



Headstone created for forgotten gold and steel pioneer William Tipple Smith 'ripped off' by history

ABC Illawarra / By Justin Huntsdale

Posted Thu 14 May 2020 at 8:50am, updated Thu 14 May 2020 at 9:29am



Bill Hamburger Snr's ambition is to install a headstone for great-great-grandfather William Tipple Smith. (ABC Illawarra: Steven White)

For his entire life, Bill Hamburger Senior has been raised to know the truth — that his great-great-grandfather William Tipple Smith was the first to discover gold in New South Wales, 172 years ago.

The problem is, history has a different version of events.

"Since I was a boy in the 1930s, my grandmother lived with us and she was a grandchild of Tipple Smith," Mr Hamburger said.

"When I was going to primary school, she said if they try and tell you Hargraves was the first to discover gold, you tell them the truth."

The Hargraves she refers to is Edward Hargraves, the man credited with first finding gold near Bathurst in 1851.

However, it has since been proven by historian Lynette Silver that William Tipple Smith found gold on the western slopes of the Blue Mountains around 1848.

In the 1980s she found the letters sent by Tipple Smith to British geologist Roderick Murchison held in the Colonial Office in London and filed under someone else's name.

"I found that paperwork that people have been looking for for decades," Ms Silver said.

"Geoffrey Blainey, who is an eminent professor of history, said that the person who can find the missing paperwork will solve the question.

"I sat there looking at this paperwork and I thought 'that person's me'."

The find verified what the Hamburger family and other relatives of steel pioneer Tipple Smith had grown up being told — their great-great-grandad had been denied his place in Australian history.

Key points:

- William Tipple Smith first discovered gold near Bathurst in 1848, but his finds were originally disregarded
- Historian Lynette Silver discovered evidence of Tipple Smith's finding while writing a book on the topic in the 1980s
- Tipple Smith's great-great-grandson is close to raising the necessary funds to install a headstone at his unmarked burial site



Gold prospector Edward Hargraves is incorrectly credited as being the first man in NSW to discover gold. (Supplied: Lynette Silver)

Righting the wrong with a headstone

Ms Silver found Tipple Smith's grave at Rookwood cemetery, in Lidcombe, as part of her investigation for her book, *A Fool's Gold: William Tipple Smith's Challenge to the Hargraves Myth*.



William Tipple Smith's burial site is between two headstones at Rookwood cemetery. *(Supplied: Lynette Silver)*

He is buried in an unremarkable plot without a headstone, but Mr Hamburger is close to raising the money needed to install a headstone with the historical achievement engraved in granite.

Through a Go Fund Me page created by his relatives and some grant money from Bluescope and the NSW Government, Mr Hamburger will soon be able to see a "lifelong ambition fulfilled".

"I'll be overjoyed and I'll be really emotional," he said.

"He was ostracised and all the colony thought he was a fraud, and it's so important to have the truth known.

"I'm one of 12 children and I'm the last of my family still living, so it will be a great achievement for me."

Father of iron and steel industry forgotten to history

William Tipple Smith and his brother Thomas founded the Fitzroy Iron Works in Mittagong in the NSW Southern Highlands, which produced Australia's first iron and steel.

The enterprise would, in time, become BHP.

Ms Silver said it was disappointing Tipple Smith's contribution to two significant industries was largely unknown.

She said he was "ripped off".

"He basically gave his life, in the end, for his gold exploration and is the father of the iron and steel industry and has been forgotten to history," she said.

"The headstone is being made and before too long Bill will see his great ambition to have his great-great-grandfather remembered properly.

"It's a project I started in 1986 and now hopefully it'll be there written for the whole world to see for a very long time to come."



Lynette Silver has written a book about William Tipple Smith's claim to being the first man to find gold in NSW. (*Radio National: Conversations*)

Posted 14 May 2020, updated 14 May 2020