

Book Reviews

Alice Meredith Hodgson, *Prospecting the Pieman: George Campbell Meredith's logbook November 1876 to March 1877*, A.M. Hodgson, Sandy Bay, Tasmania, 2009. ISBN978-0-646-50927-3, i-x, 109 pp. illustrations index, endnotes, bibliography, maps. Price: \$18.11, Tasmanian Co-op Bookshop.

While being refreshing to read, and very realistic of the real life of miners, *Prospecting the Pieman* is in itself a wonderful primary source book. It is well set out, and relevant illustrations are interspersed throughout the book.

The manuscript of the two prospectors brothers, George Campbell Meredith and Owen Meredith is a remarkably frank record of their prospecting along the Pieman River on the west coast of Tasmania during the summer of 1876-1877. The logbook held in the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office is a very slim blue-covered, lined notebook, 11.5cms X 18cms. The transcription is faithful – maintaining original punctuation and spelling, grammar and structure. The book is in two sections side by side – on the left hand page are explanatory and historical notes from newspapers and other historical sources and on the right the transcription of the diary, thus following the principles of publishing manuscripts in having the original text on the right and a well-researched and explanatory commentary on the left.

The result of the Merediths' prospecting trip was the registration by the brothers of the first tin mining claim on the Heemskirk Field. The log book contains all the detail of the harsh weather conditions, torrential rain and flooding rivers, secrecy, communication with competitors, the sounds of the bush, camp and travelling conditions, and details on the vegetation including Bauera and Razor Grass, and the fierce Horizontal (*Anodopetalum biglandulosum*). The branches of the latter each thrust new branches upwards, which formed an interlacing network that had to be cut through. Four parties (the Merediths and three others led by Thomas Moore, Charles Donnelly and Frank Long) were competing in the Summer of 1876 for the first major discovery in the west. They fired the scrub to clear a path and to keep track of each other. Although the parties met and yarned, their conversation was strained. On 27 February the Merediths found their tent cut down and a note left by Donnelly on a nearby tree, providing inaccurate details of the location of his own camp. The parties had all been following tracks of government surveyor Charles Sprent, which proved fortuitous, for on the 8th, 9th and 10th March 1877 the Merediths found good tin on the flats and rises of Heemskirk.

George and Owen Meredith walked from Macquarie Harbour to Emu Bay arriving on 24 March 1877 'ragged and almost barefoot', the first white men to have done the overland trip. The brothers registered their claims followed on 13 October 1877 by registration of their company, the Emu Bay and Pieman River Prospecting Company. On 6 March 1878, George Meredith was granted the first Miner's Right on the west coast by Mining Registrar, Charles Sprent, and in that same month he went back to the Pieman where he built the first sluice box on the west coast.

The author outlines the Meredith family's early land development endeavours in Tasmania following their arrival in 1821, and the subsequent careers of the brothers. In so doing she creates a sensitive and colourful overview of early mining development on the west coast of Tasmania.

Ruth S. Kerr

President AMHA

John Ferguson and Elaine Brown, *Gympie Goldfield 1867 – 2008*, Gympie Regional Council, Gympie, 2009, ISBN 9780646518770, 102 pp, illustrations, index, key sources, endnotes, maps, 295X205mm (Available from the Gympie Regional Council, P.O. Box 155, Gympie Q 4570; email: council@gympie.qld.gov.au)

Many books have been written over the years about the Gympie goldfield that focus on particular aspects of the discovery and the town. Booklets to promote the town's mining history, and especially the mining machinery and the head frame at its Monkland headquarters, have been produced by the local Historical Society. Bill Mulholland, Hector Holthouse and William Lees have also produced a variety of books and articles. In another venture, John Dale, a schoolteacher at Kin Kin and Caboolture, compiled extensive data on Gympie goldfield miners from 1867 to 1880, especially concentrating on mining companies, until his untimely death on 31 October 2001.

In producing this book, John Ferguson and Elaine Brown have significantly advanced the historiography of Gympie goldfield, their project being supported financially by the Queensland government's Q150 Community Funding Program for the Sesquicentenary of Queensland, and also by the Gympie Regional Council. Substantial research work for the project was done by Elaine Brown in the Gympie Regional Libraries Local History Collection where Elaine has done such dedicated work for 15 years.

The book is written from the perspective of the modern day citizen of Gympie. The style belies the hidden, extensive research and distilled evidence. It suggests an unfounded sense of superficiality – in the complexities of human behaviour, company formation and management, and the scientific assessment of the geological formations. The book is very comprehensive, covering the whole history of the field from before discovery to closure of the Gympie gold mine in 2008. The writing style indicates that the book is a distillation of extensive reading of the newspapers (*Gympie Times*, *Brisbane Courier*), geological survey reports, and Mines Department *Annual Reports* relating to Gympie, while the decades of distilled research provides the book with a sense of certainty of presentation and content.

The descriptions of the fledgling settlement and the subsequent establishment of crushing batteries along the Mary River in the first five years are exceptionally good. Similarly the publication of compiled plans and reproductions of geological survey plans are of enormous value to the reader and the scholarly researcher. The book is a

mixture of technical explanations of the mining and its associated technology, and this facilitates an understanding of the geography and structural geology of this hilly goldfield above the Mary River. The story is told very methodically in a simple structured way under the heading of each scientific topic and dedicated mining history scholars desiring to understand the whole unfolding mining, technological, commercial and company history of the goldfield in one analytical chronological tapestry, will find this publication useful.

The Gympie goldfield provided enormous wealth and employment for its population. The boom of the late 1880s with its influx of British capital brought expanded opportunities for major company development and mine expansion. Capital was available for deep exploration shafts – for chasing the reefs – at a time when there was very limited understanding of the field's structural geology.

Although the book contains little on the significant early miners other than James Nash, the biographical sketches of wealthy miners are excellent and provide a flavour of what a detailed history of the goldfield detailing the company formation and operation should look like. However, more detailed biographies of Matthew Laird, William Smyth and David Reid would have been very welcome.

The calculation of production figures is a difficult task but the figures published in this work should prove very worthwhile for further research. Production figures for the 20 largest reef mines illuminate the core of Gympie goldfield's mining and production, one finding being that the four largest producing mines accounted for just over half the total over the working life of these 20 mines. These were the Scottish Gympie Gold Mining Company (1896-1923), the No.2 South Great Eastern Gold Mining Company (1887-1920), the South Glanmire & Monkland Mining Company (1888-1915), and the 1 North Phoenix Gold Mining Company (1880-1918). The first three of these mines were clustered together at Monkland, and feature on the book's attractive cover, based on a postcard photo from 1909. Another statistic from the pages is that nine companies that began their life in 1870 (the first production year of a company in the top 20) produced 19,529 kgs of gold bullion, or 24 percent of the total of the top 20 mines. However, it is a pity for readers that that it is difficult to compare and analyze figures presented on pages 26 and 67 (except for the top four mines) with that of Devex's figures that are quoted, because of the different units used by that authority and the authors.

In total, 33,439,177 ounces of gold were produced on the Gympie goldfield between 1867 and 1930. The largest production year was 1903 (180,456 ounces). Between 1884 and 1906, more than 100,000 ounces of gold was produced in 12 of those years, and 150,000 ounces was produced in both 1903 and 1904. The largest number of mines operating was 215 in 1902.

The details on the Scottish Gympie that is provided should prove valuable as a template for studying other mines, as it has used most available technologies, although it would have been useful to learn something about Matthew Laird's training and skills for his position as General Manager. But perhaps omissions are understandable due to the destruction of records (page 72), an unfortunate but standard practice under Companies legislation in western legal jurisdictions.

The success and failure in mining that David Laing experienced (he took over as manager of the Scottish Gympie Goldmining Company in 1897) is typical of the mining industry (page 73). The presentation to him by the miners on his resignation is indeed exceptional and laudatory.

Another notable personality discussed in the book is Andrew Fisher who worked at the South Great Eastern Extended mine as an engine driver, and who had a highly influential role in the Labor Party at the time. He had also worked underground in The 1 North Phoenix Gold Mining Company mine, before moving to the South Great Eastern Extended mine at Monkland sometime after 1890. The summary of Fisher's career on page 44 is very effective in describing his place in Gympie and Australian political history. His establishment of the *Gympie Truth* newspaper in 1896 was very significant for labor politics, and union formation and management, in Queensland.

The visit on 6 June 1888 to The 1 North Phoenix Gold Mining Company mine by Lady Lucinda Musgrave whose husband was the Governor of Queensland, was really ground breaking because she went underground (page 81). The captioned photograph of the visitors to the mine that day includes the names of all the mining company and town council personnel including their wives and daughters. Another photograph on page 72 of 200 invited guests (mining, financial, commercial) to the opening of new winding machinery in 1900 is highly depictive of the town's culture – a wonderful illustration for a centenary booklet. A list of names would have provided an excellent historic record but no doubt impossible, as they are unlikely to have been recorded at the time.

Deep exploration shafts came to be beyond the capability of companies after 1904 – as demonstrated by The West of Scotland shaft, which proved a duffer. However the shaft was later used as a critically important access to the area of the deep lodes of the Inglewood structure.

The refusal in 1915 by Benjamin Dunstan, government geologist, to pay a subsidy for the No.2 South Great Eastern mine (the second largest producer on the field, page 76) on the basis that the company had been profligate in payment of dividends provides the cold evidence of a significant mining industry administrative decision. It indicates that the company did not meet the criteria for the grant program.

We also learn of a very constructive mine rehabilitation decision by the Scottish Mine where underground voids were filled with mullock, perhaps an unusual trend at that time in history. The winding and reported flood prone Mary Street demonstrates the living heritage of an administrative, legal, financial and commercial precinct that has operated for 144 years. While fires of 1881 and 1891 destroyed the old wooden buildings of Upper Mary Street, the new buildings built mostly of brick during the most prosperous periods of Gympie's economic history are still utilized in practical and highly functional ways and many were entered on the Queensland Heritage register in 2010 and 2011. The brief histories of the use and architectural style of each of the buildings should prove very helpful for visitors to the town.

Comparisons with other major goldfields – Charters Towers, Bendigo, Ballarat, Croydon and Kalgoorlie - would have given the book a wider perspective and defined Gympie more clearly in Australian mining history. Also some analysis of the rate of

investment in deep mining and machinery in the depression of the 1890s by the major companies would have helped in understanding the impact of the contraction of capital and mine production on a goldfield as significant as Gympie.

It's a pity a book like this was not been written on Gympie for the centenary, as it would have guided the Council, the Historical Society and local historians. There are a number of small detractions from the book – such as the source for the plan on page 3; the reward letter by Nash on page 8 being really too small to read (ID2766, Queensland State Archives); the apparent mistake in the date of birth of J.O. Bligh (page 36); and the name of the ministry Andrew Fisher held in 1899 – viz., Secretary for Railways and Public Works from 1 December 1899 to 7 December 1899, rather than Minister for Transport (p.44).

Ruth S. Kerr

President Australian Mining history Association

David Upton, *The Olympic Dam Story – How Western Mining defied the odds to discover and develop the world's largest mineral deposit*, UPTON Financial PR, Armadale, Victoria, 2010. ISBN 978-0-646-54381-9, 180pp, including maps and photographs. Price \$35 including GST. Available from the author (david@theolympicdamstory.com) and from selected Dymock stores. Further details are available at <http://www.theolympicdamstory.com>

‘Failure is an orphan but success has many fathers’. The second half of that statement has long been applied to Western Mining’s discovery of Olympic Dam, the large multi-metal deposit in northern South Australia, now owned by BHP Billiton.

In a well-written and highly readable book, author David Upton gives a detailed history of the discovery of the iron-rich, copper-uranium-gold-silver-rare earth deposit and the role of the key players, but more importantly describes the elements that contributed to the exploration success. In the process, David discusses the culture that Western Mining (‘WMC’) developed from its beginnings in 1933. It was a culture that encouraged and supported exploration, even through difficult times, that led to the company becoming such a successful explorer.

In his first chapter, David provides a succinct summary of the history of Olympic Dam. He deftly conveys the excitement in late 1976, as the company’s directors inspected mineralised drill core from RD10, the hole that first demonstrated the economic potential of the orebody that had been discovered nearly 18 months earlier. The story covers the ensuing development of the project, the political battle to bring the orebody into production in 1988, plus the role of BP, through to the subsequent takeover of WMC by BHP Billiton in 2005.

In the subsequent chapters, David fleshes out the story. While there is some repetition, this does not distract the reader, and is necessary because of the intersecting story lines within the book.

For the technically minded, there is a complete chapter summarising the current geological thinking on how the orebody was formed, while the author also discusses in detail the geological theories that led to the discovery after 20 years of searching for copper throughout Australia. In describing the science, Upton also introduces us to the individuals who were developing the science and those who were providing the support framework for those scientists. This culminated in Western Mining drilling their first hole on Roxby Downs Station in 1975, in a region which has no surface expression of the riches hidden below.

David has the ability to convey an understanding of complex scientific and technical issues. Where more detailed explanations are required, for example on geology or ore reserves, he avoids the distraction of copious footnotes by the clever use of separate, concise information boxes, so as not to interrupt the flow of the story.

David doesn't shirk from discussions on some of the more controversial aspects of the discovery history. These included the role of tectonic lineament studies in the discovery, and later criticism that the orebody found was nothing like that predicted in the theoretical studies that led to the initial drilling. David provides credible explanations and balanced arguments to justify the decisions taken at the time and to rationalise the thinking of the time with the benefit of hindsight.

The book discusses more recent developments by BHP Billiton at Olympic Dam. In addition, it also looks at the fruits of successful exploration by other companies in the region that have resulted in the discoveries of Prominent Hill and Carrapateena.

Upton has captured the culture of a successful explorer and the key people who created and supported that culture. In his conversational style, he provides an intimate picture of the key individuals, their motivations and reasons for their actions taken during the discovery process. The book illustrates the successes which come from the support of scientific excellence, attention to detail, persistence, perseverance and above all teamwork.

As background for the book, David interviewed many WMC executives including former Director of Exploration, Roy Woodall, and his senior executives Jim Lalor, Dan Evans, Douglas Haynes and Hugh Rutter, who were key players in the copper search project. He was unable to interview the late Tim O'Driscoll, but Tim's contribution is acknowledged. David also had access to WMC's previously unpublished records and has produced a well-researched account of the events preceding the discovery at Olympic Dam.

One of Australia's greatest industrialists and former WMC executive, Sir Arvi Parbo, has written a thoughtful Foreword to the book. He emphasises just how significant the find is and the importance to successful discovery of having a capable, well-trained, dedicated and persistent team of people. He also highlights the need for a very long term perspective in the minerals industry.

And finally, to quote from Sir Arvi Parbo; 'High level and persistent exploration effort is necessary if the Australian minerals industry is to maintain its world leadership position. I hope *The Olympic Dam Story* will assist in understanding that there is nothing easy or granted about it'.

The book is highly recommended to general readers and in particular to geoscientists, students, exploration managers and directors of mineral exploration companies. It should also be required reading for politicians and public servants!

Ian Scott

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Alan Murray, *No Easy Field: Ipswich Coalmining, 1920-2000*. Queensland University Press, 2010 (xiv + 418pp), ISBN 9780702239014

Publication of this book coincided with the celebration by Ipswich of its 150 years as a municipality. Its period picks up from where the late Professor Ray William's Volume III of the coalmining history of Queensland left off. Publication was sponsored by the local William L. Haenke Historical Foundation which promotes awareness of coalmining in the Ipswich region of South-East Queensland. Support was also provided by the New Hope Corporation, the field's only remaining coalmining company, and by the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). The outcome is a large, handsome, luxuriously produced and lavishly illustrated tome rarely found among latter-day industrial and economic histories. Important among the author's lengthy list of remaining acknowledgements is that to his wife, Dr. J.B.Murray, for her work as editor of this weighty volume.

The author reminds us that as late as 1950 the Ipswich-West Moreland field still led state coal production with some 1900 employees producing 58 per cent of Queensland's coal output. Thereafter it was increasingly swamped by production from the easily accessible, large scale, open cut operations in central Queensland that catered for the exponentially growing export trade. By 1975, when Australia accounted for 22 per cent of world coal trade, the Queensland Coal Board Report saw West Moreland's role as largely peripheral. Although open cuts were opened there, by 1991 the field produced a mere 4 per cent of the Queensland total and ceased to be separately delineated in official statistics.

A noteworthy factor concerning the field's early expansion was, of course, its proximity to Brisbane, the state's capital and major domestic market. Murray emphasises that, although the key to its original predominance, this proximity became a negative in the post war years. This was because Ipswich increasingly became a dormitory for booming Brisbane's commuters who came to object strenuously to the deleterious environmental externalities of mining, particularly subsidence. West Moreland's major problems were, however, geological and historical. From the earliest days its readily accessible but narrow, tilted seams lent themselves to the crudest form of coal extraction. From the first nineteenth century scratching at the earth in shallow pits the field was epitomised by small, undercapitalised mines whose output lurched upwards in the early twentieth century. A few mines endeavoured to stay abreast of

technical change but the small pits remained relatively unmechanised – underground haulage of coal by hand could still be found in 1946, while the last local case of mining by the ancient method of contract-share labour only disappeared in 1971. By and large, occupational health and safety was appalling and the accident rate was high. Naked lights were not totally banned until 1945. Eighty-one men were killed between 1928 and 1934, for example, and in 1971 managerial technical ignorance contributed to the death of 18 others in the Box Flat disaster which rocked the contemporary Ipswich community.

Two things spring out from Murray's immensely detailed account: a) the central importance of state regulation of the industry and b) the human and social aspects of mining this field. Successive major coal industry Inquiries and legislation, notably in 1933, 1946, 1947 and 1949, helped, via increasingly stringent regulation, push the field towards greater production and marketing efficiency and safer operational practices – aided respectively, of course, by growing market competition and by trade union pressures. Meanwhile the local coalfield community lived, struggled, coped or celebrated through booms, depression, war and pit disasters. Here Murray is at his strongest. Any family, local or company historian will find great value in his book. Virtually every major event in Ipswich, including Royal visits, and in individual mines seems to get a mention and the author really shines in humanising his story around individuals. Most pre-war West Moreland coal owners appear to have been beneficent compared to their NSW equivalents and the sense of community closeness pervades the book. Some of Murray's pen-pictures and epitaphs are quite moving.

From the outsider's viewpoint, however, the book suffers from too much detail. It appears that the author studied his many sources literally year by year and he groups his findings in chronological chapters each covering two or three years and seeming to list every single change. The trees consequently obscure the wood. After being informed of each and every ownership change, technical plan or development in each and every mine and seam, a picture of fairly steady progress tends to form in the reader's mind. Subsequent disclosure of the damning criticism of the field's continuing backwardness in successive official inquiries and reports tends to come as something of a shock. Above all, tables and/or graphs depicting output, employment and exports are completely lacking. Their inclusion would have obviated the lengthy, tedious and repetitious literary enumeration of the data in this year-by-year account. In summary, this essential reference book provides a rewarding but overly dense read.

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