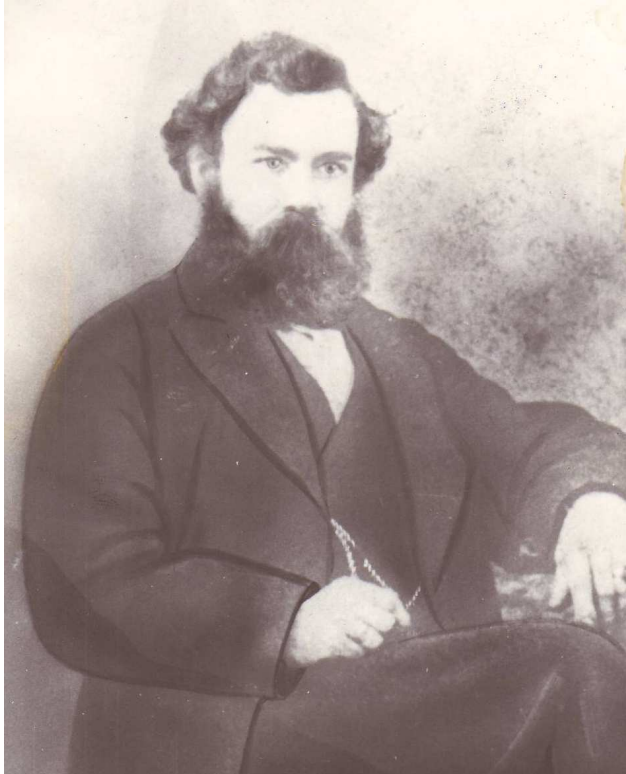


Discovery of Gold

James Nash



Scaring rooks away from the bean field in his native England was the first job of James Nash, founder of Gympie. He was then 9 years of age and quite proud that he was selected for the job with 6 other boys, while they were playing marbles.



James Nash was born in the village of Beanacre in Wiltshire on September 5, 1834. At the age of 23, left for New South Wales in the Herefordshire (Captain Champion) and landed in Sydney on May 25, 1858. He obtained employment as a labourer on the North Shore and after 6 months, went to the Turon goldfields, remaining there for three years. He then walked 600 miles to Taloon but found there were no rations at this place and he returned to McLeod's Creek. Here he did some sluicing and made a fair amount of money.

About December 1861, Nash went to Sydney and the rush having started at the Snowy River, he set out to walk to Kiandra. After about five months on the field he left, walking to Mooramboola, Twofold Bay, he took the steamer for Sydney.

At Baramba Creek

Nash went to Brisbane about 1864 and was engaged in the construction of a bridge across Baramba Creek on the Mondure Run. He remained there for 8 months and then went to Gladstone and did some digging. Next he went to Nanango and later decided to return to Gladstone. He began his journey with only his dish, pick and dog. He walked via Mount Stanley to Yabba, after getting colours in several places, diverted to Brisbane via Imbil to buy a horse and rations.

Nash then returned to Yabba Creek and tried for gold in several places but obtained only a colour. He left for Imbil, camped there for a night and the next morning went to Denman's camp. Denman (a timber-getter and former Victorian miner) told him that the Six Mile Creek would be a likely place for gold. Next day Nash had reached the creek but not liking the look of the place, did not try it or any other place until picking his way down the slope, which is now known as Caledonian Hill.

Got Specks Of Gold

He tried a dish of dirt in the gully and got specks in it that half-day and the next day he got an ounce and 3dwt. On the second day he broke his pick and could do no more digging so he went to Maryborough, where he endeavoured to sell his gold at 2 banks and several stores but without success. As a last resort, he tried Mr Southerden a second time and the latter allowed him 3 pounds for his gold (1 pound cash and the balance in tools and rations).

Nash went back to try the place again and started digging in the same spot, washing the dirt at the back of what was formally the Tattersall's Hotel. However, the water became too dirty and he went up the creek where gas works stood in Mellor Street. While washing his first dish there, he picked up gold in small pieces.

Left For Maryborough

Nash got 75 ounces in the next 6 days and left again for Maryborough, where he took the first steamer to Brisbane. On board, he met a young man called Malcolm and they stayed together at a hotel in Brisbane. Nash told Malcolm that he would be going into the bush around Maryborough and if he wished, he could accompany him and it would cost him nothing. He then went to Flavelle Brothers and sold the 75 ounces of gold for 200 pounds.

Nash bought a horse and dray. He had a cradle made at the old Pimlico Shop. He took the steamer to Maryborough, Malcolm accompanying him. They took about 9 days getting back to his camp, having to unload several times in order to cross creeks. He started work again and waited nearly a fortnight for his brother John for whom he had left directions at the Sydney Hotel. Nash decided not to wait any longer for his brother but to report the find, so he started at sundown from the camp and reached Tiaro at daylight, missing his brother on the way.

Reported Discovery

However, as soon as he reached Maryborough, he discovered that his brother had gone to Gympie and accordingly he reported at once to Mr Sheridan, P.M., who despatched Sgt. Ware to peg out the claim. Accompanying the Sergeant were Maurice and W. Walsh, Charles Brown, W. Leishman and J. Cartwright.

A few days after the report, nearly all the people had left Maryborough for the new rush. Mr Davidson (later Surveyor-General), who was land commissioner in Maryborough at the time, put the compass on Nash's claim and cut off a claim and a half at the bottom. His brother, John, had an adjoining claim. Nash took his brother into partnership and in 12 months they made about 7000 pounds out of Nash's Gully.

Previous to the find, the Government had offered a reward of 3000 pounds for the discovery of a payable goldfield within 90 miles from Brisbane. Nash claimed the reward but as the Government contended that Gympie was more than 90 miles from Brisbane, he was not entitled to that amount but at the expiration of a year, he was awarded 1000 pounds.

The young man, Malcolm, whom Nash took with him to Gympie, made 1500 pounds out of his claim and returned to Scotland, his native country.

Lost All His Money

Nash was not destined to enjoy the fruits of his labours for any lengthy period. A portion of the share of gold won from the prospecting lease and the 1000 pounds awarded to him by the Government was invested in mining stock that depreciated in value. He was also induced to open a drapery shop and in this, lost all the money that he had made. As a sort of consolation for his misfortunes, the Government in 1888 appointed him keeper of the powder magazine at Gympie at a salary of 100 pounds a year.

Nash had a family of 3 children, a girl and 2 boys. He was a quiet, unobtrusive man but fond of relating incidents from his early mining career, especially those immediately preceding and after the discovery of Gympie.

He died on October 5, 1913 at the age of 77 years and was buried in the Gympie Cemetery. One of his sons, Major A. Nash, was killed at Gallipoli.

Geology Of The Goldfield

When he reached for his pick to dig for gold for the first time, the average miner had little or no knowledge of what lay below him, but he knew that alluvial gold was the outcropping of a reef and his task was to find the source of the auriferous stone.

In a brief geological note on the Gympie goldfields, the then Government Geologist, Mr B. Dunstan, wrote: “ The rocks in and around Gympie consist of permo-carboniferous slates, shales, sandstones, lime stones, conglomerates and tuffs, with inter-bedded and intrusive volcanic rocks.

Three defined slate beds are known as the first, second and third series respectively. Between the first and second there is a ‘greywackle’ series, between the second and third ‘greenstone’, below the third ‘diabase’ and below this, an unconformable series of altered shales, sandstones, conglomerates, etc. On the first bed there rests a ‘conglomerate’ series with ‘plumbago’ bands and above this, in ascending order, lime stones and shales.

Gold-bearing reefs traverse the country but as a rule, are productive only where they are in contact with slate carrying graphite or anthracite. Marine fossils occur in most of the strata.”

Another Government Geologist, Mr W. H. Rands, in a report on the field in 1889, referred to the use of sandstone (which overlaid the Gympie beds in various places) for building purposes. He wrote: “A large ‘outlier’ of this sandstone can be traced from Eel Creek, crossing the Mary near the Fisherman’s Bend, where it forms high banks to the river. It has been used in several of the principal buildings of the town. The foundations of the Court House are of it; the new Roman Catholic Church is built entirely of it; and the stone used for capping the piers of the bridges on the Howard and Bundaberg railway was taken from this quarry. Outliers of this stone also occur a few miles north of Gympie near the Maryborough and Gympie railway line.”

Extracts are from ‘A Golden Past – A Golden Future’ published in 1967 for the Gympie Centenary celebrations.