

## **THE NUGGET FROM NASHVILLE (GYMPIE) 1868: OF PERSEVERANCE AND A PRINCE**

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**Key Words:** Nugget, gold mass, Gympie Goldfield, Curtis, Brigg.

**I**n October 1867 James Nash, a solitary prospector, discovered alluvial gold near the Mary River 'south of Maryborough'. Known landmarks were scarce when he made a claim for a reward, mentioning only the Wide Bay District and a vague location 50 miles south of Maryborough between Curra and Traverston<sup>1</sup>. Since that time, a hierarchy of landmarks - geographic, geological and social - have evolved, allowing a more detailed description of the subsequent metamorphosis of Nashville into the Gympie Goldfield and the city of Gympie. An overview of this history was recently published.<sup>2</sup>

Early in February 1868 two miners unearthed an extremely large nugget of gold. Their good fortune enhanced the reputation of the infant goldfield and attracted other miners and capital. The lifespan of this nugget was very short, approximately two months before being converted to gold bullion at the Sydney Mint. Only brief details of the nugget were recorded in newspapers and no image has been found. The nugget remains the largest found in Queensland and rates among the largest in Australia.

The paucity of formal records transforms newspaper and eyewitness comments into rich wash-dirt for history enthusiasts. This paper summarises the history of the nugget, to the extent possible from primary sources, and provides an explanation of the formation of this rare gold specimen.

### **Nashville in early 1868: The setting**

James Nash was awarded his claim on approximately 18 October 1867 and the rush was on. Diggers arrived and departed along evolving horse tracks and crude roads, from Brisbane to the south, Maryborough to the north. The entire area was heavily timbered and included some dense rainforest. The goldfield was officially proclaimed on 30 October 1867, as the Upper Mary River Goldfield, 25 square miles in extent. By early 1868 a crude settlement known as Nashville with a population of approximately 10-14,000 souls, overwhelmingly male, had evolved.<sup>3</sup>

Formal titles were not always the preference of locals, leading to other titles being promoted by the press, these being ~~were~~ the 'Gympie or Gympy Creek, Diggings or Gold Fields', as well as the 'Currie Diggings'<sup>4</sup>. The name Gympie was derived from 'gimpi gimpi' an Aboriginal name for a stinging rainforest shrub<sup>5</sup>. Gympie Creek was a landmark, joining the east bank of the Mary River just north of Nashville<sup>6</sup>. The principal sources of alluvial gold were Nash's, Sailor's, White's, Walker's, Scrubby and Nuggety gullies, as well as Deep Creek,<sup>7</sup> and were worked more or less in that order.

Nash's Gully was named after James Nash, whose discovery entitled him to his choice of a Prospectors Claim (PC) plus a Reward claim. He elected a site just upstream

from the confluence of Nash's Gully with Sailor's Gully, this location being based on his experiences before he declared his discovery. This area was rich in coarse grained gold and small nuggets.<sup>8</sup>

Sailor's Gully was named by Billy Malcolm and W. Leishman, both ex-sailors, who were granted the first claim on this gully. Their claim, probably 40x40 ft. was adjacent to where the Nash brothers had their claims on Nash's Gully.<sup>9</sup> Early diggers would have sought this gully because of its proximity to the claims of the Nashs.

**Figure 1:** Sketch Map of Nashville, showing topography, Nash's Gully, Sailor's Gully, Caledonia Reef, by Clarendon Stuart, c. 1868.



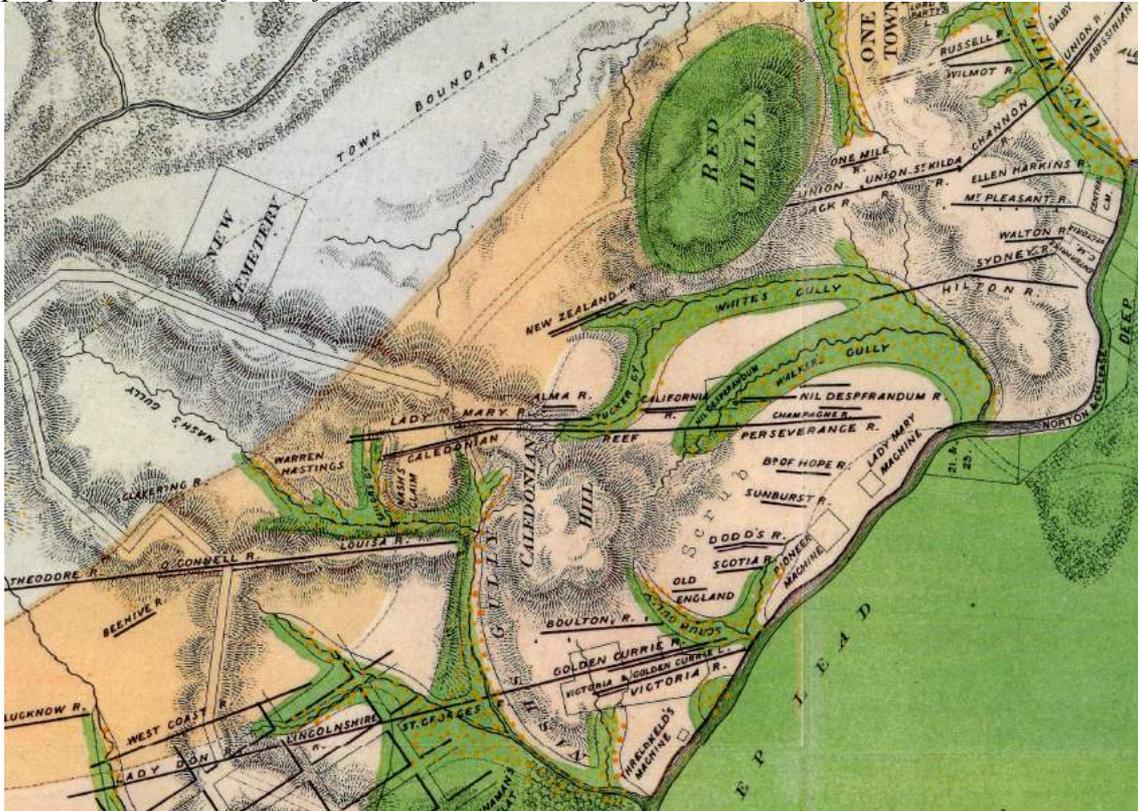
Source: Courtesy of Gympie Regional Libraries.

While the mining of alluvial gold was close to its peak and dominated the minds of most, subtle changes were already underway. Outcrops of gold bearing quartz reefs had been discovered, for example, the Lady Mary and the Caledonia along the crest of Caledonian Hill. On 8th November 1867, applications were made for the Lady Mary PC (420 ft. along the line of reef) and the Caledonia PC (240 ft).<sup>10</sup> Attempts were being made to raise capital in Brisbane for underground mining. In early February, one ton of ore from the Lady Mary reef was consigned from Maryborough to Sydney on the 'Saxonia' for assay, so as to determine the actual gold content<sup>11</sup>. Gold production from hard rock, however, was still dependant on the arrival of a crushing battery which did not begin operation until May 1868. When crushing finally began these claims provided sensational yields of gold.

The first map of the area (Fig. 1) shows Nashville, Sailor's Gully, and the purported line of reef of the Caledonia terminating at Sailor's Gully.<sup>12</sup> The absence of the Lady Mary reef herein, perhaps indicates that the line of reef of the Caledonia included

more outcrop and was more definable. Later, more detailed maps show a branching about midway and also the auriferous nature of Sailor's Gully.<sup>13</sup> The first geological map of the Goldfield (Fig. 2) shows some speculative extrapolation of the Caledonia line of reef continuing into the Perseverance reef.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 2:** Extract from the first geological map of the Gympie Goldfield, showing the purported lines of reef of the Caledonia and Perseverance reefs.



Source: T.R. Hacket[t], Map of the Gympie Gold Fields, Southern Queensland, Government Engraving & Lithographic Branch, Brisbane, 1870.

Robert Pollock, both a shareholder in the Lady Mary PC and resident in the relevant era, later stated that

Alluvial gold was found mainly in Nash's Gully, Deep Creek and New Zealand Gully; there was little in Sailor's Gully (except about where the Gas Works are now), although it is admitted that the famous Curtis Nugget was found higher up Sailor's Gully. Its comparative absence in this gully supported his own private theory that all the alluvial gold had come from the Caledonian Reef and probably none from the Lady Mary.<sup>15</sup>

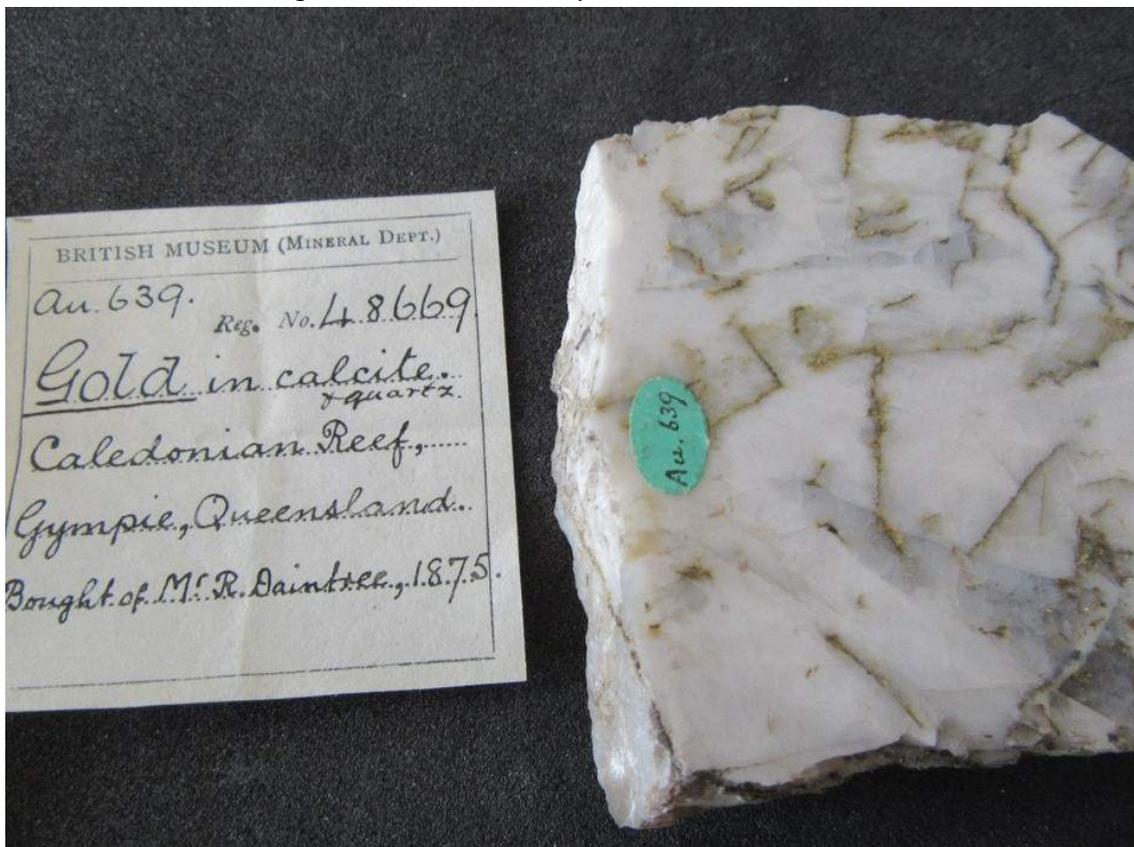
An ore specimen from the Caledonia reef was sold to the Natural History Museum of London by Richard Daintree (Fig. 3). This is a rare, surviving remnant of this reef from the relevant era.

Banks in Nashville were paying £3/5/6 per ounce of native gold for coinage compared with £3/10/- at the Sydney Mint, at a time when the standard English gold standard was £3/17/10 per ounce of pure gold at the London Royal Mint. Many diggers

were reluctant sellers locally at this price.<sup>16</sup> A gold escort service delivered gold bullion to Maryborough.

By early February 1868, while Nash was working his alluvial PC just upstream from the junction of Nash's with Sailor's Gully, above him on the crown of Caledonian Hill, the first hard rock reef miners were sinking their shallow shafts and stockpiling ore for crushing. At this dynamic-embryonic stage of development, Nashville did not have a local newspaper and relied mainly on the Maryborough Chronicle. The *Nashville Times* began publication only from the 15th of February 1868.<sup>17</sup> The future of the fledgling goldfield was very uncertain. How long would the gold last? While many diggers had experienced disappointment, a few had found riches and some sensed opportunity deeper down, but something was about to happen!

**Figure 3:** Specimen stone from the Caledonia reef, Gympie, c. 1870, showing gold veinlets in calcite and quartz. Natural History Museum, London.



Source: From the collections of the Natural History Museum, London, specimen number BM.48669. Photo taken by Loretta Ferguson, June 2018.

### Discovery and geographic provenance

George Silas Curtis had taken leave from his job as Sheep (scab) Inspector in Maryborough to try his luck at the diggings. Curtis made some arrangement with Charles Collin who had legal right to an abandoned claim on upper Sailor's Gully on Caledonian Hill and began working along with George Canny. Results were uninspiring and Canny soon departed. Curtis sought the help of his nephew Valentine Curtis Brigg (Fig. 4) who arrived in early January 1868. Both were aged in their early 20's. On the afternoon of 6th February 1868, Brigg was using a pick when he unearthed a huge nugget close to the

**Figure 4:** *Photo of Valentine Curtis Brigg.*



Source: Courtesy of Gympie Regional Libraries.

surface. An early report credited Curtis with the find but in a letter to the *Maryborough Chronicle*, Curtis confirmed that it was Brigg who unearthed the nugget:

The paragraph in your issue of Saturday last having reference to the finding of the nugget of gold in the claim at Sailors gully, and which I have the good fortune to have a share in, is not altogether substantially correct. My nephew, Mr. Valentine Brigg, had the pleasure of first bringing to light this unmistakable wonder, showing as it does the hidden treasures of these goldfields.<sup>18</sup>

Despite this early public disclosure, debate over who actually discovered the nugget has continued. Those who nominate Curtis are either confusing claim ownership with discovery or are poorly informed. The role of Valentine Brigg (Fig. 3) was reaffirmed by both his son, Vernon Mortimer Brigg and by

grandson Douglas Brigg: the former when stating ‘that it was his father who actually found the big nugget and that he stood guard over it for two hours until the return of Mr Curtis who had gone up the town’,<sup>19</sup> and the latter who later confirmed the preference of Curtis for the name ‘Perseverance’ and advocated a change to that name.<sup>20</sup>

According to various reports, the nugget was carried by Curtis and Brigg: ‘in a bag’,<sup>21</sup> ‘in a sack’,<sup>22</sup> or ‘conveyed ... in a five gallon winch bucket’<sup>23</sup> to the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney (CBCS) in Mary Street where it was deposited for safekeeping with the manager Tom Pockley.<sup>24</sup> The discovery provoked a swarm of nearby claims to be worked over but ‘no more gold was found’.<sup>25</sup>

### **Discovery Site**

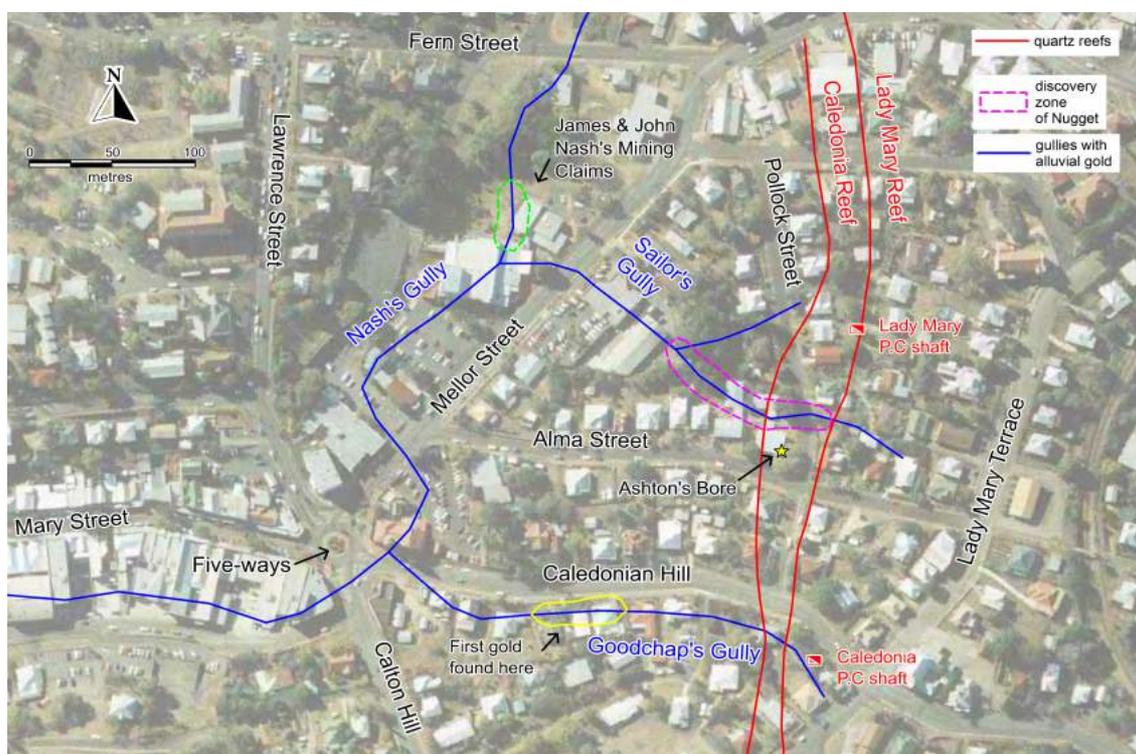
The claim worked by Curtis and Brigg had been worked on previously. In this early period, unrewarding claims were quickly abandoned and many only worked superficially. Robert Pollock’s comments indicate that Sailor’s Gully was not amongst the richest,<sup>26</sup> so it is not surprising that some diggers chose to move elsewhere, allowing Collin and Curtis to ‘persevere’ and rework it.

Comments providing some spatial orientation to the claim and/or nugget include the following: ‘four feet from the Caledonian reef’;<sup>27</sup> ‘between the Caledonian and Lady Mary reefs’;<sup>28</sup> ‘the famous nugget was found less than 50 yards outside his [Nash’s] pegs’;<sup>29</sup> ‘the claim was situated near the head of Sailor’s Gully ... the nugget was found only a few feet from the boundary of the famous Lady Mary P.C. boundary’;<sup>30</sup> and ‘a few feet below the place on Sailor’s Gully where the [Caledonia] reef was expected to continue the famous Curtis nugget was discovered’.<sup>31</sup> A more precise indicator to the

Curtis claim comes from the known site of a drill hole (Ashton's Bore) made in the 1890's and said to be 'on the big nugget claim'.<sup>32</sup>

These historical comments with their generalities and ambiguities, when blended with opinions of present-day residents, allow the definition of a discovery 'zone' along Sailor's Gully (Fig. 5). More precise interpretations can favour a site either above or below the present-day Pollock Street. While Lambert placed the site 'above',<sup>33</sup> we tend to favour 'below', because of the references to Nash's pegs, Ashton's Bore, the Caledonia reef and also local opinions.

**Figure 5:** Aerial photograph of the discovery area of the nugget. Superimposed are; gullies with alluvial gold, the Caledonia and Lady Mary reefs (after Dunstan, 1911), and Ashton's Bore.



Source: Compiled by the Authors.

### Discovery depth

Newspaper comments on depth from the surface range from: 'but a few inches',<sup>34</sup> 'little more than a foot',<sup>35</sup> 'the sinking being 3 or 4 feet deep',<sup>36</sup> to 'four feet'.<sup>37</sup> A revealing comment was:

Curtis was camped on Sailor's Gully over which I passed daily. He was getting no gold and offered the claim for £5. But he was constantly absent "fossicking" on Walkers Gully and the claim liable to be "jumped"; no one was ambitious to pay for it. Every other place failing him, he conceived the idea of breaking down a ledge of earth on the grassy banks of the gully on his claim, a most unlikely place to find gold.<sup>38</sup>

While unearthed with a pick, we conclude the nugget was loose/free from bedrock, that is, a 'floater' within the margins of the gully at shallow depth. Comments regarding

a shaft being dug are regarded as questionable as this was an alluvial claim in a gully environment. The term ‘sinking’, however, may well have been applied to any working in a gully.

### **Description, in retrospect**

*Names:* Despite such a short life, many names are associated with the nugget. At Gympie, it is generally referred to as the ‘Curtis’ nugget, reflecting his role as claim operator, from early publicity derived from the court litigation with Canny and useage in recent publications.<sup>39</sup> George Curtis himself preferred the name ‘Perseverance’ and this was reported as the intended name as early as the 15th February 1868,<sup>40</sup> in Court proceedings<sup>41</sup> and **in** some recent useage.<sup>42</sup> Early newspapers also made reference to the ‘Gympie Creek’, ‘[Gympy]’, ‘Big’, ‘Big Gympie’, ‘Monster’, ‘Prince Alfred’ and ‘Brigg’ nugget. During the rush to monetize the nugget, however, there was no time for a definitive naming ceremony.

*Weight:* This thematic is complicated by a lack of an original, authentic reference from the Sydney Mint. In 1903, some newspapers reported information provided by William Walker including weights stated to be from the Returns Record from the Sydney Mint held at the CBCS Maryborough.<sup>43</sup> A similar summary statement dated 29 October 1903<sup>44</sup> also includes mention of Deposit No. 50523 for coinage, a strategic comment not mentioned in other reports, and for this reason, we have elected to place credence to the weights reported therein.<sup>45</sup> Between reports, however, these weights differ, but by less than two grams, possibly from transcription errors. Why these weights only appeared after the turn of the century is intriguing but probably indicates missing references.

In the newspapers, the coarse nugget was reported variously as weighing between 67-85 troy lb. while the escort fee on the transfer to Maryborough was paid on ‘1040 ozs’.<sup>46</sup> The CBCS Maryborough records (supposedly from the Mint), report the coarse weight as 974.86 ozs, with 69.72 ozs loss in smelting, and a nett weight of pure gold of 905.15 ozs.<sup>47</sup> We believe these weights are the most authentic and allowing for rounding errors, are the basis of later reports of 975 troy ozs coarse and 905 or 906 troy ozs pure gold.

The nett weight of pure gold of 905 troy ozs (or 28.1 kg or 75 troy lbs approximately) places the nugget as the largest ever in Queensland and among the larger nuggets found in Australia.<sup>48</sup>

Reports of second large nugget (of 804 troy ozs) being found at Sailor’s Gully, Deep Creek, Gympie, in 1899,<sup>49</sup> are regarded as erroneous. Our chronological interpretation is that in 1889 Rands<sup>50</sup> was either misled by a Curtis family comment in 1868 about an 840 troy oz nugget,<sup>51</sup> or he made a transcription error about the weight of the first (and only) nugget. In 1913, Dunstan referred to a 906 troy ozs nugget found in 1867 at Gympie Creek and a 804 troy ozs nugget from Sailor’s Gully, Deep Creek, Gympie Goldfield.<sup>52</sup> His misinterpretation between these watercourses, over 2 km apart, led to his reporting a second nugget (of 804 ozs) which has then been repeated by others.

With respect to gold concentration (or purity on weight basis), the coarse nugget was 93% gold, similar to that of the Maitland Bar nugget from Hill End, NSW, at 91%.<sup>53</sup>

Based on general experience of the nature of gold ore from nearby reefs, the most likely impurities, that is, the 7% of associated material, would have been, quartz, alloyed silver, clay and iron oxide.

*Form and Colour:* An eyewitness report stated:

it is a mass of solid gold about fourteen inches long, and eight inches high in the centre, from which it shelves suddenly towards the edges. The average width is about eight inches, and the bottom is slightly concave. Only one small speck of foreign substance can be seen ...<sup>54</sup>

A differing comment, for which the dimensions are suspect, was,

It was an irregular lump of gold about 8 in. long and 5 in. wide, and of a thickness that I do not remember - probably about an inch and weighing 1040 oz., over 80 lb. troy. There was dirt and some quartz in the hollows, which afterwards were removed'.<sup>55</sup>

The raw nugget was stated to be 'a dull red mass'<sup>56</sup> and

the surface being rough, with the interstices filled with red earth, making some parts of the surface look like a beautiful piece of frosted work. No one without trying to lift it, would have an impression from merely seeing it that it is as heavy as it actually is.<sup>57</sup>

*Value:* The Sydney Mint paid out £3,132/9/9 after deducting charges,<sup>58</sup> indicating a realized value of approximately £3/10/ oz. In 2020, with a gold price of US\$1,750 per oz or approximately \$2,500 per oz, the present-day intrinsic gold value of the nugget would be approximately \$2.5 million. As large nuggets have attracted a premium of 50-100%, (depending upon size, aesthetic appeal and historical or scientific value), the present-day value of the nugget should be above \$3 million.

*Model and Exhibits:* Mr Allan Blackman, a volunteer at the Gympie Gold Mining and Historical Museum, has created an attractive model of the nugget attempting to replicate its original form. Displayed as the Curtis nugget, the popular exhibit allows visitors to sense the size, shape, texture and colour of the nugget. Also, on display nearby, are a photograph, headstone and notes regarding the life of Valentine Curtis Brigg.

*Image:* No image (photograph, engraving, etching or sketch) has yet been found, so regrettably we cannot provide a photograph. Assuming an image does not exist, this could reflect the nugget's discovery at a time before the Goldfield had a newspaper and subsequent confinement because of security concerns during a very short post-discovery life span. Even so, it is surprising that with reported public showings in Nashville and Maryborough (and possibly Brisbane), an image was either not taken or does not survive. Examination of Sydney newspapers at the time of Prince Alfred's visit, show the predominant use of sketches and engravings for illustrations and very few photographs. This reflects both the scarcity of cameras and technological limitations for publication of photographs prevailing in early 1868.

### **Post discovery life of the nugget**

*Nashville and Maryborough:* The nugget was in Nashville for only about a week, from approximately 6-12th February 1868, and was the subject of much curiosity and concern for its security. Pockley and Curtis did arrange for display opportunities at Nashville, for as stated:

This great nugget was conveyed to the bank at Nashville, in a sack, and is now on view there, at one shilling a sight; the proceeds of the display to be devoted to the diggers' hospital ...<sup>59</sup>

On approximately 12th February 1868, both the nugget and George Curtis departed Nashville with the gold escort bound for Maryborough and the CBCS branch managed by William Walker. The nugget was displayed at the Royal Hotel from 18-20<sup>th</sup> February with the public charged a shilling a head to benefit the Maryborough hospital.<sup>60</sup> The nugget was then shipped to Sydney, possibly via Brisbane.

*Sydney:* The 'Alexandra S', which carried the nugget, had arrived in Sydney from Maryborough by 11th March 1868<sup>61</sup> and it was delivered and placed with the CBCS under manager T. Dibbs. On 23rd March 1868, via Memorandum of Deposit No 50523, it was 'left for coinage' at the Sydney Branch of the Royal Mint. Smelting into gold bullion followed, with payment made on 6th April 1868.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, by 6th April 1868, the life above ground of the nugget had ended unceremoniously. The derived gold bullion was probably minted into gold sovereigns or lives on as part of a bar of bullion in a bank vault. In total contrast, in 1887 the Maitland Bar nugget of 313 ounces was purchased by the New South Wales Government, has since been exhibited around the world<sup>63</sup> and survives to this day as a heritage attraction at the Australian Museum.

*Legal disputes re ownership and termination of partnership:* Alarm bells over ownership quickly appeared.<sup>64</sup> According to Charles Collin, his legal rights to the claim entitled him to one third of the gold found, free of all charges and expenses, whether he was present or not. He demanded his share should be sold and proceeds remitted to him by bank draft. Curtis engaged solicitor William Barnes to negotiate a settlement, which led to Collin being paid £750. George Canny reappeared to also claim a share of the nugget (referred to as the 'Perseverance') but his court case was finally dismissed.<sup>65</sup> It is possible that this court case provided precedents used in the drafting of later mining legislation in Queensland. Curtis also paid £550 to Valentine Brigg.<sup>66</sup>

*Sojourn in Sydney:* The arrival of the nugget in Sydney, barely recorded in the press, was as the 'Gympie Creek Nugget'.<sup>67</sup> The low public profile was due in part to the presence of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, on a Royal Tour of Australia. Overall, the general public were euphoric about his visit, with every city and public figure competing for his attention. Even in outback Nashville, one romantic royalist suggested the Prince be invited there and presented with the 85 lb nugget from Mr Curtis.<sup>68</sup> The press reported extensively on the Prince's numerous formal events, his informal dalliances and his

interest in gold. Later books recorded the Tour,<sup>69</sup> but without any mention of the aforementioned nugget.

The Prince had arrived in Sydney on board his ship HMS 'Galatea' accompanied by a few friends, including Francis Charles Needham or Lord Newry, an artist and photographer. On 12th March 1868, while attending a public picnic at Clontarf, the Prince was shot in an assassination attempt. While initially there was fears for his life, he recovered fairly quickly while being confined to Government House. During this period, he declined all formal and public events and refused any visitors except his personal retinue, which included Lord Newry. He expressed interest, however, in viewing the nugget. Mr T. Dibbs conveyed the 'Gympie Creek' nugget to Government House on 18th March 1868 for a private viewing. The Prince was eager to lift the nugget but was discouraged from so doing by his medical attendants:

The Prince expressed himself highly gratified with the inspection of the magnificent lump of gold, and desired to be permitted to handle it, but his medical attendants interposed, fearing that the exertion would be injurious in his present state.<sup>70</sup>

It is highly probable that Lord Newry was both present with his camera and that he photographed the event. Soon after, on 6th April 1868, the 'Galatea' sailed off to return Prince Alfred and Lord Newry to the UK. These events and their timing allow speculation that an image could have departed Australia for overseas. The Gympie and District Historical Society were unsuccessful in their attempt to explore the archives of British Royalty for such a photograph.<sup>71</sup>

### **A geological perspective and nugget formation**

Rocks in the Gympie Goldfield are part of the Permian Gympie Group, with most gold mineralisation occurring in the Pengelly Siltstone Member of the Early to Middle Permian Rammutt Formation (approximately 259-299 million years old). The Pengelly Siltstone is typically 60m thick, features variably carbonaceous (graphitic) siltstone and shale<sup>72</sup> and was referred to as 'Phoenix Slates' and the 'Monkland Slates' by the early miners.<sup>73</sup>

The gold-bearing quartz veins in Gympie formed approximately 229 million years ago in the Triassic period and are thought to be mesothermal in style with an intrusion-related gold source due to their spatial and temporal relationship with the nearby granitic intrusions of the Woondum Igneous Complex.<sup>74</sup> Most quartz veins typically had a northerly strike, a dip of 55° towards west, and were 0.2-1.2m thick. The deposition of abundant coarse gold occurred where the veins intersected graphitic sedimentary beds and graphitic, bedding-parallel faults locally termed 'breaks'.

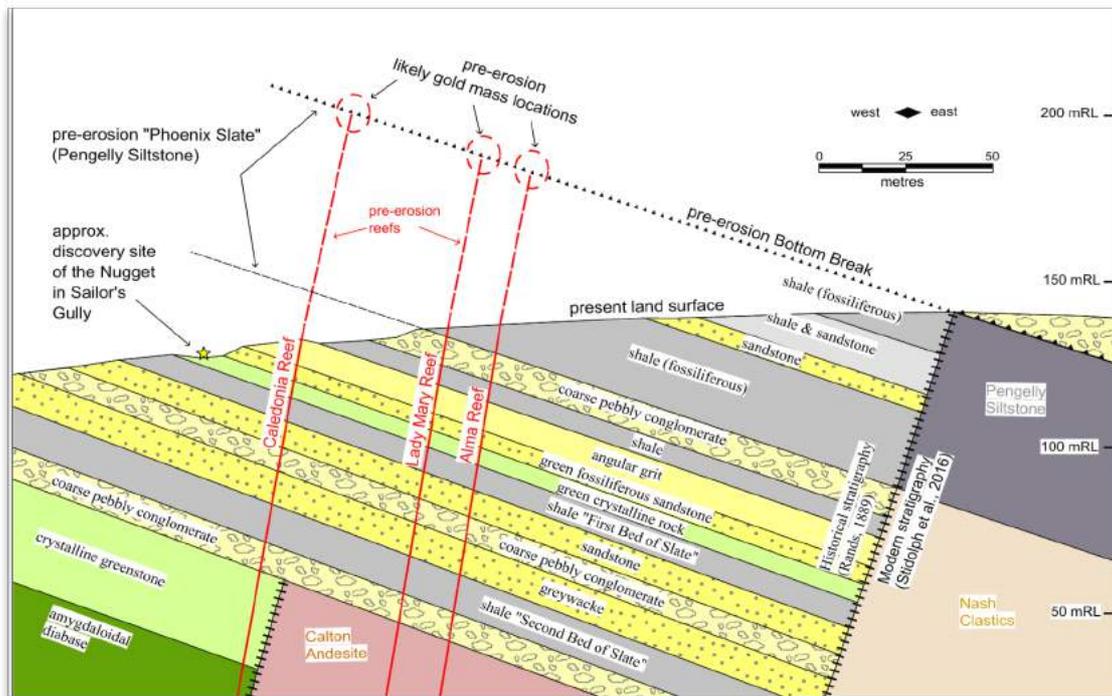
The historical mining phase at Gympie occurred from 1867-1927 and produced approximately 128,363 kg (4,127,427 ozs) of gold bullion, with a further approximately 12,000 kg (387,000 ozs) produced in the modern phase of gold mining from 1994-2008.<sup>75</sup> Most of the total gold produced from Gympie occurred in quartz veins in the Pengelly Siltstone.

Since mineralisation, the region has undergone tectonic uplift, several episodes of faulting, and a significant amount of erosion. Tectonic uplift and erosion along the eastern

margin of Queensland has been estimated to have been in the order of 300 m since the Early Cretaceous period,<sup>76</sup> approximately 100 million years ago. These processes have resulted in a structurally fragmented goldfield with some parts containing auriferous quartz reefs located up to 1,000 m below the present land surface and other parts where quartz reefs have been eroded away, leaving behind alluvial gold in watercourses.

The gold in the Nugget is thought to have a hypogene source, originally forming as an interconnected network of thin gold veinlets within a quartz vein in the central portion of the goldfield known as the Phoenix Block. It is considered most likely that the precursor gold mass occurred in either the Caledonia or Lady Mary reefs at the intersection with the 'Bottom Break', a strongly graphitic zone at the top of the Pengelly Siltstone (Fig. 6).

**Figure 6:** Vertical section of the discovery area of the nugget, looking towards north, showing the stratigraphic sequences. Pre-erosion projection of quartz reefs to intersect with the Bottom Break graphitic fault defines possible source locations for the nugget's precursor gold mass.



Source: Compiled by Authors from stratigraphic sequences from both W.H. Rands, 'Gympie Gold Field', *Queensland Geological Survey*, Publication 52, 1889, and P.A. Stidolph, J.S. Dugdale and F. von Gnielinski, 'Structure and Gold Mineralisation in the Gympie Group at Gympie, Queensland', *Queensland Geological Record*, 2016/05.

The Caledonia and Lady Mary reefs were typical of the many auriferous quartz veins of the Gympie Goldfield, in containing spectacular gold masses where hosted by graphitic sedimentary rocks and graphitic faults. The concentration of gold in such masses can be measured in percent by weight, in contrast to being measured in parts per billion in the exploration for gold deposits, and parts per million (or grams per tonne) in the mining of gold deposits. For example, gold concentrations of >10 parts per billion (0.01 parts per million or 0.000001%) from soil samples were of interest to Gympie exploration

geologists attempting to discover more gold deposits in the modern phase of mining. The average gold concentration of gold ore in the modern phase of gold mining in Gympie was 7 parts per million or grams per tonne (0.0007 %), and the gold concentration of the 15-19A gold mass specimen (Fig. 7) was approximately 15% (or 150,000 parts per million or grams per tonne).

**Figure 7:** *Photograph of 15-19A gold mass mined at Monkland Mine, Gympie, in November 2000.*



Source: Gympie Gold Limited, 2001 Annual Report, p. 22.

Weathering and erosion of the Caledonia and Lady Mary reefs would have occurred over millions of years and involved the progressive fragmentation of the reef until the gold mass, as part of the alluvium, ended up in the nearby Sailor's Gully watercourse. Over time, physical abrasion in the watercourse would have led to further fragmentation and dispersal of most of the quartz component, and compression of the relatively soft gold veinlet network into a dense gold nugget. Physical amalgamation of two or more gold masses in the watercourse may have occurred to produce the nugget although the size of gold masses mined historically and in modern times in Gympie (and at other places such as Hill End, NSW, and at Kambalda, WA, in 2018) suggests that this physical amalgamation step is not essential to form large gold nuggets. An example is the 15-19A gold mass mined in Gympie in November 2000. This portion of the Inglewood reef was located at the highly graphitic Bottom Break zone, approximately 700m below surface in the southern end of the goldfield and was estimated to comprise 3,500 ozs gold in 7 tonnes of quartz vein. Most of the gold occurred as an interconnected network of gold veinlets. The transformation of this gold mass into one or more large gold nuggets may be envisaged if this portion of the goldfield had been tectonically uplifted and eroded for many millions of years.

### **Concluding remarks**

Our historic perspective of the nugget is clouded by both a crack and a void. The former is the lack of an original report of a nett weight from the Sydney Mint while the latter is the absence of an image. We acknowledge the unpublished extract from the Maryborough CBCS records by William Walker in 1903 as our primary reference to the weight of the nugget. An intriguing question remains as to whether an image remains undiscovered, most probably overseas. Perhaps the way forward to fill this void, would be a search of the Newry archives in Northern Ireland with hopefuls exploring via the ‘Gympie Creek’ name. Meanwhile, an elegant model is on display the Gympie Gold Mining and Historical Museum.

The huge nugget, 905 ozs of pure gold, remains the largest found in Queensland and among the larger found within Australia. This size is exceptional by world standards. The gold concentration of the coarse nugget was 93 percent by weight, also very high. Reports of second large nugget (of 804 ozs) being found at Sailor’s Gully, Deep Creek, in 1889, are regarded as erroneous.

In 1868 George Curtis received about £3,132 from the CBCS for the gold value of the nugget. He then, voluntarily, paid £750 to Collin and £550 to Brigg. Today’s value is in the range of \$ 2-4 million.

Publicity from the nugget had a significant impact on the youthful goldfield, first generating funds for local hospitals, then attracting both labour and capital from interstate and overseas.

The nugget has numerous names, but most commonly, the ‘Curtis’, ‘Gympie Creek’ or ‘Perseverance’. The sources of these names are: ‘Curtis’, from George Curtis; ‘Gympie Creek’ from the landmark creek; and ‘Perseverance’, the choice of George Curtis, possibly due to his willingness to persevere on a claim that others thought a ‘duffer’, or from the name of a nearby reef. We suggest the name ‘Nashville-Perseverance’ would have preserved both provenance and the preference of George Curtis.

The main players in this odyssey are grouped as follows. a) *Miners*: George Silas Curtis, claim operator and claimant of ownership of nugget; Valentine Curtis Brigg, nephew and partner of Curtis, who actually unearthed the nugget; Charles Collin, legal owner of the claim and silent partner; George Canny, short term, pre-discovery workman or partner of Curtis and post-discovery litigant. b) *CBCS managers* who left valuable traces in the press as they guided the nugget towards the Mint: Tom Pockley, William Walker (in particular) and T. Dibbs. c) a *photographer*: Lord Newry or Francis Charles Needham, cohort of Prince Alfred, who may be a key to an image.

The precise discovery site is undefined but is assumed to be either just below or above the intersection of present-day Pollock Street with Sailor’s Gully at a shallow depth. The nugget could have originated from any one of several gold rich quartz reefs in the vicinity, most probably the Caledonia or Lady Mary, at a contact between graphitic sedimentary rocks and faults.

The early loss of this rare, natural specimen, combined with the lack of an authentic image, has detracted from both our cultural and scientific heritage and made

awareness of the nugget relatively obscure. This nugget, worthy of more attention, remains a highlight in the history of Queensland and, in particular, the Gympie Goldfield.

### Acknowledgements

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### Glossary

Hypogene: processes that occur deep below the earth's surface and form deposits of primary minerals. Mesothermal gold deposits: structurally controlled, lode gold quartz vein systems, hosted in low to medium temperature metamorphic terranes, and often spatially associated with granitoid intrusions.

### Units

1 foot = 0.3048 m, 1 yard = 0,914 m, 1 acre = 0.4047 hectares.

1 square mile = 2,589 square km.

1 troy oz (the standard measure of gold and silver) = 20 dwt = 31.10348 g; 1 dwt = 1.555 g.

1 pound (lb) = 0.454 kg, 1 ton (long) = 2,240 pounds (lbs) = 1.01604 tonnes.

1 (imperial) gallon = 4.4561 litres.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Minister of Lands, with James Nash's signature, 16 October 1867, Queensland State Archives, Digital Image ID 2766.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ferguson and E. Brown, *The Gympie Goldfield 1867-2008*, Gympie Regional Council, 2009, 102 pp.

<sup>3</sup> W. Woolgar, *Historical Sketch of Gympie 1867-1927*, Gympie, 1927, 158 pp.; A. Laurie, 'The Gympie Gold Strike of 1867', *Queensland Government Mining Journal*, July 1963, pp. 404-408.

<sup>4</sup> B. Dunstan, *Queensland Mineral Index, Gympie Goldfield*, Government Printer, 1913, p. 539.

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson and Brown, *The Gympie Goldfield 1867-2008*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> T.R. Hacket[t], Map of the Gympie Gold Fields, Southern Queensland, Government Engraving & Lithographic Branch, Brisbane, 1870.

<sup>7</sup> W.H. Rands, 'Gympie Gold Field', Queensland Geological Survey, Publication 52, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> H. Holthouse, *Gympie Gold*, Angus and Robertson Publications, 1973, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Woolgar, *Historical Sketch of Gympie, 1867-1927*, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Maryborough Chronicle*, 5 February 1868.

<sup>12</sup> Clarendon Stuart, *Sketch Map of Nashville and Environs*, Gympie Regional Libraries, Gympie, c.1868.

There is inconsistency in the naming of the Caledonia reef in the literature. We believe the reef was named as the Caledonia, which then led to derived names for other nearby features, such as Caledonian Hill and the Caledonian PC Mining Co. We, therefore, regard the name 'Caledonian reef' as a misnomer. This name did appear frequently in newspapers, was used in Hackett's Map 1870 (see Fig. 2) and was associated with a mineral specimen sold to the British Museum (see Fig. 3). In quoting from such references herein, we respect the original name quote but otherwise use 'Caledonia'.

<sup>13</sup> B. Dunstan, Geological Map of Gympie and Environs, Geological Survey of Queensland Publication, 221b, Sheet 9, 1911.

<sup>14</sup> Hacket[t], Map of the Gympie Gold Fields, 1870. This early interpretation did not survive the test of time and experience. Later geological maps show two distinct reefs with different lines.

<sup>15</sup> R.J. Pollock, 'Overland with Dray and Team', *Gympie in Its Cradle Days*, Reprinted by the Gympie and District Society Inc. 1985, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Maryborough Chronicle*, 5 February 1868.

<sup>17</sup> *The Nashville Times and Mary River Mining Gazette*, 15 February 1868.

<sup>18</sup> 'Mary River Gold Field', *Maryborough Chronicle*, 15 February 1868, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Big Gympie Nugget', *Morning Bulletin Rockhampton*, 1 August 1929, p. 6.

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- <sup>20</sup> 'Record books wrong, says man seeking name change for nugget', *Queensland Government Mining Journal*, vol. 94, no. 1097, 1993, p. 10.
- <sup>21</sup> Brown, 'Extracts from 'Memoirs of a Queensland Pioneer', Mimeographed Brisbane, 1944, p. 36.
- <sup>22</sup> 'The Big Nugget', *Queensland Daily Guardian*, 10 February 1868.
- <sup>23</sup> 'The Big Gympie Nugget', p. 6; *Morning Bulletin Rockhampton*, 1 August 1929, p. 6.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Gympie Creek Gold-Field', *Maryborough Chronicle*, 7 February 1868.
- <sup>25</sup> Brown, 'Extracts from 'Memoirs of a Queensland Pioneer', p. 36.
- <sup>26</sup> Pollock, 'Overland with Dray and Team', p. 41.
- <sup>27</sup> '[Gympy] Creek', *Queensland Daily Guardian*, 12 February 1868.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Gympie Creek', *Brisbane Courier*, 8 February 1868. The original wording, however, is very ambiguous.
- <sup>29</sup> 'The Curtis Nugget', *The Morning Bulletin Rockhampton*, 8 August 1929, p. 10.
- <sup>30</sup> Woolgar, *Historical Sketch of Gympie*, p. 12.
- <sup>31</sup> Brown, 'Extracts from 'Memoirs of a Queensland Pioneer', p. 36.
- <sup>32</sup> 'The Future of Gympie', *The Gympie Times*, 9 January 1913.
- <sup>33</sup> J. Lambert, *Pathways to Gold*, self-published, 2011, Map 29, p. 148.
- <sup>34</sup> 'Gympie Creek Gold-Field', *Maryborough Chronicle*, 7 February 1868.
- <sup>35</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 12 February 1868.
- <sup>36</sup> 'The Curtis Nugget', *Morning Bulletin Rockhampton*, 8 August 1929.
- <sup>37</sup> '[Gympy] Creek', *Queensland Daily Guardian*, 12 February 1868.
- <sup>38</sup> Brown, 'Extracts from 'Memoirs of a Queensland Pioneer', p. 36. When working manually, breaking down a ledge is easier work than digging vertically.
- <sup>39</sup> Woolgar, *Historical Sketch of Gympie*, p. 12; Ferguson and Brown, *The Gympie Goldfield, 1868-2008*, p. 29.
- <sup>40</sup> 'Mary River Gold Field', *Maryborough Chronicle*, 15 February 1868, p. 2.
- <sup>41</sup> *Canny v. Curtis*, Supreme Court Records, Brisbane, vol 1, p. 186.
- <sup>42</sup> Jean Stewart, *Kenmore Park, the land, the house and the people*, 1994, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>43</sup> 'The Curtis Nugget', *The North Queensland Register*, 16 November 1903, p 14; *Morning Bulletin Rockhampton*, 17 November 1903, p. 14.
- <sup>44</sup> William Walker, 'Curtis Nugget', unpublished typescript summary, 29 October 1903, Gympie Regional Libraries, Gympie, p. 1.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> *Maryborough Chronicle*, 15 February 1868, p. 2.
- <sup>47</sup> Walker, 'Curtis Nugget', p. 1.
- <sup>48</sup> 'Queensland Gold Nuggets', *Queensland Government Mining Journal*, vol. 51, June 1950, p. 394; B. Birch, 'Australia's large nuggets', in T. Stannage (Ed.), *Gold and Civilisation*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2001, p. 31.
- <sup>49</sup> Rands, 'Gympie Gold Field,' p. 1; 'Queensland Gold Nuggets', *Queensland Government Mining Journal*, p. 394; Birch, 'Australia's large nuggets', p. 31.
- <sup>50</sup> Rands, 'Gympie Gold Field', p. 1.
- <sup>51</sup> 'The Big Gympie Nugget', *Morning Bulletin Rockhampton*, 31 July 1929, p. 8.
- <sup>52</sup> Dunstan, *Queensland Mineral Index*, p. 467.
- <sup>53</sup> Ken McQueen and Robert Barnes, 'The Maitland Bar Nugget: A Key Link to the Gold Rush Heritage of New South Wales', *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, vol. 8, September 2010, p. 100.
- <sup>54</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 12 February 1868.
- <sup>55</sup> 'The Curtis Nugget', *Morning Bulletin Rockhampton*, 8 August 1929, p. 10. These size dimensions are regarded as suspect.
- <sup>56</sup> 'Gympie Creek', *Brisbane Courier*, 8 February 1868.
- <sup>57</sup> 'Mary River Gold Field', *Maryborough Chronicle*, 15 February 1868, p. 2.
- <sup>58</sup> Walker, 'Curtis Nugget', p. 1.
- <sup>59</sup> 'The Big Nugget', *Queensland Daily Guardian*, 12 February 1868.
- <sup>60</sup> 'Monster Nugget!' *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 February 1868.
- <sup>61</sup> 'New South Wales', *Leader* (Melbourne), 14 March 1868, p. 7.
- <sup>62</sup> Walker, 'Curtis Nugget', p. 1.
- <sup>63</sup> McQueen and Barnes, 'The Maitland Bar Nugget ...', pp. 88-102.
- <sup>64</sup> 'The Big Nugget', *Brisbane Courier*, 27 February 1868.
- <sup>65</sup> 'Canny v Curtis', Supreme Court Reports, vol. 1, 1868, pp. 186-193.
- <sup>66</sup> Letter 26 July 1868, Collin's Family Papers 1860-1870, John Oxley Library, Brisbane.
- <sup>67</sup> 'Big Nuggets Found in Australia', *The Illustrated Sydney News*, 1868, p. 356.
- <sup>68</sup> *Nashville Times*, 19 April 1868.

<sup>69</sup> B. McKinlay, *The First Royal Tour 1867-1868*, Rigby Limited, 1970, p. 157; S. Harris, *The Prince and the Assassin: Australia's First Royal Tour and Portent of World Terror*, Melbourne Books, 2017, p. 326.

<sup>70</sup> 'The Gympie Creek Nugget', *Sydney Empire*, 19 March 1868.

<sup>71</sup> 'Search for Gympie's famous gold 'nugget'', *The Gympie Times*, 28 March 1995.

<sup>72</sup> P.A. Stidolph, J.S. Dugdale and F. von Gnielinski, 'Structure and Gold Mineralisation in the Gympie Group at Gympie, Queensland', *Queensland Geological Record*, 2016/05.

<sup>73</sup> Rands, Gympie Gold Field, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> S.E. Easter, 'The spatial and temporal relationship between mineralisation and magnetism in mesothermal gold deposits: an example from the Gympie Goldfield, southeast Queensland', BSc Honours Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2000, p. 85.

<sup>75</sup> Stidolph, Dugdale and von Gnielinski, Stratigraphy, Structure and Gold Mineralisation, p. 86.

<sup>76</sup> P. Wellman, 'Eastern Highlands of Australia; their uplift and erosion', *BMR Journal of Australian Geology and Geophysics*, vol. 10, 1987, pp. 277-286.