

## Aldeburgh man finally credited with Australia's first gold discovery – after being branded fraud

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Lynette Silver holds lost documents and a photo of the last surviving mineral specimen (gold in quartz) belonging to William Tipple Smith  
Picture: LYNETTE SILVER

A Suffolk born pioneer has been recognised for his part in history – after almost two centuries of being branded a liar.



*Lynette Silver at the grave of William Tipple Smith Picture: JANIS NATT*

William Tipple Smith, born in Aldeburgh in 1803, was labelled a fraud for claiming he found gold in New South Wales in 1848.

Instead, Edward Hargraves was credited for making the discovery in 1851 and heralding a gold rush that would shape the country.

All until a historian and descendant of Tipple Smith set the record straight and restored his reputation.

Although the achievement was noted by the Department of Mineral Resources following publication of Lynette Silver's book *A Fool's Gold?* in 1986, it took 35 years to make it official with an inscribed headstone on a previously unmarked burial site.





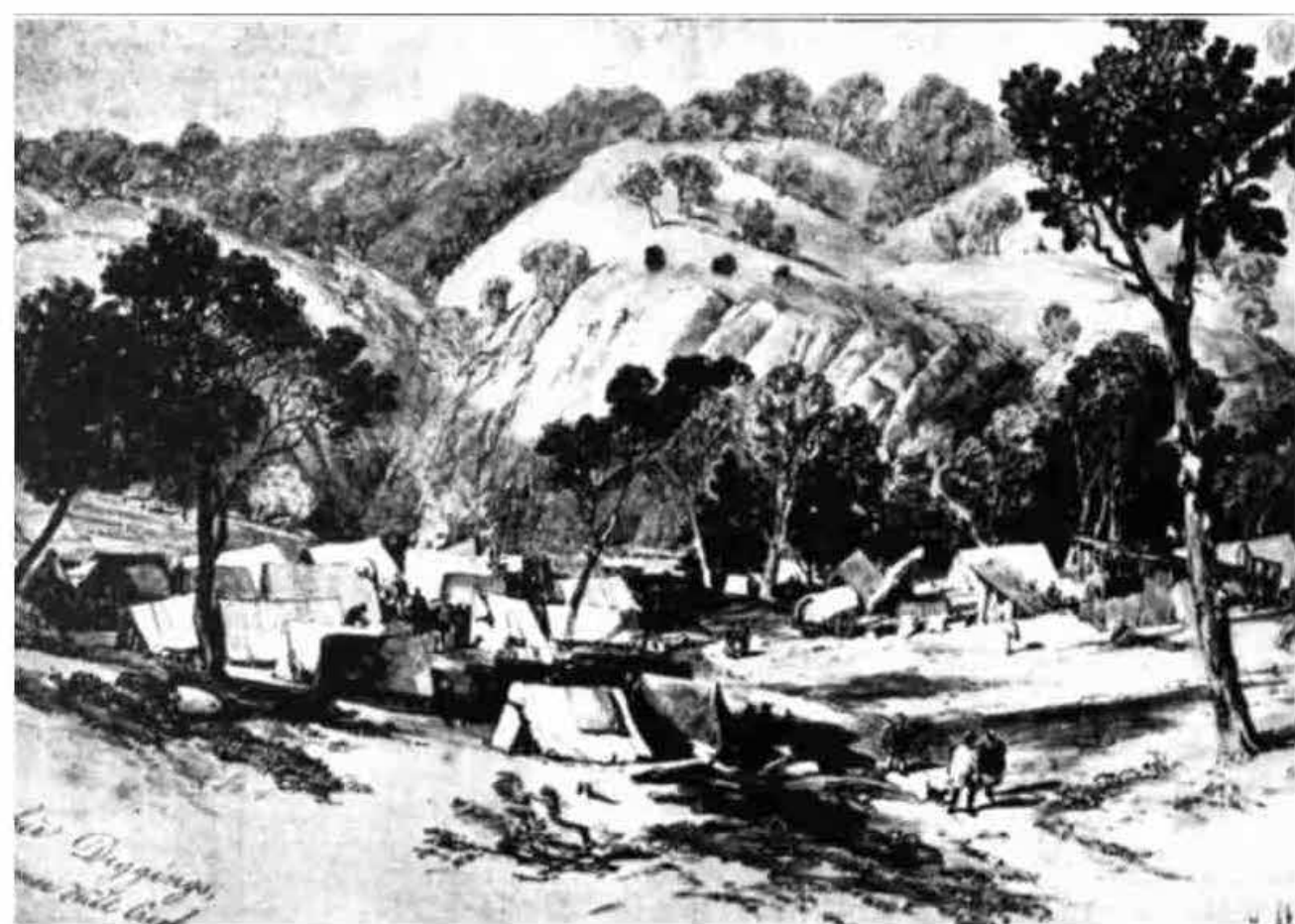
*William Tipple Smith's new headstone Picture: LYNETTE SILVER*

"It was immensely satisfying to see the headstone with its important inscription unveiled, thereby restoring the reputation of an honourable and innocent man," said the author and great-great-great granddaughter of Tipple Smith's brother, Thomas, following the unveiling.

The brothers left Aldeburgh in 1835 to sail for Australia, where Thomas set up a building firm and William a lapidary, jewellery, mineral appraisal business.

By 1847, they and two partners had invested in a new iron and steel venture - later to evolve into global company BHP - building a blast furnace from sandstone in the bush south of Sydney.

Acting on a prediction by geologist Sir Roderick Murchison, Tipple Smith found gold on the western slopes of the Blue Mountains - confirmed by Ms Silver in the 1980s in misfiled letters held at the Colonial Office in London.



*The diggings at Ophir, formerly Yorkeys Corner*

Tipple Smith visited the Colonial Secretary with a gold nugget and offered the location in return for £500. But the Colonial Governor took no interest, according to Ms Silver's research, which found he later altered the date of Tipple Smith's visit when the government was criticised for its inaction, allowing him to argue the gold may have come from the California rush.

Following his death in 1852, Tipple Smith was known for having tried to defraud the government with a made-up story, until an online funding campaign, with grants from a steel firm and the local government, helped pay for a fitting headstone.

Ms Silver said Tipple Smith's rightful place in history was acknowledged publicly with a gold exhibition in Sydney to support her research in the 1980s, but added: "His reputation had been so thoroughly trashed that it has taken 35 years to obtain official acknowledgement for his achievements, now literally set in stone, by the NSW Government.

"It is fitting that the Premier of NSW in 2020 has put right the wrong perpetrated by a corrupt government administration almost 170 years ago, and ensured that William Tipple Smith has been given his rightful place in the annals Australia's mineral heritage.



*William Tipple Smith's Fitzroy Iron Works, in Mittagong*

"Suffolk should be proud of him, and his brother, for their amazing contribution to our iron and steel industry."