



AUSTRALASIAN MINING HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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EDITORIAL

It is heartening to know that BHP is returning to its roots in Broken Hill. As reported by Matt Chambers in *The Australian* (Business section), 29 January 2016, despite recent financial woes, BHP Billiton has broken a three-decade absence from the town by making a donation of \$5.7 million towards enhancing its heritage. Last year Broken Hill became the first town to be placed on the National Heritage list, a move that prompted the Company to make its donation. The funds will go towards highlighting the town's history through archive preservation and in building new mining-themed 'parklets'. This according to the article will help celebrate the town's unique [and romantically named!] Iodide, Chloride, Bromide and other similarly named chemical streets. The funding will also help restore the BHP chimney and site of the first office built in 1885. With the recent downturn in mining prospects in the town in focus, it is hoped that the activity will help make Broken Hill more attractive as a tourist venue, and also help the local economy.

We are sure that all our heritage supporters will applaud the move by BHP and would hope that other companies will follow suit to preserve and enhance our mining heritage in Broken Hill and other mining areas in the country.

FACEBOOK

As previously announced, to those interested in keeping in contact with fellow members, our Facebook page is now open. As initiator of the page, Rob Barnes states over 70 members had registered by December 2015, with the majority being made up from our brethren in New Zealand. To join the throng, and perhaps to redress the balance, you can link up by clicking on the address below:

www.facebook.com/groups/720189911426071/

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Just a gentle reminder to those who intend but have not yet renewed their memberships for 2016, that you can do so with great ease by tapping into our 'Register Now' on-line registration process - a simple click on the following address (if you have trouble just copy the address directly into Google or other search engine).

[https://www.registernow.com.au/secure/
Register.aspx?ID=19330](https://www.registernow.com.au/secure/Register.aspx?ID=19330)

You can also, of course, go into our webpage to download a paper registration form. **As a reminder**, fees are very reasonable, being: Ordinary members \$35; Family \$45; Institutions and Societies \$50; Student members \$15; Overseas members an additional \$10 to cover postage costs, and if sending a foreign cheque an additional \$15 to cover the bank charges. You can bet on the banks never losing out!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

AHA Annual Conference 'From Boom to Bust', Ballarat, 4 – 8 July.

Note that end of conference tours will be arranged for Saturday 9th July. For further details see: aha2016@federation.edu.au

International Mining History Conference, Linares, Spain

Another reminder that registrations are now being accepted for the 11th International Mining History Congress to be held in Linares, Spain between the 6th and 11th September 2016.

The programme should appeal to all members, as there is a smorgasbord of activities that include convivial gatherings, trips to various mining venues, visits to museums, tapas events and excursions, as well, of course, as the more serious business sessions. Get in early to take advantage of 'Early Bird' registration fees. We already have 8 or 9 of our members registered.

NOTE: The conference web site also provides information on travel and accommodation. For full registration and other details see the web page at: <http://www.mining2016linares.com/?lang=en>

AMHA 22nd Annual Conference, Cobar, NSW, 16-21 October 2016.

'Mining History in an Active Mining Centre'

Planning for the AMHA Conference in Cobar is well underway with the venue booked and a number of the proposed field trips now locked in (Great Cobar, CSA, Mt Boppy), and two others to finalise.

To reiterate from the previous newsletter, as we'd like to get an idea of likely numbers attending, please confirm with Ken McQueen that you are definitely attending, or possibly planning to attend. Note too the call for Abstracts and copies of the Registration form are now up on the AMHA website under the Conferences tab. Download forms from our web site or Click on the following to register on-line:

<https://www.registernow.com.au/secure/Register.aspx?E=20571>

Anyone wishing to offer either an oral or poster presentation should send their expression of interest with name and title of the presentation as soon as possible to Ken at Ken.McQueen@canberra.edu.au Also book your accommodation soon as to guarantee your preferred option (see details on AMHA website or check <http://www.cobar.nsw.gov.au/tourism>

PUBLICATIONS

Hesperian Press has been busy lately, as noted in the publication of the three titles listed below. Two of the authors, Alwyn Evans and Criena Fitzgerald, I'm pleased to report, are fellow members of the AMHA (as is Hesperian's publisher Peter Bridge). The third title, Ludovic de Beauvoir's visit to Australia, contains a great deal of information on the Victorian goldfields in 1866. Information below is taken from Hesperian's descriptions of the publications. To obtain further details on postage costs see Hesperian Press's information at: www.hesperianpress.com

Alwyn Evans, *From Wales to Gwalia: A Swansea Editor and His Australian Goldmine*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, Western Australia, ISBN – 978-0-85905-630-4, A4, heavily illustrated. 184pp, Cost \$50.

This is a long-awaited publication that stems from Alwyn Evans' research on the Welsh and Australian origins of the Sons of Gwalia goldmine at Leonora, Western Australia. In his examination, readers should expect to find new information and interpretation of the events surrounding the developments associated with the celebrated Mine and the characters involved. As well as casting new light on the early development of the mine, the book brings attention to the vital role played by entrepreneur George W. Hall, which to a degree, also highlights the 'exaggerated' role played by Edgar Hoover, especially in the early days of development. Light is also shed on the valuable contribution of other leading mining characters and financiers in Western Australia.

Criena Fitzgerald, *Turning Men Into Stone: A social and medical history of silicosis in Western Australia 1890-1970*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, Western Australia. ISBN 978-0-85905-635-9, 2016, 170 x 240, section sewn, 252pp, illustrated, indexed, \$50.00 + postage.

In 1960, WA physician Dr Bob Elphick remarked to his colleagues that the mining industry was turning men into stone. This evocative image aptly described the end-stage pathophysiological changes that occurred in the lungs of the state's goldminers after exposure to silica dust. Until 1926 in WA, when X-ray technology became readily available and financially viable, diagnosis of dust disease in miners was fraught, flawed and at best an educated medical guess.

Medical men and miners believed that their ill health was caused by a combination of infection from tuberculosis and exposure to dust, but it was tuberculosis rather than silicosis that became the focus of preventative and 'curative' measures. Silicosis damaged a man's lungs, but in the first ten years of the twentieth century, he would usually die of tuberculosis.

'Turning Men into Stone' examines physicians' and miners' understandings of disease in miners and the response of government, unions and public health officials to the rise of morbidity and mortality in the mining workforce. Obscured by tuberculosis, silicosis was, like the dust that caused it, often swept under the carpet.

This is an important new historical study of the goldminers who toiled hard to exploit and profit from the massive golden riches of Western Australia. Yet many died dusted miserable deaths from silicosis and tuberculosis leaving widows and families destitute and in poverty, to battle for what little, if any compensation all. This is a largely untold social and medical history at the birth of the state's mineral wealth.

Translated and edited by John Melville Jones with Nicola Cousen, Steve Mullins, Stefan Petrow and Marie &

John Ramsland, *Ludovic de Beauvoir's visit to Australia*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, Western Australia. ISBN 978-0-85905-626-7, 2016, 160 x 240, 351pp, qualillustrated, \$50 + postage.

This publication presents a revised English translation of the first volume (Australie) of an account of a voyage around the world undertaken in 1866 by two young French aristocrats. In Australia they visited Melbourne, Ballarat and Bendigo, and outside Melbourne experienced the life of a squatter at that time. They also visited Hobart, Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane before sailing north towards South East Asia.

The separate chapters are preceded by a general introduction written by Marie Ramsland (University of Newcastle), and by introductions to the separate chapters written by the editor, and by Nicola Cousen (Federation University), Steve Mullins (Central Queensland University), Stefan Petrow (University of Tasmania), and John and Marie Ramsland (University of Newcastle). The text and the introductions provide a vivid picture of the eastern states of Australia as they were in 1866, as seen through the eyes of a young French aristocrat.

Lloyd Carpenter & Lyndon Fraser (eds), *Rushing for Gold: Life and Commerce on the Goldfields of New Zealand and Australia*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2016, ISBN 978-1-877578-54-0, 396pp, illustrations. \$45.

This as a productive time for member authors, for as well as those members already mentioned, Lloyd Carpenter, is one of the editors of this trans—Tasman odyssey that should appeal to members with an interest in 19th century Australian and New Zealand goldfields interaction. As noted by co-editor Dr Lyndon Fraser, the goldrush was one 'where diggers chased their gold dreams in a headlong rush back and forth across the inconvenient Tasman Sea'.

Further, the book 'reveals the cultural complexities of the mining frontier. The gold rush impacted on all

domains of life, upending the social order, mixing up classes, races and nationalities'. For further details see www.otago.ac.nz/press

Sue Britt, *The Coober Pedy Blower*, Peacock Publications, Adelaide, ISBN 978-1-925263-10-7, A4, iii, 43pp. Cost \$20 (include postage).

Sue Britt has written this interesting account of developments on the Coober Pedy Opal field on behalf of the Coober Pedy Historical Society. The account deals with the development from the first blower that was attached to a tunnelling machine to the more sophisticated machines in use today. The 1970s saw the 'golden age' of technological developments on the field as illustrated by the fact that 'Coober Pedy was so mechanised that only two Australian cities consumed larger amounts of diesel fuel and gasoline'. The book takes the form of first hand accounts of developments as perceived and recorded by miners on the field. Copies of the publication can be obtained by contacting the editor at suebritt@westnet.com.au Tel. 08-86723542. All proceeds go to the Coober Pedy Historical Society

BITS AND PIECES **THE BLOWER**

Following the above information on the Coober Pedy Blower publication, author Sue Britt has submitted the following account of some of the developments on the opal field that should be of interest to members:

'An adaption of established hydraulic lifting principles, the blower revolutionised opal mining in the 1970s by shifting mullock and bad air from underground workings. In that decade, along with the Calweld drill, the noodling machine and the tunnelling machine, plus an expanding world market, it contributed to Coober Pedy's golden age. The machines eliminated down time, and with a young population, cheap diesel and minimal government intervention, creativity flowed to the benefit of all.

The Blower



Photo provided by Sue Britt.

Actually a "sucker," the name "blower" originated with a machine built in about 1968 by Mario Pagnon, an Italian mechanic from Melbourne. With a view of looking around the field he had arrived at Coober Pedy from Andamooka, where he'd been mining opal. Straight away he noticed the difference in the ground. Coober Pedy's soil was softer, lighter, chalky. "It could be sucked up," ⁽¹⁾ he thought. When Mario went back to Melbourne, he borrowed money and built a high pressure vacuum fan with hardened blades and a wearing plate which he connected to a 120hp, six-cylinder Ford diesel motor with a V-belt drive. Mounted on a seven-ton truck sucking through a 9-inch PVC pipe, Mario achieved unprecedented suction with the fan running at 2,900rpm. He drove it back to Coober Pedy.

As soon as the opal miners saw it, they recognised it as the answer they'd been looking for. Set up on the "Farm" at 10 Mile Field, its cloud was visible for miles around as the fan shot dirt and stones across two claims. Hence: the "blower." The visiting mines inspector banned the machine from Olympic Field, which was just opening up. Mario used it on other fields, long enough to know the idea worked. Then he sold it and went back to Melbourne to build a bigger and better machine with a cyclone that would emit no dust.

Meanwhile, the Coober Pedy opal miners were eager to get their own machines. Apparently engineering firms

and fan and cyclone manufacturers were approached but showed no interest in developing the idea.⁽²⁾ Murray Joynt, a fitter and turner from New Zealand, built a blower with a hopper to control the dust. He wrote, “pneumatic conveying is a very old practice; it has been used to convey sawdust in sawmills for as long as I can remember”. His first blower with a hopper was designed to follow a Proline drill. It used a Holden motor and a VB4 fan. It had 7-inch pipes and a hopper made of two 44-gallon drums welded together. Mounted on a trailer, this blower was used on Olympic Field to sink 8 shafts. It was this blower that was the prototype of the Coober Pedy blower - designed, built, trialled, modified and developed by Coober Pedy opal miners. Mounted on trucks for greater flexibility, the advent of the blower must have caused a run on old trucks in Adelaide.

Murray Joynt 1993

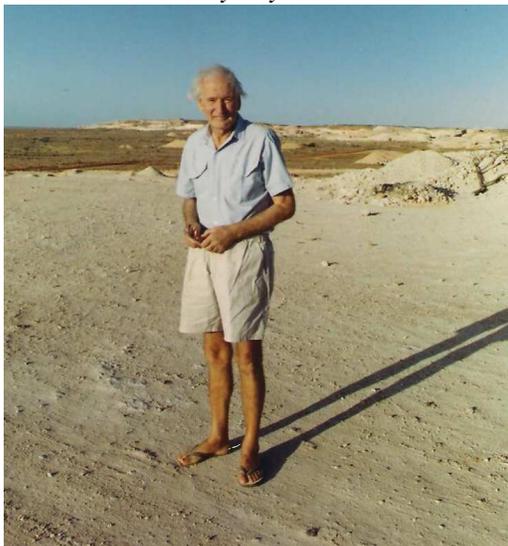


Photo provided by Sue Britt.

The working blower continued to mark its presence with a cloud of white dust. The hopper collected and controlled the emission of dirt but up to 30% of the fine dust passed through the fan and out. The fans were a critical feature of the blower. Murray Joynt set up Coober Pedy’s first workshop, producing blowers on a commercial scale. He used Richardson fans designed to be used in large building air conditioners, to move air, later making the fans out of heavier

steel. The aim was always to suck quicker and over greater distances. Running at 2,000 to 5,000rpm, fans wore, became unbalanced and just exploded. Initially most fan housings were made of cast iron but several accidents resulting in disintegration of bearing housings and shooting shrapnel saw iron replaced by steel.

Other garages, Ross Chatfield’s Outback Agencies and Ivan Vanajek’s Blower Manufacturer business, produced blowers and blower parts. Both specialised in fan assemblies. Vanajek also developed a bigger, more efficient hopper. Pipes, motors, fans, housings, stabilisers, struts and angles, every combination of these elements was subjected to trial & error development, resulting in the array of individual designs that characterise the blower today. Now recognised as the most efficient means of shifting mullock and bad air, its use has spread to other mining and other industries.

The blower is a testament to the talent, skills and ingenuity of Coober Pedy’s opal miners who ignored engineering best practice and persevered with an idea that revolutionised opal mining.

¹ Pagnon, M (3/4/15) Interview filmed by Rob Staines

² Calvert, B.L., ‘Use of Pneumatic Conveying Systems (‘Blowers’) on the Opal Fields’, *Mineral Industry Quarterly* #12, December 1978.

³ Joynt, M, Personal letter, 17 December 2012.

Of particular interest to Kiwis

Anne Both has supplied the following information not only for our NZ compatriots but also for our Aussie brethren who try to trace movements of Australian miners across the Tasman.

Anne draws attention to the Goldminers Database that contains 50,000 names of miners in NZ 1861-1872. This can be found at: at www.kaelewis.com or alternatively a search of Otago records Goldrush online may provide the same information.

CONGRATULATIONS

Barry McGowan has recently been in the limelight with his illustrious publication (Barry's description) on the Chinese people in the Rutherglen Wahgunyah area. This saw him shortlisted and commended in the small publications category of the Victorian Community History Awards 2015. Barry states it's the only award he's ever won, though he seems to have forgotten that he has twice won the celebrated AMHA Brakeshoe trophy that he has hidden in his wardrobe.

Barry has also been busy in other spheres, for in June this year, together with his colleague, Ms Genevieve Mott, he was commissioned by the Orange Shire Council to write a 'Thematic history of the Chinese people in the Cabonne, Blayney and Orange Shires'. This is all to do with the new Orange museum, which is under construction. The final report is due in June 2016.

Adding further spice to his life, Barry was invited by the University of Toronto to participate as a discussant with Rachel Silvey (Professor of Geography) and Lisa Mar (Richard Charles Lee Professor in Chinese-Canadian Studies) at the launch of the Honourable Vivienne Poy's new book, *Heroes and Gamblers: Tales of Survival and Good Fortune of the Poy Family*. Vivienne was appointed to the Senate of Canada in 1998 and is the first Canadian senator of Asian ancestry. Her story straddles her family's lives in China, Australia and Canada. Members of the Australian branch of the family live at Albury and elsewhere.

Barry attended the launch on 27 November. In addition he was invited to be a guest lecturer in the Contemporary Asian Studies program's capstone course, 'CAS400 Critical Perspectives on Asian Modernity', that was open to the faculty, and the public.

Should Barry have survived the Arctic temperatures and possible disasters to which he is prone, we will no doubt be regaled with his North American adventures when we get to Cobar next October. This will follow a hoped for

attendance at the International Mining History Congress in Spain in September. He's a well-travelled lad and is 'suspiciously' thought to have actually found Lasseters Reef, thus explaining his frequent and expensive jaunts overseas.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Member, David Carment, has forwarded the following information that may be of interest to some members:

Each year the History Council of NSW presents a range of awards and prizes, and nominations are closing soon. Entries are welcomed for the following:

The inaugural Aboriginal History Prize.

\$1,000 cash prize for students and other beginning historians (up to post-doctoral career) in the writing of Australian Aboriginal history, including Torres Strait Islander history, from original sources.

The Deen De Bartoli Award for Applied History.

First awarded in 2015, the Deen De Beroli award encourages historians to approach their subjects in ways that use the past to inform contemporary concerns and issues. For 2016 the subject for the award will be for works in applied and public history that have the potential to inform good public policy. The winner will receive a citation and a prize of **\$5,000** at the Annual History Lecture during History Week. The **Max Kelly Medal** plus a prize of **\$500** is awarded annually to a 'beginning' historian for a work of excellence in any aspect of Australian history.

All nominations close on **31 March 2016**. Send submission to: The History Council of NSW, PO Box R1737, Royal Exchange, NSW 1225.

JOURNAL

At the moment contributions for the 2016 Journal are somewhat on the thin side. This is a plea to all aspiring authors out there to prepare and send in your offerings to the editor for consideration. Your early response will be greatly appreciated.

MJD/March'16

