Tramp*, Journal of the Hobart Walking Club, no. 5, 1936, pp. 31–36; and Geoff Christensen, 'Beyond the Vale of Rasselas', *Walk: a Journal of the Melbourne Bushwalkers*, no. 3, 1952, pp. 8–13.

³² Administrator for Charitable Grants to Director of Public Works, 10 February 1934, 'Florentine Valley Track from Fitzgerald', PWD24/1/6 (TAHO).

³³ Moore returned to Gordon Vale briefly in 1938, see Ernest Bond diary, 16 March–5 April 1938, NS1331/1/2, married at his native place, Scottsdale, Tasmania, in 1939, enlisted for World War Two and was killed in action in Papua New Guinea in January 1943, see 'Killed in Action', *North Eastern Advertiser* (Scottsdale, Tas.), 26 January 1943, p. 2. Callaghan returned from Adamsfield to mind Gordon Vale during Bond's annual holiday in October 1943, see Ernest Bond diary, 4–15 October 1943, NS1331/1/7. For Powell as sly-grogger, see Kathleen, Ralph and Timothy Gowlland, *Adamsfield—the Town that Lived and Died*, C.L. Richmond and Sons, Devonport, Tasmania, 1973. For Hartnett at the Jane River, see entry for 16 July 1935, Sustainance Allowance Register, AB964/1/1; see also Jane River district file, AC13/1/18 (TAHO).

³⁴ Goyen was sacked by Bond in November 1938 as punishment for his late return from Adamsfield, see Ernest Bond diary, 24 November 1938, NS1331/1/2 [TAHO].

³⁵ Ernest Bond diary, 15, 16 and 27 August 1937, NS1331/1/1 (TAHO).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 November 1937, NS1331/1/1 (TAHO).

³⁷ See, for example, *ibid.*, 20 August 1943, NS1331/1/7 (TAHO).

³⁸ Bill Mollison, *Travel in Dreams: an Autobiography*, Tagari Publications, Tyalgum, NSW, 1996, pp. 89–90.

³⁹ Betting, cash account, Ernest Bond diary, 1937, NS1331/1/1 (TAHO).

⁴¹ See, for example, *ibid.*, 21 August 1941 and 25 January 1944, NS1331/1/5 and NS1331/1/8 respectively (TAHO).

⁴² Bond's cash account with packer Arthur Story, in *ibid.*, 1937, NS1331/1/1 (TAHO).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28 September 1939, and notes at back of 1939 diary, NS1331/1/3 (TAHO).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 July 1938, NS1331/1/2 (TAHO).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 31 December 1938, NS1331/1/2 (TAHO).

⁴⁶ Summer agistment of sheep: in February 1939 Arthur Story placed 500 sheep on the Huntley Plains at the Gordon Bend, see Ernest Bond diary, 5 February 1939, NS1331/1/3; from February to June 1941 Bond agisted sheep for Oliver Bowerman, who owned Dick Reed's former Ivanhoe property in the Derwent Valley and was thus following in Reed's footsteps by grazing the Vale of Rasselas, see Ernest

Bond diary, 3 and 24 February 1941, NS1331/1/5. Wool and mutton to Adamsfield: for example, he supplied 18 kilograms of veal to Adamsfield in January 1941, see Ernest Bond diary, 2 January 1941, NS1331/1/5 [TAHO].

⁴⁷ In December 1938 Bond sent about 210 kilograms of wool to a Hobart merchant, see Ernest Bond diary, 31 December 1938, NS1331/1/2; in 1941 he sent out about 80 kilograms of wool, *ibid.*, 23 December 1941, NS1331/1/5 [TAHO]. For the thylacine tracks, see Ernest Bond, 'Tiger Tracks', *Mercury*, 12 December 1946, p. 19. For Bond snaring a thylacine, see Norman Laird, notes attached to his clipping of the article by 'Wayfarer', 'Osmiridium was Glamour Metal', *Mercury*, 13 October 1959, Norman Laird papers, NS1143/1/8 (TAHO).

⁴⁸ Ernest Bond diary, 1 and 3 December 1943, NS1331/1/7 (TAHO).

⁴⁹ See, for example, Jeanette Cox, 'To the Denison Range and Adamsfield', *Tasmanian Tramp*, no. 5, 1936, pp. 34–35.

⁵⁰ Ernest Bond diary, 1 August 1940 and 26 March 1942, NS1331/1/4 and NS1331/1/6 respectively (TAHO).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7 March 1940, NS1331/1/4 (TAHO).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6 May and 12 December 1940, NS1331/1/4 (TAHO).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20 May, 13 June, 7 July and 23 August 1940, NS1331/1/4 (TAHO).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 July 1941 and 28 July 1942, NS1331/1/5 and NS1331/1/6 respectively (TAHO).

⁵⁵ Ernie Bond to Secretary for Mines, 22 April 1943, MIN2/1/585–587 (TAHO).

⁵⁶ David and Mark Shepherd, *Parker '51'*, Surrenden Pens Ltd, Brighton, England, 2004, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Andreas Lambrou, *Fountain Pens of the World*, Classic Pens Limited, Epping, England, 1995, p. 142.

⁵⁸ W. Williams, Director of Mines, to John Byrne, 18 May 1943, MIN2/1/587 (TAHO).

⁵⁹ Williams to Byrne.

⁶⁰ W.H. Looby to C. Cully, Minister for Mines, 19 March 1943, MIN2/1/587 (TAHO).

⁶¹ Ernest Bond diary, 1 May 1944, NS1331/1/8 (TAHO).

⁶² 'Bridge Reported Destroyed by Fire', *Mercury*, 19 February 1948, p. 6.

⁶³ Ernest Bond to Stan Gerny, 27 March 1950, letter held by Roger Nutting, Deloraine, Tasmania.

⁶⁴ 'Bush Homestead Gift to Clubs', *Mercury*, 11 March 1952, p. 7.

⁶⁵ 'Gordon River Elbow', *Mercury*, 29 January 1949, p. 11.

⁶⁶ 'Bush Home Now Walkers' Hostel', *Examiner*, 11 March 1952, p. 14.

⁶⁷ Information from Roger Nutting, 2017.

⁶⁸ Ernest Bond, 'Gordon River Visited', *Mercury*, 5 January 1954, p. 13; 'Adamsfield Track', *Mercury*, 15 June 1954, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Jocelyn Fogaglono, 'Bushman's Son Becomes the First-aid Officer of the Esperance District', *Sunday Tasmanian*, 11 May 1986, p. 16.

⁷⁰ For an account of Gerny's last days at Adamsfield, see Mollison, *Travels in Dreams*, pp. 66–68.

⁷¹ Information from Roger Nutting, 2017.

⁷² Tasmanian Land Conservancy, Gordonvale [sic] World Heritage Area Reserve: Background Report, Sandy Bay, Tas., 2013, pp. 2 and 3, <http://www.tasland.org.au/content/uploads/2015/06/DRAFT-Gordonvale-Background-Report-June-2015.pdf>, accessed 1 June 2018.

⁷³ See, for example, Barry McGowan, *Dust and Dreams: Mining Communities in South-East New South Wales*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2010, pp. 123–24 and 134–36; John Hall-Jones, *Goldfields of Otago: an Illustrated History*, the author, Invercargill, 2005, p. 113.

⁷⁴ Mollison, *Travel in Dreams*, pp. 89–90.

⁷⁵ Ralph and Kathleen Gowlland, *Trampled Wilderness: the History of South-West Tasmania*, Devonport, 1973, p. 183.