

THE “MOTHER SHIPTON” CLAIM



“Although the reefs around the Mother Shipton had been discovered as early as 1871 and the Temora Goldfield had been proclaimed in 1880, the main lead of the claim was not discovered until September 1881...

One of the shrewdest men on the field, William Bradford Lucas, had noticed that the Upper Temora alluvial leads fanned out below the Diorite hill. He took up a reefing licence over the area which he kept paid up. Being possessed of an unequalled knowledge of mining law and procedure, he was able to reclaim the ground every time any find was made on it.”¹

“On last Wednesday afternoon (14th Sept. 1881) the town was electrified out of its chronic state of dullness into quite a fever of excitement by the news that some extraordinary rich stone had been struck at Upper Temora and until a late hour in the evening curious spectators gathered round where the specimens had been found and where, in reality, nothing whatever but a shallow drain cut down the slope of Flagstaff Hill to the surface claims was to be seen...”²

“The Goulburn *Herald* reports that intense excitement has been caused by the reported discovery at Upper Temora of an immensely rich reef which it is estimated will go 1,000 ounces to the ton. On proceeding to the spot it was found that Penman and party had taken up an abandoned claim on the road at Upper Temora, alongside Harris’s Hotel, and in a trench at a depth of nine inches had unearthed the grandest stone ever seen in Temora...One piece was crushed and yielded 7½ ounces, and the remaining 30 lbs. weight of stone taken from the leader is nearly all gold...(The reef) is situated only a few yards from the Amelia Company’s boundary...(It) is in a line with Bourke’s mine and parallel with the Amelia...The shareholders ask £1,000 for their interest.”³

“The history of the discovery is characteristic. The ground where the find was made has been held successively by several parties, none of whom could do any good with it. Griffiths and party employed Mr. J.J. Ryan’s boring rods there for a short time and gave the claim up in disgust, and two other parties have since tried there luck there without any marked success. During the recent rain, Penman and Nixon, who are interested in one of the surface claims at the foot of the hill, commenced to cut a drain down the slope in order to catch as much water as possible for their tank, and in the work of doing this came upon a surface specimen which at once arrested their attention. The ground at that time was held by Lucas and party, in a kind of half-hearted manner, and the finders quietly waited until the ground was virtually abandoned and then lodged their application.

The time by which they were entitled to conditional registration elapsed on Wednesday last (14th September) and they then proceeded to break the surface, when the specimens spoken of were found at very little depth below...

A new rush followed to this area...

Lucas, true to form, (promptly) laid claim to the mine and eventually a compromise was reached with him as part owner... The miners were represented (in the Temora Mining Warden's Court) by the Attorney-General, Jack Want... who castigated... Lucas as an inveterate claim-jumper 'waiting like a carrion crow in the sky to swoop down on honest men and take away their livelihood'.

Lucas' title to the mine hung over the heads of everyone who tried to work it. Although it was the richest mine on the field, most of the profits inevitably went into lawsuits and expensive delays.

Others also tried to 'jump it'... The NSW Mining Gazette of 1881 says: '...No sooner was discovery made known, than the ground was 'jumped' by Lucas, whilst it was pegged in by other parties all interested to have a finger in what promised to be so rich a pie... Even the road was not exempt from the action of the more energetic among the peggers...'”²

In the weeks that followed “...after sinking a few feet... the proprietors, now comprising Messrs Lucas and Moore in addition to the discoverers, came upon indications of a well defined leader, containing about as rich stone as anyone need feast his eyes on. Before the evening had set in, about a small hide bucket of the stone had been unearthed and lodged at the ASJ Bank and all through Thursday fresh additions were made to the golden store by the lucky finders.”⁴

“They dollied out 680 ounces, worth £2,400, in eight hours – the greatest find of gold in the state except Hill End. Several more attempts were made to jump the claim and then the alluvial suddenly cut out. Lucas went to live in Sydney and several parties in succession took over the claim...”¹

William Bradford Lucas registered the Surveyed Mining Tenement covering the Mother Shipton claim, (the southern portion of No.1 West Amelia and No.1 South B Amelia, amalgamated quartz claims at Upper Temora) in the names of his children, William George Goodin Lucas, Mabel E. Lucas and Jane Augusta Lucas on 18th Sept. 1884.⁵

“On 2nd March 1885, William G.G. Lucas, on behalf of his sisters and himself entered into an agreement with William Swannell, Benjamin Morgan, William Rivers and James Bushell to work the Mother Shipton claim on 'tribute'. The amount payable to Lucas by Swannell and party was 7% of the proceeds after paying wages and working expenses. The term of the agreement was twelve months with the right to renewal for a similar period if desired; and, in the event of Swannell and party wishing to discontinue working the claim, they were to give Lucas a month's notice of their intention. Some of the Lucas

family had left Temora prior to the agreement being arranged and William G.G. Lucas left immediately afterwards.⁵

Swannell and party subsequently worked the claim for five weeks without success, before Morgan and Rivers withdrew, notifying Lucas on 6th April, that all were giving up the claim. Swannell and Bushell stayed on for another month to prevent it from being jumped, finally abandoning it in early May.

On 28th July, two of the miners from the previous group, James Bushell and Benjamin Morgan, now with new partners, Henry Allen, D. McFedris, George Penman and Henry Ponting, applied for possession of the claim on the grounds that it had been abandoned for more than the month required to establish that condition under section 126 of the Mining Act. The application was conditionally registered on 12th August.⁵

The elder William Lucas did not initially object to the application by the new claimants, but hurried to the Mining Warden's Court in October after the following article appeared in the press under the headline, 'The Rich Patch'.

"The excitement over the rich patch which was alleged to have been found by Allen and party in Lucas' Mother Shipton claim, Upper Temora, has entirely subsided, and matters respecting the claim are going on as usual. Although no rich patch was revealed, the shareholders have discovered what may eventually prove better, and that is a new make of stone penetrating the diorite rock and carrying fine gold as far down as the stone has been taken out. When the claim was worked formerly by Lucas and party the gold was found only in patches in the stone, and many hundreds of tons of stone were raised which contained no gold whatsoever. At a depth of 70ft. a belt of diorite, with an underlay to the west, was met with, and it was found that the stone did not continue through it, but broke off short on the rock. Since the present holders of the ground have been working it, they have found that the stone does continue through the rock; and there is every probability of it widening and carrying better gold as they go down. Strange to say, the gold, instead of being coarse as formerly, is very fine and more evenly distributed through the stone, which is an indication that it will be regular and not patchy."⁶



Lucas's legal action, lodged on 23rd September, to reinstate his children's interest in the claim was based upon the assertions that not all of the parties to the March 1885 'tribute agreement' had signed the letter notifying his son of their intention to withdraw, and that one of the parties, James Bushell, now part of the new consortium, had not, in fact, ceased to work the claim while it was deemed to be 'abandoned'.⁵ Mining Warden, James Baker rejected Lucas's arguments⁷, but the momentous discoveries in the claim

in the week following this legal rebuff, sealed his resolve to appeal the decision before the District Court in December 1885.

“...Just after Penman had acquired his share he went down the shaft to have a look at it. He took hold of the drill and exclaimed that it was ‘in something not earth or rock’. He examined the drill and saw gold on the point. They put in a charge of dynamite and blew out the wonderful Mother Shipton nugget.”¹

“The greatest excitement prevailed amongst the miners and townspeople on Saturday morning (17th Sept 1885) in consequence of the rich find of specimens by Allen and party in Lucas’s Mother Shipton claim at Upper Temora. They were on view at Mr. Dietz’s Royal Exchange Hotel nearly the whole of the day on Saturday, and people came from far and near to see them...”⁸

“...They are three in number, and the gold is almost as plentiful in them as the quartz. But the quantity of gold is not so attractive as the peculiar forms which the gold has assumed. These are very striking, and they include the very rare feature, in specimens of the kind, of gold crystals or octahedrons. The three specimens contained in all 305 oz. of gold, the value of which is £1,233. The largest of the specimens, weighing with the quartz 360oz., contains 258oz. of gold, the second contains 42oz. of gold, and the third piece 11oz.”⁹ “...Side by side with these was to be seen two small bags of clean gold which had been crushed out of the stone by pestle and mortar process, which contained fully 100oz. of gold each. Many of the pieces weighed from 1 to 10 oz. Besides the gold that was on exhibition, it is stated, upon good authority, that the lucky shareholders have in their possession specimens calculated to contain 500 to 600oz. The rich specimens which are described above were purchased by the Warden, Mr. Baker, for the Mines Department...”⁸



George William Penman

As the days passed, Lucas’s grasping legal argument continued to overshadow the extraordinary find. “The splendid specimens recently obtained in Lucas’s Mother Shipton claim, are still the theme of general comment, and great regret is expressed by the general public, that such a valuable property should be continually before the law courts. While a vexatious law suit is pending in connection with the ownership of the claim, speculators are prohibited from spending their money in connection with it, and the public generally suffer in consequence. Reports say that rich specimens have again been found during the present week. The reef is now being worked at a depth of 90ft. from the surface, and the stone is gradually widening as it is sunk upon...”¹⁰

Lucas was ultimately successful in re-establishing his family’s right to share in the proceeds of the claim. However, “The rich leader again cut out, but after much working was rediscovered. From a crushing of 120 tons, two nuggets of 112oz. and 12oz. respectively, were picked out and the rest hardly paid for the cost of crushing.”¹

In April 1886 it was reported that “The celebrated Mother Shipton reef continues to yield gold considered to be payable, but no rich patches have occurred during the past few weeks”.¹¹ In July of that year, *The Argus* (Melbourne) reported, “The Mother Shipton reef, Upper Temora, has been conditionally sold at a good figure. The working shareholders – Messrs. Penman, Bushell, Allen and Morgan – are to receive £8,000 cash and £14,000 scrip, and £14 per week are allowed for the wages and working expenses of the claim for three months without the floating occurs before that term has expired. A lease of 16 acres outside of the Mother Shipton ground has been applied for, so there will be a large area with numerous reefs here and there. I am informed that the claim will be placed in the English market by the Sydney promoters...Another patch of rich stone was obtained on Friday last in the Mother Shipton reef. The last trial crushing from the Mother Shipton gave 15oz, 5dwts, 6gr. Gold from 2 tons of stone”.¹²

On January 14th 1888 it was reported that “Another patch has been struck in the Mother Shipton claim. Specimens containing gold which would yield several hundred ounces per ton were exhibited today. This gold has been found slightly above where the big find was obtained from which the New South Wales Government purchased the big specimen forwarded to England. The reef is patchy, but the patches are good.”¹⁵

In mid 1889, “Messrs. Bell and Henderson report the floating of the Mother Shipton Gold-mining Syndicate at Temora, with a capital of 4,800...There is a large quantity of stone on the ground, which is expected on good authority to yield 4oz. or 5oz. to the ton, and crushing plant will be procured immediately.”¹⁷

The pieces of the Mother Shipton nugget that were purchased, upon discovery, by the NSW Mines Department, were bought “with the object of including them among the exhibits intended to represent the products of New South Wales at the approaching Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London...The specimens purchased at Temora are very remarkable. They surpass in attractiveness anything of the kind yet seen by Mr. C.S. Wilkinson, the Government Geological Surveyor, and are certain to be a very prominent exhibit in the New South Wales collection at the Exhibition...”⁹

For twenty years under the ownership of the NSW Mines Department, the Mother Shipton nugget made numerous appearances at exhibitions across the world, promoting the economic potential of New South Wales and stimulating interest in migration from the United Kingdom. Upon their debut at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886, the smallest of the three pieces of the nugget “was offered to, and graciously accepted by, the Queen”.¹³

In 1887 “The ‘Mother Shipton’ nugget, which is in two pieces, and valued at £1,000, has just been added to the already valuable collection of minerals in the New South Wales court in the eastern annexe” of the Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition.¹⁴

A report on the 1888 Melbourne Exhibition states that the mineral exhibit in the New South Wales court “...is crowned by a magnificent specimen from the Mother Shipton

reef estimated to contain upwards of 258oz. of pure gold, the quartz being literally strung together by thick threads or veins of gold.” This exhibition may have been the first of the many occasions at which the reef gold, “Mother Shipton” nugget, appeared in company with the 313oz. alluvial “Maitland Bar” nugget found at Hargraves, NSW.¹⁶ The two are next reported displayed together in the Mineral Court of the New Zealand Exhibition at Dunedin in November 1889,¹⁸ before travelling to England to feature in the International Mining Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London in August 1890.¹⁹ By November 1891, the two nuggets had returned to Australia to take pride of place in the New South Wales Court at the Tasmanian Exhibition in Launceston.²⁰

The Mother Shipton nugget continued to feature prominently in international exhibitions all over the world - notably at Chicago in 1903¹ – before returning to the Crystal Palace in London early in 1905 to take its place in the latest Colonial and Indian Exhibition.²¹

In September 1905 the “Mother Shipton” and “Maitland Bar” nuggets formed part of a New South Wales Primary Production exhibition at London’s Guild Hall²² and, remaining in London, went on display in the window of a Regent Street jeweller’s shop in June 1906.²³ From there, the nuggets were exhibited in the offices of the Agent-General for New South Wales at 123 Cannon Street, before being placed on display in the window of the Orient Royal Mail Steamship Company in Cockspur Street, near Trafalgar Square, while arrangements were being made to exhibit them in Glasgow and other large centres in the north...²⁴

Only the two pieces of the “Mother Shipton” nugget were on display at this location when, at 1.00am on the morning of Thursday 30th August 1906, after having been on display there for “the past month”²⁵, both were stolen.

“Apart from their intrinsic value, the lumps of gold have been considered among the Colony’s finest advertising assets. Since they were exhibited in Trafalgar Square the emigration returns have shown a decided increase. For the first two weeks in August, thirty one new settlers went out to New South Wales, but for the past fortnight the figures stand at eighty one...

The lights in front of the Orient windows were extinguished at 11pm on Wednesday, and the daring burglary was committed at 1.00am (the following morning). A man ran across the Square to catch the last bus going east, and as he ran he called out that he had heard the smashing of the glass. Policemen rushed to where he pointed, and found a pane of glass broken at the Orient Line offices, and saw the “nuggets” – the special care of the police there – gone. The burglars were favoured in their designs by the fact that next door to the Orient offices is a large hoarding (projecting two-thirds over the pavement²⁶), behind which a building is in process of construction. It is supposed that the men must have hidden themselves at the back of the hoarding, and after the police patrol had passed, sprang out at a given signal from a confederate in the Square. From pieces of twine found sticking to the jagged edges of the broken glass, it is presumed the window was smashed with a brick wrapped in sacking so as to deaden the sound. In this, however, they were not, as has been stated, quite successful, but the window being composed of

foot square panes set in a wooden frame, the noise was not great, otherwise it would have been heard by the police in the Square. Besides serving as a hiding place, the hoarding was further useful to screen the actual burglary, for no-one advancing from Charing Cross could possibly see what was happening in front of the window... In the hope of saving them from the melting pot, the insurance company (the "Ocean Accident and Guarantee Corporation") is offering a reward of £100, but little hope is entertained of their recovery."²⁵



Sources:

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5. The "Cootamundra Herald", Sat. 3rd Oct. 1885
6. The "Cootamundra Herald", Sat. 15th Aug. 1885
7. The "Cootamundra Herald", Sat. 10th Oct. 1885
8. The "Cootamundra Herald", Wed. 21st Oct. 1885
9. The "Sydney Morning Herald" Thurs. 26th Nov. 1885
10. The "Cootamundra Herald", Sat. 24th Oct. 1885
11. "The Queenslander", Sat. 8th May 1886
12. "The Argus" (Melb) Thurs. 29th July 1886
13. The "South Australian Advertiser", Mon. 19th Jul. 1886
14. The "South Australian Advertiser", Wed. 17th Aug. 1887
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16. The "Sydney Morning Herald", Mon. 17th Sept. 1888
17. The "Sydney Morning Herald", Mon. 8th Jul. 1889
18. The "Sydney Morning Herald", Sat. 7th Dec. 1889
19. "The Argus" (Melb) Sat. 30th Aug. 1890
20. "The Argus" (Melb) Sat. 28th Nov. 1891
21. The "Sydney Morning Herald", Sat. 15th Apr. 1905
22. The "Sydney Morning Herald", Wed. 27th Sept. 1905
23. The "Sydney Morning Herald", Thurs. 14th Jun. 1906
24. "The Advertiser" (Adelaide), Tues 2nd Oct. 1906
25. The "Kalgoorlie Western Argus", Tuesday 9th Oct. 1906
26. "The Sydney Morning Herald", Thurs. 11th Oct. 1906