



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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### Bro EDWARD HAMMOND HARGRAVES (1816 - 1891)

Edward Hargraves, born at Gosport in the English County of Hampshire on 7 October 1816, was a man of many parts. 1.

The son of Lieutenant John Edward Hargraves and his wife Elizabeth, he was educated at Brighton Grammar School and Lewes but he left school at age 14 and went to sea.

He arrived in Sydney on 1832 and, for a time, he worked on a property at Bathurst. He then returned to the sea where he gathered Beche-de-mer and tortoise shell in the Torres Strait. 2.

In 1834, he returned to Sydney and, moving to the south coast, he acquired 100 acres near Wollongong.

In 1836, Hargraves married Elizabeth Mackay in Sydney and, three years later, they moved to East Gosford where he became an agent for the General Steam Navigation Company and, using his wife's dowry, purchased land and built the Fox under the Hill Hotel.

His venture as a publican did not last long and, in 1843, after just seven years of marriage, Hargraves forfeited his property and left his wife so that he could manage a store and take up land on the Manning River.

Ever the opportunist, Hargraves sold out and, on 17 July, 1849, he sailed for the Californian goldfields. 3.

He met with modest success and, when he returned to Sydney in January 1851, he found that the New South Wales Government had offered a substantial reward for the discovery of a payable quantity of gold.

Hargraves decided to make his fortune, not by digging for gold but by claiming the reward. He remembered his earlier years at Bathurst and decided that the central west of New South Wales, which he thought looked like California, would be the place to start.

On his way to the Wellington district he saw promising specimens at Guyong.

He began prospecting with John Lister in the Bathurst-Orange region and, on 12 February, 1851, they washed the first pan of gold-bearing gravel at the junction of Summer Hill and Lewis Ponds Creeks. The five specks of gold in the pan looked promising but it was not a payable quantity. Hargraves continued searching the area with only slight success.

His ambition depended on finding payable quantities so he enlisted John Lister and the brothers William, James and Henry Tom to continue to search the area. He taught them the Californian panning techniques and how to build and operate a wooden cradle.

Hargraves then returned to Sydney and, in March 1851, interviewed the Colonial Secretary, E Deas Thomson. The following month at the site of Hargraves' first find, Lister with William and James Tom discovered the first gold in Australia in a payable quantity.

They immediately notified Hargraves and on 6 May 1851, Lister and the Tom brothers supplied Hargraves with their find of some 120 grams of gold which he delivered to the Colonial Secretary.

Hargraves was wary about disclosing the location of the find but, after ensuring his reward he did so and named the area Ophir, the Biblical name for the area where King Solomon sourced his gold and precious stones (1 Kings 10:11)

On 14 May, a government proclamation announced the discovery and Hargraves who ignored pleas from Lister and the Toms for secrecy, announced the location of the find in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Australia's first gold rush began and within days of the announcement, 300 diggers were at Ophir.

In June 1851, the New South Wales Government paid him £500 and, in October, 1853, he received a further £10,000.

He was presented with valuable cups and other mementos and he received many testimonials and was feted by the society figures of the day.

In 1851, Hargraves was appointed a Commissioner of Crown Lands for the gold district and a Justice of the Peace.

During 1853-54, Edward Hargraves visited England, met Queen Victoria and lived in style. In 1855, he published *Australia and its Gold Fields* although it is believed that he used a ghost writer.

He returned to New South Wales, having spent some £3,000 of his fortune and proceeded, with a builder he brought from England, to erect a mansion at Norah Head on the central coast of New South Wales. The house was built entirely of cedar and he entertained lavishly until, inevitably, by the early 1860's he was almost penniless.

In 1854, he received £2,381.6s.1d of a £5,000 reward which had been offered by the Government of Victoria. He then unsuccessfully petitioned the government for the balance and, in 1861, he sought assistance from Bro James S Butters who persuaded a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly to put forward a motion in the parliament for payment of the balance.

The motion was lost and Hargraves went to Melbourne and, in correspondence published in the *Age* charged politicians with corruption. A subsequent inquiry by a Select Committee found none of his charges proven and Hargraves then turned on Bro Butters who, as a brother mason, had paid his hotel bills but had cast doubts on Hargraves' honesty.

Invited by Governments, Hargraves prospected in Western Australia in 1862 and South Australia in 1863 but he found no gold.

Meanwhile, back in New South Wales, controversy raged when Lister and the Tom brothers realised that they had been used by Hargraves to his own advantage.

In 1853, a Legislative Council Select Committee upheld Hargraves' key role but granted £1,000 to the men whom Hargraves had taught.

The exaggerations in Hargraves' book did little to help matters and the Toms and Lister continued in their struggle with the New South Wales Parliament for due recognition. They lodged petitions and wrote to the press until, in 1890, a Legislative Assembly Select Committee found that, although Hargraves had taught them how to use the dish and cradle, 'Messrs Tom and Lister were undoubtedly the first discoverers of gold obtained in Australia in payable quantity'.

Hargraves didn't give up and the disputation continued for many years.

The issue of *The Australian Freemason* for October 1875 stated:

The Committee of the Parliament of New South Wales have granted to Bro. E. H. Hargraves a gratuity of £250 a year. It must, however, be kept in mind that our brother is the great Pioneer and Benefactor of this colony and Victoria: and yet, Victoria, with all its "lordly ideas" of superiority, has almost done nothing for our brother.

Hargraves continued to be dogged by controversy and *The Australian Freemason* in September 1876 again gave editorial support for the claim against the Government of Victoria.

#### THE CLAIM OF BRO E H HARGRAVE UPON THE GOVERNMENT OF VICTORIA

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If hope deferred makes the heart sick, then must the heart of Bro Hargrave be sick nearly unto death, by the delay of the powers that be in Victoria, to pay over to him the balance of the amount awarded by them to him for the Gold Discovery of 1851. This is not a political matter. If it were, we should not deal with it in this publication. It is simply a matter of pure justice, and therefore we deem it our Masonic duty to aid its furtherance, as far as lies in our power. Without going into details as to the grounds on which Bro Hargrave's claims are founded, it will be sufficient to state the fact, that in 1855, a Committee of the Legislature of Victoria appointed to consider the claims of the discoverers of gold-fields, recommended that the sum of £5,000 should be paid to Mr Hargrave for his services. This was just half of what had been previously recommended as his reward, - the other moiety being equally divided among five other claimants, for their services in extending and developing the original discovery. In that year, owing to a depression in the finances of the sister Colony, somewhat less than half the amounts so awarded were paid to the respective claimants. But in 1861, the balances of each were paid with the sole exception of Mr Hargrave's, to whom, therefore, according to the original appointment there is still due a sum of over £2,500. In point of fact, it is £2,619; but surely he is also entitled to legal interest on that sum from the time when the other balances were paid. If he is entitled to the principal, and that is so clear that it cannot reasonably be disputed, simple fairness and equity would add the interest. He has made many applications to the Parliament of Victoria for a settlement, but hitherto without success. His claim has never been repudiated, but somehow the precedence of local measures, counts out, dissolutions, and other disappointing incidents of Parliamentary proceedings, have occasioned the postponement of the question from year to year. It is really a great pity that Bro Hargrave should be so treated. It is unquestionably to him, under the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, that

these Colonies principally owe their greatness and prosperity. He has been at great expense in prosecuting his claim during the last twenty years, and it is high time it was settled at last. Most men would long ago have given it up in disgust and despair, but Bro Hargraves is *tenacissimus prepositus*, and of indefatigable perseverance in whatever he undertakes. We learn that he has again renewed his application. We wish him all success, and we trust that our Masonic brethren in Victoria will do their best to assist him in the accomplishment of an object which is not merely just to Bro Hargraves, but will be highly honorable to themselves and their country.

The rights and wrongs of the case aside, there was many an Australian school child taught that Edward Hargraves was the discoverer of gold in Australia.

The Australian Post Office also thought so. In a booklet *Australian Commemorative and Airmail Stamps 1927 to 1961*, the description of the stamp released on 2 July 1951 bearing the portrait of Hargraves which was reproduced from the frontispiece of his book, there is the description:

### Centenary of Discovery of Gold, 1951



The suggestion that a stamp be issued in 1951 to commemorate the centenary of the discovery of gold originated with the Government of Victoria. The Post Office accepted the proposal, particularly because there had been many earlier suggestions that there should be special stamps commemorative of gold discoveries in various parts of Australia. It was considered more appropriate to provide one stamp significant of gold discovery generally.

While gold had been reported in various parts of Australia in the early years of the 19th century, its first discovery in payable quantities is credited to Edward Hammond Hargraves.

Hargraves died in Sydney on 29 October 1891. He was survived by two sons and three daughters.

Bro Edward Hammond Hargraves was made a mason in Sydney in the Leinster Marine Lodge of Australia No 266, Irish Constitution (now No 2 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory) on 21 April 1853. He was passed a Fellowcraft on the same evening and raised a Master Mason on 9 May 1853. On 17 December 1853, he was invested as Senior Warden.

Bro Hargraves was exalted in the Royal Arch Degree in the Leinster Marine Royal Arch Chapter No 266, Irish Constitution meeting in Sydney in 1853.

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3. *Concise Encyclopedia of Australia and New Zealand*, Bay Books Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1977