

Mining

Kingston's Quarry

Two early sandstone quarries have been recorded in the Logan area. One at Tygum was used to obtain sandstone for the foundations of the Tygum Mill. The other was at Kingston on land owned by J. Dennis. The sandstone was used for making grinding stones and was said to have been very suitable for this purpose.¹ There were probably other small quarries used for similar local purposes.

In January 1890, Charles Kingston requested a railway siding to a quarry he had developed. He stated that he expected to send a large amount of metal and gravel by rail for ballast and road-making. His request was granted provided he paid £53 for the cost of points, a crossing, a gate and old rails for the line. Kingston was to carry out the remainder of the work himself.² He later asked for the siding to be extended to hold six wagons.

After several years, use of the siding declined with the last wagon loaded in May 1893. In November 1895, the Railway decided to remove the points, promising to reinstate them if wagons were to be loaded in the future. Charles Kingston explained that he and his wife had hoped for income from the quarry in their declining years and he expected things to improve.

In January 1897, the quarry was leased to Tramways Construction Co Ltd who expected to take out 300 to 500 metres of material. The points for the siding were reinstalled within two weeks.³ Ballast trains worked there until at least 1911 but work had again ceased by 1914. The abandoned quarry filled with water and became a swimming hole for local children.

Coalmining

The "Ipswich Coal Measures" are not strictly confined to the Ipswich area, but extend for a considerable distance and outcrop at several other places including the Kingston-Logan Village area. Seams of coal 5 metres thick were noticed on the banks of the Logan River in 1866, on land owned by Mr Weaber on one side and Mr Barnes on the other. Unnamed experts declared the coal to be "superior to any yet found in Queensland" and Weaber, who had been trying to find a purchaser for his land, immediately withdrew it from sale. A prosperous future was predicted for the area, with mines expected to increase the population and ultimately attract manufacturing industries.⁴

Many people tried to mine the coal. One of the earliest prospectors was Henry Jordan who had two test bores dug at Tygum. The work was supervised by Mr Strachan. The bores reached 250 feet and found hard coal, but no further action was undertaken.

In 1887, black and coaly shale was noticed in a gully at "Shailer's". At least three tunnels were dug into the hillside and material was brought to the surface. A little further west, J. Dennis dug a shaft for coal without much success.

During a drought, the water level dropped in the creek on Charles Kingston's land and he started prospecting, assisted by Mr C. Hardie who later said that 10 bore-holes had been sunk, the deepest extending to 16 metres. Coal was found, but no serious mining was carried out.

On the south of Scrubby Creek, Mr Eshelby dug a shaft in 1904. News of his work attracted the attention of Inspector of Mines William Fryar (the former partner in Loganholme Sugar Mill) who immediately paid him a visit to check on safety.⁵

He reported that a shaft had been dug to a depth of 15 metres, about two miles south-west of Kingston Station. Two men were working, one the farmer Eshelby and one an assistant who clearly knew little



James Downman's Mine (Source: John Oxley Library)

about mining. The assistant was digging and Mr Eshleby was on top, winding up the material (including water) with a windlass. Again coal was found, but Fryar commented that it was a pity that the low price of coal and the limited markets at that time would not encourage anyone to invest in a new mine.

This type of mining by enthusiastic but inexperienced amateurs had its risks. Near Logan Village, Samuel Smith started a shaft in the 1880s, striking a seam of coal at a depth of 13 metres. However Smith and a friend William Weaber were both suffocated by foul air and no further mining was carried out.⁶

One of the most persistent efforts was on the property of James Downman at Logan Reserve. Downman put down a test bore using a new “calyx drill” invented by Francis Davis of Helidon. The seams of coal found were not promising, so he then sank an exploratory shaft to a depth of 85 metres, abandoning it when water became a problem. In 1908, further test bores were put down by the Mona Park Coal Syndicate, assisted by two Government grants of £100. Again, the tests showed coal, but not of commercial quality.

This appears to have been the last attempt and in spite of those glowing predictions made in 1866, coal was never mined commercially in Logan.

Sandmining

Sandmining or dredging has been carried out in some of the creeks running through Logan City. Mining along Scrubby Creek has created a string of artificial waterholes.⁷ Mining along Oxley Creek has provided building sand for Brisbane, but has contributed to degradation of the area.

Gold Mining at Daisy Hill

In 1935, a syndicate applied for a gold mining lease in Daisy Hill Forest. Members of the syndicate were Arthur Morry, William Thurlow and Henry Gerns. Morry was an architect and surveyor who had worked in the Colonial Architects Office and the Department of Agriculture and had also been the Member for South Brisbane 1890-93.

Morry's method of searching for gold was by divining – holding a forked stick which is supposed to bend when it passes over underground deposits. Divining is usually associated with looking for water, but Morry believed it would help him find gold at Daisy Hill. He formed a syndicate and applied for the lease. The Queensland Forest Service opposed this because the area had good stands of Red and Grey Ironbark and Spotted Gum but a lease was granted near the forest's southern boundary.

Work started in July 1934 and the first shaft was dug to 200ft, reputedly lined with timber cut from the forest. From this depth, the shaft was drilled down to a depth of 425ft. A second exploration hole was then dug to 626ft.

In the 1940s, the number of members of the syndicate increased to 21 people but the Chief Geologist of the Department of Mines L.C. Ball was pessimistic about their chances of success, stating that there was no geological evidence of gold on the site and that the Department did not recognise divining. After World War II, more drilling took place, still without result. Eventually in 1981, the Department refused to re-grant a lease. According to family members, Henry Herod Gerns remained certain that gold would be found right up to his death in 1988.

Some remains of the shaft and mullock heap still exist at Daisy Hill, although the shaft has now been filled for safety.⁸

Kingston Gold Mine

Gold was discovered in the Kingston area in 1885 and several geological reports and surveys were made over the next few years.

In 1913, the Queensland Kingston Mines and Investment Company was formed, soon digging a 22 metre shaft at Mt Taylor - a slight elevation about a kilometre north of Kingston Railway Station. The State Mines Department carried out sampling and assaying of the gold. The results were encouraging but the Assistant Government Geologist Lionel Ball cautiously suggested that further work should be done before making a major investment in plant. Exploratory shafts were dug and the existence of a lode of gold was confirmed but two years later, Mr Ball was still cautious. He stated that there were "doubts as to whether moderate quantities of ore carrying but a few pennyweights of gold per ton can be profitably mined and treated at Mt Taylor". Further exploratory work was carried out, then the site was temporarily abandoned.⁹

In 1932, Mr Kussman leased the area and Mr Ball again inspected the mine. This time, he said he was pleased to see the deposit being exploited and employing 25 men. The mine now consisted of a shaft and an opencut area. A 10-head stamp battery had been erected and an electromagnetically operated shaking screen was being installed to treat surface soil. In its first year, it treated 3000 tons of ore for return of 2.21 pennyweight of fine gold per ton. Over the next 5 years, a further 25,401 tonnes were crushed but the recovery of gold was poor.

In early 1938, South Queensland Gold Mines Pty Ltd installed additional equipment and introduced crushing in cyanide solution, a process which resulted in higher recovery. In 1941, the mine was worked under a tribute system – men worked the mine and paid money to the owner for the right to do so. Kingston (Opencut) Gold Mines Ltd acquired the property in 1950 and new plant was brought into



Kingston Gold Mine 1936 (Source: Keith Schmidt/Dora Joyce)

operation in October 1951. For the first eight months of operation, ore was treated at the new plant for a fairly high average cost per ton. It was then anticipated that higher through-puts at a decreased cost per tonne would be possible when the water supply to the mine was increased. However the mine closed permanently due to uneconomic grades in 1954.

Unfortunately there were drastic repercussions from this mining activity. After mining ceased, the old opencut was used as a refuse tip. The combination of the cyanide waste used for the gold-mining and new waste including used engine oil produced a toxic site. This was not realised at the time and in 1967, the area was filled and subdivided for housing.

Problems began when the contaminated wastes began to surface in the late 1980s, when residents in the Diamond Street area found black sludge oozing up through the ground on their properties. The State Government took action after complaints from residents. This involved the resumption of 46 properties in the contaminated area and rehabilitation of the site including sealing, capping and venting the contaminated ground.

In December 1991, the Mt Taylor Parklands were opened on the once-contaminated site.¹⁰



Cyanide treatment tanks at Kingston Gold Mine 1935 (Source: Keith Schmidt/Dora Joyce)

Working at Kingston Gold Mine

From an interview with Stan Seers by Joan Starr.

Stan began working at the mine in 1951 and remained there until it closed on 8 May 1953.

The manager was Fred Birchall. Another chap named Bill Griffiths and I operated the 50hp double-drum winch used to haul the ore to the crushing chamber.

It was an opencut mine, about 100 metres across the top and perhaps 30 metres deep when I went there.

Two powder monkeys drilled and blasted the rock which fell into the bottom of the cut. The crushing chamber was underground at the base of the cut. It was covered with a heavy timbered grille – possibly about 3 metres square – to which the ore was dragged with the winch. This winch had an endless steel cable and a one tonne scoop. The cable ran through a large pullet which was anchored to a big tree well back from the top of the cut.

After leaving the crushing chamber, the ore was carried by an underground conveyor belt to the stampers where it was ground to a fine powder before being processed to extract the gold.

The gold was collected fortnightly by a Brisbane stockbroker who also brought out money to pay the men. About 20 men were employed there.

The ore extended well beyond the area then being mined and into a property used for growing pineapples. The mine owners offered the grower a considerable price for his land, but he demanded twice as much and when this was refused, he wouldn't sell. Shortly after that, the mine was closed.

On one occasion, Bill Griffiths and I were allowed to handle the fortnight's take of gold. It was the size and shape of a medium-sized pudding basin – solid gold! The broker said it would be worth about £500 at that time. What would it be worth today!

References

¹ Qld Mining Journal 15.1.1910

² Railway Minute Book Folio 185 No 458 quoted in Kerr Notes Railway Historical Centre Ipswich

³ Qld State Archives A/12470 1914/10492

⁴ Brisbane Courier 27.10.1866 and Qld Mining Journal 15.1.1910

⁵ Qld Mining Journal June 1904

⁶ Qld Mining Journal 1910

⁷ Local Studies Information Series "Browns Plains"

⁸ Information on Daisy Hill mining from: A Cultural Heritage Study of Daisy Hill State Forest Park, a report prepared for the Qld Dept of Environment and Heritage by UQ Students enrolled in History Dept Subject HT419

⁹ Qld Government Mining Journal 15 Oct 1913, 15 June 1915, 15 Dec 1916, 15 July 1940, 20 Sept 1952

¹⁰ Logan City Council Local Studies Information Sheet