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Gundaroo Goldfields

Including Bywong

The Gundaroo goldfields are scattered over a wide area to the north of Canberra, the age of the sites ranging from 1860 to 1910 and beyond. For example, the diggings at Brook's Creek were some of the earliest in the district and were closely associated with early settlement in the region. The main area of interest is at and around Bywong, which was worked primarily in the period of 1895 to 1910 and was the only settlement with any reasonable degree of permanency. Notwithstanding this, Bywong and almost all other diggings in the area were examples of subsistence mining, with very few miners and their families rising above this level. **All sites are on private property.**

Site Descriptions

Brooks Creek

There are several areas of interest at Brook's Creek, spread over a wide area. They include both alluvial diggings and reef mines. The main area of alluvial workings was at Golden Point on Brook's Creek. There is a water race, two hut sites and a stone lined well in the vicinity. An area of reef mining is located at Camby Hill, where there are a number of costains and one deep, well timbered shaft. As least one other area of reef mining is located on a spur overlooking the creek. The main area of reef mining was at Diamond Hill. This area is located off Brook's Creek road and includes several very deep shafts, but no other relics. The battery site for these operations has not been located. The school site is located east of Brook's Creek road.

Dairy Creek

The Dairy Creek complex is located about three kilometres north west of the Brook's Creek diggings, near the creek of the same name. It is characterised by two long costains running in a northerly direction towards Dairy Creek and the remains of several deep shafts. Several miners' hut sites have been identified. North of Dairy Creek there are further areas of shallow diggings and on the east side the remains of two further huts. While this site was not occupied by miners, there are some located some distance to the east of the mines on Dairy Creek. It consists of a large stone embankment and a cutting into a hill. There are no machinery remains on site.

Mac's Reef Area – Newington, Brady's Tunnel, Deadman's Creek and the Hit or Miss

Of Newington, almost nothing is left. The town lay astride the main Bungendore road, now Mac's Reef road, and a good part of it has long since disappeared. From local advice it is clear that, notwithstanding

road development, there were as many as 20 to 30 hut sites still remaining south of Mac's Reef road. However, in recent years hobby farm development and the ubiquitous bulldozer have led to the destruction of almost all hut sites. The only remains are the stone foundations of two buildings. It is interesting to note that these foundations are substantial and confirm the seriousness with which the gold find at Mac's Reef was addressed in 1865 and 1866. There are mine shafts and diggings in the area, but most have long since collapsed.

Brady's Tunnel is located to the north of Mac's Reef road. The tunnel extends for over 100m into a hill bordered by a precipitous gully. There is a very large ore dump at the mouth of the tunnel. Further up the gully is another dump and mine, and the remains of several hut sites; in one instance the wall remains are reasonably significant. Leaving the gully in a northerly direction there are a number of other mine sites and possible tent sites. There were several batteries located in the area between Mac's Reef and the Yass River crossing, but little evidence of these now remains.

The Deadman's Creek area is located near the old Federal Highway, a short distance from Mac's Reef road. The site of Cartwright's house is located near a small eroded area and his tunnel is located a short distance down Duck's Creek. About 100m either side of the tunnel are two areas of costains. The remains of a forge and several possible camp sites are located in the vicinity. The southern most diggings are the most extensive. Here there are several deep shafts and a small gully has been either dammed or prospected for alluvial, probably both.

The Hit or Miss area is at the southern end of Denley Drive some distance from Mac's Reef. It consists of a deep mine shaft close to which are the remains of a two roomed stone building. On the opposite side of the road is another building comprised of brick, stone and pise, with parts of the walls still standing. The remains are of significance for they are far more substantial than most other structures on the Gundaroo goldfields. Norm Moore has stated that the mine was owned by the Shepherd family before they commenced operations in Bywong. Other local informants have stated that the mine was highly profitable and that one of the buildings was a hotel and the other a miner's residence.¹

Johnston's Battery Site

This is located to the north of Bywong, some distance from the village. The main features are the large boiler and a flat area where the battery (a Huntington mill) and engine were located. The dam further down the hill was built at the same time as the battery. Johnston's was one of the richest mines in the area; the shafts, now filled in, were further up the hill. The boiler is the largest single relic from the 1890 period left in the area.

Bywong

¹ Errol Lea-Scarlett, *Gundaroo*, Roebuck Society Publication No 10, Canberra, 1972, p 90

This site has been redeveloped as a tourist attraction by the Moore family, and is located off Millyn road, south of the Gundaroo to Bungendore road. It is signposted. Fortunately, the owners of the property have sought successfully to preserve the sites remaining from the earlier 1890 period of activity. There have been a number of reconstructions such as the horse drawn whim, and the miner's humpies of calico and iron, but the character of the site has been faithfully kept.

The miner's humpies may appear anaesthetic, but they closely approximate the living conditions at almost all goldfields in the first few months of activity. In Bywong's case, although more substantial buildings were built, they were few in number and relatively small. In common with many other fields in the Monaro Southern Tablelands area, Bywong was a subsistence mining field. Living conditions and the environment were harsh; and even today it presents a forbidding aspect. A sense of community developed quickly in Bywong, although it was relatively short lived and not much in evidence after the early years.

A village was surveyed at Bywong in 1895, and although lots were allocated and streets named, few sites were taken up, as the ground was too low lying and flood prone. It is in this area that the present owners have build most of the tents, humpies and huts. In this area are located Harrison's pise but, protected by a shelter shed, and the stone lined Government well. The small dam to the west is a later addition. According to Norm Moore, when he first saw Bywong in 1957 the bark roof was still on Harrison's pise hut and a number of site blocks near the well showed signs of habitation. There were shreds of canvas hanging from tree trunks that had been "squared off".

West of the small dam, there are three building sites on a low raise mound. Directly opposite are mine shafts and the poppet head for the Prospector's shaft. The Prospector's was one of the early mines at Bywong. It was worked again by Norm Moore in the 1960's. Close by there are three other sites, one of which was Hyles' store/post office. One of these sites has part of its iron chimney and the concrete slab floor remaining. This latter site dates from the 1950's and was owned by Bill Hodson. This area was part of the old town centre.

Walking through the compound, Lowe and Alchin's mine and the open cut are clearly visible. The Government aid shaft (with a reconstructed horse whim) is to the east of the open cut. Further east is a hand battery, and Shepherd's battery and dam dating from 1942. The hand battery was worked by one of the Shepherd boys at the turn of the century, often while reading a book. The pise hut remains were the hope of the Shepherd children in the early 1900's. Arthur Shepherd's house, restored by Norm Moore, is nearby. The house was originally built in 1942 at the time of the discovery of the Long Corner mine which was worked by Arthur and James Keir. Further down the track there are a large number of shafts, some of which have been recollared in recent years.

History

Background

The first significant interest in mining in this area was generated by the Rev W B Clarke, the Government Geological Surveyor, who visited the area in 1852. In his book published in 1860, *Researches in the Southern Goldfields of New South Wales*, he identified a number of possible gold bearing areas, including Brindabella on the Goodradigbee River, Bywong, Brook's Creek, Gundaroo Creek and the Yass River. He stated that "gold in profitable quantities will hereafter be found in some part of the district of which Bywong Hill is the centre".²

The Rev Clarke was correct to a point. Gold was found in payable quantities, but most of the mines were short lived, and in most instances were not particularly remunerative. In common with all other goldfields in this report, the mines certainly did not match the size and yields of other more well known mining areas in Australia. The fields were poor in quality of life and in gold yields, with few miners in the area rising much above subsistence living. It is this poverty, however, which is in part the main aspect of interest.

Brook's Creek

Alluvial gold was found at Brook's Creek in May 1861. There was a small rush to the site and within a few months there were between 50 and 70 prospectors on the field. A report in July 1861 referred to slab buildings going up and the presence of families, there being eleven tents and one slab building with a calico roof, serving as a store. Progress was, however, hampered by the winter cold and inadequate and inefficient equipment. A separate report in July stated that there were 80 on the field and 21 tents or buildings. Masters and party were getting about six ounces a week. Later that month it was reported that there were about 200 on the field, but with many departures, and while some still had faith there was little evidence justifying such a hope.³

By January 1861 it was reported that the parties at work in the main creek were the only ones doing anything; the hill diggings were doing very little and would do still less until they had a fall of rain. Many of the diggers had gone into Gundaroo to assist in reaping for a few weeks as many of the farmers were short of hands and their crops were very heavy. In February it was stated that the mining was still quiet, although all hands were "...quite sanguine as regards the ultimate paying character of Brook's Creek." Owing to the scarcity of water, however, washing operations were at a standstill. The correspondent stated that sooner or later Brook's Creek would turn out a good goldfield, but that as yet he could not endorse the "...flattering account which some puffer has furnished to your contemporary, the *Braidwood Observer*, - the day will come, though, when I or someone else will be able to do so."⁴

There was a short lived but substantial Chinese presence on the field. There were 80 on the field in early February 1862, and it was reported that a publican at Gundaroo had given them a start by way of a supply of rice. Later that month it was reported that

² Rev W B Clarke, *Researches in the Southern Goldfields of New South Wales*, Reading and Wellbank, Sydney 1860, p 238

³ *Golden Age*, 4 July 1861; *Yass Courier*, 10 and 27 July 1861; Lea-Scarlett, *op cit*, p 81

⁴ *Golden Age*, 23 January 1862 and 1 February 1862

“Our Chinese population already reaches about 150, and they are still increasing. They had erected a joss house and made for themselves a god, the latter is rather a clumsy piece of workmanship, cut out of a tree. I may be wrong, but I think that our government should not allow heathen temples to be erected in a land calling itself Christian...John (John chinaman) appears to make that (Sunday) his market day. The last Sunday I was at Gundaroo it was like a fair day. It is a pity something can't be done to prevent such desecration of the Sabbath in the bush.”⁵

By the end of February the greater portion of the population of the field was Chinese, and a further forty arrive the following month. In April, however, the Chinese left the diggings en masse, not because of poor mining results, but because of the actions of their boss, Jo Sang Qua, who had a monopoly of their business and had supplied them with inferior goods, paying for their gold with damaged rations and his own cheques. He was left alone at the diggings, a “monument of avarice rewarded.”⁶

In April 1863 there were reports of a rush of diggers from Lambing Flat. However, a report in June suggested that the field was by then in decline, the writer stating that, “...everyone you meet has such a tale of woe.” The field continued to be worked for some time, however. For example, a report in the *Yass Courier* in November 1863 stated that the population was increasing rapidly, and among the recent arrivals were several old miners from Araluen and Major's Creek. The ground opened extended for a considerable distance with the “calico town” giving place to substantial bark and slab buildings. Several stores were scattered over the diggings and a branch of the Gundaroo post office had been opened. More than one party had been getting between £5 and £6 per man per week for some time past. In September 1864 a petition was forwarded by the diggers for a sum of £10 to be provided by the Government to help with the development of Brook's Creek. A deputation was sent to Sydney with the petition, returning successfully with the money. In May 1865 there was a report of rich finds in the main creek, and in December 1868 there was a report of a large diamond find by a miner who up until then had barely earned enough to support himself and his family.⁷

Brook's Creek again became prominent in 1878 when quartz was found in an area known as Diamond Hill. The gold veins were described officially as “...uncertain, both as regards to continuance and size.” They were not difficult to work, however, and the yields were high, ranging from between three to six ounces a ton. The richest reef at Diamond Hill was Dawson's “Hidden Treasure”. Expensive mining machinery was installed in 1879 by the Suburban Gold and Diamond Company, which also sought to locate gold at Mac's Reef. In January 1880 further machinery for the reef passed through Gundaroo, with more to come, it being some time before crushing could commence. Brook's Creek was described as a “...home for several poor med, who put in the winter months fossicking about and go reaping and shearing during the season.”

⁵ *Ibid*, 11 February 1862

⁶ *Ibid*, 27 February, 22 March and 5 April 1862

⁷ *Ibid*, 30 April 1863; *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, 17 June 1863; *Yass Courier*, 25 November 1863 and 4 December 1868; *Queanbeyan Age*, 15 and 22 September 1864 and 25 May 1865

Notwithstanding this it was estimated that 130 oz had been won from the creek over the past year. By 1881 the venture had collapsed.⁸

Alluvial mining continued throughout this period, but increasingly it was a small time fossicker's field. For example, in 1879 the officially recorded yields at Brook's Creek were 37 oz from quartz and 86 oz from alluvial, and in 1881 135 oz from alluvial, shared between eight men. By the end of that year there were only four men left on the field. In 1883 it was reported that a reservoir had been built on Brook's Creek, and a race constructed from there to the old workings. The operations were suspended, however, due either to lack of water or capital. Thereafter, fossicking continued on a small scale. In 1894 there were 30 men fossicking in the area and in 1895 there were 20 men left. In 1896 it was reported that the "...few men fossicking on Brook's Creek managed to make a little more than a living at the work." By 1897 the yield was down to 48 oz.⁹

A school was established at Brook's Creek in January 1884, after a number of representations from locals, although some parents seemed to be perfectly indifferent to the matter. One of the most interesting accounts of life at Brook's Creek was by Elizabeth Gunter, who took up residence as the local schoolteacher from 1890-1895. She stated that she was

"...appalled by the sight of a cluster of bark roofs where I was kindly greeted and offered tea.....I was told that a teacher had been sent to Brook's Creek, had arrived on a Saturday and having seen the school building and lodgings offered her, she refused to accept the appointment and left on Monday. This was discouraging to my sinking spirits, and when I saw the school building I felt inclined to follow the young lady's example."

Fortunately for Brook's Creek she stayed on, and the dilapidated school building was soon replaced with a new weather-board building. Elizabeth described life at Brook's Creek as monotonous; only one child was born there during her five year stay. Some of the holdings produced wheat, and the women bred turkeys which feasted on the briars in the creek. Of the gold mining, she stated that "...none of the diggers at Brook's Creek ever struck a nugget or ever appeared to rise above bitter poverty." On her holiday visits to Sydney, she was entrusted the task of carrying the gold, packed in a tin and wrapped in heavy brown paper. She had carried as much as £100, the equivalent of almost half a years wages.¹⁰

Mac's Reef and Newington

⁸ Lea Scarlett, *op cit*, p 82; *Yass Courier*, 16 January 1880; New South Wales Department of Mines, *Annual Report*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1878, pp 82-83

⁸ Lea Scarlett, *op cit*, p 82; *Yass Courier*, 16 January 1880; New South Wales Department of Mines, *Annual Report*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1878, pp 82-83

⁹ *ibid*, 1883, p 87; 1894, p 27; 1895, p 24; 1896 p 31; 1897 p 39

¹⁰ Elizabeth Gunter, "Recollections of Bungendore 1890-1895", *Bungendore Mirror*, 17 June 1977; Correspondence and internal memos, 25 April 1882, 24 April and 9 October 1883 and 24 January 1884, *NSW Department of Education Records*, NSW Archives

The 1865 rush to Mac's Reef or Woodbury, as it was called in the first days, was one of the most fervent in the district. The subsequent sudden collapse of this venture coloured local views on mining for many years afterwards and may in some part explain the relative lack of enthusiasm for the Diamond Hill, Mac's Reef and Bywong ventures some years later.

The first reports appeared in November 1865 and spoke of a rapid influx of population from all parts of the district and more distant parts, numbering 130 to 150 in a short space of time. Little in the way of mining was, however, occurring, and squabbles and rows over claims were the order of the day. The early finds were very rich and claims were taken up for a couple of miles in the direction of the reef. However, the correspondent for the *Queanbeyan Age* cautioned against rushing to the "El Dorado of Queanbeyan".¹¹

A week later, samples of gold displayed by a Mr John Cartwright, a local landowner and part shareholder of the Prospector's claim, caused an additional exodus to the reef. The main claim was the Prospector's, which was owned by John McEnally and Cartwright. McEnally was a local free selector, who discovered gold while working for Cartwright. There were numbers of slab and bark huts at the reef and a population of about 300, being hourly augmented. There was a township of "...all sorts of impromptu dwellings", some, including Mr Margules' and Mr Veitch's stores, assuming the "...respectable state of slab and bark buildings". Sparrow was building a public house and Devlin a butcher's shop. Water was in short supply and was sold at sixpence a bucket. The Prospector's claim was the only one in active operation. Most miners were awaiting the Gold Commissioner's arrival before working their claims.¹²

Gold fever was certainly the order of the day. A Mr North struck a vein of quartz so resplendent with gold that it was described as equivalent to a display in a jeweller's shop. A person near the top of the shaft was so excited that he nearly fainted, and Mr North went into an uncontrollable state of trembling for several hours. Not long after, the first debate began as to what the field should be called, with the popular clamour for it to be named Mac's Reef in honour of its discoverer. The first church service had been held on the field and on the main street, Griffin Street, especially in front of Margules' hotel, the area had the appearance of a fair, with vehicles, horsemen, police and groups of men everywhere. A twice weekly coach service between the field and Queanbeyan had been commenced.¹³

There were varying reports on the field. In December 1865 it was stated that there were between 300 and 400 on the field, but with "...scarcely and exception they were of the indigent class". There were plenty of shanties and a public house, but "...it was a rare thing to see inebriates about the place". This was taken as an indication that the diggings were of questionable value. A later report that month described the place as "lively enough", with new buildings in the course of erection.¹⁴

The absence of a crushing plant on the field meant that details on yields were slow coming, but the first crushing of stone from the Prospector's at over two ounces a ton was encouraging enough. In March 1866 a deputation led by John Cartwright visited Messrs Davies and Alexander of Goulburn to propose the

¹¹ *Queanbeyan Age*, 2 November 1865

¹² *ibid*, 9 November 1865; *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, 11 November 1865

¹³ *ibid*, 11 November 1865; *Queanbeyan Age*, 16 November 1865

¹⁴ *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, 9 and 27 December 1865

erection of a crushing plant. The field continued to grow and in April 1866 the well known Beehive store at Michelago was relocated to the town. By May a second hotel was in the course of erection and a third was in the pipeline. A crushing machine was on site by May and a second one was proposed. The opening of the plant was a big occasion, with over 200 attending from all over the district. A postal service was established the same month and in June there was a coach connection with Gundaroo. By then the town was known as Newington.¹⁵

By early August the reports were not encouraging. Of 17 claims, only two were being worked. Only four claims had ever struck gold, and with the exception of the Prospector's, the yields were not overwhelming. In addition, there had been complaints concerning crushing charges, causing these to be subsequently lowered.¹⁶

The end of Mac's Reef and Newington was sudden and bloody. On 17 August 1866 Charles Loftus and Denis Keeffe were working the Mac's Reef mine. There had been a near fatal accident on the morning of 17 August due to carelessness in the use of explosives. Keeffe had been in close proximity to that explosion and had been shaken by the incident. He and Loftus were engaged later that day in setting an explosive charge prior to returning to his family on his farm, when an explosion occurred. Two men at the top of the mine lowered a rope. When the rope was raised a slipper contained a handful of blood and grit was found attached. The slipper had been placed there by Loftus who was still alive, but severely wounded, and scorched and blackened by the explosion. Keeffe had been killed instantly, and Loftus lingered on in pain until the next morning, when he died. At a court of inquiry a jury returned a verdict of accidental death from an explosion cause by the improper use of iron taming bars. When struck suddenly against quartz of hard rock the iron bars could spark; the jury felt that it was this which had cause the explosion.¹⁷

By November 1866 Newington was almost totally abandoned and dismantled. A correspondent reported that there had been a "...wholesale demolition of houses, huts, tents and gunyahs, churches and inns and even not a wreck left behind". The correspondent predicted that Mac's Reef would be the precursor to a better beginning in the matter of reefing in the neighbourhood of Bywong. By December the Beehive store had returned to Michelago.¹⁸

There were other attempts to reopen Mac's Reef. A joint stock company was floated unsuccessfully in 1872 under the title of the Mac's Reef Gold Mining Company. In 1880 the Suburban Gold and Diamond Company tried its luck unsuccessfully, and in 1883 it was reported that about 70 tons of ore had been taken from an 80 foot shaft, yielding about an ounce o ton. Apart from the efforts of solitary diggers, mainly local farmers, there was no further activity on any scale until 1887 when two mines, by Brady and Party and Wright & Co, were sunk, the former tunnelling in 15.2m. An official report in 1890 stated that the Mac's Reef Gold Mining Company were still tunnelling into the hill and were in 149m. Four men were employed and tramway put down, but no gold had yet been won. Mining continued into the 1890's and in 1896 there were

¹⁵ *ibid*, 3 March, 19 and 26 March 1866; *Queanbeyan Age*, 19 April, 31 May, 6 and 26 June 1866

¹⁶ *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, 4 August 1866

¹⁷ Lea Scarlett, *op cit*, p 84; *Queanbeyan Age*, 23 August 1866

¹⁸ *ibid*, 29 November and 20 December 1866

over 1,000 tons of ore at grass at Brady's tunnel. The mine was sold in October to the Bungendore & Bywong Gold Mining Company. By 1897 the Company ceased operations.¹⁹

Mention here should be made of the Deadman's Creek diggings which were reported in the press as "The reported discoveries of gold at Mac's Reef", the first full report being an editorial in the *Queanbeyan Age* in March 1888. It had been rumoured that two excellent reefs had been found showing gold freely within a few hundred metres of each other, and that there were prospects for alluvial gold. The *Age* sent its representatives, the Nugent Brothers, to verify the reports. The tunnel of Thomas Cartwright and shafts sunk by Cartwright and Charles Masters were described, but at the time of writing a defined reef had not been found. Both Cartwright and Masters told the Nugents that gold had been found, but not in the quantities reported, and that earlier reports had been very misleading. The purpose of the editorial was to scotch any premature rush. In any event it was noted that some locals, including a Mr Foord, had taken up adjoining land and there was little room left for other prospectors. A week later it was reported that claims were held solely or in partnership by Cartwright, Masters, Wright, Noakes and the Nugents, the latter obviously having had a change of heart.²⁰

On a visit shortly after by Mr Garvan MLA, it was reported that fine gold specimens had been displayed, that the gold improved with depth and that discussions were being held with a Victorian mining company.²¹ No further reports on Deadman's Creek have come to light, attentions probably being more focussed on the new prospects at Mac's Reef itself.

Dairy Creek

The Dairy Creek field, located to the west of Brook's Creek, had been worked unsuccessfully by the Suburban Gold and Diamond Company in 1880. In 1895 there was a small "rush", resulting in James Kershaw's moderately successful "Who'd a Thought it" mine. In 1896 this claim yielded 80 oz from 26 tons. An official report in 1896 stated that the cost of exploring and exploiting such narrow veins at a depth below the surface would be great and that, "the chances are against these reefs being mined profitably at depth". It was conceded, however, that... "future prospecting may result in other rich patches of ore being discovered upon the surface when they could be cheaply mined."²²

There were five mines operating in 1897, but only 61 tons were crushed, for a yield of one ounce a ton, giving some idea of the part time nature of operations. A Mr Coleman erected a battery on the field in 1898, but later abandoned it. Kershaw kept the battery in operation for some years by processing his own finds and those of the Keir Brothers at Diamond Hill and Seymour at Doughboy Hill. Tom Alchin was reported to have struck a rich reef at Dairy Creek in 1902, and in 1906 there was the prospect of a floating company to exploit the "Black Maria" reef, but this came to nought. Other parties, including the Lowes, tried their luck,

¹⁹ *ibid*, 19 September 1872; NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1883, p 83; 18887, p 82 and 85; 1890, p 99

²⁰ *Queanbeyan Age*, 10 and 17 March 1888

²¹ *Bungendore Mirror*, 29 March 1888

²² Lea Scarlett, *op cit*, p 90; J Jacquet, "Report on Dairy Creek Goldfield", NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1896, pp 131-132

but without success. Dairy Creek again featured in 1915 when a number of men commenced digging in the creek bed. It was reported, however, that "...while the prospects were encouraging, subsequent operations proved that the report was, to say the least, premature." Mining in subsequent years was hampered by either too much waster or too little.²³

Bywong

Mining and settlement history

In August 1894 it was reported that a good number of Gunning people were leaving for the Bywong Reefs, where the first finds had been made three weeks earlier. Among the five working claims on the reef were those of Lowe and Alchin, Cartwright, Earnshaw and party and Johnston, who was also in the course of erecting a Huntington mill. A Receiving Post Office was set up in November under Earnshaw. There was some reluctance to even go this far as "...all former gold discoveries about this district had proved failures."²⁴

Little more was heard of Bywong until February 1895, when the *Queanbeyan Age* described it as "a stunning field". Other local papers carried similar reports. The richest claim was that of Alchin and Lowe – the Gundaroo schoolteacher. The reef was far richer than any others on the field, and from a depth of 12.2 m yielded more than 51 oz from 4 tons sent for assay. It was reported that when gelignite was used the quartz shattered leaving the gold hanging down in strings. As an interesting aside, Lowe was often absent from the school on mining business. On such occasions he put one of his pupils in charge. His teaching career came to an abrupt end when he returned to school one day to find the district school inspector giving his lessons in his absence.²⁵

The report of Lowe and Alchin's find caused an immediate rush to the field and Gundaroo was reported to be almost deserted with only the women left. Two butcher's stores were in the course of erection and other businesses followed. The local member, Mr O'Sullivan, expected that the population would soon reach 500 and that when this happened he would apply for schools and a courthouse. He had already applied to the Minister of Mines to lay out a township and for a tri weekly mail service.²⁶

Amidst the excitement there were several dampeners. The first was a report by Father Curran. The gist of it was the field was not large, that there were as many on the field as could be justified by the results and that rich returns would remain exceptional. The majority of miners were displeased with this report.²⁷ This was followed up by unfavourable comments from the Mining Warden. Probably more damaging, however, was the report from Carne, the Government Geologist. He reported that the overall yield was low,

²³ NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1915, p 92; Lea Scarlett, *op cit*, p 90

²⁴ *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, 15 August 1894; Department minutes, *Post Office Records*, Australian Archives, October to November 1894

²⁵ *Queanbeyan Age*, 13 February 1895; *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, 18 February 1895; Lea Scarlett, *op cit*, p 115

²⁶ *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle*, 18 February 1895; *Queanbeyan Age*, 16 February 1895; and *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 14 February 1895

²⁷ *Queanbeyan Age*, 16 February 1895

with payable stone confined to six, perhaps four claims, the richest by far being that of Lowe and Alchin. Carne stated that:

“From a careful examination of the locality I am of the opinion that the conditions which prevail in the majority of instances, viz., thin rubbly veins separated more or less by country, are not promising for permanency, also, that the winning of available stone in these affords more legitimate scope for small parties of miners than for the more extended and systematic exploitation of companies. I am also of the opinion that other similar veins will be discovered in the vicinity.”²⁸

Despite these unfavourable remarks, good finds continued to be made, particularly at Johnstons, where over 12 oz a ton was reported. By late February over 300 men were on the field. The correspondent reported that unemployed men were not wanted and that the public should be cautioned against rushing the field without money. There had been a number of people lured to the field by false reports of alluvial gold.²⁹

Stores and dwellings continued to be erected. As one correspondent said, “...a hut with a good fireplace is more substantial than a bit of calico over ones carcass”. However, the “psalm grinding mill and public house” ...could...“wait in abeyance for a while as they are not wanted”.³⁰ A visitor to Bywong later that month described the township thus:

“Two slab buildings bearing the inscription “General store”, a brown and white tent with the words “Cheap Grocer” roughly traced across it, half a score of windlasses studding the hilltop and indicating the shafts, one or two slab huts for miner’s dwellings, and numerous tents presenting a weatherworn appearance...”

“There was nothing in the first appearance of Bywong to lead a visitor to imagine that a “rush” was going on, and a day spent on the field, which is a very scattered one, confirmed the impression that whatever rush there had been was over and the future of the field depended upon a character of work that required patience and capital.”³¹

On the basis of an increased volume of correspondence, the Receiving Office was converted into a Post Office in April. The comment was made the Earnshaw’s cottage was the only permanent and substantial buildings on the field, and that calico tents and bark huts prevailed.³²

²⁸ J Carne, “Report on the Bywong Gold-field”, 28 February 1895 in NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1895, p 132-137

²⁹ *Queanbeyan Age*, 27 February and 6 March 1895

³⁰ *ibid*, 6 and 20 March 1895

³¹ *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 23 March 1895. The extract also appeared in the *Burrowa News* on 29 March

³² Department minutes, *Post Office Records*, Australian Archives, April 1895

Bywong was deserted over Easter and by May it was described as a “sleepy hollow of a goldfield”, there being only a small amount of work in progress. One of the problems was lack of water for crushing. However, good yields were still being obtained from Lowe and Alchins and Johnstons. There were several stores, two butcher shops, including one owned by Millyn, a local landowner, and a bakery. There was a need for a public battery as charges for cartage and crushing were exorbitant. However, it was not until September that the batteries were being erected on the Yass River and on Schofield’s property.³³

Many other claims were not being worked, however, and were for sale. One of the two stores was closing accounts and Bywong was becoming known as Bygone. On a lighter note a market garden was established on East’s claim, selling everything from tobacco to asparagus. Water continued to be a problem in summer, not only for the batteries, but also for domestic use. A Government well was sunk by three Chinese well diggers to a depth of eight metres and included a horizontal drive of five metres. It was expertly walled with stone, without the use of mortar, and is still standing. Only a small amount of water came from it, however. The lack of water often caused all work at the batteries to cease. Government Aid was also paid for the sinking of a shaft near Lowe and Alchins, known as the Government Aid shaft. The miners were paid for every 6.1 m and the shaft reached a depth of 48.8m.³⁴

Despite Bywong’s unpromising aspect, the size of the initial “rush” was enough to ensure that a village was officially surveyed, and in December 1895 the village of Bywong was proclaimed, with four streets, Burbong, Bungendore, Burra and Gundaroo. The irony was that the site chosen was in a low lying area subject to periodic flooding. The original town site was slightly more elevated and nearer the main mining claims. There are no records of any houses or establishments being built on the newly proclaimed town site.

In September 1896 it was reported that “...after a lengthy depression this field is likely to hold its own against any field of the same stage in New South Wales”. To further the interests of Bywong, the “Keep it up” (KIU) club was formed, the Chairman being Dr Quinn. However, the reality was that, despite the richness of some individual claims, overall production on the field steadily declined from 814 oz in 1895 to 363 oz in 1896 and 150 oz in 1898. In 1895 Johnston’s and McAllistir’s claim yielded 200 oz from 700 tons, and Shepherd’s Bywong Gold Syndicate took 400 oz from 120 tons. An official report in 1896 lamented that

“...contrary to anticipations very little work has been done at Bywong during the past twelve months, the principal object of the mine owners would seem to be the successful sale of their properties, leaving the work to the buyer. A great cry was made for a village site and when that was laid out only one application was received for an allotment. Then an agitation was got up for the erection of a battery, when it was erected the mine owners made no

³³ *Queanbeyan Age*, 20 April 1895, 8, 15 and 22 May 1895 and 1 June 1895

³⁴ *ibid*, 21, 30 November and 10 December 1895 and 10 January 1896; *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 8 and 15 October 1895 and 16 November 1895; *Bywong Town Mining Village Tour Guide*

attempt to raise stone, and there are now three plants lying idle for want of stone to crush.”³⁵

In 1896 the “Lowe and Alchin Central Gold Mining and Quartz Mining Co, Bywong”, was formed to further exploit the earlier promising finds of Lowe and Alchin. Despite considerable expenditure on machinery, buildings and dams the principles were unable to attract further capital, and within a year it had ceased. The mining activities by the Bungendore & Bywong Gold Mining Company at Brady’s Tunnel were similarly unsuccessful.³⁶

By 1897 Bywong was reported as almost deserted. Even the Post Office was in demise, for in March 1897 the Post Master at Bungendore reported that Earnshaw had been absent for 11 months, leaving the office in charge of his wife. Stamps and money notes could not be obtained, the business being conducted in a “very loose manner”. An inspection was made and the Post Office put in charge of Henry Hyles.³⁷

Bywong survived for many years, due to a few stalwarts, the most renown of whom were the Shepherds, Cartwrights and Seymour. Both Bywong and the surrounding fields continued to be worked by others as well, and there is one report of the mining activities raising enough money to pay the debts on a selection, with the balance being used to purchase some stock. One particularly promising mine was Seymour’s Doughboy Hill. In May 1902 good returns were also reported from Shepherd’s Lowe and Alchin claim. The ore was crushed by his five head hand powered battery and averaged about four ounces a ton.³⁸

In July 1902 it was reported that Shepherd has sold his crushing plant to Cartwright, who was preparing for the erection of a larger plant. A battery had been purchased by Seymour, but was not yet in place, his ore being crushed at the Dairy Creek battery. Seymour’s battery was not installed until 1904, and it was reported in the same year that Shepherd was still using his hand powered battery. By December 1902 the only two claims working were Shepherds and Seymours; the latter was down 42.7 m and had tunnelled in 12.2 m. By October 1903 Seymour had tunnelled in 48.8 m. Several other parties, including Kershaw, Keir and Wakefield were prospecting at Bywong.³⁹ Throughout this period and beyond there were never more than two, perhaps three, claims working at the one time, and these were only small operations.

Some insight into the size of the community and the mining activity can be gleaned from the debate surrounding the relocation of the Post Office in early 1904. The Post Office was relocated to Schofields following the resignation in January on the grounds of ill health of Henry Hyles, who dies some weeks later. Schofields was located some distance from Bywong. Seymour wrote requesting that the Post Office be relocated at Bywong. He stated that there were 40 persons on the field and that almost everyone was not at

³⁵ *Queanbeyan Age*, 19 September 1896; NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1895, p 24; 1896, p 31 and 67; 1898, p4 40

³⁶ NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1896, p 31; Lea Scarlett, *op cit*, pp 89-90

³⁷ NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1897, p 39; Department minutes, *Post Office Records*, Australia Archives, March and April 1897

³⁸ “Bywong Gold Village”, *Social Science Project*, letter dating form about 1898 from a relation of Mr Lyall Gillespie; *Queanbeyan Age*, 31 May 1902

³⁹ *ibid*, 26 July and 6 December 1902, 16 October 1903, 2 August and 7 October 1904

least two miles (3.2km) from the Post Office. Previously, it had been conveniently located near the public school, and the children could post and collect the mail. He could not understand why the appointment had been made without an inspection as there was steady work going on at the field and good prospects. Obviously his representations had some effect, for John Shepherd was subsequently appointed Post Master, commencing duties in May 1904.⁴⁰

After John Shepherd's departure in 1905, his sons, in particular Arthur, took up mining in their own right. In 1905 it was reported that they had raised 200 tons for 110 oz, and that "...having regard to the somewhat indifferent crushing plant in use, this return is regarded as satisfactory." By 1905, however, the field was well into decline. In July 1905 it was reported that there were only about seven residents who used the Post Office for mail and it was subsequently closed. In 1906 the once promising Doughboy Hill claim was abandoned without the reef ever having been cut, and in 1908 it was stated that, "It is the general opinion that the reefs on the field have now been worked out."⁴¹

Despite this lamentation, limited mining continued at Bywong for many years, notably by the Shepherd brothers and the Cartwright family. In 1910, seven men were employed intermittently, and a small cyanide plant was erected to process tailings, 100 tons yielding 80 oz. In 1912 and 1913 there was no work because of a lack of capital, the lessees depending on their savings from labouring to finance the mines. From the mid 1930's on the main activity recorded is by Arthur Shepherd, with reasonable returns being reported from 1940 to 1942. The last gold was discovered by James Keir in 1942 at the Long Corner mine, which he worked in partnership with Arthur Shepherd. In 1946, 57 oz were reported by Arthur Shepherd and his brothers. In 1953 a further three head battery was erected, and in 1957 42 oz were recovered from the Lowe and Alchin mine.⁴²

Mining in Bywong was plagued by the fractured and faulted nature of the reefs, and many of the early miners were easily discouraged. To prospect a reef fully a deep shaft had to be sunk. This was hard work and the equipment used was often primitive. Many of the men came from a farming background and were novices at mining, lacking both capital and expertise. They were easily discouraged if they sank a "duffer", and their claims were readily abandoned. These factors explain why the Bywong rush of the mid 1890's was so short lived.

Civic life and the school

In March 1895 the first signs of civic pride emerged, with the establishment of a Progress Association. Public Meetings were held near a tree with a seat carved on it called the "tree of liberty". One of the first jobs of the Association was to fence the only water-hole to prevent pollution. By May the Progress Association was pushing for a school, and a hall for public meetings to be erected near the "tree of liberty". In June there was an interesting aside over the construction of the public hall, with one of the miners taking

⁴⁰ Department minutes and correspondence from Seymour, Emily Kershaw and Mrs J Schofield, *Post Office Records*, Australian Archives, January to May 1904

⁴¹ NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1905; *Queanbeyan Age*, 23 November 1906

⁴² NSW Department of Mines, *op cit*, 1910; 1912, p 14; 1913, p 15; 1946, p 10; 1957, p 21; also discussions with Robert Moore

charge of the committee formed by the Association for the purpose of raising funds. The move backfired, however, and the person was voted off the committee by a meeting of miners.⁴³

There were few reports on community life at Bywong in these early years, which was probably a reflection of the poverty of the field and also the proximity of Bywong to large settlements such as Queanbeyan, Gundaroo, Bungendore and Sutton, and the fact that some of the miners were also local farmers with homes located away from the town. One such function was, however, held in September with 200 adults and about 50 children present, many of whom came from Bungendore, Sutton, Gundaroo and Brook's Creek.⁴⁴

A school was established at Bywong in 1895, the teacher being Mr John Gunnell. The school was described as "...a weather board building, lined with pine and furnished with all the up to date requisites". It was situated on four acres of land, close to Lowe and Alchin's claim. As the following figures show, average annual attendance rose above 20 on only a few occasions. The school was clearly the focal point of the community, but as discussed below it was not without controversy.⁴⁵

Bywong – School Enrolments and Attendances

YEAR	ENROLMENTS	ATTENDANCES
1895	27	20
1896	28	21
1897	31	25
1898	30	19
1899	22	12
1900	32	22
1901	20	14
1902	18	14
1903	18	14
1904	14	10

Arbour day was celebrated at the Bywong school in August 1896. IT was a large function, with between 200 and 300 present, including 25 children from neighbouring towns. The children were each given a tree to plant, the first being an English oak "...the emblem of unity between this and the mother country". Games and a tea were held, with a social in the evening.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Queanbeyan Age*, 6, 13 and 20 March, 15 and 29 June 1895

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 18 September 1895 and *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 14 September 1895

⁴⁵ *ibid*, 11 August 1896

⁴⁶ *ibid*, 11 August 1896; *Queanbeyan Age*, 12 August 1896

The next report was in August 1898 when Gunnell requested a transfer in August 1898 as he was doubtful if the school could maintain its standing, there being only 21 on the roll and no prospect of that increasing due to the failure of mining at Bywong. The request was refused. In July 1899 he requested an increase in salary as there was neither board nor residence at Bywong, which only had "a few huts upon it". Consequently he had to travel daily to and from Bungendore.⁴⁷

In December 1899 a complaint was made against Gunnell on the hours of opening and closing and of non collection of fees. Gunnell replied that he had never heard of any complaints from the parents and that he had collected the fees wherever practical, the storekeeper at Bywong being "his informant generally as to the circumstances of the people". He described the complainant, Maston, as "...one of those meddlesome individuals who frequently appear on mining fields." An enquiry was held in January the following year. Maston was very put out that he had to substantiate his charges and there were repeated altercations between he and Gunnell. Maston was particularly aggrieved that because of his accusations on the non payment of fees, the whole town was against him. A counter petition supporting the teacher was sent in by a number of parents.⁴⁸

There are few reports of social activity over the following years. However, in October 1903 a gramophone and magic lantern entertainment were held at the school. Visitors came from the surrounding districts, with between 130 and 140 adults and children present. In December a surprise party was held with 15 couples present, the numbers limited by the accommodation. The function was an all night affair, with refreshments being taken at day break. Mr Vidler, the school teacher, was present at both activities and took a major role in organising the former.⁴⁹

Misfortune was never far away for the struggling community, however. In 1903 John Shepherd's wife died, and in 1905 he was sentenced to six years in jail for an offence, leaving ten children to fend for themselves. The task of child raising fell upon the elder children, such as Arthur, and neighbours.⁵⁰ The even surrounding John Shepherd's fate was covered at length in the press of the day. Any analysis of this even is well outside the scope of this study, however, it must have cast a pall over the whole community.

The school closed in April 1906, reopening later in the year following an application by Colonel Ryrice MLA for a subsidy towards the education of the children at Bywong. The subsidy was at the rate of £5 per child per annum up to a maximum of £25 yearly, calculated on the average daily attendance of pupils. A Mr Remington was temporarily appointed as teacher and the parents were allowed to use the school buildings and materials. The school was opened with an attendance of eleven children.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Letters from Gunnell to District Inspector, Goulburn, 3 August 1898 and from Gunnell to Chief Inspector, Sydney, 12 July 1899, *NSW Department of Education Records*, NSW Archives

⁴⁸ Letter from Gunnell to District Inspector 1 January 1900; Petition from parents to Minister for Education 19 January 1900; Letter from Maston 15 December 1899 and 18 January 1900, *NSW Department of Education Records*, NSW Archives

⁴⁹ *Queanbeyan Age*, 16 October and 4 December 1903

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 4 and 14 July 1905

⁵¹ *ibid*, 24 August 1906

Clearly excitement was not high on the Bywong agenda as a report in November 1906 referred to "...a series of small excitements" ...which had... "occurred lately to break up the monotony which prevails as a rule in our little settlement". The events were an address by Mr Falconer, one of the candidates for the Yarrolumla Shire, and a function at the school on the occasion of the King's birthday. In September 1907 a social was organised by Mr Remmington with about 40 adults and 20 children attending. Dancing was kept up until daylight. Later that month the inspector visited the school, promising the teacher a share of the monies that had been set aside for increased teachers salaries.⁵²

A remarkable piece of correspondence in November 1907 by Mr Remmington to the Editor of the Queanbeyan Age provides an incisive insight into the life at Bywong and the role of teachers in such communities. The most pertinent parts are quoted thus:

"Just a year ago I received a circular from the P.I. Department requesting me to forward all fees collected to the Accountant and to collect no more. This I complied with at once, and immediately the accountant returned to me the amount I had transmitted him, explaining that subsidised schools were not required to submit the fees. But the mischief had been done. I had read the circular to the parents abolishing the fees, and they have never paid any fees since. I had twelve children paying 3d, and this averaging 2/6 per week. That made all the difference to me betwixt poverty and misery. I could exist in poverty on 12/6 per week, but for twelve months I have been struggling in misery on 10/-.....No minister of religion, none of the local magistracy visited this school or the locality for over eighteen months. The morals and the immortal souls of these children, as well as the healthy development of their bodies and the intellectual expansion of their reasoning powers are entrusted to the teacher".⁵³

March 1908 saw the visit of the school inspector and a nerve wracking occasion this was, for he conducted his own arithmetic test and was not all that pleased with the results. However, the good news was that the Department had decided to give £5 per head for the average attendance immediately, which would have assisted Mr Remmington considerably. In September 1909 it was reported that the school was without a teacher.⁵⁴ The school closed again in 1911.

Thereafter, press reports cease and apart from the efforts of the Shepherd brothers and the Cartwrights, so too does the story of Bywong community. Arthur was the last resident, passing away in 1964. He was a remarkable person, mastering the fractured reefs where so many others had failed. However, it was a hard life and like many others in the district he used beekeeping and hone production to supplement his income, often being away from his property for months at a time.⁵⁵

⁵² *ibid*, 23 November 1906 and 3 September 1907

⁵³ *ibid*, 22 November 1907, Colonel Ryrie, the local member, was exempt from this criticism

⁵⁴ *ibid*, 31 March 1908 and 10 September 1909

⁵⁵ Discussions with Mr Norm Moore and Marie Grady