

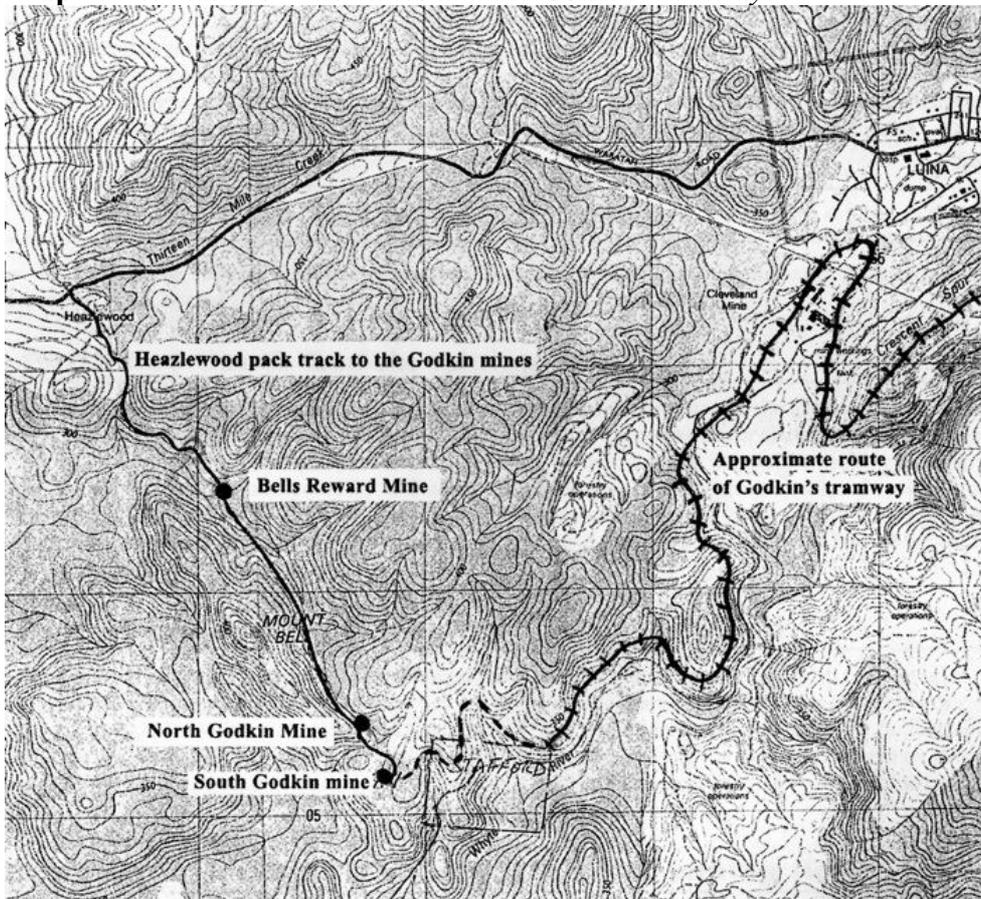
## **‘The Broken Hill of Tasmania’: the rise and fall of the 13-Mile silver-lead field, western Tasmania**

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Tasmania has produced some disastrous mining ‘bubbles’. Stamper batteries and water wheels were rushed to the ‘Cornwall of the Antipodes’, the Mount Heemskirk tin field, in the early 1880s.<sup>1</sup> In the following decade the hydraulic gold craze crossed the Tasman Sea from Otago, while in 1910–12 the discovery of a so-called second Mount Lyell mine was celebrated in the Balfour copper boom. All of these were spectacular failures.

Among them was the ‘Broken Hill of Tasmania’ was another case of catastrophic piggybacking.<sup>2</sup> It began in 1885 with prospector William Robert (W.R) Bell returning to Tasmania from an exploratory tour of the Barrier Ranges silver field—later to become famous as the Broken Hill field—in western New South Wales. Bell put his Broken Hill experience to good use at home in the next five years, making a series of silver, galena and lead discoveries.<sup>3</sup>

**Map 1:** *The main 13-Mile mines and the Godkin Tramway.*



Source: cropped from Parry Kostoglou, *An Archaeological Survey of the Historic Godkin Silver Lead Mine*, Archaeological Survey Report, 1999/03, Mineral Resources Tasmania, Hobart, 1999.

Among them was the Bell's Reward mine on what became known as the 13-Mile silver lode, since it was 13 miles (about 21 km) west of Waratah, in Tasmania's west coast mining province. However, it was the adjacent Godkin mine that grabbed the headlines—and shareholders' wallets—when in 1888 the Broken Hill silver boom reverberated across Tasmania. Never was there a better example of needless infrastructure spending before a mine was proven, or of the blinding effect of 'mining fever', than the Godkin. The result today is several rich mining heritage sites with great potential for interpretation.

### **Broken Hill invigorates the Tasmanian silver mines**

In June 1887 Bell and his friend and business partner James 'Philosopher' Smith were granted 20-acre reward leases at what became known as the Bell's Reward and Discoverer mines respectively.<sup>4</sup> Axes rang in the forest and cross-cut saws echoed in sawpits as a new mining village known as Heazlewood was established. Myrtle timber served for mining props, rails, building timber and firewood. Within a few years, five mine managers, two carpenters, a sawyer, a constable, a baker, a bank manager, three other storekeepers, a cricket team, hoteliers Joe and Emma Jupp and a branch of the Amalgamated Miners' Association, all called Heazlewood home.<sup>5</sup>

Other prospectors arrived on the 13-Mile, including 23-year-old New Norfolk prospector Norman Godkin, representing the Dunrobin Prospecting Association.<sup>6</sup> A touring phrenologist, Professor Klang, claimed to have divined Godkin's suitability to a mining career from reading the bumps on his head, vocational advice which the customer adopted.<sup>7</sup> Working south from the Bell's Reward, Godkin found a gossan outcrop close to the northern side of a small tributary flowing into the Whyte River, and the Godkin mine was born.

Since the Broken Hill boom stirred the furious development at the 13-Mile, the services of a Broken Hill manager were deemed essential. The Bell's Reward syndicate rejected Lane, manager of the Block 14 Company mine at Broken Hill, after he demanded a salary of £2,000 per year, plumping instead for Edgar L. Rosman, former mine manager for the Broken Hill Proprietary itself.<sup>8</sup> The pedigree of Arthur Richard (A.R.) Browne, the Godkin Silver Mining Company's (GSM Co's) Broken Hill man, was even more impressive. The English-born nephew of the Marquis of Sligo, he was educated at the Freiberg School of Mines, Saxony.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, neither of these men had experience of Tasmanian geology, geography, climate, terrain or transport infrastructure.

In 1891, only months before a severe economic downturn, Bell and Smith floated the Bell's Reward and Discoverer mines, pocketing £3,000 each from their sale.<sup>10</sup> The shareholders of the Bell's Reward Silver Mining Co., an under-capitalised, privately subscribed Melbourne company, grew dispirited in 1893 after two years of fruitless work when water burst into a crosscut, flooding the main shaft.<sup>11</sup> By then the true meaning of the Bell's Reward was apparent on the hill above Burnie, where Bell had used his share of the proceeds to raise, still one

of the city's finest homes (Photo 1). This remains the second most impressive product of the 13-Mile field, albeit physically distant from the mines themselves.

**Photo 1:** 'Glen Osborne', W.R. Bell's 1892 Burnie home.<sup>12</sup>



Source: Author's photograph.

### **Tramway to nowhere**

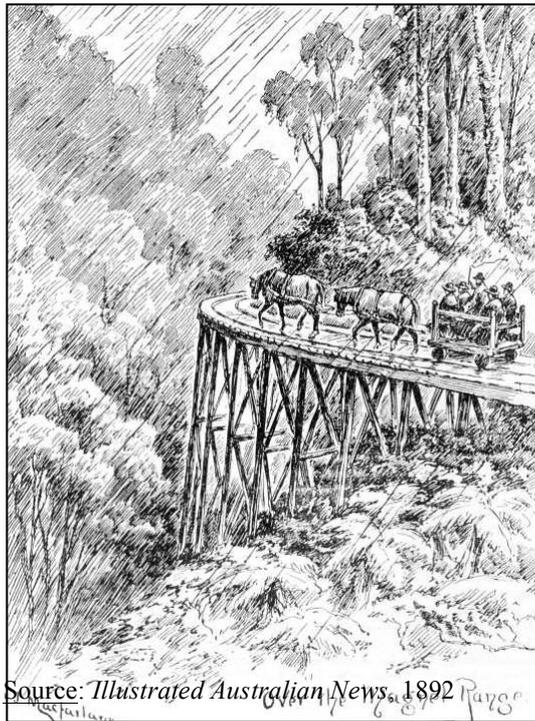
The most impressive product of the 13-Mile field was the Godkin Tramway. Having raised much more money than any of the neighbouring mines, the GSM Co. was able to exercise its delusions of grandeur. During winter the dray track between Waratah and the 13-Mile mines was a sea of mud. Possibly with Broken Hill's Silverton Tramway in mind, the GSM Co took matters into its own hands. The well-known Huon timber tramway builder known as John Hay no. 2 (junior) was engaged to deliver the mine from isolation. He surveyed and built the 3-foot-6-inch gauge horse-drawn wooden-railed Godkin Tramway at a cost of about £7,000, the wide gauge having been chosen to connect the line with the Van Diemen's Land railway from Waratah to the port of Burnie.<sup>13</sup> The *Godwin Tramway Act* (1891) empowered the company to charge neighbouring companies for freight on the line, potentially placing it in a position to dominate the mining field.

Early bush tramways were constructed of whatever timber was available locally. Hay would have been familiar with the process of clearing and levelling the route, splitting myrtle sleepers, sawing and morticing the wooden rails and securing the line with gauge sticks. He set up a sawmill to cut the rails. The tramway rested on cross logs, on which were placed stringers, then four-inch slabs across those. The wooden rails were fixed on top of the slabs. Trestles were necessary in several places, but no ballast was used. Steel rails were placed on some of the curves on the line.<sup>14</sup>

The Godkin Tramway (Fig. 1) must have rivaled the famous Zigzag Railway in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales for switchback bends. At

one point passengers could see two other sections of tramway and the Whyte River stretched out beneath them. The views were spectacular: 'Here and there magnificent gullies and ravines, precipices of 200 ft or 300 ft on one side or the other that made one's blood run cold to anticipate an overthrow'.<sup>15</sup> Yet it was said that the line enabled one horse to draw two tons of freight and/or passengers, with four trips possible in a day.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 1:** 'Over the Magnet Range':  
the horse-drawn Godkin Tramway



The mine remained unproven, but excitement mounted as some Godkin silver was smelted into a pendant for the governor, Sir Robert Hamilton.<sup>17</sup> Tramway builder Hay was a 'strict total abstainer', but soon he also became intoxicated—by silver. While constructing the tramway he struck his own silver lode near the Whyte River, floated a company, installed a concentrating plant alongside the tramway and set it up as the custom crusher for the district.<sup>18</sup>

In mid-February 1891, Minister of Lands and Works, Alfred Pillinger, opened the 4.8-km-long first stage of the Godkin Tramway to the bridge over the Whyte River.<sup>19</sup> Now the mine could be tested. The 200 tons of Godkin ore reported to be ready for export could be sent out.<sup>20</sup> Pumping and winding machinery could be brought to the Godkin, enabling sinking to prove whether the mine lived down. Tenders were called for the supply and erection of 40-ton and 80-ton water jacket smelting furnaces at the mine and for the construction of a police station at 'Godkin's and Heazlewood'.<sup>21</sup> The arrival of machinery in July 1891 also warranted a celebratory banquet in Waratah and, more ambitiously, a christening ceremony on site on the mine's southern section.<sup>22</sup> Mine manager Browne guaranteed one of his invited guests 'a regular little spree for the men & the visitors'.<sup>23</sup>

Getting to the spree was a challenge. A party of guests, including Miss Seagrave, Browne's future bride, left Waratah by coach and horseback for the start of the tramway. The coach broke down on the Magnet Range, forcing its passengers to wade through knee-deep mud for about a kilometre to the rails. At the mine, the Melbourne-based Austral Otis Elevator and Engineering Company boiler was inspected, after which Miss Inge and Miss Seagrave set the machinery in motion for the first time.<sup>24</sup>

**Photos 3 & 4:** *The Godkin Tramway formation today, high above the Whyte River and One of several sets of discarded tramway wheels along the formation.*

**Photo 3**



**Photo 4**



Source: Author's photographs.

**Photos 5 and 6:** *The North Godkin shaft site today: pumps, windlass, main shaft and Cornish boiler. A collapsed horse whim and Worthington pumps also help tell the tale of the mine's development and de-evolution*



Source: Author's photographs.

### **The collapse of the Godkin**

Browne wanted the Godkin to not only control the field's transport but to be its custom smelter.<sup>25</sup> The GSM Co's early half yearly reports are a litany of grand installation plans fed by Browne's delusional ore values: £10,000 worth of ore were said to be on the claim in September 1890; £70,000-£80,000 worth in

March 1891.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps he told directors what they wanted to hear, or perhaps, buoyed by the Broken Hill boom, he really believed that 'a large quantity of bullion would be sent out'.<sup>27</sup> A shareholder who dared suggest that the erection of smelters should be contingent upon the Godkin property being proven at depth was rounded upon by mine discoverer Norman Godkin.<sup>28</sup>

**Photo 7:** *Windlass, North Godkin.*



Source: The author

The September 1891 report, tabled when Browne was on sick leave, painted a sobering picture of the mine. Only 27 tons of silver and lead ore from the southern section had been despatched to the Dry Creek Works, South Australia, and to Kennedy and Sons, Hobart, for a profit of £218—not much of a return on the £7,000 tramway.<sup>29</sup> Directors were nervous.<sup>30</sup> The Australian colonies were in economic depression, the silver price had collapsed, and mining capital was scarce. Notably, no banquet was called to celebrate completion of the second, 4-km-long stage of the Godkin Tramway

to the Arthur River, which was tipped to occur in October 1891. No announcement of the achievement was ever made. Since the tramway never reached Waratah, it is safe to say that none of the construction costs were defrayed by hauling freight for other mining companies.

Browne never returned to the Godkin, reportedly resigning in protest at directorial preference for tramway construction. His preference remained that of not proving the mine, but smelter building.<sup>31</sup> His last hurrah, delivered vicariously by Chairman of Directors T.C. Smart at the February 1892 half yearly meeting, was to compare the Godkin with Broken Hill mines and to continue to press for a smelter. Smart kept up the rhetoric, declaring in September 1892 that no Broken Hill mine had produced such rich ore at such a shallow level.<sup>32</sup> When Browne returned to Tasmania in January 1893, it was as the Burnie agent for the Queensland Smelting Company, which envisaged buying ores from the new Tasmanian silver fields at the 13-Mile and Zeehan.<sup>33</sup> Browne must have died an optimist in 1900 when, at the age of only 34, after stints at mines in Western Australia and British Columbia, he succumbed to asphyxia at the London home of his father, Lord Richard Browne.<sup>34</sup>

Despite securing another Broken Hill mining manager, Nathaniel Hawke, the GSM Co. was already doomed.<sup>35</sup> It had spent about £26,000 for a return of less than £300 when in 1892 government geologist Alexander Montgomery

reported that it was no closer to success than when it started, having no payable ore on hand and needing to conduct deep sinking to prove its claim.

Montgomery also offered a cheaper alternative to deep sinking, but it was one which could never be definitive: driving a 1,200-metre-long drainage tunnel from the Whyte River through both southern and northern leases to meet the engine shaft in the northern lease. While still working the upper, oxidised zone, this would test the entire property at a deeper level as well as drain it. The estimated cost of £2,500–£3,000 was well beyond the means of the GSM Co during tough economic times, and it succumbed to creditors in May 1894.<sup>36</sup> The surveyed township reserve of Stafford near the South Godkin site was never needed.

### **The 13-Mile field today**

The subsequent history of the 13-Mile mines is a typical one of de-evolution, both financial and technological. In the case of the Godkin, under-capitalised companies forced to revert to basic technology sought to exploit a lode that a heavily capitalised company had failed to even prove. The Victorian Magnet Company, which in 1912 completed the 1,200-metre-long drainage tunnel, worked the North Godkin shaft using not a steam engine but a horse whim for motive power.<sup>37</sup> By 1923 this company still used the Godkin Tramway to access the mine from the Corinna Road at Whyte River, but had converted it into a sledge track, the wooden rails having been torn up decades before in order to help build the nearby Whyte River Hotel.<sup>38</sup> None of the 13-Mile mines was tested at depth until Electrolytic Zinc drilled the North Godkin site, Bell's Reward, Discoverer and Godkin Extended in 1949—and the South Godkin mine site remains undrilled to this day.<sup>39</sup> The likely presence of zinc in the Godkin's pre-1917 finger dumps (that is, tailings that pre-date the separation of zinc in Tasmania by the electrolytic process) and the possible presence of tin threaten to disturb what can now be seen as a fine historical mining interpretation site.

Aside from pilfering by bushwalkers and bottle collectors, the 13-Mile field has remained largely undisturbed for almost a century. With so many artifacts still in place and with more than 50 adits, shafts and other workings, this is a rich archaeological field with the potential to provide information about late-19<sup>th</sup>-century and early-20<sup>th</sup>-century mining methods. The northern and southern claims of the Godkin mine together form one Tasmania's most impressive mining heritage sites. The expenditure demonstrated by the Godkin and Godkin Extended Tramways (1889–92), Cornish boiler (1891), blacksmith's shop, ship's water tank, steam pumps, windlass, flywheel and head frame tell the tale of a fanatical response to the Broken Hill silver boom of 1888, while the horse whim at the North Godkin shaft recalls the technological reversal of later years. Similarly, the main tramway, with its in places corduroyed formation, bridge ruins, discarded iron wheels, axles, sledge artifacts and branch tramways to other

mines, demonstrates not only the GSM Co's efforts to capitalise on the mining field's transport needs, but the de-evolution of the Godkin.<sup>40</sup>

While the Godkin mine would satisfy criteria A (demonstrating the evolution or pattern of Tasmanian history), B (demonstrating rare, uncommon, or endangered aspects of Tasmanian's heritage) and C (potential to yield information that may contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history) set for listing on the Tasmanian Heritage Register, its prospectivity for zinc and tin make registration problematical.<sup>41</sup> The presence of open shafts and removable artifacts would also need to be addressed if the mine was to be interpreted and opened to the public.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The phrase 'Cornwall of the Antipodes' was credited to John Addis, manager of the Prince George mine on the Mount Heemskirk tin field, in 1881, see 'Mount Heemskirk', *Mercury*, 7 December 1881, p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> 'A Bushman', 'The Whyte River Silver Field', *Mercury*, 27 February 1890, p. 3, described the field as being 'in the opinion of many ... destined to be the Broken Hill of Tasmania'.
- <sup>3</sup> For Bell, see Nic Haygarth, 'Richness and Prosperity: the life of W.R. Bell, Tasmanian Mineral Prospector', *Papers and Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, vol. 57, no. 3, December 2010, pp. 203–35.
- <sup>4</sup> P.B. Nye, *The Silver-Lead Deposits of the Waratah District*, Geological Survey Bulletin 33, Department of Mines, Hobart, 1923, p. 109.
- <sup>5</sup> For Smith being elected vice-president of the Heazlewood Cricket Club, see J.E. Lyle to James Smith, October 1888, no. 485; and 15 October 1888, no. 500; NS234/3/16, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, Hobart (hereafter TAHO). For Smith generally, see Nic Haygarth, *Baron Bischoff: Philosopher Smith and the Birth of Tasmanian Mining*, the author, Perth, Tas., 2004.
- <sup>6</sup> 'In Chambers', *Mercury*, 7 November 1888, supplement p. 1.
- <sup>7</sup> Editorial, *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 19 November 1890, p. 2.
- <sup>8</sup> W.R. Bell to James Smith, 3 March and 4 March 1891, NS234/3/19, TAHO.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Mining News', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 June 1889, p. 3; 'Queenstown Notes', *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 12 May 1900, p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Agreements dated 3 February 1891 and 15 June 1891, NS234/3/19, TAHO.
- <sup>11</sup> J. Harcourt Smith, 'Report on the Mineral District between Corinna and Waratah 28 July 1897', *Secretary of Mines Annual Report 1897*, Parliamentary Paper 44/1897, pp. i–xix.
- <sup>12</sup> W.R. Bell's 1892 Burnie home built on the proceeds from selling two dud mines at the 13-Mile, was recently offered to the public for \$1.85 million.
- <sup>13</sup> 'Meetings: Godkin's SM', *Mercury*, 29 March 1890, supplement, p. 1; Henry Penn Smith, Godkin Silver Mining Company, to J.W. Norton Smith, Van Diemen's Land Company, 23 February 1891, VDL22//21, TAHO.
- <sup>14</sup> Arthur R. Browne to J.W. Norton Smith, Van Diemen's Land Company, 27 September and 4 October 1891, VDL22/1/21, TAHO.
- <sup>15</sup> 'Whyte River Silver Field', *Launceston Examiner*, 22 July 1891, supplement p. 2.
- <sup>16</sup> 'The Godkin Tramway: Opening Ceremony', *Wellington Times*, 18 February 1891, p. 3.
- <sup>17</sup> 'Personal', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 1920, p. 8.
- <sup>18</sup> 'Mining', *Mercury*, 30 January 1891, p. 3; 'Obituary', *Examiner*, 16 May 1902, p. 7.
- <sup>19</sup> 'The Godkin Tramway: Opening Ceremony'.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Waratah Notes', *Wellington Times*, 27 May 1891, p. 3.
- <sup>21</sup> Adverts, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 1891, p. 1 and 22 August 1891, p. 7.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Starting the Godkin Machinery', *Mercury*, 20 July 1891, p. 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Arthur R. Browne to J.W. Norton Smith, Van Diemen's Land Company, 12 July 1891, VDL22/1/21, TAHO.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Starting the Godkin Machinery'. Details of the boiler inspection can be found in AC705/1/1, 1885–1898, TAHO.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Meeting of the Company', *Mercury*, 8 January 1891, p. 3.

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- <sup>26</sup> ‘Meeting: Godkin SM Co’, *Mercury*, 26 September 1890, p. 3; ‘Godkin SM Co’, *Mercury*, 26 March 1891, p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> ‘Banquet at Waratah’, *Wellington Times*, 11 October 1890.
- <sup>28</sup> ‘Godkin SM Co’, *Mercury*, 26 March 1891, p. 3.
- <sup>29</sup> The company would sell only seven more tons of ore, to Kennedy and Sons and the Clyde Works in Sydney, in 1892.
- <sup>30</sup> ‘Godkin Silver Mining Co’, *Mercury*, 29 September 1891, p. 4.
- <sup>31</sup> ‘The Godkin Mine’, *Launceston Examiner*, 5 November 1891, p. 4.
- <sup>32</sup> ‘Meetings: Godkin SM Co’, *Mercury*, 1 October 1892, supplement, p. 1.
- <sup>33</sup> G.V.S. Dunn to J.W. Norton Smith, Van Diemen’s Land Company, 31 May and 10 June 1892, VDL22/1/23; Arthur R. Browne to J.W. Norton Smith, Van Diemen’s Land Company, 24 January 1893, VDL 22/1/23, TAHO.
- <sup>34</sup> ‘Queenstown Notes’, *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 12 May 1900, p. 4; ‘Sudden Death of Lord Richard Browne’s Son at Reigate’, *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 28 April 1900, p. 10.
- <sup>35</sup> Little is known of Hawke’s performance, but his ability to defend himself with a gun prompted a conviction for assaulting the mine’s dismissed engineer in August 1892, see editorial, *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 12 August 1892, p. 2.
- <sup>36</sup> Alexander Montgomery, *Report on the Godkin Silver Mine*, Geological Surveyor’s Office, Launceston, 1892, p. 3; advert, *Launceston Examiner*, 14 May 1894, p. 2.
- <sup>37</sup> *Secretary of Mines Annual report for 1912*, 1913, p. 37.
- <sup>38</sup> Nye, *The Silver-Lead Deposits of the Waratah District*, p. 118.
- <sup>39</sup> D.I. Groves, *The Geology of the Heazlewood–Godkin Area*, Department of Mines, Hobart, 1966, pp. 37–39; Allegiance Mining, *EL 14/2001 Heazlewood Area, Tasmania: Partial Relinquishment Report*, 2002, p. 20.
- <sup>40</sup> See also Parry Kostoglou, *An Archaeological Survey of the Historic Godkin Silver Lead Mine*, Archaeological Survey Report, 1999/03, Mineral Resources Tasmania, Hobart, 1999.
- <sup>41</sup> There are eight criteria for inclusion of a site on the Tasmanian Heritage Register. The site need only satisfy one criterion to qualify for registration.