Chapter 2

‘Westward Ho!’

1851 - 1852

The excitement that had overtaken the colony for the better of the preceding three months quickly spread north through the broken ranges and narrow valleys that form the erroneously titled Central Tablelands. New discoveries were being made from south of Bathurst to north of Mudgee and places in between. Large numbers were continuing to swarm from all directions to the gold fields of Ophir and the Turon, and human nature being what it is, it wasn’t long before determined attempts were being made to unearth similar treasures elsewhere. The reports of the Reverend William Branwhite Clarke and Edward Hargraves had made much of the geological similarity of the country to the north of Ophir with Hargraves reporting what he considered payable finds as far afield as downstream of Wellington in the Macquarie River. The scene was set for the unveiling of the Meroo River as one of the colony’s premier goldfields.

May, 1851 – Gold Regulations and Licence fees.

The issuing of licences was placed in the hands of the recently appointed Gold Commissioner and his Assistant Commissioners. Despite the trepidation felt by many observers, owing to rumblings from diggers on the goldfields, the implementation of the new regulations proceeded in a peaceful and orderly fashion under Commissioner John Richard Hardy. ¹

June, 1851 - World’s End prospecting – the beginning of the Meroo rush.

Flushed with the fervour of thousands of others, cousins George Henry and Vivian Cox, W. Lewis, C.M. Keele and Charles Lowe, determined to commence an investigation of a hitherto little discussed stream called the Meroo River; today forced to bear the diminished appellation of ‘creek’. They were among the wealthy landowning elite of the Mudgee district with holdings accumulated through the benevolence of a squatter-dominated colonial Legislative Council. Determined to play the part of gold prospector they may have been, and, though, ‘clothed in appropriate mining costume’, ² they were certainly not your average prospecting team.

Demonstrating their combined resources and economic standing, they had the luxury of sending forward to their destination, a day prior to their departure, a cart containing items they believed to
be the essentials for a successful prospecting enterprise. No doubt furnished with the latest intelligence on the tools of the trade, and experience gained in tending their expanding squatting runs, they decided to pack a cradle, crowbar, miscellaneous other equipment, bedding and a week’s worth of provisions.

Gold Licence issued under 1851 regulations.

The morning of Monday the 30th of June, 1851, dawned brightly with a wintery sun attempting to prevail over the scattered showers that dotted the valley intermittently blowing in across the ranges from the south-west. Undaunted, our intrepid prospectors donned their mining costumes, lifted their collars, dropped the brims of their hats, and mounted their steeds, eager to be on their way. The roads, such as they were, had been made slippery by the seasonally wet conditions, but the men congratulated themselves on their staunchness in the face of such adversity and headed from Mudgee toward Grattai. Along the way, they passed through the Reeves’ country run by the widow of the unfortunate William Reeves who’d been prematurely killed in the Blue Mountains some years before when a drunken ticket-of-leave man had run over him with his own dray whilst returning from Sydney. Till this time, they’d been making steady progress on a good road and, having made three miles beyond the farm of Mrs. Reeves, were now forced to pick their way along six miles of quickly deteriorating track.

Within a mile of their destination, they were given cause to draw their reins as they surveyed the prospect of a steeply rising mountain scarred by their road, in deference to a mass of rocks in
Grattai Creek, along which the road had up to this point wound. After navigating the ascent, they found themselves in a secluded valley in the vicinity of Henry Cox Esquire’s run known then, as today, as World’s End. They surveyed the tall, steeply rising slopes and noted the great slivers of quartz that ran in seams through the traprock in myriad directions with veins ‘appearing like snow’ crossing the creek and beetling up the opposite slope. These were the great quartz seams that they had seen and heard so much about in the areas confirmed as auriferous, and it was here they determined to commence their investigations. They made camp for the night, no doubt making their rendezvous with the men who’d pre-delivered their cart with its sundry accoutrements, with a view to starting afresh in the morning. Determined to prove their fair valleys and streams the equal of any other in the colony for mineral wealth, they chose a bar on the strongly flowing Meroo River in the early morning of Tuesday, June 31, 1851.

Commencing work, they began to wash gravel in their cradle rocking the machine back and forth to separate the clay and sand from the heavier gold, and after just two bucketful’s, had found what they were seeking. The exuberance common to gold miners everywhere overtook them and, in their excitement, shouts of joy were soon reverberating around the rocky mountain-sides. Their suspicions had been confirmed with specks of gold, similar to those reported at the Turon, seen in the bottom of the cradle. Enthused by the ease of their discovery, they continued to prospect along the creek pursuing the buried treasure among the extensive waterholes teeming with fish, ducks and shy platypus and in the rocky ridges abundant with rock wallaby. They worked the gravels in at least a dozen other spots over the course of the next day, and at each location they were successful in finding gold. And, as gentleman do, at day’s end, they took advantage of the opportunity for some sport by shooting a number of the ducks to make into a ‘first rate curry’.

With confirmation of the presence of gold in their own neighbourhood, and every confidence of it proving highly rewarding to the swelling ranks of enterprising and hardworking gold miners, the party wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* to spread the good news. On July 11, a little over a week after their successful expedition, an article written by a member of the party appeared among those celebrating the magnificence of the colony’s riches. They provided confirmation of the presence of gold at numerous locations on the lower Meroo River and looked forward to the inevitable prosperity that would follow. In a portentous statement, they looked forward to the river drying up in the coming warmer months to allow its bed to be properly tried as well. The movement of diggers on the Meroo goldfields would become inextricably tied to the seasonal fluctuations, and
their contribution to stream flows, that would force them onto the tablelands and ridges into the dry diggings to return to the river and creek beds in the drier months.

**July, 1851 - Ophir, Havilah, Turon and Bungonia Goldfields.**

Meanwhile, the Ophir and Turon goldfields continued to vie for the attention of the many men who’d flocked to the goldfields to seek their fortune. After the initial tide of success, the miners had moved on from the Ophir diggings to try their luck elsewhere most notably at the Turon diggings. By the 4th of July, however, new arrivals of adventurous novices, keen to try their luck, had arrived in great numbers to be greeted by sunny skies and unseasonably mild conditions. The trees which once shaded dark, cool waterholes and clothed the mountain sides soon fell to the axe leaving those areas populated by the diggers newly denuded. Many old faces were also seen among the eager new diggers having tried their hand at the Turon and deciding in favour of the Ophir. Good finds of nuggety gold were reported, with one party of two men reaping 9.5 ounces in one day and following it up with nearly 20 ounces the next, including one nugget alone weighing in at 13 ounces. The primacy of the Ophir fields was lauded loud and long, at least by the Bathurst Free Press⁵, optimistically proclaiming that a more systematic approach to working the goldfields would yield even greater results.

One correspondent, however, wished to take issue with what he felt were misleading reports from the Press as to the certainty with which one might expect success in one’s labours on the goldfields. James Quinn had been working the goldfield at Summerhill Creek, west of Bathurst, and his observations of the slovenly and unskilled approach taken by many of the parties of three or four miners led him to the view that much labour was being wasted. He described the tools of trade among the amateur miners of 1851 as consisting of cradles, picks, shovels, crowbars, buckets and tin dishes. His description of their methods vividly captures the work of thousands at the time:

Each party of three or four men work a cradle – one picks and digs at some ten or twenty yards distance from the water’s edge; another carries the earth to the cradle in buckets, where it is deposited, and washed by the man who continuously rocks the cradle. When it is washed, the coarse gravel is thrown away, and the gold (if any) falls with the fine sand and earth to the bottom of the cradle. After some fifty or sixty buckets are thus passed through, the fine sand with the gold is drawn off into a tin dish, and ultimately washed out, leaving nothing at the bottom but gold.⁶
Despite the exuberance of the regional newspapers, James insisted that average earnings were in reality no more than 15 shillings per week; not considered by him to be sufficient compensation for labouring all day only to then endure sleeping on the ‘cold, wet ground under a sheet of bark’. At the Havilah diggings, centred on the Fish River, south-east of Bathurst at O’Connell Plains, between 130 to 150 hardy souls had made camp in early July and were rocking cradles industriously. Earnings among the thirty or so camps were variable, with the odd lucky soul turning up over half an ounce per day; however, some were making wages of one pound per day - sufficient to ease sore backs and aching muscles. The gold was found distributed randomly throughout the soil and was often found in patches, while flaky gold was found in Gilmandyke Creek to the west.

While some of the miners had returned from the Turon to the Ophir and Summerhill Creek diggings, business was still thriving there aided by the dry weather that had seen the bed of the Turon worked unceasingly. Many continued to make the fifty-five-mile trip along the bridle track from Hartley to add to their numbers. Parties of diggers were doing a better stroke than those on the Havilah and Ophir diggings with finds of 7.5 and 3.5 ounces per day and earnings of up to 16 shillings per day reported. A roving reporter for Bell’s Life had returned to his Sydney offices replete with a parcel of flaky gold he’d won from the north bank of the Turon River, and, armed with a new fervour, vowed to equip himself more suitably for a return.

Among the hustle and bustle on the river flats, the Commissioner was active in bringing order to the new goldfield and to that end had issued over 300 licences by early July. He’d also wasted no time in asserting the Crown’s right to the resource by moving on those unable to pay for the privilege of joining in the hunt. Already, dissatisfaction was starting to surface over the government’s initial attempts to regulate the burgeoning mining industry. Complaints were made over the unfairness of paying 30 shillings for a full month’s licence even if only arriving at the diggings in the last week of the month. An alternative was suggested that would see miner’s paying 20 shillings for a month’s mining right from the date of payment. Objection was raised to the right of the government to impose a licence fee for those digging on private land as well; particularly as landowners frequently charged their own fee for access to their land in addition to the licence fee. Essentially the argument came down to the principle of the right of reservation held by the Crown to minerals beneath the land; a debate that resonates today.

The first Sabbath of the month saw winter re-asserting itself in the form of showers that had started to fill the waterholes in the upper Turon River. The relief was tangible as water supplies had been reaching critical levels; however, it was short lived and soon turned to dismay. Widespread
rain continued to fall through the middle of the month, and not only filled the waterholes, but soon reached levels that prohibited any further working of the creek beds. By the 18th of July, the creeks and rivers had been turned into torrents sweeping away man’s endeavours and carrying all before them. Recently uprooted and ill-treated trees formed rafts of debris along with tents and cradles leaving the miners to clean up. Reporting on the floods revealed the little-recorded presence of the Wiradjuri on the goldfields with reports published in the Bell’s Life’s of members of the tribe profiting from the floods by rowing miners across the flooded river and canoeing supplies, letters and communications to isolated camps.10

The nomadic and moustachioed men, dressed almost uniformly in hunting shirt, California hat and broad belt, picked up their cradles and shouldered their belongings to head for the drier diggings on the ridges. The nearly complete absence of women on the early diggings was starting to cause concern among the respectable with the fear expressed that it induced a most un-English carelessness towards personal presentation; almost to the point of ‘apeing the barbarism of the continent’.11 The 21st of July saw a return to blue skies and fine weather allowing the miners to recover their equipment with the assistance of horse and bullock. They immediately set to work again; this time trying the higher river banks whilst waiting for the flows to subside, so they could attack the river bed. As with the Ophir diggings, it was felt that those prepared to work hard, systematically, and with skill were being the best remunerated. Not all were so determined with familiar vices beginning to proliferate, as many hands were left idle by the unfavourable conditions. Sly grog tents were doing a roaring trade in lieu of commercial hotels, bare knuckled prize fighting provided amusement, and gambling on almost anything was carried out to an ‘alarming extent’.12

The absence of a permanent police force, and an otherwise fully occupied Commissioner, meant all manner of activities were able to flourish. As the miners accumulated wealth in the form of gold and cash, robberies escalated. Further south, the growing search for new goldfields led to the discovery of auriferous gullies and creeks in the Shoalhaven district at Bungonia. Incentives were given with a committee formed to offer a reward to anyone discovering a payable goldfield in the Goulburn police district. Miners with experience at the Ophir diggings had returned to the district sure of finding gold in similarly described country. One such party of six, counting among their number a veteran of the Ophir rush, was successful in washing gold from the banks of the Shoalhaven River itself as well as its tributaries. Reports continued to come in of gold being found around the southern tablelands at locations including the Abercrombie River and Tindery Mountains, and expeditions set off to
search the ranges around Lake George. The commotion evident elsewhere was overtaking communities all along the ranges fanned by a press which recognised good copy when it saw it.

**July, 1851 – Discoveries in the Mudgee district.**

The work of Cox and Co. had served its purpose. After Cox had published his group’s discoveries the imaginations of many were fired, and by the end of July gold had been discovered in many of the districts streams, alluvial plains and quartz ridges. The Cudgegong River was found to be auriferous with the precious metal even found in the bed of the river within the township of Mudgee itself. But the real action was on the Meroo, and it was to the bottom of the system they flocked. One hundred and fifty people were estimated to be at World’s End seeking to take advantage of the newly discovered goldfield where they were ‘collecting gold in large quantities’. Just as at Goulburn and Bathurst before it, Mudgee now came under the heady influence of the chance for wealth previously only dreamed of but soon enough was all but deserted.

In the meantime, William Henry Suttor Esq., M.C., of ‘Brucedale’ near Peel, had been conducting his own searches throughout the first half of July in the country north of Bathurst to the Pyramul Creek area. Suttor had squatting runs such as ‘Toolamanang’ (on the south side of modern day Pyramul) and leases over vast tracts of country among the ranges and valleys in the epicentre of the area held so promising by the likes of Hargaves and Clarke. Suttor’s unquestionable bonafides as a member of the ‘Bunyip Aristocracy’ leant him influence and standing. Being a member of the Legislative Council and a wealthy landowner meant his opinions were respected in the local community, and, so, when he announced that his own searches had proven successful in almost all locations tried from Winburndale Rivulet to Mudgee, people listened.

**July, 1851 - Kerr’s Hundredweight of Gold.**

Doctor William John Kerr had arrived from Ireland as a surgeon aboard a convict transport, married the sister of W.H. Suttor, and settled in the colony on the plains near the garrison town that grew to become today’s Bathurst. He took to growing wool at a property named ‘Wallerwaugh’ (also “Wallawa”) on the undulating tablelands in the crook of the junction of the Macquarie and Meroo Rivers on the other side of the Meroo River from Cox’s property, ‘World’s End’. In his employ were a number of the local Aborigines who shepherded his flocks around the grassy valleys and flats. Three of them, Jemmy Irving, Long Tommy and Tommy Bumbo, were excited by the prospect of the gold discoveries, and being well placed as shepherds, decided to keep an eye out
whilst performing their duties. So it was, that, in early July 1851, Jemmy became curious about a large rock of quartz protruding from the ground near where he was watching his flock among the stately white gums and stringybarks about 8 miles from Kerr’s homestead. The quartz blocks were in a heap on their own some 100 yards from a prominent quartz vein that climbed the slope from the Meroo River. His curiosity yielded dividends when it was revealed to consist of a large slab of drably coloured gold encased in quartz. Two other smaller blocks were also found to contain gold.

After notifying the Kerr the next morning, Jemmy and his employer returned to the location to collect the specimens. In W.H. Suttor’s collection of stories, *Australian Stories Retold and Sketches of Country Life*, published nearly thirty-six years later, the destruction of the three specimens was attributed to Jemmy who is said to have broken them open with his tomahawk out of curiosity and for transporting. Contemporary press reports, however, claimed that Kerr broke them up the day after their discovery to allow their transportation into town. The reporter admonished him for his decision, claiming that he had substantially reduced their value by forsaking the chance to exhibit them as unparalleled specimens; whereupon, it was estimated they could’ve earned twice as much or even up to £40,000. Commissioner Hardy himself is alleged to have referred to Dr. Kerr not as ‘the lucky man who made £4000 in a day’, but ‘the luckless individual who failed to properly realise the value of the specimen in its native form and cost himself £40,000’. The mistake was apparently not lost on Kerr himself, who upon reflection, was said to have long regretted the decision. The gold was packaged up and arrangements made to proceed into Bathurst as soon as possible. The party and their precious cargo spent the night at ‘Brucedale’ with W.H. Suttor before returning to the location the next day with a dray determined to unearth more riches. Unable to substantially add to their find, they commenced the trip into Bathurst. Along the way they let the secret out of the bag prompting both a rush to the lower end of the Meroo River and scenes of delirium in town.

‘A Hundred Weight of Gold’ proclaimed the headline on the second page of the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal’s* edition of Wednesday the 23rd of July, 1851, breathlessly announcing the discovery made at Suttor’s brother in law’s property on the Meroo. The town was set abuzz as rumours that had been circulating for several days were confirmed on Monday the 14th of July. Suttor had brought the nugget to town. Crowds gathered outside the newspaper’s office in William Street to handle the gold amazed by its dazzling colour and stupendous size. Broken into three pieces for ease of transport, the two largest gold pieces were freely passed around a crowd of around 150 incredulous and awed people; so freely in fact that keeping an eye on it became a frantic
business. Those who had seen the gold later described one of the blocks as having a honeycomb appearance with crystalline material throughout. The other large pieces were described as being more compressed and appearing waterworn. The smaller pieces were purer in appearance and, when placed together, ‘presented a splendid appearance...calculated to dazzle the brain’. After the crowd had been largely satisfied, Suttor put the reins to the flanks of his two fine greys and drove his gig to the Union Bank to make safe Kerr’s find. At the bank, the fanfare was enough to ensure the earnest attention of the managers who hurried Suttor and Kerr into the boardroom along with William Farrand, proprietor of the Bathurst Press. The two largest pieces were weighed and found to be 6 pounds 5 ounces and 6 pounds 4 ounces respectively. After all the fragments were weighed, the combined weight of the find was calculated to be 106 pounds.

Lieutenant Colonel Godfrey Charles Mundy, cousin of Governor FitzRoy, was on a private tour of the western goldfields prior to his imminent departure for England when he heard news of the find at Binning’s Inn on his approach to the garrison town of Bathurst. Arriving at Bathurst at 2pm in the afternoon, he came upon Suttor at Mrs Black’s Inn and was immediately conveyed to the bank to view the gold specimen. Mundy described the larger pieces as resembling ‘coralline sponges’ and later joined others in lamenting the loss of its original form. He felt it would’ve done the Empire much credit to have the complete specimen safely lodged in London for its unique value and could have been worth as much as £50,000 to a travelling showman like Barnam. Mundy then travelled on to the goldfields, staying with Suttor at Brucedale, where he satisfied his curiosity with a couple of days of successful prospecting on the Turon in the company of his host. Competition soon ensued to purchase the gold with bids received from gold buyers both local and in Sydney. Offers started at 3 pounds 7 shillings and 3 pence but were bettered to the tune of 3 pence by Doctor Machattie with the same bid also made by a Mr Dunsford and a Sydney firm of the name Thacker, Daniel & Co., of 541 George Street. Ultimately, the Sydney broker was the winner and Suttor and Kerr granted them the purchase. They finally realised the value of the gold to a total of £4160.

At a meeting of the Executive Council on the 24th of July, consisting of the Governor General, Colonial Secretary, Commander of the Forces, Attorney General and Colonial Treasurer, the news of Kerr’s find near ‘Murroo Creek’ became the topic of much discussion. Concern existed over whether the gold had been obtained legally and in consideration of the Queen’s rights, and, given the importance of the matter, there was disquiet over the failure of Gold Commissioner Hardy to furnish the Executive with a written report. The Executive resolved to request Gold Commissioner Hardy to determine whether the gold had been obtained legally by Kerr and called on him to
explain his inaction. Taking this to mean he should seize the gold to protect the Crown’s interest he promptly relieved the purchaser of the burden. Five days later, Hardy had seized the gold and secured it under Crown seal in the Union Bank at Bathurst while awaiting further direction from the Council. The Executive then referred the matter for legal consideration in determining if a royalty was payable and required a bond from Thacker & Co. equivalent to ten percent of the purchase price recommending the gold be released.

In the meantime, the Council referred the matter of the royalty to Colonial Secretary Earl Grey with a recommendation from FitzRoy that the royalty be waived in recognition that appropriate steps had been taken to prevent the recurrence of such a situation. On the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of January 1852, Grey put quill to paper to acknowledge the Council’s submission agreeing that Thacker & Co. should be released from their bond and Commissioner Hardy commended for so swiftly moving to protect the Crown’s interest. No substantive reason was given for the largesse of the Secretary of State or Executive Council, beyond the Crown’s rights somehow being vindicated, and Messrs Thacker & Co having conducted themselves in an ‘open and honourable’ fashion.\textsuperscript{24} The honourable W.H. Suttor Esq. M.C. was not prepared to let the matter lie so easily, however, and later pursued the matter through the use of his powers as an elected member of the Legislative Council.

The discovery of the gold on Kerr’s property at the Meroo confirmed it as the next diggings to be rushed. On the word of Kerr and Suttor, many men packed up their equipment and hastened to the Meroo River. Not only did it offer the opportunity of wealth to the many men and their parties, it also contributed to the chaotic scenes observed elsewhere in the colony and the wider antipodes, England and California. The imaginations of men everywhere were fired by the prospect of untold wealth accessible to anyone with an adventurous spirit. They hurried to buy newspapers to be kept abreast of developments on the diggings and the discovery of new fields, with diggers and travelling correspondents contributing stories and letters regularly. The \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} sold 4150 copies of its first edition to report on Kerr’s Hundredweight - over 1000 more than its usual circulation. Ships of all types, such as the clipper \textit{Cantaro}, were advertising steerage passages for intercolonial passengers wanting to try their luck on the goldfields. For the Meroo River it was the beginning of a golden era that would see it become one of the colonies pre-eminent goldfields.

\textbf{August, 1851 - Advertising their wares to the diggers.}

With a booming new industry came benefits to a host of ancillary businesses seeking to capitalise on new opportunities through expanding their trade, introducing new products and services, re-locating or opening new stores on the goldfields. The most effective medium available
to businesses of the day was the newspaper. Advertisements provide a picture of the digger’s destinations, favoured accoutrements and equipment, gold selling options, their transport arrangements, diet, pre-occupations, leisure pursuits, and their origins. They demonstrate the growing richness and diversity of colonial life and the economy’s heavy reliance on imported goods. Businesses previously marketing their merchandise to the squatter, overseer and shepherd were now targeting the numerous bands of amateur gold miners.

G. Wilkie of the Bathurst diggings proudly trumpeted his steam-made Pilot Biscuits at 30 shillings per hundred, long keeping and free from flint. His Cabin Biscuits were to be had for 35 shillings per 112 pounds and were stored safely in an air tight and soldered canister. Henry Fisher of 480 George St, Sydney was looking to catch the diggers before they left town; he was selling table rice to parties of diggers at twopence per pound. His Van Dieman’s Land flour leapt from the classifieds in the Empire, with other essentials such as ‘digger’s shoes’, Van Dieman’s Land water boots and cradles also available at his city depot. For the inevitably thirsty miner he also had rum, brandy and whisky of various provenances available in hogshead casks. E. Peek and Co., Importers and Dealers, helpfully established the minimum requirements for anybody thinking of stocking up for a trip to the diggings. Their advertisement asserted the minimum requirement to be two months’ supply of provisions including tea, coffee, chocolate, sugar, rice and salt. They were urged to err on the side of having too much, rather than too little, for fear of being fleeced by unscrupulous traders on the ground. Henry Woolley, advertising under the banner of ‘Gold! Gold!!’, had all the equipment a man could need with his portable, screwed together cradles made from cedar and galvanised iron, and his portable painted tents. The industrious digger would be wanting to enhance his yield by using the latest in technology which included Quicksilver (Mercury) for the separation of gold from its matrix – available in jars of ‘eight pounds each, suitably packed for transmission to the ‘Diggings.’

Intending gold diggers, loaded up, could be spared the walk out to the Turon if they applied at John Francis’ Square and Compass of Brickfield Hill, nearby to Surry Hills. His two horse teams were to commence operations on the 11th of August making return trips to the Turon junction every second Monday of the month. Other more well capitalised parties could take up the option of purchasing their own horse teams with one George Street Saddler offering three horses complete with harness and cart for ‘…Parties Proceeding To The Gold Fields’. Sydney firms were looking to find carriage to the diggings for their merchandise as well and advertised in the ‘Wanted’ columns while others had the means and were seeking loads to put their fine horse teams to use.
Diggers too advertised, looking for additional members to make up a party, or contribute capital. One such party of three were looking to add two more to their crew and had among their number a digger freshly returned from the Turon who could vouch for the riches to be so easily had – apply, ‘T.H., Glasgow Arms, 4767 George Street’. Returned diggers would have no doubt brought with them the news of winter deprivations on the diggings; chief among them the unrelenting cold frosty mornings and wet miserable southerly changes with their biting winds and drenching rains. Rush & Merrington’s of Albion House on Pitt Street, though, had the answer with rugs and blankets and their winter outfits consisting of pilot cloth coats and serge woollen shirts. Such were the beginnings of many an enterprise far more lucrative than any mining claim.

Those successful in finding gold were spoilt for choice in selling it. Apart from those gold buyers on the diggings, there were Sydney and Bathurst firms who began advertising their services including the successful purchaser of Kerr’s Hundredweight. All were prepared to purchase gold dust in any quantity, and all would pay the highest cash price going. At the Ophir Diggings, Garsed and Morkill had established a store that typified the enterprising spirit of the goldfield’s shopkeepers. Catering to every need of the miner, they sold tools, clothing and provisions. They’d also erected boarding houses where customers could lodge with their own bedding for 14 shillings per night. They bought and sold gold and offered to exchange it for goods. Goods could also be stored at their premises at the rate of one pound per ton per month. Their advertising helpfully advised the digger of the best route to take to the diggings (turn right at Scotch Harry’s Farm), and of a hut where refreshments could be taken along the way. Storekeeping on the goldfields was likened to ‘fortune making’, with claims of prices as much as three hundred percent those of the Sydney stores. Those on the Turon were said to be making more than the diggers were; one newly opened store doing over two hundred pounds worth of trade in his first afternoon.

**August, 1851 – Additional Gold Regulations.**

As the public’s imagination was fired so too was the government’s, and with the growing interest in mining for matrix gold, the government decided to modify its existing regulations. On Tuesday the 5th of August, 1851, the doughty Scotsman, E. Deas Thompson, published additional regulations in the *Government Gazette* on the mining of gold. Increasingly, people were developing an interest in pooling their capital to form companies to exploit the opportunity for mining gold from quartz veins so often prominent on the diggings. Gold found within geological structures such as quartz veins was known as matrix gold. It required the crushing of large amounts of rock containing commercial quantities of gold, often found embedded in quartz seams. Men began to seek
likeminded individuals to join them in such endeavours often whipping up fervour back home in Britain to raise funds or placing advertisements in the local papers. Steam engines capable of three horse power were advertised on the goldfields along with other requisite items such as throw pumps and gear for the emptying of waterholes or use in powering crushing operations.

Recognising that large capital expenditure and machinery were required to separate matrix gold from its parent rock, the government moved to licence the digging for alluvial gold and the mining of quartz veins under separate regimes. The debate over local control of revenues had been going on ever since limited representative government was acceded to in 1842; however, till the discovery of gold, this had largely been focussed on the revenue obtained by the alienation of the waste lands. Now the debate would become even more urgent as unprecedented revenues began to be generated through the taxing of gold mining operations. With elections approaching, candidates for the Legislative Council began proclaiming their positions on the subjects dominating public debate: a public education system, local control of revenues, resumption of transportation, free trade and public expenditure. Stuart Donaldson, a sitting member of parliament, recognised the opportunities for the colony with the discovery of gold and proclaimed his support for local control of all revenues as did James Byrnes. A candidate for the Sydney Hamlets, Joshua Josephson, stated his support for exclusive colonial control of all revenues along with broader representation of the people through the establishment of a Legislative Assembly. Exporters of gold were also brought under the regulatory umbrella on the 8th of August with the Government Gazette announcing new requirements for all colonial gold to be declared to Customs House prior to departure, though, large quantities had already made it clear of the harbour.

The regulations limited all gold mining licences issued under previous regulations to that gold found within alluvial deposits irrespective of the form the gold took. They were an interim measure designed to buy the Governor and his parliament time to design legislation that would properly protect the interests of the Crown. Predictably, the new regulation was focussed on ensuring the protection of the Crown’s interest through charging people for the pleasure of mining for Her Majesty’s mineral wealth. Accordingly, a royalty would now be charged to the tune of ten percent on all earnings on matrix gold retrieved from Crown Lands and five percent for that found on private land. The public interest would be protected by requiring interested parties to obtain the written permission of the local Commissioner or Assistant Commissioner, and lodging appropriate security, prior to undertaking any mining. The conservative’s interests were protected by the continuation of the existing regulations in respect of private landowners only being allowed to mine
on their privately held land unless otherwise authorised by them. This, of course, meant that those seeking to exploit such finds could be expected to pay substantially more than the five percent levied by the government.

August, 1851 – Commissioner Hardy at the Meroo Diggings.

Commissioner Hardy arrived on the Meroo Diggings in the middle of August with the intent of ensuring the government’s regulations were implemented to the letter. He commenced collecting licences from the massing diggers who to this time had been largely able to go about their business without the dead hand of government. Miners without the necessary fees were quickly removed with many resorting to working for wages among the successful parties until they’d made enough to equip themselves and meet the newly enforced licensing obligations. The local Aboriginals were also turning their hand to gold prospecting and had been noticed busy at work collecting nuggets lying near the surface. Hardy was impressed with the potential of the new diggings on the Meroo River and nearby Louisa Creek noting them as being highly auriferous and proving highly remunerative to those who’d been there now for some weeks. He fully expected that many more would soon follow with up to a thousand eager diggers anticipated. Many of the diggers continued to abandon or sell established and successful claims on the Turon in favour of the new diggings they’d heard so much about just over the Crudine Ridge to the north west.

In accordance with the new regulations, Commissioner Hardy began accepting applications from those wanting to mine for matrix gold among the auriferous veins beetling about the ridges on the Meroo. Claims would be granted for half a mile of quartz vein to interested parties. Four applications were promptly received from parties keen to investigate the possibility of another hundredweight of gold being found among the quartz first explored by Kerr’s shepherds. Hardy granted the claims, which took up the entirety of the quartz vein, and almost immediately they set about staking their individual claims. Meanwhile, many parties were still making good livings away from the Meroo notably at the Turon. The favoured method of chasing alluvial gold with cradle, pick, spade and tin dish was being faithfully employed, though, increasing numbers were opting to use quicksilver. American miners were promoting the option of washing soil using quicksilver as being a more efficient method for separating gold from its earthy camouflage with claims of as much as three times the amount of gold being obtained in this manner.

August, 1851 – Diggers rush the Meroo.
August of 1851 was wet on the Meroo. Winter had arrived. Miners were forced to confront the realities of frontier living on the goldfields as dustings of snow covered the turned over earth and canvas tents of the goldfields. Some sought refuge from the soggy camps and claims among the ever-growing number of sly grogs shops and gambling dens. Others, unperturbed, went about their business during the intermittent dry periods on the ever-expanding goldfields that collectively became known as the Meroo Goldfields. Optimistic diggers were active nearly everywhere with localities being named and re-named in honour of the new industry. Cradles were rocking at the Pyramul Diggings, Nuggetty Gully, Long Creek, Devil’s Hole Creek, Married Man’s Creek, Tambaroora, Golden Gully and Bald Hills. New diggings were being opened up almost daily. Long Creek had been a hive of prosperous activity, but the recent rains had driven the men out of the watercourse in favour of drier diggings on the tablelands at places such as Tambaroora and Nuggetty Gully. As many as 500 men were working the clay soil yielding between three and five ounces for each three to four-man party. By stripping the soil to a depth of three feet, Golden Gully could be worked dry with the gold being found at depths of around seven feet (1.95 metres). Devil’s Hole Creek had also been deserted, but only after a thorough going over; the miners again favouring drier diggings at Tambaroora and the Macquarie River. Married Man’s Creek still had a population of around 150 successful diggers; many of whom were sick of fighting a losing battle against the rising water level and were tempted by tales of Tambaroora’s wealth.

The pattern that would come to define the nomadic existence of miners at the Meroo diggings was being established. When wet conditions resulted in freshes coming down the creeks and rivers, parties decamped for the drier diggings at Tambaroora. Conversely, when the drier months caused local waterholes to evaporate, leaving the men to walk miles to wash their soil, the miners descended on the Meroo River and its tributaries to once again work the beds and banks of the newly accessible creeks. Whilst the wet conditions made mining difficult, some were lucky enough to be making more than wages at the Tambaroora diggings. Parties were yielding between one to eight ounces per day particularly along the creek near the Commissioners Quarters. Over 750 licences had been taken out around the Meroo in previous weeks with many hopeful diggers arriving daily. Tents had been struck and camps abandoned on the Turon as news continued to filter in of discovery around the Meroo. With new men arriving by the score daily, it was estimated that numbers might soon exceed 2000 across the Meroo Goldfields. Despite the numbers arriving on the goldfields, the continuation of wet weather throughout the middle of August, replete with spells of snow and hail, combined to place a temporary halt on proceedings. Food prices rose by over twenty
percent in response to increasing demand, and bread couldn’t be found at all; just to add to the misery being experienced among the waterlogged campsites.

Soon men started to talk, as miners were wont to do, and parties started to drift off from World’s End to the Turon again. The World’s End diggings, made famous by Kerr’s Hundredweight, had failed to live up to the promise that had spread like wildfire. That find was made in one of the quartz seams reaching up to the ridges, but the men who followed were working the deep black alluvium along the creek. Returns early were promising, but, as more men descended on the field, finds were said to be steady rather than spectacular with most finding between 6 and 12 ounces per day. Numbers had increased from 200 to 500 in the space of days all of them camped on the flat around their claims hoping to strike it rich. A party led by the persevering Fitzpatrick had found 12 ounces of gold nuggets in their first day on the field, but, as the week wore on, the majority were only making wages, and that just wouldn’t do in those heady times. Mining was hard work at the best of times and, at World’s End, soil had to be carted 200 to 300 yards to be washed in a chain of pools known by local Aboriginals as ‘Gonduorra’. With local knowledge on their side, the Aboriginals themselves were producing large quantities of gold for sale found at an undivulged location nearby. Unaware or disinterested in its true commercial value, they were being taken advantage of by cunning gold buyers; some of whom were rumoured to be using false weights and dodgy scales. Added disincentive came from provisions becoming scarce as the road from Mudgee deteriorated in the wet weather and the rough track from Bathurst became even more unreliable. The one shop on the diggings, run by Mr Keele, was selling as much flour as would make a damper for the exorbitant price of 10 shillings.

August, 1851 – Gold fever in the Mudgee district.

Even in the 1850s, the Mudgee district’s reputation for beautiful scenery, fertile soils and prolific pastures was secure yet the village itself had evolved little since its inception in 1836. Contemporary descriptions were less than flattering describing the township as, ‘nothing more than a scattered village of a medium order…with a discouraging appearance’. Not that it was on its own in its apparent dishevelment with Bathurst also receiving a less than glowing report around this time from Governor FitzRoy who thought it a rather unprepossessing, primitive and barren township. Such descriptions give an indication of the nature of rural colonial life at the time with its preoccupation with large sheep runs and rural outbuildings and limited opportunity for closer settlement on freehold land. Some building had been carried out around the village of Mudgee with the construction of a parsonage and church, though, most were of a mediocre nature constructed by
men of only moderate means. Blame was attributed to the locking up of the fertile flats surrounding Mudgee by the likes of William Lawson and his family who were accused of dedicating some of the area’s best land to the ‘maintenance of valueless horses’. This, it was claimed, had denied the establishment of a tenanted yeomanry capable of generating wealth and prosperity and increasing Mudgee’s population.

None of this bothered the rushing diggers who were eager to get their share of the wealth to be made from the diggings and who had a keen eye for opportunity elsewhere. On the back of Hargrave’s proclamations, men had searched for, and found, gold across the district at Lawsons Creek, Redbank Creek, Grattai Creek, Uamby Creek, Piambong Creek and McDonalds Creek, among others. The goldfield on Nicholas Paget Bayly’s property was perhaps optimistically described as being one of the richest in the colony. Returns from the scattered diggings were variable, and many of these localities supported diggers in small numbers for short periods only. Nonetheless, optimism abounded and the whole of the district was considered to be auriferous with only a quarter of the gullies and ridges at this time subjected to the rigours of prospectors. The impending establishment of government infrastructure in the form of a Goldfields’ Commissioner and police force at the Meroo diggings provided confidence to the inhabitants of Mudgee that they would soon be sharing in the prosperity about to wash over the wider colony.

**August, 1851 – England’s civilised colony and San Francisco’s wild savagery.**

Competition for labour and commerce on the diggings led to goldfields being championed for their prosperity and prospects as local businessmen competed for the attentions of the bands of nomadic diggers. Nowhere was this more evident in the early days of the gold rushes than in comparisons soon drawn between the goldfields of San Francisco and those of England’s newly wealthy colony, New South Wales. Both were vying for immigrants seeking to exploit the gift of an opportunity for instant wealth. Prior to May 1851, NSW had seen the emigration of many able-bodied men to San Francisco due to the allure of gold and labour was becoming difficult to procure at reasonable wages. Editors, politicians and businessman bemoaned the advertising of cheap fares to the goldfields of San Francisco as precious labour and newly arrived immigrants headed across the Pacific Ocean. Men of capital and captains of industry soon realised however that the discovery of gold would place the colony in a position of being able to reverse the trend, and they quickly became very keen to trumpet the advantages offered to immigrants, particularly those from England, in coming to the colonies. Lengthy speeches, letters and editorials ensued over what the
gold discoveries would mean for the colony and what measure would be needed to protect the virtuous and loyal people of Britain’s newly pre-eminent colony.

The propaganda war was on in earnest. In just three months more Antipodean gold, 80,000 pounds worth, had been exported to England than had been shipped from San Francisco’s shores in eight months; so claimed the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the 23rd of August. As the sun breached the horizon just after 6.30am, the newspaper’s Saturday edition was promoting the advantages of NSW to fellow Britons who might be inclined to pursue the opportunity now on offer. It painted San Francisco as a lawless land of crime and danger where the mob ruled in the absence of an effective government and judiciary. Its people consisted of the ‘lawless Mexican bandit, the semi-Spanish bravo, the buccaneer of the West Coast of South America, of wretches and lawless incendiaries and vagabonds from every corner of the globe’. It was described as ‘a trackless waste…sterile, barren and sickly’ and without a broad-based economy that might offer future prospects upon expiry of the gold rush. It therefore had nothing to offer the prospective immigrant.

Australia, on the other hand, was a place where the best advantages of civilised society were on display. Where the Crown’s sovereignty prevailed, the rule of law took precedence and was observed, and where strong and effective government assured that the dangerous idea of republicanism was not polluting its society. Its citizens were united in their loyalty to the Queen and benefitted from her benevolent protection as a natural right. California, after all, was nothing more than a desert peopled by barbaric ruffians before being overrun with gold seekers, with no respect for the rule of law or restraint that so naturally followed obedience to the Crown. They had nothing else to offer. NSW, however, was a well-populated British colony and had the benefit of established industry and English institutions such as schools, churches and military. She was well placed to ensure the ‘orderly and safe’ development of the new wealth promised by the discovery of gold.

Satisfied that it had made its case, the invitation was offered for their countrymen to make the journey to Australia in their millions. It was widely acknowledged within the colony, having viewed the Californian experience from afar, that many would seek to land on the shores of NSW with estimates as high as 100,000 immigrants possible in the next eighteen months. Concerns were expressed of the type of individual such an incentive might lure to the colony and whether they were a desirable addition to the population. A preference was expressed for British subjects of course; those being considered more civilised and compatible with the society already established across the colony. A strong response from executive government and the legislature was demanded to ensure the rule of law and sovereignty of the Crown prevailed over the rapidly expanding
goldfields. If immigrants were to be lured to the colony they would need to ensure that crime and vice could be held in check and that peace and protection would prevail. Increased police numbers and special troops were demanded for the goldfields. The land question was raised with the new wave of immigrants seen as an opportunity to agitate for the release of Crown lands on reasonable commercial terms using the security offered in freehold tenure as an inducement. Infrastructure such as bridges and roads would be needed to ensure the free passage of capital and labour around the goldfields and keep commodity prices in check. All of this would go towards ensuring Australia would, in a few short years, become ‘a nation rich, powerful and virtuous’.46


In its edition of Saturday 23rd of August, 1851, the Sydney Morning Herald carried a new article on page five written by George Lloyd, who was a gold buyer and auctioneer among other things. The article was titled ‘Gold Circular’ and became the authoritative standard for the latest news on the diggings, gold discoveries, prices and volumes being sent to Sydney by escort. George Lloyd had been in the colony for nearly twenty years having arrived in 1833 to open a store in the Hunter district. He immersed himself in business and achieved success, among reversals, before seeing an opportunity to buy Californian gold placing him well to seize the moment when gold was discovered in NSW. His first article provided a précis of the events that led to the official discovery of gold and the extent of the goldfields three months hence. He claimed that the excitement in Sydney was such that it would be largely deserted at the present rate of men decamping for the western goldfields with over two thousand men of all classes and conditions said to be on the Bathurst road heading west and only eleven to be encountered heading east.47

Lloyd stated that the newly constituted government escort had brought down 969 ounces of gold in July, and that, as its availability had become known, this had quickly increased to 7244 ounces in following weeks. His figures didn’t take into account the many parcels of heavy mail arriving regularly in Sydney by private hands, however. Lloyd’s business history in export and import placed him well in obtaining contacts among the skippers of vessels charges with carrying the precious gold to Mother England and he began to amass intelligence on the amount of gold being exported by those means. The price of gold was quoted at 3 pounds 8 shillings 6 pence per ounce (£3l. 8s. 6d.). His assertion that Australian gold was found to contain as much as ten percent silver soon elicited a letter to the editor contending that this was not in fact the case and that local gold was in fact superior to that found in California in terms of its purity.48 Lloyd expressed great
optimism in the prospects of the nation under its new industry and the continuation of its other staples of wool, agriculture and commerce.

Lloyd’s next circular, published on the 30th of August, reflected the seasonally wet conditions that had been experienced across the Western Goldfields throughout much of August. The torpor that had overtaken previously frenetic alluvial diggings had overtaken many of the new goldfields around the Meroo. Returns of gold brought by the escort reflected the cessation of mining in many quarters and the consequent reduction in yields. News of the discovery of gold in the neighbouring colony of Victoria had started to be tentatively reported as confirmation of its auriferous status as well along with announcements of continuing discoveries in NSW. The Victorian government was quick to place its stamp on the goldfields issuing notice to prospective miners of the consequences of not first obtaining a licence. Lloyd’s reports continued to be filed on a fortnightly basis and soon came to include much detail on specific goldfields, and, in particular, the prices being paid for gold found at each and the volumes received at Sydney by official hands.

**September, 1851 – Gold discovery announced in Victoria at ‘Ballarat’.*

By the end of September, it had been officially acknowledged that gold had indeed been discovered in Victoria and that it was of sufficient quantity to yield payable returns. The find had been made near Bunninyong, some 60 miles north west of Melbourne, and was to be officially known as Ballarat. Over 200 people had already established themselves on site with many more on the roads from Melbourne and Geelong intent on joining them. The miners had sent in over £3000 worth of gold to Melbourne in the space of a few short weeks as evidence of their success. Soon enough, the mines would yield gold of unsurpassed quality and quantity and escalate the competition between the colonies for the labour of those miners taking to the roads to try their luck.

**October, 1851 – The best of beef and mutton at the Meroo Diggings.**

After the initial announcement of gold being found at the Meroo, miners had continued to converge on the district. Canvas tents and their red and blue inhabitants, were now found from the source of the Meroo to five miles below World’s End, a distance of over 32 miles. Food was plentiful with local beef and mutton in ready supply at reasonable prices. Many of the Meroo’s tributaries continued to attract prospectors as well with Long Creek, Dirt Hole Creek and Devils Hole Creek all well populated. Pyramul Creek, a tributary of the Macquarie River, was being worked along almost its entire length including all the gullies and creeks that ran into it. All the miners were reported to be doing well with finds of nine and a half ounces per day being common.
On the Louisa there were about 200 miners at work. One lucky individual had discovered a 21-ounce lump of gold enmeshed in a rock of white quartz, though, his luck soon ran out when he broke his leg at the thigh just a few days afterwards. At World’s End, two drays that had brought flour to goldfields were loaded with quartz from the same vein in which Kerr’s Hundredweight had been found. They were destined for crushing by a company recently formed in Sydney that had paid £500 for the privilege.

Numbers were becoming difficult to estimate as the miners’ notoriously restless and migratory habits resulted in shifting populations moving about the scattered goldfields of the Meroo River. ‘Too much room’ was to blame, and the sooner numbers made it necessary for men to stake out the best locations and work at them, the sooner order would prevail. Commissioner Henry Whitty too found the going difficult as he chased after the swelling numbers of unlicensed miners and raided tents suspected of selling sly grog. Though generally well behaved and orderly, the miners were tempted by the sale on the Sabbath of illicit spirits from the sprouting sly grog shops much to the chagrin of the more pious. Commissioner Whitty fought a losing battle in trying to control the trade, but did have some notable successes, seizing a quantity of spirits at Louisa Creek one Saturday in mid-September, thereby preventing the inevitable iniquitous behaviour found so distasteful by those with a fondness for observing the holy Sabbath. Whitty’s earnest endeavours had earned him promotion to the office of Commissioner of Crown Lands, at Warawa, in the north of the colony at Maranoa, and he was to be replaced by Assistant Commissioner Bowman.

October, 1851 – New Gold Regulations for Alluvial Claims and Quartz Veins.

After a visit to the goldfields to familiarise himself with the goings on, the Colonial Secretary, Deas Thompson, received Commissioner Hardy at his office in Sydney with a view to drafting new regulations for the proper management of the goldfields. On the 7th of October, 1851, they were issued for publishing in the Government Gazette; their appearance prompting dismay and outrage among the goldfields’ populations, and moving those of a liberal persuasion to wonder at the tyrannical restrictions on the flow of capital for overseas. The new regulations turned their attention to the search for gold and operations of the diggers by defining the area their licences entitled them to operate in; they also defined the means by which quartz veins could be worked. Alluvial miners were to mark their claims on a scale commensurate with the likelihood of gold in the feature they were digging in and were entitled to an area for each person:

≈ river or main creek - 15 feet frontage to either side,
tributary - 20 feet of the bed,

ravine or watercourse - 60 feet of the bed,

tableland or river flat - 20 square feet.

Failure to work the claim within 10 days of receiving a licence would see the claim forfeited. Those found working a claim in the absence of a licence would be required to pay twice as much for the licence, whilst those on private land were granted the concession of paying only half the licence fee.

The individuals and companies who had formed up operations on the back of the remarkable discovery of Dr Kerr’s Hundredweight, with a view to further exploiting the presence of large quartz veins on the goldfields, were the next to be brought into line. The government intended extending its influence to the daily workings of such operations, and seven of the ten points that made up the new regulations were dedicated to governing their activities. Applicants had to accurately describe the location of any proposed exploration and were required to enter into a bond of 2000 pounds and pay ten percent royalty (five percent for those on private land) on all gold retrieved. The royalty was payable to the local officer who had to be provided almost unfettered access to the miner’s operations, including buildings and books, and was to be allowed to reside on site at the Commissioner’s discretion. It was further necessary to employ no fewer than 20 men to retain the miner’s right. Claimants had the sole enjoyment, for an initial period of up to three years, of a half a mile of a quartz vein and 50 yards either side of it for locating buildings and structures. Added to their mining right was the ability to harvest firewood and construction timber from adjoining Crown land and the right to take water for use in the mining and crushing of quartz. When their licence expired, mining companies were required to remove all buildings and infrastructure, provided the terms of their bond had been met. Failure to meet the obligations now placed upon those intent on mining quartz veins would result in the forfeiture of a claim and its availability to subsequent claimants.

Water was an ever-present issue on the goldfields whether it be too little to allow puddling and washing of spoil or too much to allow the sinking of shafts and working of stream beds. The miner’s demand for water, and the impact their operations had on its quality, readily brought them into conflict with neighbouring pastoral interests reliant on the same creeks for stock water. Miners themselves also competed for access to close supplies of water and the beds of auriferous
waterholes. The new regulations addressed these tensions by requiring miners to apply to their local Assistant Commissioner for the right to drain waterholes and ponds. An application had to be made with the assurance that not less than 40 licensed people would be employed to carry out the work with allowance for interruptions to the progress of the work made only in the instance of flood or unforeseen accident. The Assistant Commissioners were given broad responsibilities and empowered with judging the relative merits of competing applicants for the draining of waterholes. They were also tasked with ensuring draining operations didn’t adversely affect the activities of other licensed miners. Their powers being what they were, it soon became accepted wisdom among the miners that the Assistant Commissioners were becoming despotic in their enforcement of the new regulations.

October, 1851 – New Gold Regulations – ‘a mixture of good and evil’.

As rumours of new discoveries of gold on the Darling Downs and Clarence River swept through an increasingly densely populated Turon Goldfield, the major newspapers of the day lined up to have their say on the government’s new gold regulations. None of them were impressed. William Farrand’s mouthpiece, The Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal, found that on balance the new measures were a ‘mixture of good and evil’, though, unsurprisingly came down on the side of the miner. The influential John Fairfax took his Tuesday 21st of October edition of the Sydney Morning Herald to the printers with descriptions of a less flattering nature. He rounded on the government for not learning the lessons on offer from over four months of gold fever, claiming the new regulations ‘erred’ and were in parts ‘absurd’, ‘preposterous’, ‘startling’, ‘impracticable’ and ‘lamentable’.

William Farrand offered his subscribers a line by line assessment of the new regulations finding them lacking in examination by the parliament and the benefit of miner’s expertise and experience. Nonetheless, he felt the requirement for shopkeepers to pay 30 shillings each month for the privilege of establishing businesses on Crown Land to be reasonable. It was, he contended, a reasonable imposition as it worked to the benefit of those self-same people in giving them some level of tenure on the goldfields. He was quick to pounce on the incongruity between the regulation’s requirements for the commencement of operations between matrix and alluvial gold which failed to allow a period of grace for the alluvial miner in the event of extended floods or other such impediment. He was equally harsh on the government’s use of penal measures for those unable to pay their fees finding them culpable in their apparent apathy toward the establishment of suitable arrangements for the mining of gold since its discovery – save for their perfection in the
In shades of modern debate over the mineral resources rent tax, Farrand gave conditional approval to imposition of a ten percent royalty on gold won from quartz veins. The tax was defensible he felt provided it was applied to useful infrastructure projects and development of the interior. His fear, though, was that it would be wasted on ‘jobbery’ and ‘squandered in reckless patronage’.53

Fairfax focussed on the impracticality of partitioning off 20 square feet of tableland per miner across an area of 600 square miles between the Meroo River and Pyramul Creek. It was, he said, incomprehensible how Hardy and Thompson could have gotten it so wrong given that they’d each had first-hand experience of the goldfields prior to framing such a provision. Fairfax claimed it would be impossible to ensure access to each claim via surveyed roads without the employment of a vast, and expensive, army of surveyors. A better solution could be had by allowing the miners to content themselves with continuing their wandering ways and digging where they would. The very nature of nested gold nugget finds, and varying depths of gold, precluded the pegging out of restrictive areas of activity. He saved the worst of his vitriol for the regulations on quartz mining which he felt were designed to ‘prohibit their being touched by anyone’, and rather than ‘giving scope and tether to … Anglo-Saxon enterprise’, would-be miners were in danger of being ‘crippled by law’.54 Farrand and Fairfax’s thoughts were as one on the nonsensical provisions for the draining of waterholes. They both contended that the provisions gave no consideration to the scale of the watercourse and associated labour requirements; Farrand expounding further on the folly of draining waterholes in a dry vast continent that very often formed the sole water supply for sheep and cattle for miles around. Objections to the newly tightened regulatory regime were expressed by the miners as well with criticism centring on the impracticality of some of the new measures and random unfairness of others.

Writing to the Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal, one man, who chose to be known as ‘A Miner’, highlighted the impact it would have on gold’s potentially lucrative enticement of immigrants from the Mother Country and the money that would inevitably follow them. Calling on British spirit, he disparaged the requirement to allow full and free access to a miner’s books on a quartz claim and called for the adoption of free and liberal trade principles. Echoing Fairfax’s bemoaning of the lack of parliamentary scrutiny in framing the regulations, he called for them to be brought before a parliamentary committee empowered to examine witnesses, particularly experienced miners. Another miner, this time ‘A Practical Miner’, complained of the restrictive nature of the regulations on the mining of quartz claims. A more flexible approach might have
allowed him to use the tools, machinery and labour of others in his vicinity in a cooperative fashion for the common good. Instead, as they stood, the regulations were heavily biased toward the establishment of large companies with large amounts of capital for large machinery. None of which, of course, was lost on the government itself.\footnote{55}

The campaign of opposition from the press chiefs and those on the goldfields brought a prompt response from Government House. The Colonial Secretary released modifications to the infant regulations just fourteen days after their inception. Principally addressing the absurdity of regulation nine, the number of men required to be employed in draining waterholes was to be determined by the Assistant Commissioner, rather than stipulated by regulation. Flexibility was also provided to allow changes to the number employed at any one time, but a licence was required for each person firstly enumerated by the Assistant Commissioner. The practice of accepting gold in lieu of the Queen's currency as payment for licence fees was to continue; however, it was to be reduced in value from 3 pounds 4 shillings to 3 pounds.\footnote{56}

\noindent \textit{October, 1851 – The Legislative Council, Parliament House, Macquarie St.}

As members of the NSW parliament gathered themselves around the ornate chamber of the Legislative Council in the afternoon shadows of Macquarie Street, notices of motion were brought before the Speaker of the House, Charles Nicholson. Elective member and Yorkshireman, John Darvall, representing the seat of Cumberland, took the opportunity to push his constituency’s claims for a bridge over the Nepean River. Other mundane business of the house followed including presentation of the Governor’s forthcoming budget estimates. In a week that would see tensions rising again between the Executive, represented by Colonial Secretary Thompson and the members of the Council, gold soon became a hot topic.

Mr James Martin, the Irish member for Cook and Westmoreland, sought to elicit information from the Colonial Secretary on the activities of miner and government alike on the goldfields. Not wishing to pursue the matter further until the Government had furnished information to the house, Mr Martin nonetheless made his point regarding control of the revenues derived from the waste lands and their new-found importance with the discovery of gold. He also expressed his reservations at what he considered the government’s unconstitutional power to array an army of police across the goldfields with the potential at least to restrict the liberty of Her Majesty’s subjects and the colony’s good citizens. Other matters weighing on his mind included the prudence of introducing gold as legal tender and concerns over law and order on the goldfields with reports of Californian lawlessness front of mind.
The revenue derived from the goldfields was always a topic of discussion, and as far as James Martin was concerned, it could be no better spent than if it was to furnish to the ‘Great Western District’ improved roads and bridges. The erstwhile William Wentworth seconded Martin’s motion with Arthur Holroyd, representing the Western Boroughs, seeking amendments for the provision of even more detailed information specific to localities. Not to be outdone by his parliamentary colleagues, Deas Thompson assured the House that all the returns would be provided forthwith and assured them they would find themselves satisfied with the response. After all, it wasn’t only the government that had been caught up in the maelstrom unleashed by the gold discovery, but society in general, and yet, against all the odds, the government had managed to protect the wider industrial pursuits of the colony. What’s more, he had anticipated just such as question and would be able to satisfy the honourable member’s motion immediately.

With alacrity, the indefatigable Thompson proceeded to put before the parliament licensing returns showing that licences issued had grown from 158 in June to total 12,186 by October – 1009 of those issued on the Meroo and Louisa Creek Goldfields. Total revenue amounted to just over £49,463 while nearly 67,151 ounces of gold had been exported from the colony with a value of £214,886. Regulation of the new industry came at a cost, and over £6,811 was spent on ensuring order on the western goldfields. The money had been spent on hiring Assistant Commissioners, Clerks, buying horses and forage, hiring new constables and establishing the gold escort and its guards, horses and coach. Additionally, the monetary recognition given to Hargraves for distinguished public service, Geological Surveyor Stutchbury’s travel expenses in surveying the goldfields, Rev Clarke’s field trips and the purchase of gold as a gift to the Queen, all came from treasury’s new-found wealth.

Thompson’s submission to parliament revealed the discovery of gold had been officially recognised at Ophir, the Turon River, Muckewa Creek, Louisa Creek, Meroo Creek, Winburndale Creek and its tributaries, Fredericks Valley, Abercrombie River, Campbells River, and the Araluen River. Reporting the revenue raised, Thompson lauded the fact that the gold districts had been unaffected by robbery; words he may later have reflected upon with chagrin after the energetic pursuits of numerous bushrangers in later years. Thompson reflected upon his own time on the goldfields in recent weeks, including the Meroo Goldfield, and attested to the remarkable scenes of law and order that prevailed, even on the Sabbath, assuring the house that even the most upright citizen would find no cause for offence at the behaviour of those on the goldfields. Not to be outdone, Darvall took to his feet again to congratulate the Colonial Secretary on his readiness to
supply information and trusted that similar alacrity would be displayed in giving the House more control over the management of the colony’s revenues.\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{October, 1851 – Surveyor-General Stutchbury reports on the Meroo and Louisa Creek Goldfields from his camp near Burrandong.}

\begin{center}
\begin{quote}
\textit{The Colonial Secretary to the Surveyor General.}

Sir,

It being considered of great importance that the extent and productiveness of the Gold Field reported to have been discovered in the county of Bathurst should be ascertained with as much accuracy and with as little delay as possible, I am directed by the Governor to inform you that his Excellency is desirous that you should yourself undertake this duty, and to request that you will therefore proceed at your earliest convenience to that district for the purpose.

2. The following are the points on which I am desired more particularly to request your report:

1. The longitudinal extent of what may be termed the auriferous ridges as they stretch from Canobolas towards the north.

2. The general form in which these auriferous ridges have been elevated, which may perhaps be explained by vertical transverse sections as far as they can be given. The object of procuring information on this particular point being to ascertain whether gold has been washed down to any extent from both sides of the auriferous chain.

3. The greatest heights of the auriferous chain at various points, the average height of the whole line, the average height of the Plain Guyong above the level of the sea, and of the plain on the western side of the auriferous chain.

4. The average angles of declivity on the east and west sides of the auriferous Siena, and more particularly the angles of declination at which the particular streams and creeks run down to the eastern and western plains from their sources on the mountain.

5. The number and general volume of these several streams or creeks, with their names, and whether they are often subject to floods.

6. The richness of the matrix near their several sources to be shown, as far as possible, by specimens broken off from the side of the mountain in the vicinity of such sources, and with their localities carefully marked.

His Excellency also requests that in addition to reports on these heads you will furnish such further information on the subject as you may consider desirable.

I have, &c.

(Signed) E. Deas Thomson.
\end{quote}
\end{center}

Instructions from Col. Secretary Thompson to Surveyor General Stutchbury\textsuperscript{59}

In October, Surveyor General Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, by now well out of favour with the local administration, set out from the Lands Office in Bridge St, Sydney to complete the tasks assigned to him. Mitchell’s Geological Surveyor, Mr Samuel Stutchbury, also set out with instructions to survey the western goldfields and areas to the west for their extent and viability. By the 27\textsuperscript{th} of October, Stutchbury had travelled widely in the district around Burrandong on the
Macquarie River, and establishing camp, proceeded to compile his reports of the localities nearby. Earlier in the month he’d came upon around 100 miners who were erratically scraping around the gullies and exposed bed and banks of the Macquarie River as its waters receded. Soon using up the waterholes available to them, they were moving about to new sites with water for washing of their spoil or carting it down onto the flat to work in the Macquarie River. On the 17th of October, while the diggers were hard at it nearby at Worlds End, Stutchbury made time to compose the second of his reports to Colonial Secretary Thompson.

In the preceding weeks he’d climbed from his Burrandong camp to the tableland east of the Macquarie River before descending onto the gullies and creeks that collectively made up the Meroo and Louisa Creek goldfields. Stutchbury was struck by the similarity of the country to that auriferous tract he’d travelled on the other side of the Macquarie as he descended onto Louisa Creek. He described the scene as being similar to an upturned hand, with the palm representing the alluvial flat and the fingers the gullies ranging off it, with an arm bent at the elbow, the creek itself. Turning his scientific mind to the task at hand, he described a landscape of layered loam and gravel alluvial infill among steep valleys dominated by metamorphic minerals of schist and quartz geology. Postulating that it had once been a lake filled by the degrading ranges, he surmised the sporadic presence of gold in the alluvium most likely to be due to ancient streams and depressions being filled by the gold laden sediment resulting in auriferous lines and veins.

With recent floods, the miners were restricted to working the banks of the turgid Meroo River. It was here he encountered the miners to be digging through alluvium to the hard clay subsoil where they stopped at a depth of around a foot (30cm). When in the creek itself, the diggers were targeting what they called ‘pockets’ and were removing and washing only the sediments collected among those crevasses in the bedrock. He also located the quartz lode made famous by Kerr describing it as a hummock on the flat tableland covering an area of some 10-12 acres. Striking out from Louisa Creek, he followed the road in a north easterly direction before turning west to follow the tableland back to Dr. Kerr’s ‘Wallerwaugh’ crossing several creeks he expected to be auriferous. Proceeding north to the Meroo at Worlds End, he described the stratified rock formations and was struck by the capacity of the goldfield. Stutchbury felt the Meroo River’s extensive alluvial flats, its ample rock bars, gold bearing tributaries, and the presence of large quartz seams in the surrounding ridges, were evidence of a substantial and highly remunerative goldfield that could support many thousands of miners.
Like his superior, Surveyor General Mitchell, Stutchbury’s career was notable for its difficulties with members of the Legislative Council and the abrasive Colonial Secretary Thompson. In 1854, he became embroiled in a public dispute with the member for Murrumbidgee, George Macleay, over what he considered Stutchbury’s tardiness in supplying mineral specimens as per his official remit. Stutchbury defended himself in the public sphere with an open letter to the Colonial Secretary published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* only to fall foul of his employers. His appointment was terminated in 1855 and he returned to England where he died just four years later aged 62.\(^{61}\) Despite the difficulties that characterised his later relationship with his political masters, Stutchbury’s ultimate contribution was in confirming the speculation of numerous members of the public and the claims of Hargraves for the edification of the colonial parliament and countless willing adventurers.

**November, 1851 - James Keppie prepares to try the Meroo Goldfields.**

While Sydney shopkeepers were advertising for carriers to take their merchandise to the western diggings and had set up branches of their own businesses at the Turon, Ophir and Meroo, others were making their way from the Hunter Valley townships of Paterson and Maitland. The thriving river port town of Maitland, on the Hunter River, had long been an important centre for pastoralists and cedar-getters in the district, and now it would become an important source of commerce for the Meroo Goldfields. Local shopkeepers saw the growing population on the goldfields as an opportunity to expand their businesses, and many of the names of the prominent businessmen and women of the Meroo and Louisa Goldfields hailed from the Maitland district. Among them was a young Scot by the name of James Keppie who settled at Richardson’s Point on the Meroo River. The site was so named due to the long occupation of the river flats by a shepherd with the surname of Richardson; however, such was the success of James Keppie after setting up his store and hotel that it soon became known locally as Keppie’s Town.

James Keppie came from a well-established Maitland district family that had emigrated from Scotland. The family had a variety of business interests and were involved in pastoral and agricultural activities at Paterson, north of Maitland on the Paterson River. At various times in the 1840s, James was the pound keeper, held the licence at the Bush Inn at Paterson, ran a coach, called the Rob Roy, to Morpeth, and constructed a steam mill for the milling of local grain. Keppie’s eight horse power mill, commenced in 1846, was finished in 1849 and consisted of ‘‘4 feet six-inch stones, Dressing and Smutting Machine, Sack Tackle, two Mill Boats and all the requisites…’’\(^{62}\). It represented a significant investment for Keppie who had already experienced the ups and downs of
being in business in the past decade. Unbeknownst to him, it would also represent an obstacle to exercising his opportunistic streak just two years later with the outbreak of gold fever.

By November 1851, Keppie had made up his mind to go to the goldfields but first had to put his affairs at Maitland and Paterson in order. Perhaps deciding he would test the waters first rather than relocate permanently, he advertised to let out his eight-horse power steam flour mill being at pains to point out that it would be business as usual in his absence. The mill was in first rate order with a pair of four feet six-inch stones, dressing and smutting machine, sack tackle and two mill boats comprising the equipment. In an indication of his confidence in his prospects on the new goldfields, Keppie decided to sell his 12-ton boat offering ‘liberal credit’ at a ‘price moderate’.  

**November, 1851 – More Gold Regulations and Assistant Commissioners announced.**

Edward Macarthur Bowman Esq. was officially installed as one of the Gold Department’s new Assistant Commissioners, to be stationed at the Meroo and Louisa Creek goldfields along with his Clerk, Mr William Platt, by instruction issued from the Colonial Secretary’s office on the 22nd of November and published in the *Government Gazette* on the 25th of November. Bowman was placed on an annual salary of 250 pounds, significantly less than some of the miners he was in charge of, and his Clerk received half that again. Each Assistant Commissioner also had a contingent of ten troopers and one sergeant assigned to their goldfield. The announcement of the new Assistant Commissioners and their Clerks was not met with universal satisfaction as doubts began to circulate over the effectiveness some of the men might be able to bring to the role.

There were a number of quite young men among the appointments and the general concern was that they may not bring the authority to the role considered necessary to control the unruly diggers. It was widely considered by the diggers that many of the Assistant Commissioners and their staff were largely incompetent and inexperienced not having much if any background in gold mining on the new goldfields. Assistant Commissioner Bowman was twenty-five years of age at his appointment and was perhaps not one of the ‘beardless youths … unable to exercise proper control’. His achievements in his post as Assistant Commissioner were later superseded by his important botanical discoveries in northern Queensland where he died at just 46.

Disappointment had been expressed in the relatively small number of licences issued since the discovery of gold: 1009 having been issued on the Meroo and Louisa Creek goldfields. It was suspected that fraud was being perpetuated on the government by an element taking advantage of the Commissioner’s ineptitude. Relations between the diggers and officialdom, represented by the
Assistant Commissioners and their troopers, were strained. Allegations had been made that they’d been exceeding their authority by smashing the cradles of unlicensed diggers rather than taking the authorised action of bodily removing them from the goldfields. James Martin’s enquiries in the parliament were not necessarily borne of any paternalistic feelings toward the diggers rather his motivation stemmed from a potential loss of revenue to the government.

On the 18th of November, Deas Thompson’s office dispatched yet more gold regulations also to be published in the *Gazette* on the 25th of November. The new regulations were aimed squarely at those miners who were choosing to avoid properly meeting their responsibilities to the Crown prior to digging for gold on Crown Land. They were designed to act as a further disincentive to anybody choosing to take their chances on Crown land armed with a licence to dig only on private land. From this time on, anybody caught working the diggings on Crown land with a licence for private lands would be liable to twice the fee normally payable. The first collective rumblings on the goldfields were heard at the Turon in response as a petition was signed by a meeting of miners for presentation to the Legislative Council protesting the regulations and licensing provisions. Despite the fomenting unrest on the western goldfields, as water levels dropped, bed claims were once again being worked by the thronging crowds, who were commended on their good conduct. Order prevailed to the extent miners were perfectly content to leave their tents untended during the long days rocking the cradle and digging up dirt safe in the knowledge that their belongings were secure.

**November, 1851 – Labour wanted: the immigration question.**

The advent of a new industry with the potential to draw men, women and children from all points of the compass, and the demand for miners to work the increasingly numerous goldfields, soon became the subject of debate at Macquarie St. Continuing where he’d left off just two days before, the Honourable John Darvall re-joined the debate over the control of land revenue, unfairly ridiculing the submissive obedience of the Colonial Secretary to his London masters, before embarking on the topic of immigration. As ever, comparisons with California were never far from mind. Darvall compared the barbarous savagery of an underpopulated wilderness to the natural order that existed under the Crown in NSW and considered his colony’s ability to accommodate immigrants as limited. After all, it wasn’t only the labour that was massing on the goldfields, but also the capital. Immigrants arriving in the colony under the current scheme, at a costly 16 pounds per head, were heading straight off to the mines rather than meeting their bonded obligations. He felt a cheaper scheme, not funded by the colony, would elicit more suitable immigrants, for, then as now, the Australian legislature was determined to decide just who came to their country.
The former soldier and convict superintendent, and newly elected member, John Holden, seconded Darvall’s motions for a new cheaper and privatised immigration system. In a contribution that illustrates the early foundations of anti-Chinese sentiment in the Antipodes, he described the Chinese as ‘a class to which there were abundant grave objections’ eliciting from the chamber resounding cries of ‘Hear! Hear!’ Holden contended that the importation of Chinese labour in the north of the colony was demonstration enough of the damage being wrought by the current scheme. Colonial Secretary Thompson evasively defended the work of the Immigration Commissioners as ensuring fit and proper emigrants were procured, rather than simply emptying Britain’s Poor Houses and, on the whole, most advantageous to the colony.

Thompson was wary of inducing an influx of immigrants into a fledgling colony with a relatively small population and had no concerns over the impact of gold rushes on the working class. Indeed, he was confident it would yield positive results as he felt most diggers would not stick at it and would soon be witnessed buying farms and businesses with their gains and strongly contributing to the broader economy. Hitting his straps, and in full flight, Thompson evoked howls of laughter and vociferous agreement with his descriptions of previous schemes and the people of dubious character that they encouraged. In the end, he opposed Darvall’s motion declaring he was convinced it would deadlock the existing system to the detriment of immigration all together.

Debate continued over who should pay for immigration and what checks and balances should be in place as to guarantee suitability of candidates and how best to redress a situation that saw 70-80% of British emigrants going to America instead of NSW. Ultimately, the motion put by Darvall failed, but the question of immigration would return to vex the house again, and the question of local control of the land revenues would remain a constant. The next session of parliament again saw the Legislature considering matters arising from the juggernaut that was the gold discovery. Charles Cowper, representing the borough of Cumberland, pushed for the improvement of infrastructure in the interior to cater for the inevitable influx of immigrants chasing gold.

In particular, he wanted to see the construction of railroads into the interior describing them as the most efficient and cheapest from of transport likely to be available and providing a useful solution to the question of transporting and employing said immigrants. The more pressing matter weighing on the minds of the honourable members, though, was the need for an improvement to the city’s town water supply. Sydney City Council had advised Macquarie Street that, with the supply via the tunnel from Lachlan Swamp becoming unreliable, residents would soon be left to their own
devices for water. Options such as the construction of a dam on the Cooks River, Nepean River and a second dam at Lachlan Swamp or sources at Botany Bay were all debated.

The concerns of the squattocracy were never far from the minds of those in the legislature amply represented there as they were. And as parliament continued to debate the immigration question, the advantages of increased immigration associated with gold discoveries were promoted as being of particular benefit to the pastoral set. They’d been among the first to raise the alarm over increases in wages and the difficulty in procuring reliable labour. Now they were being told it would in fact put downward pressure on wages allowing capitalists to employ people at rates considered (by capitalists) more reasonable to both master and servant. An expanded population would increase demand for, and hence the value of stock and produce, ensuring a better price for meat and tallow. It would also increase the value of stations and stock as demand for investment opportunities grew, ensuring the accumulation of capital in the colony. A growth in the colony’s population was generally regarded as inevitable with the natural advantages of a peaceable God-fearing colony of the Empire soon to prevail over California’s lawlessness of ‘Lynch law, bowie knives, and revolvers…’.

Rather than fearing the ruination of pastoral pursuits and agriculture, it was considered that the drawing power of the goldfields and free market forces would ensure the prosperity of all aspects of the colonial economy.

**November, 1851 – Wiradjuri gold on the Louisa and Meroo Goldfields.**

Reports exist of Aboriginals on the early Turon, Meroo and Louisa goldfields actively participating in the search for gold and involved in commerce on the goldfields. Though the common perception might be of them as fringe dwellers in camps on the edges of settlements in NSW by the mid-19th century, they clearly retained an identity and connection with their territory whilst providing their services in cutting bark for shelters or canoes for transporting of diggers and goods. Newspaper reports of the time intermittently, and often obliquely, reveal an otherwise unremarked chapter in the history of the Wiradjuri people after the conflict-marked 1820s.

Meanwhile, November had begun with promise. Drier weather meant stream flows were receding to the point that bed claims were once again a hive of multinational blue and red activity. The respite didn’t last long, however, with the turn of the season bringing spring rains and localised flooding to the goldfields at the Turon, Meroo and Macquarie Rivers. Men abandoned their bed claims, though, those eying off the banks of the Macquarie River above Burrandong were soon warned off by Suttor who’d sent a man to keep them off his freehold country. Not to be discouraged, they started out for the dry diggings on offer around Louisa Creek and Tambaroora.
where rumours of gold being brought in from the ridges and gullies by the local ‘blacks’ had excited the flighty diggers. The Aboriginals were coy about revealing where they were finding their treasure know doubt aware they held the upper hand whilst they kept it a secret. One such digger named Wilson, his judgement probably affected by that ‘auri sacre fames’ (accursed hunger for gold), had enlisted the local blacks to take him to a nugget they promised was as long as his arm.

The tale was soon embellished by Wilson to resemble a find extending into the earth to an unknown depth and possibly weighing three times as much as Kerr’s Hundredweight. He set off from Mudgee along the muddy and rutted track with two horses (for one would not be able to carry it!) to collect his promised prize and cart it to the Commissioner at Avisford only to soon discover his benefactors had the better of him. Following them through the broken country south of the Murray, the Wiradjuri disappeared into a ravine leaving Wilson bereft of satisfaction. Clearly enraged by the deception, Wilson and three of his party mounted steeds and armed themselves with rifles. Evoking memories of events of recent decades in the district, they pursued them intent on gaining the satisfaction they’d been denied. Ultimately, they were unsuccessful, though, miners across the district were now on the lookout for that secret location and hatched plans to bribe the Wiradjuri gold prospectors with a less than generous 20 pounds for their trouble.68


Louisa Creek was gaining a reputation for its pale gold in matrix among the beetling quartz seams. One party on the Louisa, led by a miner named Peter Brennan, was doing very well turning up a nugget of 35 ounces and several of 8 ounces and smaller. In an adjoining hole they’d found a 4 lbs. nugget the size of a man’s fist. On Thursday the 13th of November, the party had been working all morning when their aching muscles and growling stomachs began turning their minds to organising something for dinner. Leaving their picks behind the men commenced heading to their tents when a cry came from one of their party still going at it. Calling out to his mates that he’d found something he was rebuffed by a hungry miner replying that it was probably only a boulder.

Nonetheless, they gathered around as his mate pulled from the earth a muddy, clay-encrusted block of quartz and gold. Before long the party were surrounded by admiring onlookers, among them Assistant Commissioner Bowman and a visiting journalist from the Sydney Morning Herald. Hurrying to the tent occupied by one of the party named Darby, where the prize was being kept, they were granted an audience with the newly discovered natural wonder. The visiting journalist brought his command of the written word to bear as he vividly described the find:
...nearly half quartz, beautifully white, interspersed profusely to fully one half with gold of the brightest quality, having all the appearance of having been in a fused state forcibly squeezed together, so as to cause the gold to protrude in abundance on all sides. In size, shape and appearance it bears no slight resemblance to a cheese of about 9 or 10 pounds in weight.69

The talk around Bathurst was of a 150 lbs. find, but, on the 22nd of November, it was announced that an almost pure specimen of gold had been found in a quartz vein at Louisa Creek weighing in at 27 lbs. 9 oz. Brennan’s Nugget, as it quickly became known, was described as ‘unquestionably a very beautiful specimen’70 that was almost totally free of quartz and reached 9 inches in diameter with a circumference of 21 inches. It had been discovered while working the same quartz vein that had yielded Kerr’s Hundredweight and was found just metres from that first discovery of Kerr’s shepherd. Handed over to Commissioner Bowman at Avisford, it soon attracted the attention of buyers with rumoured offerings of 1100 to 1350 pounds all of which were refused.

Three days later the gold arrived in Sofala where rumours circulated that as much as 1300 pounds had already been paid for the exquisite lump of matrix gold. Despite all of the local attention, it was soon entrusted to the firm of Mr John Godfrey Cohen of 490 George Street, Sydney, where it was to be sold at public auction in his rooms at noon on the 6th of December. Cohen’s advertisement left no-one in doubt as to the extraordinary nature of this latest specimen of gold to land on the world’s stage. With all the hyperbole he could summon, he described the gold specimen in terms guaranteed to stir up excitement in his well-patronised auction rooms. With an eye to its value as a curiosity rather than its intrinsic worth as gold, he emphasised its pre-eminence among the world’s natural wonders.

On the appointed day a large crowd turned out to get a first-hand view of the latest example of the magnificence of the colony’s wealth. Not all were impressed after finally seeing ‘Peter Brennan’s Lump’71 on the morning of the sale, decrying its supposed quartz free status as perhaps slightly exaggerated. Nonetheless, the auction room was crowded and anticipation building as midday approached. Already Colonial Secretary Deas Thompson, the Chief Justice and several members of the Legislative Council had taken up positions to witness the event. Many of the city’s leading merchants had also made it their business to be on hand, many no doubt with express instructions from prominent clients.
Bidding opened at 700 pounds with a flurry of quick bids promptly taking the price to 1155 pounds. Outlasting the competition, George Lloyd and Mr Thomas Holt junior were the final bidders before the auctioneer’s gavel fell for the last time and Brennan’s Nugget was knocked down in short order to their safe keeping. As with most of the colony’s gold, ‘Brennan’s Lump’ sailed abroad to England. The famous ‘nugget’ was consigned by George Lloyd to the Alert, along with £107,974 worth of gold, which sailed through Sydney Heads into the open ocean on Saturday the 20th of December a fortnight after the gold was auctioned.

**December, 1851 – New goldfield discoveries.**

While excitement over the prospects of matrix gold at the Meroo and Louisa Creek goldfields continued to build with the discovery of specimens weighing 62 ounces and 20 ounces, news of new goldfield discoveries continued to trickle in. Newspaper editors were continually bombarded with correspondence claiming to have news of new gold discoveries - not always borne out by close scrutiny. Throughout the month of December, though, news arrived at the Herald’s offices in Sydney of claims that gold had been found to the south near Albury and in the north at Armidale, and indeed, as far afield as Moreton Bay (near modern day Brisbane) and Wide Bay (in the region of Bundaberg) in the distant north of the colony. The neighbouring colony of Victoria was also making its mark as astonishing figures were returned for the receipt of gold in Melbourne – over 130,000 ounces in one week of December alone.

**December, 1851 – Regulations for the working of quartz veins.**

The importance of quartz veins, and the gold contained therein, to the Meroo and Louisa Creek goldfields had been established from the very beginning with the discovery of Kerr’s Hundredweight and recent news of Peter Brennan’s 27lbs specimen. The government considered their development an important part of the jigsaw of gold mining that confronted them. Showing that it was prepared to respond to protest over the deficiencies of hastily prepared regulations, the government next amended the October regulations in respect of matrix gold with a proclamation issued from the Colonial Secretary’s office on the 25th of November. More flexibility was introduced as to the number of men required to be employed by equating one horse of steam power to seven men. Exclusive rights to water supply would be conceded but only on those occasions when inconvenience would not be wrought upon the broader public. The security required was reduced and uptake of occupation was capable of being extended beyond six months where legitimate grounds could be demonstrated. Regulation (2) provided no such comfort to storekeepers who were expressly reminded that their licences conveyed no right to permanent occupation or
compensation for any improvements they made. Direct reference was made to the consequences of instant licence revocation upon conviction for selling sly grog - already endemic on the goldfields.74

**December, 1851 – Effect of the gold discoveries on the wages of shearers, washers, shepherds and watchmen.**

Even as far as 400 miles from the mania of the goldfields, the inflationary effects of the gold rush on wages on the runs in the west of the colony was claimed to be as much as 30%.75 Certainly on the Beardy Plains of the New England region, near the Hanging Rock Goldfield, wages had risen in response to the competition for labour. Table 1, below, shows the wages reported by a grazier over the eight years up to and including the gold rush. Whilst 1851 saw an improvement in wages for the many labourers required by the industry, it had come on the back of a long period of stagnant wages paid under circumstances favouring the pastoralist.

### Wages on the Sheep Runs of New England 1843 - 1851

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Shearers (per score)</th>
<th>Washer (per day)</th>
<th>Shepherds (per annum)</th>
<th>Watchmen (per annum)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>2s. 3d. (full ration(^1)), 2s. 6d. (dry ration(^2))</td>
<td>3s.</td>
<td>£18</td>
<td>£15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>2s. 3d. (full ration), 2s. 6d. (dry ration)</td>
<td>3s.</td>
<td>£20</td>
<td>£18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>2s. 3d. (full ration), 2s. 6d. (dry ration)</td>
<td>3s. 6d.</td>
<td>£20</td>
<td>£18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>2s. 6d. (full ration), 2s. 9d. (dry ration)</td>
<td>4s.</td>
<td>£30</td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{1}\) weekly, each man, 10 pounds of flour, 10 pounds of meat, ¾ pound of tea and 2 pounds of sugar. 

\(^{2}\) weekly, each man, 10 pounds of flour, 10 pounds of meat.

*Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser* 17/12/1851.

19\(^{th}\) century pastoral consisted of vast runs unclaimed by barbed wire and ring lock fencing. There were no lines of wire bound star posts ranging off into the distance to manage the movements of sheep and cattle. The most that might be found was a timber hurdle construction around an overseer’s hut or nearby to an isolated shepherd’s hut. It was a time when shearing was carried out laboriously using hand shears and hard-won skill and sheep were herded onto well-laid boards
adjacent to waterholes and rivers for washing before being shorn. Consequently, pastoral runs were labour intensive operations requiring shepherds and their companion, the watchman, the seasonal labours of itinerant shearsers, and the hardy washers who wrestled the wet and heavy sheep complete with burr-covered woollen coats into and out of the washing race. A good team of washers could get through a flock of 800 head in a day with the best shearsers relieving as many as 160 sheep of their fleece each day. The sheep needed to be shorn on schedule, and it was a squatter’s worst nightmare to have to compete with the goldfields for the men to do the work.

In the spring of 1851, most sheep runs in the area were reporting an adequate supply of men applying at their stations for work to ensure shearing could proceed unhindered. The early hysteria voiced by squatters and employers across the colony after the discovery of gold in May was proving misplaced. Nonetheless, it was noticeable, they said, that the workers they were getting were of an inferior quality with many shearsers capable of shearing only 60 sheep a day. This had previously been all that flock masters would let them turn out, lest they leave wool on or cut them, but those farther out were more anxious to have the job done. It was the habit of shearsers to be at leisure in the early part of the season, so that they would be available when the calls rang out across the sheep runs, and with the goldfields remaining wet, perhaps more than the usual number were willing to return to their normal trade. There were also warnings of the random nature with which good fortune was being bestowed upon those on the goldfields.

**December, 1851 – The Golden Year.**

The end of 1851 provoked much reflection across the colony. Some 142,975 ounces of gold had been exported to England since May, worth £464,668; however, regulation was scratchy, and even Thompson admitted that he couldn’t properly account for all of it in those early days. Never before had the colony stood on the precipice of such unbridled potential as it now did with the promise of the goldfields being realised daily. Much was made of the new standing of Australia on the world stage because of its auriferous wealth. The longed-for recognition from Mother England was anxiously hoped for as its fawning colony now surely stood ‘as the brightest jewel in Her Majesty’s Crown’. The glittering colony boasted goldfields from its south to north at hitherto unremarked localities such as Braidwood, Ophir, Frederick’s Valley, Tuena, Sofala, Louisa Creek and Meroo. Grudging respect was even paid to the sister colony to the south where Mount Alexander, Bendigo and Ballarat had become household names. The roles of Murchison, Hargaves, Clarke, and sundry anonymous shepherds in unearthing the heavenly treasure and developing a viable industry, were being lauded. Gold digging now stood alongside wool-growing and rendering
hides, hooves and horns for tallow as the staples of an increasingly diverse economy. The prospects looked golden indeed for 1852.

SMH 11/7/1851 ‘Mudgee’ p.3.

ibid.

ibid.


ibid.

ibid.

ibid.


Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer 26/7/1851 ‘Summer-hill Creek, Ophir and Turon Diggings’ p.2.


ibid.

ibid.

ibid.

ibid.

ibid.

Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal 23/7/1851 ‘A Hundred Weight of Gold’ p.2 puts the discovery in early to mid-July, whilst the recollections recorded in Suttor’s ‘Australian Stories Retold, and, Sketches of Country Life’, recorded much later date the find in June of that year.


Lt. Col. Mundy reflecting on comments allegedly made by Gold Commissioner Hardy, in Keesing 1967, p.44.


Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal 19/7/1851, p.2.

ibid.

Mundy, Our Antipodes, 1855, pp. 573-610.

The Maitland Mercury, ‘The Hundred Weight of Gold’, 30/7/1851, p.4.

House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online, Correspondence relative to the recent discovery of gold in Australia, February 3, 1852. Minutes of the Executive Council meetings at the time suggest a lack of confidence in the beleaguered Hardy, who was faced with bringing order to the rapidly emerging goldfields. They also fail to explain the justification for waving the royalty, though the influence of Suttor looms large.

SMH, 5/8/1851, p.4.

Empire 19/8/1851, p.2.

ibid.

SMH 8/8/1851, p.4.

ibid.

SMH, 5/8/1851, p.4.

ibid.


Empire 5/8/1851, p.2.

SMH, 20/8/1851, p.2.


SMH, 20/8/1851, p.2.

ibid.


SMH, ‘Mudgee’, p.5.

McLaughlin, J.K., 2009, ‘Chapter 10: Sir Charles Augustus Fitzroy’ in Clune, D. & Turner, K., 2009, The Governors of New South Wales 1788-2010, p.217. FitzRoy’s cousin, Colonel Mundy wrote upon a visit in 1846 that he thought Bathurst at the time ‘the mere promise of a red-brick rectangular town’, with the Governor remarking that it look[ed] as if it had just been put down to bake on the hot, bare and bright slope which forms its site’.

ibid
SMH, ‘Original Correspondence, 23/8/1851, pp.2-3.

ibid.

SMH, ‘Attractions of New South Wales for Persons in England, 23/8/1851, p.4

SMH, 23/8/1851, pp.2-3.

ibid.


SMH, ‘Original Correspondence’, 26/8/1851, p.3


ibid.


House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online, Correspondence relative to the recent discovery of gold in Australia, February 3, 1852.


House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online, Further correspondence relative to the recent discovery of gold in Australia, February 3, 1852. In response to the instructions Stutchbury filed three reports on the Western Goldfields during October where he was primarily based in the Burrendong district investigating the Bell River and lower Cudgegong River catchments.

Ibid. Stutchbury’s report dated October 18, 1851 suggests he travelled from the vicinity of modern day Hargraves in a north easterly direction toward the Meroo; however, his subsequent description of the landscape places him on the south side of the Meroo and travelling in a north-westerly direction back toward the Macquarie River.


MM, ‘Notice’, 14/2/1852, p.2

The Maitland Mercury, 12/11/1856. Underneath Keppie’s advertisement was another from horseman Thomas Moore cheekily pronouncing ‘Not Gone For Gold!’ obviously aware of what Keppie’s plans were.

Bathurst Free Press, ‘Mining Intelligence’, 6/12/1851, p.4. Bowman’s Clerk is actually listed as T.B. Naylor in this source, with Platt being stationed at Sofala instead.


SMH, ‘Louisa Creek’, 21/12/1851, p.3.

Ibid.


Empire, ‘The Gold Mines’, 1/12/1851, p.3.

SMH, ‘Abstract of Sales by Auction This Day’”, 8/12/1851, p.3.

SMH, ‘Gold Circulars’, 20/12/1851, p.5.


House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online, Correspondence, February 3, 1852.